

I AM A SALAFI

A Study of the Actual and Imagined Identities of Salafis

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Foreword

Anja Wehler-Schoeck, Resident Director, FES Jordan & Iraq

While Salafism is by no means a novelty, Salafi movements have witnessed a strong surge over the past decades. Traditionally averse to involvement in political affairs, since the so-called Arab Spring, several Salafi movements have developed political agendas and have become active in the political arena. Salafism has been receiving increased media attention with Salafi Jihadi groups recruiting from around the globe and fighting in Syria. Oftentimes, little attention is being paid to the fact that Salafi movements are neither static nor homogenous. Jihadi factions, for instance, are not representative of the whole movement, whose different components have undergone considerable transformation in recent years.

Few studies so far have analyzed the social and economic background, from which the members of Salafi groups have come, or the motives behind their involvement. This book hence presents a pioneering study of Salafism. The author Dr. Mohammad Abu Rumman resorts to a narrative-based approach, building his analysis on numerous interviews with Salafis in Jordan to understand their motivation, their social, economic and cultural context as well as their values, convictions and aspirations. Instead of studying the movement from the outside, Abu Rumman offers first-hand accounts of its members and presents his conclusions based on these personal encounters. The author selected the majority of his interviewees from those committed to Salafism who are not in leadership positions but who constitute the base of the movement. Consequently, the book represents an important contribution to understanding the complexities of Salafism and its different trends.

To shed light on the various streams and trends and to promote an educated discourse on Islamist movements, the Amman office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) has created a line of work dedicated to Political Islam. With the aim of providing information, which both satisfies academic standards while at the same time being accessible and understandable to a non-expert readership, we launched a publication series on Political Islam in 2007. Since then, FES Amman has published eight widely received books in this series. Furthermore, FES Amman regularly brings together experts from throughout the region to discuss the developments, which the Arab world is currently witnessing with regard to Islamist parties and movements.

The German Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is active in promoting democracy and social justice worldwide. With more than 90 offices around the globe, FES organizes activities on a broad spectrum of topics, ranging from the promotion of trade unions and labor rights, to capacity development for civil society, to the furthering of human rights and many other issues.

The team of FES Amman wishes to express their heartfelt gratitude to the author of this book, Dr. Mohammad Abu Rumman, whose expertise and continuous work on Political Islam present an invaluable contribution to the discussion of this important topic.

We thank you, our readers, for your interest in the events and publications of FES Amman and hope that our book “Ana Salafi” will prove an insightful resource to you.

Dedication

To my parents

Hoping that this modest endeavor will be a reward for your
efforts and dedication

Acknowledgements

The completion and publication of this study would not have been possible were it not for a number of people and institutions. First and foremost, I thank the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in Amman and its active Resident Director Anja Wehler-Schoeck, who has unwaveringly supported me while writing this study and others. I also would like to extend my gratitude to the entire FES staff, particularly Mays Nawayseh, Esraa Abdullah, Alia Khammash, and Batool Zaidan.

The credit for providing me with both a comfortable environment and moral and logistical support goes to the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) at the University of Jordan. I am especially thankful to its director and my friend, Dr. Musa Shtewei. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the staff of the CSS, and Mohammed Salameh and Ahmed Sa'd Eddin and Rania Mish'al, in particular.

As always, I deeply appreciate my dear friend and colleague in this discipline, Hassan Abu Hanieh. He followed the writing of this book step by step, offered ideas, read the manuscript from beginning to end as it evolved. A price cannot be put on the time and effort he spent offering his advice and thoughts. I greatly benefited from his feedback, which helped to develop the methodological vision of this study.

Additionally, I would like to thank my friend Dr. Hassan Barari for reading and translating the manuscript, and offering valuable observations and questions. I also thank my Salafi friends who facilitated my study by introducing me to their Salafi circles.

In particular, I thank the head of al-Kitab wal Sunnah Society, Zaied Hammad, the head of the al-I'tisam Society, Hisham al-Zu'bi, and my friend, researcher Osama Shehadah, to whom I refer whenever I have a question about Salafi figures or specific events that took place within these social circles.

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Author's Note

When I started working on this book, I was concerned that I might be reiterating the work I had already done with my friend Hassan Abu Hanieh in our book “The ‘Islamic Solution’: Islamists, the State, and the Ventures of Democracy and Security”¹. In particular, I was worried about potential overlap with the chapters that address the different brands and styles of Salafism in Jordan. In that book, we identify and focus on the development of the Salafi movement and its most salient stages, features, figures, and ideological discourse.

However, this book emanates from a different methodological approach and epistemological perspective than the aforementioned text. It represents a departure from the external analytical-descriptive approach toward the evolution of these movements, their ideological discourse, and their social role. This book is based on narrations from within the movement. Here, Salafis themselves express their perceptions of themselves versus the “other.” The “other” in this context refers to that, which is different or outside of the circle of “us,” be the other an individual, an idea, a society or group, Islamist or not.

Despite this new methodological approach, the apprehension that I might be repeating previous work was persistent during the early stage of the research. And prior to my fieldwork among Jordan’s Salafi circles, the question that kept coming to mind was: would presenting the Salafi experience from the vantage point of Salafis themselves, rather than that of the researcher, make any difference?

¹ Mohammad Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Hanieh, *The “Islamic Solution”: Islamists, the State, and the Ventures of Democracy and Security* (Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2013).

My apprehension receded as I arrived at two main conclusions: First, Salafism is not static; it is changing, whether through the transformation of ideas, through intellectual, political, and social practices, or through solidarity among Salafist groups. I was taken by surprise by the realization that my knowledge of Salafist groups had become obsolete in the few years that had passed since my first fieldwork on the subject.

A second conviction became clear during the discussions and interviews that I conducted with individual Salafis themselves. While some information may be repeated from my previous work, the different methodological approach revealed new variables to be understood about the Salafi movement, lending the methodology importance and leading to the reformulation of the book's hypothesis. Of course, presenting the Salafi experience through Salafi narratives renders a better understanding of Salafism's internal societal and psychological structure; the mechanisms of adaptation, thinking, and self-analysis; and an understanding of the transformation and the developments that take place within the movement in a more expressive way. On the other hand, despite the existence of a huge body of literature on Salafi movements – especially in the present day with the emergence of Salafism on the Arab social and political scene, the media attention it has captured, and its integration in both peaceful and violent political interactions – existing examinations of Salafism are still missing a narrative-based methodology to better understand the phenomenon of Salafism's ascendance. If anything, this requires getting closer to the Salafi community, the Salafi language, and the personal narratives of these groups and individuals. It is imperative to hear directly from them their views of politics, media, society and research.

Perhaps it is the ideological gap between Salafis and the Arab media and political elite that explains the mutual suspicion between Salafis and the rest of society. Salafis view other political and social groups and movements as a deviation from their straightforward Islamic line, and as adversaries in a winner-takes-all struggle. Salafis can admit no power-sharing or forms of social organization that do not fit their belief system. On the other hand, non-Salafis are concerned by the ascendancy of Salafism, and view it as a strange phenomenon that impedes progress and development, and is antithetical to modernity.

Both Salafis and non-Salafis exist in the same society, even within the same family. And yet, dialogue and communication is often limited. I have frequently met friends who have siblings with Salafi inclinations. They have a hard time understanding and interacting with them, and express their incredulity as to their siblings' ideas and attitudes. In fact, this dichotomy summarizes the fundamental crisis of identity in Arab and Muslim societies, which are still struggling with their confusion over the safe balance between preserving their religion and tradition and meeting the requirements for modernity. For a Salafi, however, the crisis is even more acute: it is not a matter of striking a balance; it is a matter of defending and protecting religion in the face of existential challenges and threats.²

² See Mohammad Abu Rumman, *Al-Salafiyun wal Rabi' al-Arabi: Su'al Eddin wal Demokratiya Fisyasah al-Arabiya* [*The Salafists and the Arab Spring: The Question of Religion and Democracy in the Arab Policy*], 1st edition (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2013), pp.37-40.

At this juncture, let me allude to an incident that occurred while I was writing this book—an incident that reinforced my perception of the “knowledge gap” between Salafis and society more broadly, and the media and political elite, in particular. I was giving a guest lecture at a Jordanian institution, and the audience was mainly distinguished youth. The lecture was part of a training course for youth to build capacity and abilities, and the theme was Islamic movements in Jordan. These movements include the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafis, the Islamic Liberation Party and others.

My discussion of the Salafi trend captured the audience’s attention and elicited such a negative reaction that I had to clarify more than once that I was presenting the Salafis’ thoughts and ideas objectively, without endorsing or criticizing them, and leaving judgment to the audience. But some members of the audience insisted that I clarify my personal view of the movements and their various ideologies.

I replied briefly that I consider myself to be neither an Islamist nor a secular who feels hostility toward religion. Rather, I tend to subscribe to the ideas presented by the Jordanian thinker Fahmi Jad’an in his book about the final redemption. It is akin to the conservative secularism that has emerged over the last few years in Turkey through the Turkish Justice and Development Party, focusing in particular on the role of religion in the public and private domains. Here, I referred to, in Jad’an’s terms, the “liberal secular”.³

³ *Fahmi Jad’an, Fil Khalas Aniha’e: Maqal Fi Wu’ud al-Islamiyin wal ‘Lmaniyyin [In the Final Redemption: An Article on Pledges of Islamists and Seculars] (Amman: Dar El-Shuruq, 2007).*

I was taken by surprise when a member of the audience protested, arguing that this opinion runs against Islam itself. He cited this verse in the Holy Quran: "This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed/My favor to you and chosen for you Islam as a religion." (Surat al-Ma'ida, Verse 3) Therefore, he argued, secularism has no place in Islam, and that Islam is a self-contained system that needs neither liberalism nor secularism to be perfect.

I asked the audience whether or not they agreed with his point of view. Some said yes, while others stayed silent. Then I suggested postponing the remaining questions, and instead trying an intellectual experiment. I began by saying, "Let me agree with you that Islam is a comprehensive system and that secularism is not from Islam. Meaning, we should refer to Islam rather than Western philosophy as the judge. I would like to develop with you this outlook to reach a logical conclusion. Allah Almighty says in Surat al-Ma'ida Verse 44 of the Quran, 'And whoever judges not by what Allah has revealed, those are the disbelievers,' and in Verse 45 'And whoever judges not by what Allah has revealed, those are the wrongdoers,' and in Verse 47, 'And whoever judges not by what Allah has revealed, those are the transgressors,' and in Verse 50, 'Is it then the judgment of ignorance that they desire? And who is better than Allah to judge for a people who are sure?'. Allah Almighty also says in Surat al-Ahzab Verse 36, 'And it behooves not a believing man or a believing woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decided an affair, to exercise a choice in their matter.' Of course there are other Quranic texts that emphasize the obligation to implement Shari'a (Islamic law) and to not deviate from it. And any law against Shari'a is blasphemous and a rule of taghut [disobedience], isn't it?"

He replied by saying that was fine. Then I asked the audience their opinion. Some agreed, while others, again, kept silent. So I asked: how then should we judge our current Arab leaders and governments who do not govern according to what Allah has revealed? Is it blasphemy or straying from the right track? Again, silence descended upon the classroom. Some supported the judgment, while others said their rule was un-Islamic, but they did not want to judge the rulers themselves. Then I said, “Welcome to the sphere of Jihadi Salafism. In just a few minutes, you have crossed half of the road, and we will not disagree on much of the rest.”

By sharing this incident, I mean to demonstrate that the road to Salafism and radical Jihadism is neither obscure, nor difficult. On the contrary, it is an easy road to travel, at the beginning of which we might stand at any moment in our day. For instance, we can listen to the imam’s sermon on Fridays, discussing the “inevitability of the Islamic solution,” or religion professors who lecture on modern intellectual schools of thought that “deviate” from the Islamic track. We can also hear a schoolteacher or a preacher, a religious doctor or engineer, or even writers who tell us the future belongs to Islam, and that contemporary Western civilization is devoid of values and spiritually bankrupt.

The growing presence of the Salafis brings to mind a quote from one of the Salafi sheikhs in Egypt, Abu Ishaq al-Hweini, when he reproached the Egyptian intelligentsia and media elite for their surprise at the Salafi emergence after the January 25, 2011 revolution. He said, “They asked us where we had been before, and our answer was that you were on Saturn and were not able to see the people below.”⁴

⁴*Ibid*, p. 91.

This argument does not take much effort to vindicate. After only a few months of its establishment, the Egyptian Salafi Nour Party ran for legislative elections. The party was able to outperform even veteran parties such as the Wafd Party, one of the biggest and oldest political parties in Egypt.⁵ A quick glance at the Arab scene today reveals that the Salafis are the most effective element in the Syrian revolution, and their efficiency and effectiveness can be seen in other Arab countries as well. Put differently, Salafism is a pervasive cultural trend in the Arab world whose influence extends to other currents. Hussam Tammam, an expert on Islamic movements in Egypt, wrote a book about how the “salafication” (tasaluf) of the Muslim Brotherhood took place. He is referring, of course, to the influence of Salafi ideas even within the Muslim Brotherhood.⁶ This influence is not necessarily represented by growing Salafi groups, but the Salafi ideas and perspectives that currently exist throughout Arab and Muslim societies.

Seen in this way, Salafism is not a novelty, nor is it a religious or cultural invasion of Arab societies. Indeed, it is a broad current with a legacy of intellectual Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and preaching. It also has an arsenal of books, religious rulings (fatwas), and a continuous body of religious theory throughout the centuries. It is worth noting that it is not only a doctrinal or intellectual trend that took root across the Arab world and gained prominence over other Islamic trends. Salafism represents a modern phenomenon with noticeable presence in various aspects of Arab life.

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 119-127.

⁶ Hussam Tammam, *Tasaluf al-Ikhwan: Ta'akul al'Itraha al-Ikhwaniya wa Su'ud al-Salafiya fi Jama'at al-Ikhwan al-Muslumin* [The Salafication of the Muslim Brotherhood: The Erosion of the Brothers' Discourse and the Ascendancy of Salafism within the Muslim Brotherhood], 1st edition (Egypt: Alexandria Library, 2010).

The task of this study therefore is to gain deeper access to “Salafi society” in order to bring it closer to the readers. This can only be done by inviting Salafis themselves to present their own narratives. This book is principally based on personal interviews with individuals who belong to and adopt Salafism not only intellectually, but also culturally and behaviorally. We are therefore confronted with a trend that combines thought, culture, behavior and practice. This trend embodies Salafism in its highest values, stances and ideas. It is based on the Salafi approach that conditions the way the movement sees itself and the way it sees the state, society, and Muslim and Arab societies as a whole, as well as the world and various schools of thought.

The Scope of the Study

By and large, I did not interview influential or renowned Salafi personalities and leaders. On the contrary, I sought to acquaint myself with the daily human experiences of ordinary individuals who had committed themselves to Salafism. I therefore interviewed a number of Salafis who represent the ideas and positions of Salafism, enabling me to study the Salafi current from within. Needless to say, leaders — many of whom may have reached advanced levels — often evade discussion of undesirable details or conceal them as they try to construct their narrative and image before society and the media.

That said, however, I interviewed some leaders whose narratives added insight into the general Salafi experience. For the sake of this study, I divide Jordanian Salafis into three main currents: traditional, haraki, and jihadi. Yet I make one exception: in the first chapter on theory, the Salafi currents in the Arab region are divided into four categories, adding the

Jami current to the aforementioned three. But in classifying Jordanian Salafis, the Jami current is blended with the traditional to constitute one trend, the Mohammed Nassir Eddin al-Albani school of thought.

It is important to note that although the first chapter of this book is devoted to the theory and evolution of Salafism and its various trends, it also identifies and classifies the various figures and practices within each of the three Jordanian Salafi currents mentioned above. Such classification is vital for a better and more profound appreciation of the experiences presented, and helps clarify the main similarities as well as the differences between the trends and their views of various Salafi figures and identities. These differences are of great importance for those who adopt a jihadi approach versus the traditional or haraki approach (more on this point in the concluding chapter of this book).

The categorization of traditional, haraki, and jihadi currents is of course not without some inadequacies or pitfalls. In fact, these are not necessarily rigid classifications; there are some similarities between the currents. However, the development of categories was the best possible way to distinguish among the active Salafi currents. In the scope of this study, these currents are classified according to the following key indicators: First, a group must demonstrate an ideological or semi-ideological Salafi vision that conditions their worldview. Second, this vision must be represented in a group or institution. Any other details of individual Salafi experiences or worldview that do not consider Salafism to be its primary foundation are beyond the scope of this study. Of course, some Salafi ideas may spread to individuals who adopt key parts of the Salafi vision or even to some factions within other Islamic groups who adopt Salafism. But these examples are beyond the scope of this study, as they do not meet the first two requirements: adherence to a clear Salafi ideology and the representation of this ideology in a group or a specific trend.

The subjects of this study are those who currently identify or have previously self-identified as Salafis. For this reason, I study their narratives and personal experiences with Salafism.

The Salafi Approach: The Sociology of Identity

The methodology that conditioned the scope and approach of this book stems from the influence of various sociologists and psycho-sociologists and is rooted in the study of cultural identities and concepts, and the study of social identities, which is derived from the disciplines of psychology and its theories of groups and communities as well as anthropology.⁷

Indeed, in examining Salafi identity, the discipline of the sociology of identity is the most appropriate because it examines the Salafi quest for political, social, and cultural identity in a precise way.⁸ Accordingly, the following questions arise: Who am I? Who is he? Why have I become Salafi? How have I become Salafi? When did I commit myself to Salafism? What does it mean to be Salafi? How has my experience with Salafism evolved? What is my vision of the self and the other? To which group do I belong? How do I

⁷ For more details about the interdisciplinary social methodology, see Roger Heacock et al. (eds.), *Al-Baḥth al-Naqdī fīl 'Ulum al-Ijtima'iyah, Mudakhalat Sharqiya-Gharbiya 'Abirah Lilikhtisat [The Critical Research in Social Sciences, interdisciplinary Western-Oriental Discourses]*, (Palestine: Birzeit University's Ibrahim Abu Lughod's Institute for International Studies and the Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2011), pp. 7-57.

⁸ For more details on the evolution of the concept of identity and its problems in social studies, see Katherine Halpern, "Maḥoum al-Hawiyah wa Ishkaliyatuh" [*The Concept of Identity and its Controversies*], trans. Elias Belka, *Majalat al-Kalamiah*, no. 46 (Winter 2005). <http://www.kalema.net/v1/?rpt=587&art>.

prioritize my personal, intellectual, societal, cultural and political affiliations and belonging? Does my commitment to Salafism define my social, behavioral, and political criteria or vice versa?

Identity is derived from a set of factors at the individual and societal levels that grant the human the sense of belonging and of collective fate. It is this feeling that guarantees both the continuity and the security of the group. Once this feeling disappears, the group begins to dissolve. Undoubtedly, the perspective that the sociology of identity offers has helped elucidate the nature of the relationship between the individual and the community, or the Salafi society to which an individual belongs.

Explicit in the concept of the sociology of identity is the notion that identity is based on the subjective definitions that groups assign to themselves, their understanding of themselves, and their ties with other groups. Additionally, it is founded in groups' self-perceptions and their reasons for existence. In other words, identity is constructed from a longing for stability and a sense of uniqueness, by juxtaposing it to others. In fact, identity cannot be conceived of if the differences of those representing the other are not highlighted or contrasted with the self. The distance between "us" and the "other" plays an essential role in self-awareness, in allowing the individual to determine the disparity or closeness of identities. As a consequence, identity achieves balance through both the self and the other.⁹

⁹ See Mohammad al-Ghilani, *Al-Hawiya walikhtilaf fi Qadaya Eddin Wal Muja-ma': Al-Hawiya Hiya al-Khilaf* [Identity and Discord over Religion and Society: Identity in Dispute], <http://www.mominoun.com>.

In conducting this study, I rely on the several concepts and assumptions that help formulate the questions pertaining to identity.

The first concept is the perception of Salafism as a validation of identity and as a defense mechanism against globalization, the challenge of modernity and the pressures of the modern world. External values, cultures and behaviors that enter traditional societies can confront them with complex and confusing questions. In this vein, Salafism is subsumed in a “traditional model” of identity formation, which views the other as “strange.” This is in contrast to models of identity that view the other as similar.¹⁰ The picture of the “other” as portrayed by Salafism is loaded with symbols and connotations, and the self-image is thus the benchmark against which others are measured.

In this regard, I capitalize on the contributions of Daryush Shaygen’s examination and interpretation of the controversies raised by modernity and dominant Western culture within local and traditional societies. In doing so, Shaygen identified religion-based identity as the ideological starting point of Islamic fundamentalist movements. In this context, Islamic identity is presented as the unifying factor or the common denominator of Muslim nations.

Shaygen examines the “dilemma of identity” in Muslim countries by discussing the nature of Muslims’ relationship with Western modernity and how to confront it. The dominant elite in Muslim countries predominantly view Western modernity simply as

¹⁰ Patrick Savidan, *Al-Dawlah Wal Ta’adud al-Thaqafi [The State and Cultural Pluralism]*, trans. Al-Mustafa Hasouni (Morocco: Dar Tobqal for Publication, 2011), p.24.

a set of practices, which they have adopted without the accompanying worldview that informs them. Shaygen calls this “updating” rather than modernity. According to Shaygen, this identity is a regressive ideological cover adopted by weak societies amid international transformation as a substitute for global modernity. In other words, it is a distorted image of the self. Furthermore, these societies’ refusal to recognize that they have adopted practices without the foundational worldview has resulted in the retention of old mindsets as well as the rejection of renewal. In the Middle East, the golden age of Arab and Muslim civilization during the medieval era is often invoked and scientific and philosophical contributions from this era to global culture and advancement is recalled with pride and satisfaction. This reactionary thinking, according to Shaygen, is characterized by worship of the past and the view that modernity is a conspiracy.¹¹

I also benefited from reading the work of Claude Dubar and Max Weber. The starting point of Dubar’s analysis is the sociological study of all societal change. He theorizes that if the individual lacks social inclusion – whether via class affiliation, political parties, or professional associations, for example – he then identifies with social groupings that have become, according to Dubar, outdated and weak. The individual thus resorts to “primitive” cultural identity, the nominal self, or societal and familial ties.

Dubar argues that this kind of identity crisis — and its accompanying depression, nostalgia and introversion — not only exists in early childhood, but is also a social framework and logic that is embedded in modern history and represented in

¹¹ Daryush Shaygen, *Awḥam al-Hawiya [The Illusion of Identity]*, trans. Mohammad Ali Muqalad (Beirut: Dar Isaqi, 1993), pp.5-31.

material losses, relationship tensions, and changes in identity.¹² This perspective helped develop one of the interpretations for the emergence and ascendance of Salafism at both the individual (individual identity) and group (social identity) level.

The second concept benefits from the notion of “identity crisis” as a factor, or indeed an assumption, accounting for the rise of Salafism in the Arab world today. Salafism, in this context, arises from the feeling that one’s cultural and religious identity is threatened. In other words, it is a reaction to difficulties experienced by individuals and societies. According to Shaygen, this stage represents a fissure in the balance between different cultural components, whether this fissure is a function of the economy, society, politics or even security.¹³

The third concept denotes the relationship between the Salafi individual and the Salafi group with which he is affiliated. In fact, the Salafi group in this case is the “reference group” or the sub-unit of society. This helps explain the interaction of the individual with the group and the role he assumes within this social system. It also describes the interaction of Salafi individuals – in the formation of groups – with broader society. The focus here is on the role of concepts, ideas and values of Salafi groups in influencing their members and their attitudes toward the rest of society and the state.

¹² Claude Dubar, *Azmat al-Hawiyat: Tafsir Tahawul [The Crisis of Identity: An Interpretation of Transformation]*, trans. Randa Ba’th (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Sharqiya, 2008), pp. 76-78.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-32.

In this section, I draw from the perspectives of “symbolic interactionism” emanating from the University of Chicago and the works of its most prominent scholars, such as George Herbert Mead, Erving Goffman, Peter Berger and Herbert Blumer.¹⁴

In an attempt to interpret social actions within a social system, this approach has developed key assumptions with regards to the concept of identity. This is realized in the methods of studying symbolic interactionism through language, symbolism, and social images, as well as the importance placed on the role of the reference group, and the impact of early childhood on one’s life and development. This approach is by and large dependent on observation and direct contact with the studied group.¹⁵

Symbolic interactionism is one of the most significant concepts in this study. My interest in this theory stems from the introduction of the concept of the “impressionistic image,” or the individual’s perception of the group and society. Hence, the individual’s interpretation of social action is consistent with their perception of their relationship with groups as well as societal contexts.¹⁶ As it is not enough to simply describe Salafi behavior and attitudes, this text examines how Salafis interpret their attitude toward the group and society in general through personal narrative.

¹⁴ Ian Craib, *Al-Nazariya al-Ijtima’iya Min Parson Ila Habermas* [Social Theory from Parson to Habermas], trans. Mohammad Hussein Ulum, ed. Mohammad ‘Asfour (Kuwait: Series of ‘Alem al’Ma’rifah, 1999) pp.129-147.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, See also Katherine Halpern, *Op. Cit.*

¹⁶ See Ghina Nassir Hussein al-Qureishi, *Al-Madakhil Al-Nazariya Li’ilm al-Ijtima’* [Theoretical Approaches of Sociology], (Amman: Dar Isafa’s for Publication and Distribution, 2011), pp.403-439.

This paradigm has helped formulate the following assumptions in this study:

- The Salafi individual's role and social attitude toward others (the family, society and other societal and political forces) are framed with reference to his affiliation with, in most cases, a group or a Salafi movement. His behavior is a reflection of his perception of what is required or expected of him. Therefore, he interprets his behavior and position in reference to others and constructs his narrative along this commitment.
- The commitment of the Salafi to this approach is stronger in his youth than in his maturity.
- Personal and direct interviews and observation are essential in establishing the contours of Salafi identity. This is what this book achieves in practice, principally through personal interviews.

The fourth concept is the comparison between Salafi identity – which will be articulated in the following chapters – and the cultural, social and political values upon which other modern identities are based. Here, I capitalize on the work and contributions of Canadian sociologist Charles Taylor in particular. For him, contemporary Western identity is based on: the discovery of the inner self; the secularism of society; and the development of what is perceived as a normal life.¹⁷

Additionally, Samuel Huntington contributed to the formation of identity theory through his use of regional, cultural, social, economic, political, and personal traits. This framework

¹⁷ See Katherine Halpern, *Op. Cit.*

sketches out the various dimensions of identity and allows us to discern the different factors that impact Salafi identities.¹⁸

The fifth concept defines the traits of Salafi identity in order to understand whether this identity is open or closed, or inclusive or exclusive, and whether it adopts religious tolerance and flexibility as values in dealing with doctrinal or religious differences. I benefit from the work of sociologists specializing in identity politics and the traits of openness or exclusion, violence, and hatred. In this context, I refer to the work of Amartya Sen.¹⁹

At the universal level, Charles Taylor examines the emancipation of cultural identities, stressing the need for recognition, which is connected to the issues of identity and cultural variation. He was the first to articulate the concept of the “politics of recognition”, or the idea that the need for recognition is based on the fact that our identities are formed – to some extent – by either recognition or a lack of it. Identity is often formed as a result of others failing to extend their recognition to us. For this reason, an individual or a group can be harmed or dangerously distorted if society degrades or disdainfully treats them, particularly when this image is internalized by the subject.²⁰

¹⁸ *Ibid.* See also Samuel Huntington, *Man Nahunu: al-Tahadiyat al-Lati Tuwajih al-Hawiyah al-Amerikiya [Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity]*, trans. Hussam Eddin (Damascus: Dar al-Hassad, 2005), p.3.

¹⁹ Amartya Sen, *Al-Hawiyah Wal 'Unf: Wahm al-Massir al-Hatmi [Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny]*, trans. Sahar Tawifq (Kuwait: Series of 'Alem al-'Ma'rifah, no. 352, 2008), pp.17-53.

²⁰ Hussam Eddin Ali Majid, *Inbi'ath Dahira al-Hawiyat: Qira'ah fi Manzor Almufakir al-Kanadi [The Emancipation of the Phenomenon of Identities: A Reading of the Perspective Canadian Thinker Charles Taylor]*, <http://www.sotakhr.com/2006/index.php?id=18620>.

To substantiate the arguments advanced in this book, I attempted to survey different cases and models of Salafism with the goal of complementing the personal interviews recorded here to give further shape to the Salafi identity. This attempt was unsuccessful; only 33 questionnaires out of one hundred were returned. Many of the prospective respondents refused to fill out the questionnaires out of concern for their personal safety, despite the fact that the questionnaire was anonymous.

Others refused to participate in the survey due to their preoccupation with conspiracy theories about the intentions of others, particularly researchers and those working in the media. Interestingly, Salafis who align with the Haraki Salafi current did cooperate. The pattern of participation, or lack thereof, in the survey reflects, as I will discuss later, the differences among the Salafi identities.

The Structure of the Book

The book begins with a chapter on theory to present a definition of Salafism and its evolution throughout history. It examines the traits, main ideas, and arguments of each Salafi current.

The following chapters address the models and currents of Salafism in Jordan, which I classified into three groups. Chapter two presents Traditional Salafism, chapter three studies Jihadi Salafism, and chapter four examines Haraki, or activist, Salafism. Chapter four is devoted to the phenomenon of the transfer of Salafi ideas to other ideologies, whether Islamist or secular. In each, the conclusion helps explain the traits of Salafi identity.

The final chapter presents a general conclusion and attempts to infer the general characteristics of Salafism and Salafi

sub-identities. This is accomplished by shedding light on the study's methodology and the existing body of work of sociologists and experts on the issue of identity.

On the whole, this effort is an attempt to explore Salafi society from within, through personal narratives presented by the Salafis themselves. If anything, this guides us to a more profound appreciation of Salafi identity and its characteristics. Furthermore, from a different angle, these narratives acquaint us with the inclinations of a range of Arab and Muslim youth who have chosen Salafism in their quest for identity against the backdrop of societal and political crises in Arab countries. While Salafi identity is the central component of this study, the findings should also lead readers to consider the conditions that make Salafism attractive to Arab youth. This is indeed one of the key tasks of this study: to understand the Salafi movement within its objective and social conditions.

Introduction:

Who are the Salafis?

On the whole, the Salafi phenomenon not only lacks universal or regional cohesion but also is fraught with vast internal differences on a number of issues. First, there is no consensus as to who qualifies as a Salafi. Second, and more importantly, Salafism is marked by differences in political philosophy; notably as it concerns different groups' positions vis-à-vis the legitimacy of political activism and strategies for socio-political change and reform. These differences are largely between groups whose political theory is founded on the principle of obedience to authority (the acceptance of the rule of the victorious) and other groups whose political ideology is based on the Islamic principle of mufasalāh (dissociating oneself from infidels, including through the defiance of or rebellion against rulers who are determined to be infidels).

Salafism is in fact an inconsistent movement in terms of ideologies and ideas. It embodies a diversity of trends, some of which have opposing dispositions. More often than not, these currents can be differentiated by their contending political points of view. Salafism is thus a loosely defined movement, the definition of which is debated by scholars and researchers due to the differing connotations. For this reason, a scholar must clearly define the specific currents or ideologies to which he or she is referring when discussing Salafism.²¹

Linguistically, the word “salafism” is derived from the Arabic language root salaf. In Arabic dictionaries, the definition of salaf is “the predecessor,” a reference particularly to the early ages of Islam.

²¹ See Abdulghani Imad, “*al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya aw al-Firqatul Najiyah*” [*Salafi Jihadism or the Surviving Group, Majalat al-Difa' al-Watani [Magazine of National Defense]*, No. 63 (Beirut, January 2008), at <http://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/article.asp?ln=ar&id=18036>.

Salafism supposes that this era represents a bright and glorious time, during which Shari'a (Islamic law) was properly understood, implemented and adhered to. This notion has its roots in Hadith, which has attributed to the Prophet Mohammad this statement: "The best generation is mine, then the following one, then the next."²²

In literature on political thought, some scholars view Salafism as a reformist movement that seeks an escape from decadence, political collapse and colonial hegemony through the revival of Islamic heritage. The mechanisms by which this should be achieved are: purging society of practices such as polytheism, sacrilege and religious innovation (*bid'ah*), and reinforcing authentic Islamic ethical values.²³ Others define Salafism as a protest movement against developments that adversely affected the Islamic religion's intellectualism and forms of worship. Indeed, the Salafi tendency of protest has developed in history without directly associating itself with the concept of Salafism. In contrast to the spread of some groups' names such as Shi'a, Kharajite, Mu'tazilah (an Islamic school of thought based on reason and rationality) and Murji'ah (a group that advocates the idea of deferred judgment of peoples' beliefs),²⁴ the name

²² I benefited from Anwar Abu Taha's study on the categorization of Salafism called "Salafism: Trends and Issues." On the meaning of Salafism, see Fahmi Jad'an, *al-Madi Ila al-Hadir: Dirasat fi Tashkulat wa Masalik al-Tajriba al-Fikriya al-Arabiya* [The Past in the Present: Studies on the Formation and the Paths of the Arab Intellectual Experience], (Beirut: The Arab Corporation for Publication and Studies, 1997), pp.79-104. See also Fahmi Jad'an, "Al-Salafiya: Hududuha and Tahawulatuha" [Salafism: Its Limits and Transformations], *Majalat 'Alam al-Fikr* [Magazine of the World of Thought], Vol.62, No.3 (1988), pp.61-96.

²³ Taha Abdurrahman, *al-'Amal Eddini wa Tajdid al-'ql* [The Religious Work and the Renewal of the Mind], (Beirut: The Arab Cultural Center, 1997), p.90

²⁴ Abdulkarim Abu Eloz, *al-Harakat al-Salafiya fil Magreb (1971-2004): Baht al-anthropoloji sosiologi* [The Salafi Movement in the Magreb, 1971-2004: An Anthropological and Sociological Study], (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2009), p.38.

Salafi is absent from the history of Islamic sects and schools of thought.

Not surprisingly, the differences over the definition of Salafism are not limited to scholars in the social and political sciences. The definition is contested even among Salafi groups, each of which claims to represent the entirety of Salafism. These trends disagree on who is the legitimate representative of this discourse.

Traditional Salafis define Salafism differently from Jihadi Salafis. For instance, Ali al-Halabi, a prominent Jordanian Salafi sheikh, does not recognize jihadis as part of Salafism, but regards them as takfiri (those who pass judgment on others as infidels) and views them as the “descendants” of the Kharajites, who also practiced takfir. Al-Halabi defines Salafism as “the call to knowledge, worship, doctrine, behavior, education, and ethics.” In his view, Salafism is “too important and too glorious to become a political party, a movement, or an organization, whether in secret or in public.” Hence, he dissociates Salafism from political activism. Seen in this way, al-Halabi excludes both activists and jihadis from Salafism.²⁵

In his book “This Is Our Call and Doctrine”, Muqbil Bin Hadi al-Wad’*e*, a traditional Salafi sheikh from Yemen, goes a step further in offering an operational definition of Salafism, and forbids any form of political activism, including rebellion against a leader. From this point of view, any person engaged in such activities is not recognized as a Salafi.²⁶

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.39-40.

²⁶ Muqbil Bin Hadi al-Wad’*e*, *Hazihi Da’watuna wa ‘Aqidatuna [This is Our Call and Our Doctrine]*, (San’a: Dar al-Athar, 2002), pp.9-17.

On the other hand, ‘Isam al-Barqawi (known also as Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi), one of the most prominent theorists on Jihadi Salafism, defines the Salafi movement as “a current that combines the call of Salafism and monotheism in a comprehensive way. Jihad simultaneously achieves both. Succinctly put, it is a trend that aims to achieve unity by waging jihad against all taghut (tyrannical leadership). This is the identity of the Jihadi Salafi trend that distinguishes it from other jihadi and proselytizing movements.” He also criticizes Traditional Salafism’s “polytheism of graves” and withdrawal from the political sphere, which leads to what he calls the “polytheism of palaces.” The latter refers to legislation and legal rulings that violate Shari’a and cooperation sanction cooperation with the West. This concept contravenes the Salafi doctrine of “loyalty and disavowal” – a reference to the concept of fidelity to Shari’a and the eschewal of cooperation with non-Muslims. He adds, “Some Salafi movements minimize and confine the call for monotheism to the polytheism of amulets, love-charms and graves. These movements do not directly or indirectly allude to the polytheism of rulers, lawmakers, laws or palaces. Ironically, these movements can be among the forces that underpin some leaders [by their refusal to engage in politics]. Some jihadi movements limit their jihadism to national principles, fully rejecting the waging of jihad beyond the borders of their own countries. If anything, the Jihadi Salafi trend does not see eye to eye with these movements.” For this reason, it calls for absolute monotheism every place.²⁷

²⁷ See this dialogue with al-Maqdisi on his official website, *The Forum for Monotheism and Jihad*: <http://www.alsunnah.info/r?i=j37307wg>.

The dissonance over the theoretical and operational definition of Salafism has pushed scholars over the last few years to add other criteria by which to distinguish Salafism's various trends. Therefore, some distinguish among these movements by describing them as academic, traditional, conservative, organized, activist, reformist, or jihadi. Furthermore, Salafism may be named, described or categorized differently depending on the country in which it exists. In Morocco, for instance, Salafism can be academic or jihadi. In Algeria, academic Salafism is widespread, while in Egypt, we find academic as well as Haraki Salafism. In Saudi Arabia, the academic and Madkhali Salafis are opposed to revivalist trends.²⁸ Salafism in Yemen embodies the activist and Wad'e (after Muqbil Bin Hadi al-Wad'e) trends.

Notwithstanding the intertwined landscape of Salafi movements, it is generally possible today to distinguish among the key contemporary Salafi movements, at least within Arab politics. The first trend is conservative, academic and proselytizing. It promotes the Salafi Call and education, and it eschews political participation. This trend responds to other Islamic factions such as the Shi'a, Mu'tazilah, and the Kharajites. It also responds to other doctrines within Sunni and Sufi factions, such as the Ash'arites (a school that was founded in response to the Mu'tazilah and other beliefs at odds with Sunni doctrine and traditions) and Maturidi.

²⁸ Rabi' Ibn Hadi 'Umair al-Madkhali was a radical Saudi scholar who founded a Salafi movement that now bears his name.

On the whole, the differences exist in religious doctrine. This line of thinking is clearly represented in Saudi Arabia by Abdulaziz Bin Baz and Mohammad Bin Salih al-'Uthaimin. In Morocco, it is represented by the head of the al Kitab wal-Sunnah association, Mohammad Bin Abdurrahman al-Maghrawi. In Jordan, Sheikh Nassir Eddin al-Albani is closely aligned with this trend, while the religious society Jama'at Ansar al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyah represents this ideology in Egypt.

The second trend is to the right of the first on the political spectrum. Its political approach is based on the imperative to obey the ruler. Political opposition is regarded as illegitimate defiance and is rejected. Adherents of this trend tend to support governments against other Islamic movements and political opponents. Furthermore, much of its discourse is dedicated to responding to other Islamist currents, particularly those Salafis who engage in political activism and opposition.²⁹ Followers of Mohammad Bin Aman al-Jami and Rabi' Bin Hadi al-Madkhali in Saudi Arabia adhere to this line of thinking, which is also reflected in the teachings of several other influential figures: Muqbil Bin Hadi al-Wad'e and his followers in Yemen; followers of Nassir Eddin al-Albani in Jordan; Abdul Malik Bin Ramadan al-Jaza'iri in Algeria; Mohammad Sa'id Raslan, Osama al-Qosi, Hisham al-Beili, and Tal'at Zahran and others in Egypt; and Abdelhadi Wahbi and Sa'd Eddin Kibi in Lebanon.

²⁹ For more information on this trend, see *al-Salafiyya al-Jamiyah: 'Aqidat Eta'ah [al-Jami Salafism: the Doctrine of Obedience]*, (Dubai: al-Massar Center for Research, 2012).

The trend farthest to the right on the spectrum of Salafism is Jihadi Salafism. Jihadi Salafism condemns contemporary secular Arab governments as infidels (takfir) and advocates a radical (sometimes violent) approach to change. This is the ideological background of al-Qaeda, which is strongly identified with Jihadi Salafism. Among its most influential representatives are Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi in Jordan and the Jordanian of Palestinian origin Omar Mahmoud Othman (also known as Abu Qutada). In Morocco, Jihadi Salafism is represented by Mohammad Bin Mohammad al-Fizazi and Hassan al-Kitani, while Anwar al-'Wlaqi from Yemen and Abu Busair al-Tartosi in Syria represent this ideology as well. Some Islamic groups that originated from this trend and achieved notoriety, if not prominence, have more recently abandoned armed activism. These groups include al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya in Egypt and some Libyan militias.

The fourth Salafi trend is located in the middle of the spectrum, and integrates both the Salafi religious doctrines and organized, peaceful political activism. Although such groups may disagree on their diagnosis of reality and their position vis-à-vis their rulers, they are in agreement on the legitimacy of political activism and opposition and in refusing violence as a means of conflict management. Among the most prominent representatives of this trend are Abdurrahman Abdulkhaliq from Kuwait; Mohammad Bin Srur Zein al-'Abidin, founder of Sruriyeh, the Islamic revival current in Saudi Arabia, the Charitable Society for Social Welfare and the Ihsan Charitable Society in Yemen the Salafi societies in Kuwait and Bahrain, and Da'e al-Islam al-Shahal in Lebanon; and Sheikh Mohammad Bin Abdulmaqsud and the intellectual current in Egypt.

Despite the deep differences in their politics and strategies for change and reform, contemporary Salafi movements seem to agree on the general guidelines of Islamic doctrine and references to specific historical jurisprudence.

However, they still differ on the interpretation and reading of their heritage and literature. For this reason, I will discuss the emergence of Ahl al-Hadith (followers of the Hadith) in the medieval period, then Ibn Taymiyyah and Mohammad Bin Abdulwahab in the modern age. On the whole, some common denominators unite the various strands of Salafis in terms of doctrine and jurisprudence, their stance on political activism, regardless of their opposition to or acceptance of Arab regimes. These common denominators are:

1. Salafis attach great importance to doctrine. Historically speaking, Salafis represent the groupings of Ahl Sunnah wal Jama'a and, especially, Ahl al-Hadith. Salafism cohered in past centuries in response to the emergence of other sects – both Sunni (Sufis and Ash'arites) and non-Sunni (Shi'a, Kharajites and the Mu'tazilah) – whom Salafis regard as deviant.

2. All Salafis are committed to a monolithic metaphysical doctrinal vision. They all agree that Almighty Allah is in heaven, where he is physically manifest in the form of a human hand and an eye. Unlike within the Ash'arite sect, this is not open to interpretation within Salafism.³⁰

3. Monotheism is central to all Salafi discourse. It is worth noting that monotheism not only refers to the position of Salafis toward non-Muslims, but also other Islamic groups. A large portion of Salafi literature focuses on the rejection of the polytheistic attributes of Sufism, such as performing tawaf (circumambulating) at the graves of the Pious Predecessors

³⁰ For this reason, Ash'arites accuse Salafis of being *mujasimah* (anthropomorphist), i.e., they liken the creator to the created. Other sects use figurative language to refer to this idea by saying "the hand of God." They argue that God is not in heaven and is not confined to a place or time. On the whole, these are contested issues in the books of doctrines and Islamic sects.

the belief in their infallibility, or their beseeching of the Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him). However, Salafis differ in their views of polytheism, with some opposing traditional polytheism (such as the performance of tawaf) versus what they consider to be modern polytheism (such as the adoption of laws and ideologies that counter Islamic law).³¹

4. Imitation and emulation is preferable to innovation. Salafis emphasize the importance of following in the way of the Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him) and committing to the understanding of religious affairs as expressed by the first Companions of the Prophet. Innovation or the invention of new religious rituals, such as setting prayers to music and the Sufi meditative practice of whirling (sama) are illegitimate and forbidden. Rather, Salafis are concerned primarily with the Prophet's Sunnah, the revival of the Hadith, and the Islamic science of "Contesting and Amendment."

5. Salafis in general give what is written in the Islamic texts primacy over reason. They stress the value of the Quran or Hadith, and prioritize the literal understanding of what is written, even if it contradicts reason. Scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Rushd ruled out the possibility of such contradiction. Unlike the Mu'tazilah for whom reason and rationalism precede literal understanding, strict adherence of the text is an integral part of Salafi discourse.

³¹ *Salafi scholars and sheikhs regard ruling by non-Islamic law or by laws that contradict Shari'a as polytheism. For this reason, one of the most prominent meanings of the concept monotheism is that legislation should be in line with the Quran and Sunnah. In this vein, this particular Salafi trend considers liberals, communists, seculars, and ruling regimes as infidels. This runs counter to the opinion of other Salafi trends.*

6. The commitment to the Sunnah in Salafism is prominent. Salafi sheiks and disciples call themselves al-Athari – which is a reference to the stories ascribed to Prophet Mohammad. Interest in Sunnah takes on an aesthetic quality, such as wearing traditional Arab dress and maintaining a beard for men, and, in the case of women, dressing fully in black – with variations in opinions as to what constitutes “fully” dressed, depending on the view of what constitutes ‘awrah (those part(s) of a woman’s body that cannot be exposed to the public gaze). Some Salafis believe ‘awrah includes the face and hands, as is the practice in Saudi Arabia, while some – such as Nassir Eddin al-Albani of Jordan who issued a fatwa about the matter – argue that ‘awrah does not include the face and hands.³²

Over the last centuries, the concept of the Surviving Group has dominated Salafi discourse, and has occupied a central place in Salafi literature. This concept is derived from several passages in the Hadith that refer to a group, emanating from among Jews and Christians, who were spared being cast into Hell. One example from the Hadith: “The Jews were divided into seventy-one groups. All of them will go to hell except for one. Christians were divided into seventy-two groups, all in hell but one. This nation will be fragmented among seventy-three groups, all will go to hell, save for one.” In another version, the Prophet says “seventy-three milla or groups.” In a third narrative, a Muslim asked the Prophet about the Surviving Group and he answered, “The one that I and my companions today are in.” In a fourth, the Prophet says, “It is the group. The hand of Allah is in the group.”

³² *These differences over women’s hijab (Islamic dress), albeit a minor issue, have been the focus of much debate in Saudi Arabia. Given the existence of secular discourse and a feminist movement that calls for loosening the Salafi grip on the state and women, the debate is vital.*

The early Ahl al-Hadith and the emergent Salafi movement that followed elaborated on the concept of the Surviving Group. Traditional Salafism seeks to identify contemporary Salafists as descendants of the Surviving Group, as opposed to other historical Islamic groups such as the Shi'a, Kharajites, Mu'tazilah, al-Qadariyah (Fatalists), Jabiriyah, etc. Some Salafis have an exclusivist view of the Surviving Group: Sunni sects such as the Ash'arites and Maturidi are not recognized as belonging to it. Other views of the Surviving Group incorporate all Sunni trends. This discussion expanded later among disciples of al-Jami and al-Madkhali to reinforce that the Salafism they stand for is that of the Surviving Group; other Islamic approaches and parties are seen as deviant. In the words of Rabi' Hadi al-Madkhali, "If we examine the reality, history, and approaches of Muslims – I mean, the Islamic groups – we will find that the Surviving Group is the one that is committed to the proper Salafi approach based on the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet."³³

Criticizing other Salafi trends in Saudi Arabia, al-Madkhali says, "Our youth is good. But they are manipulated like blind soldiers into fighting what is right. This is the result of cunning plots by the people of innovation. They hoped that the impressionable youth would be soldiers for Islam and for the call. They became soldiers for the ideology of Sayid Qutb, al-Banna, and al-Mawdudi, the people of innovation and deviance."³⁴

³³ For the lecture of Rabi' Bin Hadi al-Madkhali on the Surviving Group, see the lecture on September 3, 2009 at http://www.rabee.net/show_des.aspx?pid=5&id=268&gid=0.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, in that lecture, Rabi' Bin Hadi al-Madkhali responds to Salman al-'Awdah who tried to extend the concept of the surviving group to al-Sunna. See the following line: http://www.rabee.net/show_book.aspx?pid=1&id=376&bid=21&gid=0

Jihadi Salafis, alternatively, view the Surviving Group or the “victorious sect” as one comprised of those who combine monotheism with a commitment to enacting the rule of Islam on earth, as well as jihad.³⁵

To gain a complete knowledge of the debate and development that modern Salafism has experienced in understanding the revolutions of the Arab Spring, this chapter will explore the main intellectual and religious Salafi ideas. It also briefly references the most prominent Salafi sheikhs in Islamic history and the key developmental stages of this school of thought. The chapter ends with a preliminary and general presentation of Salafi doctrines and political dispositions.

1. Ahl Al-Hadith: The Surviving Group

The common historical assessment of Salafism points to the importance of the Pious Predecessors as the ideal models for the present. The Pious Predecessors, according to Salafi literature, are the Muslims of the first three centuries that followed the advent of Islam. The notion of the Pious Predecessors dates to the Prophet’s saying that “the best among the people are those living in my century (generation), and then those coming after them, and then those coming after the latter. Then there will come some people whose witness will precede their oaths, and their oaths will precede their witness.”³⁶

The origin of the Salafi school dates back to the early Islamic era. For this reason, the word *salaf* (predecessor) is mentioned causally by both the Hanbali and Maliki schools of thought (both belong to the Sunni sect) in the context of their

³⁵ See Abu Qutada, *Ma'alim al-Ta'ifah al-Mansora [The Hallmarks of the Victorious Group]* on the website of Monotheism and Jihad at <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=jqmd-m3ht>.

historical debate with the Mu‘tazilah. This debate centered on doctrinal differences such as the creation of the Quran, denying the attributes of Allah, or the issue of the Act of God.

The leading and most persistent factor of Salafi identity is the belief that Salafis are the descendants of the Ahl al-Hadith of the second and third centuries after the Hijra (the Muslim immigration from Mecca to Medina). The contemporary mainstream Salafi trends describe themselves as the Surviving Group, and the Victorious Sect. In the same vein, the movement has mapped their connection to the Surviving Group through a network of names and symbols marking the emergence of the differences within the Islamic sects and schools the differences the differences within the Islamic sects and schools of thought to demonstrate their consistency with the Ahl al-Hadith (and by extension others’ deviation from that path). Their identity as Ahl al-Hadith was consolidated in particular in response to the trend of Ahl al-‘aql (people with reason or people with opinion). Between them, they differed mainly over the authority that scholars had to interpret the Quranic text and Hadith after the death of the Prophet (Peace be upon him).

Ahl al-Hadith viewed the interpretations of the Pious Predecessors and the Companions of the Prophet as the most credible, and seen in this way, the followers (khalaf) regard the companions as models to be emulated. They argue that reason – in the fashion of the Greek tradition – undermines the methodological foundation upon which Islam is based.

³⁶ A Prophet Hadith mentioned in *Sahih Muslim* and *Sahih al-Bukhari*.

Furthermore, they argue that the people of reason (known also as Ahl al-Kalam) have imposed other cultural or intellectual traditions, particularly Greek philosophy, on their readings and interpretations of religion – acts and outcomes which they regard as heretical and which they believe must be confronted to maintain the purity of Islam and inure it to the infiltration of external ideas.³⁷

Salafism developed in response to the trend of reason established by the Mu‘tazilah during the era of Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal (241 Hijri) in the third century after the Hijra. The defining moment for this trend was the Mu‘tazilah assertion that the Quran had been created during the term of the Abbasside Caliphate al-Ma’mun in 218 Hijri. This moment was critical for Salafism’s emergence as a movement in opposition to the principle of interpretation. Ahmed Bin Hanbal refused the Mu‘tazilah argument about the timing of the Quran’s creation. His perseverance in his conviction in the face of torture distinguished him among the Ahl al-Hadith and Salafis.³⁸

The fall of Baghdad to the Tatars in 656 Hijri brought to an end the Abbasside Caliphate and ushered in a second, more mature Salafi trend came to the fore under the leadership of Ahmed Ibn Taymiyyah (661-728 Hijri) and his school. Ibn Taymiyyah blamed the heretics (those following Jahmiyah, al-Qadariyah, Sufism, and other philosophies) for the deterioration of the Islamic state, and he dedicated a great

³⁷ Mohammad Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Hanieh, *al-Salafiya al-Muhafiza: Istratejiyat Aslamat al-Mujtama’ wa Su’al al-’Ilaqa al-Multabisah ma’ al-Dawlah* [Conservative Salafism: A Strategy for the Islamization of Society and the Ambiguous Relationship with the State], (Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Jordan & Iraq, 2010), pp.17-27.

³⁸ See Mohammad ‘Imarah, *Tayarat al-Fikr al-Islami* [Trends of Islamic Thought], (Cairo: Dar Shuruq, 1997), pp.128-161.

deal of time and effort to corresponding with other Islamic sects, explaining the Salafi doctrine, and building a Salafi epistemological theory of politics, thought, and jurisprudence.

The era of Ibn Taymiyyah marked a significant development in the formation of the epistemological and doctrinal framework of Salafism. Indeed, that era was fraught with conflicts and disputes within Islam among the various key schools of thought (Shi'sm, Kharajites, Mu'tazilah, and Sunni) and even within the same Sunni sects (Ahl al-Hadith, Ash'arites, and Maturidi). As a consequence, Ibn Taymiyyah took it upon himself to clarify the Ahl al-Sunnah approach as opposed to other Islamic trends, and he earned unique stature within the Salafi school.³⁹

Ibn Taymiyyah's writings, religious edicts, and schools of thought (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, al-Dhahabi and others) formed the compass of the Salafism of antiquity. His work includes volumes of written exchanges with other Islamic groups, both within and outside of the Sunni sect (such as Shi'sm and al-Qadariyah). He also clarified the Salafi doctrine for the Sunni community in his book al-'Qida al-Wasitiyyah (The Centrist Doctrine) and others.

Until the ascendance of Ibn Taymiyyah, historical Salafism had been represented by a wide range of scholars.⁴⁰ Arguably,

³⁹ On the role of Ibn Taymiyyah in developing the Salafi approach, see, Abdulghani 'Imad, *al-Harakat al-Islamiyah fi Libnan: Ishkaliyat Eddin wa Isiyasa fi Mujtama' Mutanaw'* [Islamic Movements in Lebanon: the Controversy of Religion and Politics in a Diversified Society], (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'ah, 2006), pp.265-268.

however, historical Salafism reached the apex of its maturity during Ibn Taymiyyah's time. During that era, the Salafi approach was fully defined, and Ibn Taymiyyah had delivered road map for all future Salafis to follow.

In the modern age, Wahabi Salafism emerged in the early eighteenth century, and progressed into the next under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Ibn Abdulwahab in the Arabian Peninsula. He called for monotheism and renounced the idea of hulul waitihad (the incarnation of God in human form) in religious doctrine. Additionally, he forbade praying to any other than God, and condemned blessing the graves of prophets and the Pious Predecessors as a polytheistic practice. He also called for jihad in defense of Islam. Not only did he revive the monotheistic legacy of Ibn Taymiyyah, but he also entered into fierce confrontation with other Islamic sects in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly Sufism.

Ibn Abdulwahab's text, Tawhid (Monotheism), remains an important reference for a majority of contemporary Salafis. Tawhid illuminates the basics of the Salafi doctrine in comparison with other Islamic sects. These sects, according to Ibn Abdulwahab, sanction "deeds and sayings" that contradict monotheism. In Salafi universities and meetings, this booklet is taught as part of the curriculum.

⁴⁰ Such as Abu-Ja'far Attahawi (321 Hijri), Ibn Battah al-'Kbari al-Hanbali (378 Hijri), and Abu Bakr Ahmed Bin al-Hussein al-Buheiqi (458 Hijri). In the second wave, we can identify Aba Shamah al-Maqdisi (665 Hijri), al-Jawziyyah (751 Hijri), and Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali (795 Hijri). Later, scholars such as Ibn Abi 'Il'iz al-Hanafi (792 Hijri) emerged. Al-Hanbali explained the al-Tahawi doctrine, which later became the basis for historical Salafism and a reference for its doctrinal arguments.

Ibn Abdulwahab gained prominence and influenced important scholars throughout the Islamic world: Mohammad Noah al-Ghilati from Medina (1752-1803), Walli Eddin al-Dahlawi from India (1702-1762), Mohammad Bin Ali al-Shokani from Yemen (1760-1834), Shihab Eddin Mahmud al-Alosi from Iraq (1802-1854), and Othman Bin Fodi from Africa (born in 1756).⁴¹

Taken together, Salafism and Wahabism have become associated with a certain trend and ideology in the modern Islamic arena. From a religious perspective, Wahabi Salafism is viewed as a “puritanical reformist call” seeking to maintain identity through rigid adherence to the text. It is based on a literal understanding of what is written, especially in the performance of its rituals, its symbolism and its doctrine, and it urges a return to the purity of monotheism and Islamic doctrine. As such, Wahabi Salafism waged a war against the rituals of Sufism and the Sufi way of life (the tariqah, or path), which Wahabis consider to be laden with superstition and heresy.

Politically speaking, the public space was divided between Sheikh Mohammad Ibn Abdulwahab and the ruling House of Saud in the Arabian Peninsula. In the modern state of Saudi Arabia, the ruling bargain struck between the House of Saud and Sheikh Mohammad Ibn Abdulwahab allocated authority over religious affairs to the latter and political authority to the former, essentially submitting Wahabi Salafism to the political

⁴¹ Albert Hourani, *Al-Fikr al-'Arabi fi 'Asr Inahda, 1798-1939 [Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939]*, trans. Karim 'Azqol (Beirut: Dar Nofel, 1997), pp.49-50. Compare that with Ahmed al-Katib, *al-Fikr Isiysi al-Wahabi: Qira'ah Tahliliya [Wahabi Political Thought: an Analytical Reading]* (Cairo, Madboli Bookshop, 2008), pp.15-43. Also see Mohammad 'Imarah, *Op. Cit.*, 253-261.

authority of Al Saud. This arrangement reflected the philosophy of the Salafism of antiquity, which counseled obedience to the authority of political rulers and forbade rebellion against them.

This marriage of interests between Wahabi Salafism and the Saudi ruling house would come to have an impact during the twentieth century in the 1970s. With the oil boom, the ruling Al-Saud family employed Salafis to serve the state, while Salafis used this relationship to define the country's public space in order to impose their religious views on society.

This mutually beneficial relationship between the Salafis and the Saudi leadership extended far beyond the domestic sphere to envelope foreign politics and contribute to the spread of Salafi ideology around the globe. The oil boom effectively financed the expansion of a global Wahabi network through which activities and publications were funded. These publications were distributed across the Arab and Islamic worlds, also reaching Muslim minorities in Western countries.

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, a new trend called Reformist Salafism was taking root. This new trend was influenced by historical and Wahabi Salafism, particularly the idea of returning to the key Islamic sources, such as the Holy Quran and Sunnah, for guidance, the rejection of heresy, and confronting Sufism. However, Reformist Salafism instead renounced the principle of imitation and endorsed opening the door to *ijtihad* (interpretation).

The emergence of the reformist movement coincided with the collapse and fracture of the Ottoman Empire and the Arab world's subsequent encounter with Western colonialism, a phenomenon that influenced, or perhaps forced, Salafism to adopt a more rational and open disposition compared to the isolationist tendency of Wahabi Salafism. For this pioneering brand of Salafis, "progress and backwardness" and religious reform became key matters of debate and discussion. In a sense, the reformists integrated rationality with the basic principles of Wahabi Salafism, which called for pure monotheism and an end to heresy.

Some differ in the ascription of Salafi figures Jamal Eddin al-Afghani (1838-1897) and Mohammad Abdu (1849-1905) to Reformist Salafism, given their general differences with Salafis in the presentation of religious doctrine. Yet their disciple, Mohammad Rashid Ridda (1865-1935), was close to the historical Salafi approach at the beginning of his life, but later on became more aligned with Wahabi Salafism.

The ideology of Reformist Salafism was born of a desire to respond to the Western challenge facing the Muslim world, and sought to fix the backward Islamic situation through a process of renaissance and progress. Although Reformist Salafism emerged in response to colonialism, it did not express the encounter with the West as a challenge to Islamic identity; rather, it concentrated on solutions to the "backwardness" of the Islamic condition.⁴²

⁴² See Mohammad Abu Rumman, *Bayn Hakimiyya Allah Wasultat al-Ummah: al-Fikr al-Siyasi li Sheikh Mohammad Rashid Ridda [Between the God's Hakimiyya and the Authority of the Nation in Sheikh Mohammad Rashid Ridda's Political Thought]*, (Amman: Ministry of Culture, 2010), pp.9-13.

Reformist Salafism urged the adoption of Western commerce and practical sciences. In order to confront European challenges, reformists argued, there was a need to introduce applied Western sciences. The reform movement sought to reform religious doctrine, unite followers around specific ideas pertaining to worship, and combat heresy as other Salafi trends did, but it also enthusiastically tackled the deteriorating social and political affairs of Muslims.

Later in the twentieth century, Nationalist Salafism in the North Africa region emerged, intent on resisting Western colonization of the Muslim world. These movements were informed by the concept of Islamic jihad and the legitimacy of confronting foreign aggression and occupation. They also sought to establish a pan-Islamic state in colonialism's wake. Among the nationalists' most prominent personalities were Abdulhamid Bin Badis (1889-1940), the Society of Muslim Scholars in Algeria, 'Ilal al-Fasi (1910-1974), Sheikh Shu'aib al-Dukali (1878-1938), and Sheikh al-Islam Mohammad Bin al-'Arabi in Morocco (1880-1964).

Nationalist Salafism combined the concern for reform and renaissance with national liberation. Mohammad Bin al-'Arabi's impact in consolidating this trend in Morocco was the most enduring. Not only did Bin al-'Arabi fight the Sufi loyal to the French Protectorate; he also resisted the French directly by exposing French policies and encouraging Moroccans to resist colonization. Moreover, he joined the rebels in the countryside, and maintained his support for the national liberation movement despite the harassment to which he was subjected at the hands of the French authorities.⁴³

⁴³For the translation of Mohammad Bin al-Arabi on the website of the Moroccan movement of Reform and Monotheism, June, 10, 2010, see: www.alislah.ma/2009-10-07-11-58-22/item/محمد-بن-العربي-العلوي - 41470 .html

Bin al-Arabi's significant impact was the transformation of Salafism in Morocco from Historical Salafism (which was Wahabi in nature and adopted by the Moroccan regime as a religious ideology) into a nationalist Salafism that produced the first generation of the Moroccan nationalist movement. It offered Moroccan Salafis an Arab-Islamic intellectual foundation that aligned with their modernist aspirations and their nationalist leanings.⁴⁴

This said, the nationalist and reformist Salafism that emerged in the early twentieth century noticeably retreated in the following decades, particularly with the ascendance of the Muslim Brotherhood and then with the emergence of jihadi trends in the latter half of the century. However, Salafism's ascendance – particularly the Wahabi brand – was restored in recent decades, which is to a great extent attributable to Saudi Arabia's oil boom prosperity.

2. The Confused Salafi: The “Polytheism of Graves” and “Polytheism of Palaces”

Since the 1970s, Salafism has flourished, with Saudi Arabia playing a key role in its ascendance due to the historical linkage between Salafism and the Saudi government. As previously mentioned, Saudi Arabia's influence was elevated thanks to the oil boom of the 1970s, when resulting funds propped up Salafism and its supporters. Furthermore, the boom helped create thousands of jobs and scholarships for Arabs to work and study in Saudi Arabia. Unsurprisingly, these developments significantly contributed to the promotion of Salafi ideology throughout wide tracts of Arab society.

⁴⁴ For more details on “enlightened Salafism,” see, Mohammad ‘Imarah, *Tayarat al-Fikr al-Islami [Trends of Islamic Thought]*, Op. Cit., pp.291-296.

During the 1970s and the 1980s, Salafism focused on religious doctrine and proselytization and had little to do with politics. It distanced itself from the establishment of political parties and other types of political activity, especially political opposition.

Abdulaziz Bin Baz and Mohammed Bin ‘Uthaimin explicitly strived to maintain a solid and symbiotic relationship between the ruling Saud family and the Salafi movement. Over time this relationship has deepened to become a pillar of the modern Saudi state. The two sheikhs and their institution, the Council of Senior Scholars, assumed the job of endowing the state with legitimacy, and they discredited anyone who defied or competed with the Saud family for power.

Bin Baz, Bin ‘Uthaimin and their companions were committed to the doctrinal and religious aspect of Salafism. They contributed to promoting the Salafi to promoting the Salafi Call by teaching it in universities, authoring books and issuing religious edicts. A large number of their books and edicts touched on the aspects of monotheism, as well as on discourse with other Islamic sects.

They also taught the proof of Hadith and published information about Salafi heritage, particularly the books of Ibn Tay-miyyah, Ahmed Bin Hanbal and Mohammad Bin Abdulwahab, as well as other scholars.

The Council of Senior Scholars’ emphasis on “obeying the ruler”, its eschewal of political participation and its regard for the opposition as deviant, however, did not prevent the emergence of a trend (to the right of the Council of Senior Scholars) during the 1980s, and particularly during the 1990s, that was more hawkish in its opposition to political activism. This trend criticized Islamic political parties for going astray, and

specialized in responding to the pioneers of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna and Sayid Qutb, for example.

One of the most prominent figures of this trend in Saudi Arabia was Mohammad Bin Aman al-Jami, who came from Ethiopia to study in Saudi Arabia. He settled in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s, and became a lecturer at the Islamic University in Medina and the Mosque of the Prophet.⁴⁵

Al-Jami and his followers (who were later called al-Jami) were known for religious intolerance. They took extreme positions against other Islamic groups, emphasized the principle of obedience and castigated political opposition and the formation of political parties as heretical.⁴⁶

In his ceremonies, seminars, and lectures, al-Jami's enmity toward Islamic opposition groups – such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the Da'wa and Tablighi Jama'at (Society for the Call and Advocacy), and Salafi politicians – was pronounced. He argued that Wahabi Salafism was the proper understanding of Islam, and he defended an approach that shunned partisan activism and politics.⁴⁷

One of al-Jami's most prominent disciples was Rabi' Bin Hadi al-Madkhali, a Saudi who came from the south of the kingdom who eventually became a lecturer at the Islamic University. Al-Madkhali followed his mentor in specializing in the response to Islamist movements and Salafi political activism.

⁴⁵ See the official website of Mohammad Bin Aman al-Jami:
<http://www.eljame.com/mktba/pageother.php?catsmktba=40>.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, Mohammad Bin Aman al-Jami:
<http://www.eljame.com/mktba/play.php?catsmktba=3>.

⁴⁷ See al-Jami's explanation of the surviving group:

This school of thought was extended to Yemen through Muqbil Bin Hadi al-Wad'e, a Yemeni who studied in Saudi Arabia and was later expelled after being accused of taking part in the Juhayman revolt and movement of 1981.

Al-Wad'e strongly denied any connection to that movement, but in the early 1980s returned to Yemen, where he settled and gained a following through his promotion of Salafi ideas.

In Jordan, Nassir Eddin al-Albani was close to the line of Ibn Baz and Ibn 'Uthaimin with regards to non-interference in politics. "It is political to leave politics" was a phrase for which he was renowned. And yet, his school, which expanded into other Arab countries, and its disciples were closer to the al-Jami and al-Madkhali trend in terms of their relationship with the government and their position vis-à-vis Islamic political activism.⁴⁸

During the 1980s, these new groups disagreed with Traditional Salafism's emphasis on obedience, and opposed its abandonment of politics and partisan activism. They refuted the notion that political involvement was heretical or an un-Islamic innovation.

One of the most famous figures of this new trend (later defined as *haraki*, or activist, Salafism) is Mohammad Bin Srur Bin Nayif Bin Zein al-'Abidin, a Syrian national who fled Syria for Saudi Arabia with the Syrian regime's crackdown on the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood at the end of

<http://www.eljame.com/mktba/play.php?catsmktba=120>; see also his fatwa on participating in Parliament: <http://www.eljame.com/mktba/play.php?catsmktba=413>

⁴⁸ For more details on this trend, see Abdulghani 'Imad, *Op. Cit.*, p.273.

the 1960s. While in Saudi Arabia, he served as a school-teacher in the city of al-Breidah, and shortly after that, in the 1970s, he left for Kuwait. He eventually settled in London to establish the Islamic Forum, and he published al-Sunnah magazine, which remains a key media outlet for this particular Salafi trend. During the 1991 Gulf War, the magazine gained more attention and currency among Salafis when several Arab governments banned it.

Srur's ideas clashed with Traditional Salafism, and his adversaries – particularly the followers of al-Jami and al-Madkhali – came to describe those engaged with political Salafism as the “Sruri group”.⁴⁹ His ideas and analysis of politics and his vision for change won popularity in Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries, and he became influential among some scholars and preachers, known in Saudi Arabia as the “revivalist sheikhs.”

During the 1970s, and more conspicuously during the 1980s, the Egyptian Sheikh Abdurrahman Abdulkhaliq came to attention. He studied in the Islamic University of Medina and then taught in Kuwait in the mid-1960s. Along with a number of other Salafis, he contributed to the establishment of the Society for the Revival of Salafi Heritage. In doing so, he presented a new Salafi approach to reform and change and a different position toward political activism.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Compare the rejection of Salafis to involvement in political activism or in Sruri with the reply of Muqbil Bin Hadi al-Wade' in his lecture:*

“this is Sruri, be careful.” You can listen to his lecture at his official website: http://www.muqbel.net/sounds.php?sound_id=6; See also Srur's response in an article about his political and proselytizing history. His article is “Chapters from the past: Sruri”: <http://www.sudanforum.net/showthread.php?t=72791>

⁵⁰ *On Abdurrahman Abdulkhaliq's biography, watch the Muraj'at show at al-Hewar TV station: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15SuN8OB9NI&feature=related>*

In his book, *al-Muslumun wal'amal el-Siyasi* (Muslims and Political Activism), Abdulkhaliq stressed the need for Muslims to be politically involved and establish political parties and associations. He advocated new means and tools for change, and believed that politics was a God-given means to achieve change that should not be dismissed.

He argued that as long as Islamists had no other alternative, they must benefit from the means of democracy in some Arab countries and allow political participation, even if there was no guarantee that ballot results would be respected.⁵¹

Abdulkhaliq helped pave the way for political activism within the Salafi movement. In the 1980s, he encouraged Salafis to participate in the partisan experiment. He was also committed to peaceful change and adamantly opposed the use of violence. Unlike Jihadi Salafism, he was opposed to political rebellion against a ruler.⁵²

Although Bin Srur and Abdulkhaliq endorsed and encouraged political activism and opposed the injunctions of obedience and takfir, Bin Srur was closer to combining Salafism with the Qutbian school of thought, and was sharper in his criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood than Abdulkhaliq, who was generally more open to Islamists. Their differences were more salient later on with regards to Salafism in Yemen when al-Ihsan Charity Association – influenced by Bin Srur – defected from

⁵¹ See the link to the book at the Salafi website that adopts the ideas of Abdulkhaliq: <http://www.salafi.net>; See also the reply of Mohammad Bin Nassir Eddin al-Albani: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUACBaSQwG0>

⁵² See Abdurrahman Abdulkhaliq, *al-Siyasa Ashr'iya Fi Edda'wah Ila Allah [The Legitimate Policy in Preaching for God]* (Kuwait: Bait al-Maqdis for Publication and Distribution, 2006), pp.337-405. This tome includes a group of studies and books authored by Abdulkhaliq in his early life.

the Yemeni Wisdom Charity Association, influenced by Abdurrahman Abdulkhaliq.⁵³

Abdulkhaliq was among the first contemporary Salafis who theorized about political participation in parliament. His ideas were deeply imprinted on the Salafis of Kuwait, Bahrain and Sudan as early as the 1980s. His theories came at a time when a majority of Salafi groups cast aside partisan work.⁵⁴

In the wake of the 1991 Gulf War, a heated debate within the Salafi movement broke out when a new trend declared that it was forbidden to seek foreign military assistance to liberate Kuwait. This fatwa directly contradicted one issued by the Saudi Council of Senior Scholars legitimating precisely that. At the helm of this new trend was Safar al-Hawali, who received his doctorate in Islamic theology from Umm al-Qura University in Saudi Arabia. Al-Hawali wrote a book about former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's promise and American objectives in the Gulf. He also lectured frequently in opposition to foreign intervention in Kuwait. Along with him, Saudi scholars such as Salman al-Awdah, Aaidh Ibn Abdullah al-Qarni, and Nassir al-Umr founded a Salafi trend that is known as the revivalist trend.⁵⁵

⁵³ See Mshari al-Dhaidi's article published in *Sharq al-Awsat* daily newspaper (October 28, 2004) in which he talks about Mohammad Bin Sruri, who mixed the Qutbian ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood with the Salafism of Ibn Taymiyyah.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, see Abdurrahman Abdulkhaliq's reception in Cairo: <http://alwatan.kuwait.tt/ArticleDetails.aspx?Id=165110&YearQuarter=20121>

⁵⁵ See Mahmud al-Rifa'e, *Al-Mashru' al-Islahi fi al-Saudiya: Qisat al-Hawali wal 'Awdah* [The Reform Project in Saudi Arabia: The Story of al-Hawali and al-'Awdah] (Washington: 1995), pp.11-34.

The revivalist trend was criticized by the al-Jami and al-Madkhali groups. They ascribed the revivalist trend to the influence of Mohammad Bin Srur and Mohammad Qutb (a relative of Sayid Qutb), who settled in Saudi Arabia in the 1980s. Qutb lectured at Umm al-Qura University and had advised al-Hawali during his doctoral studies on the phenomenon of *irja'* (postponement of judgment until judgment day) in Islamic thinking.⁵⁶ One of the most significant themes in this thesis was the concern to empower Islamic law and connect faith with work. Implicit in the thesis was a tacit response to the Salafi trend that does practice *takfir*.⁵⁷ His master's thesis, meanwhile, had been on secularism.⁵⁸ A great number of his lectures emphasized the need to give Shari'a legal supremacy, regarding it as the essence of monotheism and Islamic doctrine.⁵⁹

The discourse of this new trend combined the call for more serious implementation of Shari'a and for the preservation of the country's conservative identity against liberalism.

This current demanded economic and political reform from the Saudi monarchy to strengthen public liberties and limit rampant corruption. It also urged a more robust commitment to Shari'a.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ See Safar Abdurrahman al-Hawali, *Zaihrat al-Irja' fil Fikr al-Islami [The Phenomenon of Postponement in Islamic Thought]*, (Dar al-Kalima for Publication and Distribution, 1999).

⁵⁷ For the attack of al-Jami's trend on al-Hawali and al-'Awdah, see Mahmud al-Rifa'e, *Op. Cit.*, pp.52-57.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Safar Abdurrahman al-Hawali, *al-'Ilamniya: Nash'atuha and Tatawuruha wa Ta'hiruha fil Hayatu al-'Amah [Secularism: Its Origin, Evolution, and Impact on Public Life]*, (1982).

⁶⁰ Mahmud al-Rifa'e, *Op. Cit.*, pp.59-86.

The revivalist movement was well received. Although it was born of Wahabi Salafism, it pursued a different political and intellectual discourse with regards to the Saudi regime, political activism, and its own relationship to other Islamic movements.⁶¹ During that same period, similar trends in Saudi Arabia (that combined other Islamic intellectual and Salafi tendencies) emerged and joined the call for reform. Some of their members – such as Mohammad al-Mis’ari and Sa’d al-Faqih – were compelled to immigrate to London following pressure from the Saudi authorities. By the end of 1994, al-Hawali, al-Awdah, and their companions were in prison. In fact, the Council of Senior Scholars issued a fatwa at that time granting legitimacy to the Saudi government’s decision to imprison them. Al-Hawali and al-Awdah remained imprisoned until 1999. After their release, the Saudi authorities significantly restricted their activities.⁶²

After al-Hawali and al-Awdah were released, they modified their discourse, urging a de-escalation of tension with the Saudi authorities, especially with the emergence of Jihadi Salafism in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Both al-Hawali and al-Awdah criticized al-Qaeda and its operations. Along with others, they distributed a letter entitled, “On What Basis We Coexist.” This letter came in response to one written by American intellectuals following the terrorist attacks of

⁶¹ *On the echo of the movement, see Mahmud al-Rifa’i, Op. Cit., pp.88-103.*

⁶² *For the position of the Council of Senior Scholars on al-Hawali and al-’Awdah, see Mahmud al-Rifa’i, Op. Cit., pp.161-170.*

September 2011 entitled “For What Do We Fight?”⁶³.

It is possible to note the landscape of political Salafism by examining the Salafi groups involved in Kuwaiti politics and other Arab Gulf countries. Examples include the Society of the Revival of Islamic Heritage in Kuwait, the Education Society in Bahrain (to which the Authenticity bloc belongs), the al-Kitab wal Sunnah society in Jordan,⁶⁴ the Lebanese Islamic Forum for the Call and Dialogue led by Mohammad al-Khadr in Lebanon,⁶⁵ the societies of al-Ihsan and al-Hikmah in Yemen, followers of Mohammad Ali Bilhaj (affiliated with the Islamic Salvation Front) in Algeria, and the revivalist trend led by Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Awdah in Saudi Arabia.

During the 1990s, jihadi and Salafi thought merged, and were embodied most clearly in al-Qaeda and its incubator, the Jihadi Salafi trend. This trend combined Salafi religious doctrine with the ideas of Sayid Qutb, and his focus on al-hakimiyya (submission to God) and jihad as legitimate means by which to achieve change. Furthermore, this trend merged the domestic battle for change within Arab states, targeting Arab regimes (the near enemy), with the external battle against the United

⁶³ For more details on the American letter, see Radwan al-Sayid, Assira' 'La al-Islam: Al-Usuli wal Islah wal Siyasat Addwliyah [The Conflict Over Islam: Fundamentalism, Reform, and International Politics], (Beirut: Dar Ilkitab al-'Arabi, 2004), pp.47-73. See also the statement “On What Basis We Coexist?” and the discussion it generated, such as Mohammad Suleiman, “Risalat Mecca, Hazihi Lughat al-Hewar Bayn al-Umam wal Shu'ub” [Mecca Letter; This is the Language of Dialogue among Nations], Majalat al-'Asr Al-Iliktroniya, May 3, 2003: <http://alasr.ws/articles/view/2258>.

⁶⁴ See the official website of the al-Kithab wal Sunnah society at http://ktabsona.com/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1.

⁶⁵ See Omayma Abdel-Latif, e Omayma Abdel-Latif, Op. Cit, p.13.

States, Israel, and the West (the far enemy). This development came with a key assumption that the West, the United States in particular, Israel and the Arab regimes were in collusion against Muslims. Jihadi Salafis reasoned that an Islamic victory over Arab regimes required attacking the great powers that underpinned them.⁶⁶

Throughout the region, modern Salafism embodies four distinct trends: traditional, al-Jami, jihadi and haraki, or activist). Nonetheless it is difficult to summarize all Salafi groups and trends under a well-defined framework: there are distinctions but the lines between them are ill-defined and blurred, rendering a Salafi scene that is fragmented but whose elements are overlapping. This is particularly apparent in Egypt, Lebanon, and Kuwait.

Broadening the focus to the general outline of Salafi political discourses, we will find there is huge range of agreement and disagreement within Salafism. This is true particularly on two accounts: the concept of the Salafi state and its general character, and understandings of contemporary politics, and strategies for change or reform to reach the aspired-to Islamic state.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ See, Mohammad Abu Rumman, *Al-Islah Isiyasi Fil Fikr al-Islami: Al-Muqarabat, Al-Awlawiyat, Al-Istratejiat* [Political Reform in the Islamic Thought: Approaches, Priorities, and Strategies], (Beirut: The Arab Network for Research and Publication, 2010), pp.255-260.

⁶⁷ For more details on Salafis in Lebanon, see 'Imad Abdulghani, *Op. Cit.*, pp.309-242 then compare that to the complexity of the Salafi map in Lebanon that addresses the sub-branches of Salafism at <http://www.nowlebanon.com/Library/Files/Arabic-Documentation/salafist%20arabic2.pdf>.

3. The Salafi State

Salafis, from the extreme right to left, agree that the domains of politics and religion are intertwined. Moreover, the implementation of Shari'a and the establishment of the Islamic state as a doctrinal issue and as an integral requirement of monotheism are not disputed. The establishment of an Islamic state is an acknowledgement of and form of submission to God alone. This perspective accounts for the Salafi reservation that democracy is alien to Islam. Here, the al-Jami trend is a case in point. Some Salafis, especially those belonging to Traditional Salafism, accept democracy either partially or conditionally, provided that it contradicts neither the rulings

of Islam nor the acknowledgment of God's right to legislate. In principle, the aspired-to Salafi state is committed to the rulings of Islam and does not defy or violate Islamic texts. Yet there is variance in Salafi discourse with regards to the rights of women and minorities, for example, as well as to the question of individual liberties and artistic expression. Yet, all Salafi trends agree that Shari'a ultimately informs their positions on these controversial issues.

There is also wide Salafi discord over the legitimacy of political authority despite general agreement on the form of the state. For instance, the al-Jami trend gives primacy to the principle of obedience and is predisposed to realism in its acceptance of the rule of the victorious. Among the al-Jami trend, a ruler's legitimacy is not suspect as long as he is Muslim. Another trend links the legitimacy of rulers to elections, consultation, or the social contract between the ruler and the ruled. In other words, this trend does not grant a ruler legitimacy simply because he is Muslim, and it endorses rebellion against leaders who do not ascend to power through consensus or who do not uphold the social contract.

The Traditional Salafi trend espousing “obedience to the ruler” does not attach importance to political freedoms, human rights or public liberties. Rather it negatively views political activism, and believes a ruler should instead be “advised”. Traditional Salafism views political opposition and political parties as Western innovations, along with parliamentary politics and elections. The reformist trend argues that the implementation of Shari’a allows for public liberties, respect for human rights, freedom of expression, and securing the rights of the opposition.⁶⁸

The traditional current stems from mainstream Sunni political heritage, which on the whole gives primacy to maintaining the status quo. This disposition was conditioned by the failure of revolutions and rebellions against the Umayyad and Abbasid reigns following the era of the Righteous Caliphs. These upheavals ended in a series of bloody crises and seditions, and the fear of recurring anarchy produced a preference for stability and security among many scholars.

Acceptance of the status quo gained legitimacy in the later stage of the second Abbasid era, especially. With the weakness of the Arab Caliphate, along with the ascendancy of the Persian, Turkic, and Mamluk militaries, scholars began to fear for the Caliphate and the Arab identity of the Islamic state. Circumstances produced a trade-off whereby they declared leadership by force to be legitimate under one condition: the imam must be from the Quraish tribe to safeguard the Arab identity of the Islamic state.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ *Al-Jami does not see parliaments as a legislature authority. He believes that this is a right of God, not people. He wonders if a Muslim can refer to himself as a lawmaker. He considers the actions of parliament as Kufr and a mockery of God. For more information about his fatwa on parliamentary participation and elections, see the following link: <http://www.alhawali.com/index.cfm?method=home.SubContent&contentID=955>.*

⁶⁹ *For more details on the Sunni fiqh opinions on the legitimacy of the political authority and the acceptance of the authority of the victorious, see Mohammad Abu Rumman, Bayn Hakimiyya, Op. Cit., pp.86-147.*

Acceptance of leadership by force is clearly echoed in the Salafi discourse of Ibn Taymiyyah, whose thought was characterized by political realism. He recognized that a ruler's legitimacy is determined by control over access to resources, provided that whoever controlled resources had the ability and the integrity to rule.⁷⁰

In the schools of al-Jami and al-Madkhali, on the other hand, legitimacy is rooted in religion. Thus, if a ruler is Muslim, he cannot be defied no matter how he came to power. In accepting the rule of the victorious, these schools also distinguish between peaceful and violent opposition. For example, they note the distinction between passive Kharajites (who practice takfir against rulers but whose defiance is expressed through political activism rather than violence) and active Kharajites. However, the distinction is only conceptual: from a doctrinal position, all opposition to a Muslim ruler is illegitimate, and therefore, the Kharajites, for whom political contestation is integral, are viewed as heretical.

4. Strategies for Change

Though Salafis share similar opinions about the doctrinal imperatives of establishing an Islamic state and implementing Shari'a, they have different views of the political conditions of Arab and Muslim societies before (and after) the onset of the Arab Spring. Therefore, they differ on strategies for reform and change to realize the establishment of the envisioned Islamic state.

A large amount of Islamic heritage forbids rebellion against Muslims rulers, even those who are autocratic or impious. This norm infuses Salafi variations with regard to Salafism's

⁷⁰ See Hassan Konakita, *Al-Nazariya Asiyasiah 'Ind Ibn Taymiyyah [Political Theory for Ibn Taymiyyah]*, (Riyadh: Dar al-Akha' in Dammam and the Center for Studies and Media in Riyadh, 2004), pp.87-92.

desired relationship with the Arab regimes formed in the post-colonial era. Their differences among them stem from how each trend defines the Muslim identity of a leader, which in turn governs whether or not a Salafi may legitimately challenge or accept a leader.

Although Ibn Taymiyyah is the most important general intellectual reference for Salafism as a whole, Salafis disagree on certain issues. Al-Jami adhered to Ibn Taymiyyah's injunction forbidding the defiance of a ruler who prayed as required. He opined that "an autocratic ruler is better than a lasting sedition." However, jihadis and Haraki Salafis refer on this matter to Ibn Taymiyyah's fatwa declaring that monotheism should be embedded in legislation, as well as to his judgment that the Tatars were infidels because they had adopted Yassa (a set of mixed rules from Islamic doctrine and Tatar teachings).⁷¹

As the Japanese scholar Hassan Konakita explained it, Ibn Taymiyyah's impact on the Jihadi Salafis' contemporary Islamic thought is evident in the transformation of the concept of monotheism into a political ideological foundation from which militant Islamic groups legitimated their activities against authorities in Egypt.⁷²

In Saudi Arabia, the situation is confused. The country's Basic Law of 1992 identifies Shari'a as the kingdom's constitution, which has encouraged Salafi revivalist leaders to call for the strict implementation of Shari'a and for the removal of "whatever violates Shari'a" from other legislation. However, Saudi Salafis take a more strident stand with regards to other Arab governments that do not implement Shari'a. For example, the writing of Salafi scholar Mohammad Bin Ibrahim al-Sheikh, entitled *Risalat Tahkim al-Qawanin al-Wadh'iyah*, declares any ruler who does not rule in accordance with Shari'a to be an infidel: "It is an explicit infidelity to consider man-made

⁷¹ Hassan Konakita, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 195-225.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp.195-225.

law to be of the same status as what has been revealed in clear Arabic to Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him.”⁷³

Among Salafis, there are three prevalent outlooks in terms of their approach to Arab leaders who do not govern according to Islamic law. The al-Jami and al-Madkhali trend as well as followers of Nassir Eddin al-Albani in Jordan, consider leaders to be infidels once they stop believing in the implementation of Shari’a. The condition of *istihlal* (to permit what Allah forbids or forbid what Allah permits) is the measure by which belief is judged to be present or not, and thus the determining factor in judgment. The absence of the conditions of *takfir* is the second determining factor. If a Muslim ruler is ignorant, or if his failure to govern in accordance with Shari’a is a result of coercion or an externally imposed inability to do so, the duty to comply with the ruler obtains. Seen in this way, their objective in seeking change is to change whatever does not correspond to Shari’a, rather than change a ruler himself. However, a Muslim ruler who adopts a heretical doctrine may be considered an infidel.

The second trend – some activist Salafis in Kuwait and the Salafi Call in Egypt – determines a situation, rather than a ruler, to be heretical when rulers fail to govern according to Shari’a. In doing so, they judge the action, rather than the individual, as un-Islamic, and they seek the removal of the conditions of *takfir* through change and reform.

The third trend is the Jihadi Salafi trend, which considers Arab rulers to be infidels when they do not rule in accordance with Shari’a. The logical conclusion is that rebellion against these rulers is inevitable, even if it entails the use of force. Jihadi ideologues, however, emphasize that conditions must be such that a Muslim has the ability to defy or change a ruler successfully before attempting to do so.

⁷³ See the *Safar al-Hawaii*’s explanation of this letter and this text: <http://www.alhawali.com/index.cfm?method=home.SubContent&contentID=955>.

Chapter One:

How I Became a Salafi

This chapter presents representative models of young Salafi groups in Jordan who belong to the traditional Salafi Call. They are an extension of the school of Sheikh Nassir Eddin al-Albani and his disciples. These groups' objectives have always been scholarship, educational, and proselytization, and their approach based on purification. They have avoided political activism, prioritizing scholarship that reinforces the concepts of Salafism and focuses on the science of Hadith (in which al-Albani excelled) to discern between correct and weak Hadith.

More often than not, the experiences of the Salafis I met and followed reveal that their personal experiences with Salafism had followed a similar trajectory. Most were attracted by Salafism's keenness on scholarship. Salafism is distinguished from other Islamic schools of thought in its focus on religious sciences, including the study of Hadith, to infer the religiously correct posture for an individual to assume towards political, social or personal matters.

The significance of Traditional Salafism's interest in the religious sciences is evident in the heightened and central status the "student" occupies. While this trend lacks the organizational or hierarchical structures that exist in other Islamic parties and groups, in practice an informal hierarchy structured by levels of learning gives this trend structure. For example, a sheikh, presumably the most learned, enjoys the highest standing, followed by students of science, and finally by the lesser or unlearned readers of Salafi inclination. These classifications are not rigid, however, and lack precise definitions. Nor is there consensus on ranking.

That said, since his arrival in Jordan in the 1980s and his founding of this Salafi current, Sheikh Nassir Eddin al-Albani has been commonly recognized as a sheikh. He enjoyed a special moral and symbolic status, and his close disciples – Ibrahim Shaqra, Ali al-Halabi, Mashhour Hassan, Salim al-Hilali, Murad Shukri, and Mohammed Musa Nasr, to mention a few – later became Salafi sheikhs in Jordan.⁷⁵

Upon al-Albani's death in 2000, a dispute broke out among al-Albani's disciples over who would be his successor. Subsequently, Shaqra and Shukri were alienated and excommunicated, and later on, a public dispute between al-Hilali and al-Halabi resulted in the latter losing leadership status within the trend. As a result, al-Halabi and Hassan, along with another group of religion professors at Jordanian universities, became this trend's sources of religious and intellectual guidance. Others, such as Dr. Bassim al-Jawabrah, Dr. Ziad al-'Abadi, Mohammad Musa Nasr, and Hussein al-'Awayseh, have since gained prominence.

Though the traditional trend shunned any political or organizational activism, the top sheikhs of the al-Albani school of thought (al-Halabi, Hassan, and al-Hilali) established the al-Albani Studies Center, which has become the mouthpiece of this trend. The center published a magazine (*Asalah*) and held seminars on the religious sciences. Later on, these sheikhs launched al-Athir satellite channel to broadcast their lessons and clarify their positions. Al-Athir also gave airtime those who represented their line of thinking across the Arab world.

⁷⁴ For more details on traditional/academic/conservative Salafism, see Mohammad Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Haniyeh, *Op. Cit.*, pp240-343.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.240-243.

Recently, Traditional Salafi community has been affected by the defection of members who upon departure have expressed antagonism toward the movement. This development led to the sidelining of some of the traditional leadership, as students of the emerging sheikhs – including the most prominent students of al-Albani – defied them as differences within the movement came to the fore. Al-Halabi was among those leaders who felt the wrath of his disciples, among them Sheikh Omar al-Btoush and Omar Bin Ibrahim al-Abdurrahman (known as Abu Talha).

Differences exist not only among the members of the al-Albani trend in Jordan. Discord between the top sheikhs – particularly al-Halabi, who is practically speaking the trend’s leader – and their allies in Saudi Arabia have also surfaced. Indeed, discrepancies arose with Sheikh Rabi’ Hadi al-Madkhali in particular, who is an extension of the al-Jami Salafi school of thought, along with prominent former leader al-Albani. The al-Jami trend not only refuses participation in politics, but also opposes other Islamist movements while emphasizing obedience and forbidding opposition. In as much as the al-Jami trend permits opposition, it is in the form of offering advice to errant or misguided rulers. They firmly oppose those within the Salafi community who disagree with their doctrine, whether jihadis (to whom they refer as Kharajites or takfiri) or reformist and Haraki Salafis such as Mohammad Bin Srur Zein al-’Abidin, Abdurrahman Abdulkhaliq, Salman al-Awdah, Safar al-Hawali, and others.

The emergence of new, youthful leaders is another significant development within the Traditional Salafi trend. A majority of them have completed – or are currently studying – Islamic higher studies, representing a new chapter in the trend’s history. Historically, the movement’s sheikhs have been disdainful of academia. However, the ascendant generation – among

them, Hamza al-Majali, Mohammad al-Ramahi, Mu'adh al-'Awayishah, Ahmed Abu Yusuf, Mahmud Mahadin and others – is keen to obtain academic legitimacy to lend more credibility to their views.

A number of the new academic leaders are sowing the seeds of “soft defiance” against the current sheikhdом that rules over Traditional Salafism. According to the sheikhs, a key principle of Salafism is to bestow an authoritative aura on any scholar of religion. Accordingly, one of the most important values of Traditional Salafism is the rejection of doctrinal intolerance. However, some of the new youth leaders have noticed that followers of this trend have granted an exceptional status to the movement’s sheikhs, with some practicing blind loyalty to them.

This has produced a situation in which the sheikhdом has been able to use its religious authority to shut out some of the movement’s most prominent and distinguished youth who have criticized some sheikhs over ethical issues concerning finance and scientific integrity. The blind loyalty of these sheikhs’ followers permits the sheikhs to use religious argumentation for essentially personal reasons; namely, the consolidation of their personal authority and the sheikhdом in general.

A number of Salafis – who are familiar with the movement’s logistics – express reservations about the domestic and external sources of the movement’s funding and how it is spent. Indeed, questions over funding explain the exclusion of Salim al-Hilali and the imprisonment of one of the trend’s most influential rising preachers, Abu Talha. Questions about finances have also led some in the movement to question the nature of the relationship between the official establishment in Jordan and the official religious establishment in Saudi Arabia.

Though details of the movement's finances are beyond the scope of this study, the matter is significant because it is a "black stain" on the moral credibility of the leadership and its relations with its members.

In addition to al-Albani, a number of other Salafi figures have enjoyed exceptional status and played a role in conflict resolution with the Traditional Salafi trend. These figures represented a sort of "shadow authority", are disinterested in much publicity and therefore have low visibility. Chief among them is Salih Taha (Abu Islam), Sheikh Ra'fat Lutfi who works at Jordan's Electric Power Company, Abdullah al-Musli who is an imam at a mosque in Amman's Gardens Street neighborhood, and Sheik Ghalib al-Saqi.⁷⁶

Among the new academic Salafi generation that emerged at the beginning of this century are Dr. Hamza al-Majali, Dr. Mu'adh al-'Awayishah, Dr. Mohammad al-Ramahi, Dr. Mahmud Mahadin, and Dr. Ahmed Abu Yusuf. Some of these ascending stars, in particular Omar al-Btoush and Abu Talha, both imams at mosques administered by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, have been marginalized by the older sheikhs. Ahmed Quteisat from al-Salt, the imam of a mosque in the city center, is another notable name.

The size of this Traditional Salafi trend in Jordan in terms of number of followers is impossible to determine due to its loose organization and the absence of any institutionalized framework. Since relationships are among informally acknowledged sheikhs, disciples and students, linkages are ethical rather than institutional. And yet, despite the absence of a rigid hierarchy, the acknowledged "moral authority" of

⁷⁶ Interview with one of the traditional Salafists who preferred to be anonymous in my office at the Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, Amman, December 23, 2013.

the sheikhs has profound influence over key issues. The academic leadership has the legitimacy to restructure and design the trend's intellectual discourse and map its priorities at any juncture and to define the movement's policy with regards to current affairs or even promote or demote leadership figures.

This Salafi trend can be found throughout Jordan, but is most prevalent in Amman, particularly in the eastern part of the capital (including the neighborhoods of Jabal al-Nasr Mountain, Hai Nazal and al-Qweismeh) which has a high concentration of Jordanians of Palestinian origin. Salafism is also evident in Zarqa, as well as in the city of Ruseifa, and to a lesser extent in the northern city of Irbid. It is less prevalent in Salt and the kingdom's southern governorates.

Some Salafis have identified a new trend in their movement's leadership. In the former generation, the majority of leaders were of Palestinian origin, but in recent years, there has been a notable emergence of leaders from Jordanian origin, such as Hamza al-Majali, Mu'adh al-'Awayishah, Mahmud Mahadin, Bassim al-Jawabrah, Ziad al-'Abadi, and Omar al-Btoush.

This chapter presents four different groupings of the Salafi trend in Jordan. First, I will present a group of residents, many in their forties, in Amman's Tafila neighborhood. They are the disciples of Ali al-Halabi and Mashhour Hassan. Second, I will examine the new scholarly generation, sharing the experience of Dr. Mu'adh al-'Awayishah. Third, I will focus on the young generation through the experience of two young Salafis, an engineer who calls himself Abu Hud al-Salafi and preferred to be referred to as such, and Fathi al-Ali al-'Athari. Finally, I will present the youth who defied the traditional sheikdom, as in the case of Omar al-Btoush.

1. The Tafila Neighborhood Salafis: Commitment to the Methodology of the Sheikhs

In recent years, Amman's Tafila neighborhood has become known for its restiveness. The demands for political reform emanating from this neighborhood were daring, and challenging to the Jordanian regime. Here, I met with nine Salafis from the neighborhood in one of their homes. They shared the milestones on their journey to Salafism, as I asked them how and why they chose Salafism, and what they found to be the most salient religious and intellectual opinions within the movement.⁷⁷

Because an organizational or administrative framework that can be used to define the size of the trend does not exist, it is impossible to discern the size of the Salafi trend in the Tafila neighborhood. Likewise, merely defining the trend I was referring to was difficult: among the neighborhood's Salafi community are those who attend all group activities, others who simply accept and endorse Salafi ideas, and still others whose worldviews and daily lives are shaped by the fatwas of the Salafi sheikhs. The active group – those who are fully immersed in Salafism and attend and participate in all of the group's proselytizing and social events – may include as many as 20 neighborhood residents, whose original hometowns are in the southern governorate of al-Tafila.

This number may sound modest given the fact that there are tens of thousands of neighborhood residents. However, the

⁷⁷ *This interview was held in the house of a Salafi in al-Tafila neighborhood in Amman, November 11, 2013.*

significance of the Salafi presence should not be measured in numbers, but by the impact of adherents' intellectual, religious and proselytizing activities. The Tafila neighborhood Salafis believe they have been successful in propagating their ideas over the past few years. It was difficult to connect with the Salafi community given its members' strict religiosity: their commitment to the teachings of Islam is firm, even if such teachings contradict Jordanian tradition and social mores. But as time went on, the Salafi Call and its followers gradually gained society's acceptance and trust.

It was apparent from the outset that this group is committed to the academic leanings of Traditional Salafism. They attend the classes of Ali al-Halabi and Mashhour Hassan, and their intellectual and preaching style is in line with the fatwas of the sheikhs of the Salafi Call. They are committed to the basic pillars of Salafism in their refusal to involve themselves in organizational and political work, and in their focus on religious sciences and concern to rectify society's misconceptions of religion.

In their assessment of other Islamic groups in the neighborhood, they see the Muslim Brotherhood youth as being "too activist" in their campaign to enlist supporters for their political opposition to the government. They have also noticed some influence and impact from Jihadi Salafism, but regard the influence of this trend as limited; they believe Jihadi Salafists are not active on the ground. The Traditional Salafi group have engaged Jihadi Salafists in an online discussion about their views of political activism and the principle of defying the ruler, which Traditional Salafis see as misguided and which marks a break between these two Salafisms.

Tafila's Salafis appear unaffected by the trend's internal differences in the wake of al-Albani's death. They attend seminars, meet well-known sheikhs and attend the classes of Dr. Ahmed Abu Yusuf, one of the most prominent rising sheikhs who occasionally preaches at the Jabal Ettaj Mosque. They have little interest in the internal differences within the trend. While they attend lectures and classes of Sheikh Mashhour Hassan and Sheikh Ali al-Halabi, they do not involve themselves in the controversies among the trend's leaders.

Our discussions led to the basic question of how they were influenced by Traditional Salafism trend and why. In time, it became clear that one member in the group had significant influence: Zaid 'Awad (Abu Osama) is one of the most important figures in bringing together the Salafis of Tafila and promoting Salafism in the neighborhood. Like a majority of them, he is in his forties, and he works in the public sector.

The Salafis living in the Tafila neighborhood – some of whom are long-time residents and others newcomers – share many social characteristics. A majority can be described as belonging to the lower-middle class, are related to the tribes of the Tafila area in the south of Jordan and generally have a conservative background. However, their intellectual experiences vary. Some are more aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood, while others are closer to the Tablighi, a strictly apolitical group that spreads the word, so to speak, about the importance of Islam. Some had not been particularly devout or observant. Yet they all agreed on what attracted them to Salafism. They were intrigued by the central role of religious science and its focus on religious affairs.

Simplicity is also one of the seductive elements of the Salafi Call. Salafism is concerned to prove religious correctness through the proof of Hadith, eschew partisanship, and separate religion from politics as well as the vagaries of personal whim and politics. This runs contrary to other Islamic groups and parties, some of which influenced this Salafi group. Other Islamic parties and groups do not attach monumental importance to the religious sciences. Such groups conflate religion and politics, and some give primacy to partisanship over religious doctrine.

One member of the Tafila group was cooperating with the Muslim Brotherhood and participating in their activities. Over time, he sensed the Muslim Brotherhood had no interest in religious science, nor was it committed to praying in the mosque. He concluded the Muslim Brotherhood lacked religious commitment, rendering suspect their religiosity, particularly where its organizational interests are concerned. He found that Salafism answered his concerns about those issues.

A member of the Tafila group expressed similar sentiments towards the Muslim Brotherhood as well as the Tablighi. He felt their engagement with Islam was only narrowly focused on attending the mosque or conducting outreach throughout Jordan. Their apparent lack of interest in verifying the Hadith and religious science became a source of frustration. Even worse, he believed, was the Tablighi group's summary of Islam as "going out for the sake of God."

Driven by these concerns, the Tafila group sought another outlet for religious commitment and expression, which they found in Salafism.

Although the Tafila Salafis tend to have only a modest education (high school diplomas, with one or two exceptions) they are interested in furthering their religious education. They attend seminars held by the Salafi sheikhs, are viewers of Salafi satellite television programming, especially the al-Athir station that represents the Traditional Salafi trend in Jordan, and channels such as al-Bseirah, al-Rahma; some follow scientific programming such as that found on the Discovery Channel.

The neighborhood's Salafis have a drastically different stance from the activists in Jordan known as the HIRAK, who have stridently demanded political reform and change. As the Arab Spring spread, HIRAK members took to the streets to demonstrate, calling out contentious and often contradictory political slogans. As a result, many of them were arrested. In spite of the Traditional Salafi disapproval of political opposition, the Salafis have not challenged the activists or opposed them publicly. Instead, they expressed their intellectual opinions of the HIRAK. According one of those interviewed for this book, Salafis in Jordan believe that such demonstrations, though peaceful today, will inevitably turn into militant dissent against the country's leadership.

Zaid 'Awad argues that though his group might agree with the demands of the HIRAK – for example, the demand to fight corruption – their position as Salafis is not to engage in politics. Another in 'Awad's group observed that the majority of demonstrations in Jordan were over bread and butter issues, and “lacked any genuine religious content. Furthermore, many of the activists are not committed to Islamic rulings, so how can we participate in their activities?”

During our meetings, group members invoked segments of the Hadith that require obedience and warn that Muslims are not to rebel against their leaders, lest they visit sedition, bloodshed and anarchy on society, they argued. Some of them wondered what they could do when the Hadith had clearly banned protests and demonstrations.

This group also disapproves of the Egyptian Salafis' involvement in politics. Their disapproval extends to the Salafi Nour party's participation in Egypt's parliamentary elections, which they believe contravenes Islamic teachings eschewing political involvement. They refer to Mashhour Hassan's prediction that the Egyptian Salafi experiment would fail, and believe that the course of events in Egypt have proven him correct.

2. Mu'adh al-'Awayishah: The New Academic Generation

In the al-Nasr neighborhood of East Amman, Dr. Mu'adh al-'Awayishah welcomed me into his home, which is connected to Dar al-Hijra Mosque, for a meeting with several Salafis who were working towards the completion of postgraduate degrees Islamic studies.⁷⁸ They represent the new generation of Traditional Salafism, distinct from the Traditional Salafis of the Tafila neighborhood. This group holds new ideas and a critical vision of the trend's reality in Jordan.

Al-'Awayishah was born in 1975 in Saudi Arabia, and spent his early life and childhood with his family there. His father, also a Salafi, was an Arabic teacher. During the Gulf War of 1991, he and his family moved to Jordan, to the Jabal al-Nasr area, where al-'Awayishah, in ninth grade, continued his studies at the Abu al-Huda al-Sayadi school. He went on to receive his bachelor degree in theology from the faculty of Da'wa and Usuluddein (now known as Al-Balqa' Applied University), and a master's degree from the University of Jordan. Recently, he received a doctorate in Islamic law from Yarmouk University, and at the time of writing was the imam of Dar al-Hijra mosque, and has delivered the Friday sermon for several years.

Early on, al-'Awayishah noticed the plethora of Islamic groups and movements in mosques, even at his state-sponsored school. At the time, Jordanian society and politics were significantly influenced by the Palestinian intifada against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. During the intifada years, several Muslim Brotherhood youth traveled to the occupied territories to lend support to the Palestinian

⁷⁸ This interview took place on December 3, 2013.

uprising and attack Israeli targets, which boosted the brotherhood's political currency and leadership status among Jordanians.

Al-'Awayishah's confusion over the Islamic movements was short-lived. His uncle, Dr. Hussein al-'Awayishah, one of the most influential Salafi sheikhs in Jordan, had a significant impact on him from the beginning. His uncle enjoyed solid relations with other Salafi sheikhs, most importantly al-Albani who also lived in Jabal al-Nasr. His social environment allowed him to interact with senior Salafi sheikhs from an early age, and he consistently attended their private as well as their public events, including sessions of al-Albani, al-Halabi, al-Hassan and his uncle, exposing him to the principles of the approach and the religious sciences. His integration into Salafism was highly influenced by his life among other Salafis over the past two decades, including his enrolment in the Faculty of Religion, where his network grew.

Differences between and among Salafi trends emerged in the 1990s; most notably, between the traditional and the Sruri strands and between al-Halabi and the religious research committee of the Saudi Council of Senior Scholars, on issues concerning belief.

This occurred as al-'Awayishah became influenced by the new Salafi discourse emanating from the acolytes of Salafism in Saudi Arabia; Safar al-Hawali, Salman al-'Awdah and Dr. Nassir al-'Amr. However, proselytization had the biggest impact on him, and he listened to a majority of their lectures on cassette. The revival movement spread to Salafis in Jordan and attracted a good deal of attention within Salafi and Islamist circles on the whole.

Yet things became complicated, as the new Salafi sheikhs (al-Hawali, al-'Awdah, and al-'Amr) disagreed with the Saudi regime. They eventually exceeded the tolerance level of authorities in Saudi Arabia and were arrested. Moreover, an edict issued by the Council of Senior Scholars represented by Abdulaziz Bin Baz and Mohammad Salih Ibn 'Uthaimin forbade Muslims from listening to their discourse. This development conformed to the general mood of the Traditional Salafi trend in Jordan, which had been critical of the revivalists' view of political activism.

Al-'Awayishah continued with the Traditional Salafi trend, becoming one of its most prominent disciples. He emerged within the new academic generation after he completed his postgraduate studies, and maintained his commitment to the approach. However, over time, he developed a more critical intellectual vision, which was reinforced after al-Albani's death and the subsequent conflicts within and among the circle of the trend's senior Sheikhs.

Crossing the Traditional Red Lines

Al-'Awayishah and his disciples clearly avoid articulating a critical perspective of the principle of obedience to/ defiance of leadership within the traditional current. Yet one can ascertain the most prominent elements of his critical approach; most importantly his rejection of the sacredness awarded to Salafism's sheikhs at the expense of method and doctrine. Al-'Awayishah regards Salafism as being grounded in religious proof, rejects sectarian prejudice and takes issue with followers' exaltations of the sheikhs and political parties.

Explicit in al-Awayishah's critical vision is a concern about educational superficiality and laxity among the trend's followers.

Although al-Albani was keen to cleanse religion by purging religious science of weak, inaccurate ideas, information and education, Salafis focused on the first element at the expense of the second. The movement has yet to direct its attention to education.

Al-'Awayishah challenges the red lines by asking about the trend's rejection of institutional or collective action. Its reluctance to be politically or socially engaged limits the extent to which this trend can influence public life, despite the movement's large size. For al-'Awayishah, greater and more effective organization would give the movement more influence.

In response to this perceived need, al-'Awayishah established the Manar al-Huda society, which focuses on charitable, social, and proselytizing work. In fact, it reflects the critical vision of Traditional Salafism shared among the new generation of Salafi academic peers.

Al-'Awayishah openly approves of involvement in political and partisan activism, provided that it can lead to public good and serve the Salafism's Islamic project. Indeed, his position on issues such as democracy is closer to that of his Egyptian counterparts. He distinguishes between the acceptable tools of democracy (elections, rotation of power) and democracy as a Western construct, maintaining reservations about the imposition of democracy as a Western value.

The priority in the next stage, according to Al-'Awayishah, should be ensuring access to education to as many young Salafis as possible. He views this objective as an essential element in reinforcing the presence and visibility of the trend in the public sphere and helping promote it across society.

All of this amounts to an indirect challenge to the hegemony

of Traditional Salafism's ruling "sheikhdom". For the moment no dissent is apparent but differences do exist and are felt by the trend's adherents. For the moment, the sheikhs' obsession with resolving the profound discord with Sheikh Rabi' Bin Hadi al-Madkhali has kept internal differences at bay, and the strands within this trend have not yet had to confront their differences directly. Whether or not these differences will lead to a confrontation with the sheikhdom or produce a new generation able to put the trend on a corrective track remains to be seen.

3. New Youth Models: Allegiant, Confused, and Devious

This section explores two models of the youth generation to shed light on details of Jordan's Salafi community and the public discourse among its followers. Engineer Muntasir and Fathi al-'Ali shares the youth experiences with Salafism in recent years.

Upheaval in Traditional Salafism

Fathi al-'Ali was born in 1987 and lives in Zarqa. He is single, and was raised by a conservative middle class family. His father is an engineer and his mother is interested in literature and culture. All of his siblings are educated, and al-Ali received a diploma in Islamic studies.⁷⁹

His experience with Salafism began when he was 14 years old. Prior to that, he had followed the Tablighi group, but after attending a debate between a Traditional Salafi and Jihadi Salafi (a takfiri), he became a fan of the former. He appreciated Traditional Salafism's use of religious proof and reliance on scientific argument. Al-Ali discovered that the Salafi debater was a disciple of Sheikh Ali al-Halabi, who lectured in religious science at al-Bukhari Mosque in Zarqa's Wadi al-Hajr neighborhood. He later moved his weekly class to the Omar Bin al-Khattab Mosque in downtown Amman.

The teenager attended al-Halabi's classes for almost four years, gaining the attention of his instructor and other prominent sheikhs. As time progressed, he immersed himself

⁷⁹ A personal interview took place with Fathi al-'Ali in his house on December 4, 2013..

in the trend and became affiliated with the tight circle of the Traditional Salafī sheikhdom. During this time, he also became well acquainted with the minute details of the academic debates within the trend and the discord behind the scenes.

When I asked al-Ali why he had chosen Salafism, he replied that it fit his personal inclinations and his passion for knowledge. In fact, his social background helps to explain his proclivity for Salafism: he was raised in a family that appreciates knowledge, literature, and culture, and they apply this knowledge in their daily lives.

His particular attraction to the Traditional Salafi trend was its apolitical nature and eschewal of politics, which has become more pronounced in recent years as other Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Jihaid Salafis have found themselves in confrontation with governments in the region and abroad, especially the United States. Individuals with Islamist leanings who prefer to avoid the harassment of the security services have generally abstained from politics.

Though Traditional Salafism avoids politics and does not place organizational constraints on its adherents, al-Ali acknowledges that partisanship and undue adoration of the sheikhdom have marred Salafism in recent years. This situation has become difficult to conceal in the context of discord among the trend's leading sheikhs and the exclusion of some individuals from the trend.

When al-Ali received his diploma in 2007, some Salafis recommended that he work with Sheikh Salim al-Hilali, which he did by working on al-Hilali's website, as well as verifying writings on Salafi heritage. But shortly thereafter, personal differences between al-Hilali and al-Halabi spilled into the media and al-Ali found himself torn

between his loyalty to his teacher and his employer. As troublesome as al-Ali (known as Abu Mut'ib on Salafi forums) found this conflict, he continued working with Sheikh al-Hilali for roughly four years, gaining new scientific experience, but also adding to his repertoire a deep knowledge of the dissonance among the senior sheikhs of Traditional Salafism.

When he finally extracted himself from this situation, he traveled to Saudi Arabia where he connected with students of Sheikh Rabe' Bin Hadi al-Madkhali, a prominent figure of the al-Jami school. But even here, the differences among the sheikhs – now al-Madkhali and al-Halabi – were apparent. Al-Madkhali's students preyed on al-Ali's desperate need for work and a Saudi residence permit, and, in a cynical maneuver, encouraged the young man to write an article opposing Sheikh al-Halabi, which he did. His article portrayed Sheikh Ali al-Halabi as a heretic, and quoted al-Madkhali as describing al-Halabi as one of the most sordid and heretical people he had known.

Although the piece became one of the most read articles on the Salafi forums, al-Ali did not benefit from it. Shortly after, he returned to Jordan, where the Salafi sheikh Osama 'Attaya, a Jordanian of Palestinian origin, promised to help him procure a residence permit in Saudi Arabia. During this time, the Jordanian Salafi sheikhs resolved their differences, which prompted al-Ali to seek work once again with the sheikhs of the Jordanian trend. Al-Halabi turned a blind eye to al-Ali's article and incorporated him again into his group and close circle.

During his work on al-Hilali's website, al-Ali also worked with Osama 'Attaya on other websites. The personal conflicts between the Salafi sheikhs of Jordan and Osama 'Attaya did not prevent al-Ali from working with the latter. Al-Ali refused to write under a pseudonym on 'Attaya's website, and eventually started to attack 'Attaya on his own website, using stinging

language to mimick the Salafi style that emerged during such moments of disagreement.

Al-Ali is still immersed in Salafi circles today, and he remains close to the sheikhdом of Traditional Salafism. He writes in the forum administered by the followers of Sheikh Ali al-Halabi, but follows the developments within the Salafi movement, particularly with regards to internal conflict and debate.

4. The Dominant Model: The Loyal Salafi

Abu Hud al-Athari, who preferred that his real name not be used in this book, embodies another model of Salafism in Jordan. Born in 1987, also to a conservative middle class family, he received his bachelor's degree in engineering from Al- Balqa' Applied University and intends to continue his postgraduate studies in engineering. He resides in al-Jandaweel in West Amman, and is currently working as a part-time teacher.⁸⁰ His journey towards Salafism began after he graduated from high school. Prior to that, he had been an amateur singer and played the drums, but upon finishing high school, he turned to religion, encouraged by members of the Sufi sect. But, he "replaced lyrical singing and timpani drums without making a genuine leap in my personal daily life or my way of thinking."

While at university, al-Athari became acquainted with Salafi students, influenced early on by a member of the Sruri school. The latter attended classes led by Sheikh Salman al-'Awdah, and he began to discuss issues of Shari'a and contemporary political matters with al-Athari. At the same time, al-Athari was increasingly being exposed to Salafism and its sheikhs by passing time with a Salafi imam.

He strove to formulate a stance with regards to this trend in a more objective manner, independently of Salafi discourse, and began to attend the classes of Sheikh Mashhour Hassan. Soon, al-Athari was reading the works of Salafi scholars and authors such as Mohammad Bin Abdulwahab, al-Albani, and Ibn 'Uthaimin, and he developed an appreciation of these circles. His quest for knowledge led him to become more

⁸⁰ A personal interview was conducted with Muntasir at Alghad Newspaper in Amman on November 16, 2013.

closely integrated with the trend, and in time, he involved himself in its science, thought and literature.

Al-Athari adopted the intellectual and methodological vision of the trend, which was reflected in his religiosity, his dress and his disposition towards current events and other Islamist movements.

In explaining his own path to Salafism, his narrative did not differ from that of others. He was naturally inclined towards learning and religious science, and he found that Salafism respected and encouraged this inclination in a way that other movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood with its emphasis on political activism, did not.

Al-Athari immersed himself in the religious sciences classes of the trend's senior sheikhs; Mashhour, al-Halabi, and Abu Islam. He also attended the Friday sermons of Sheikh Hamza al-Majali, an academic figure of rising prominence whose mosque is situated on the way to the airport. He dedicated himself as well to reading religious texts and works on Salafism.

Al-Athari ideas and opinions conform to the established positions of the Salafi sheikhs, especially with regards to political activism and opposition, which in his view, contradict Shari'a and threaten anarchy and sedition, and he sees these as a preoccupation with temporal rather than religious issues.

He views democracy as a loose construct that can lead to unpredictable outcomes, whereas in Islam authority is derived from the Quran and Sunnah. In this vein, he criticizes the Egyptian Salafi trend's involvement in politics as a violation of established Salafi principles. Because political engagement contradicts Shari'a, he believes Salafis who participate in politics are not likely to achieve qualitative or genuine change

and points out that even after years of experience, the Muslim Brotherhood has failed to achieve anything of note.

Al-Athari regards change as a bottom up process, whereby society must first be corrected by rectifying religious doctrine and Islamic concepts, starting with a focus on the Salafi Call and on education. The proper approach to change is gradual reform, part of which is renouncing usury and encouraging society to re-commit to the rulings of God and Shari'a. Realizing the dream of Islamic governance in accordance with Shari'a in the foreseeable future is therefore not an easy task. But, according to Muntasir, attempting gradual reform is preferable to idly observing society moving along the wrong path, and allowing it. He believes that rulers should be discretely advised rather than opposed outright, and contends that Salafis such as Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-'Awdah have mistakenly conflated the Salafi approach with the political activism of the Muslim Brotherhood. Interestingly, he refuses to acknowledge jihadis as Salafis, believing that they have strayed from Salafism to takfir. Furthermore, he objects to the practice of categorizing Salafism, since he believes Salafism embodies only one approach, and that whatever deviates from that approach is not Salafism.

This begs the question of al-Athari's ambitions. On the societal level, al-Athari is keen to see society become more pious and devout. He would also like to see the "correct" religious science prevail and anticipates the day when people demonstrate commitment to Shari'a.

On a personal level, al-Athari plans to continue his career as an engineer or pursue his postgraduate studies in engineering, while also becoming a religious scholar in order to teach. Like his Salafi friends, he wears a beard and maintains what Salafis consider the sunnan (habits) of religion. He prays in

the mosque, attends religion classes, and tries not to mix with the opposite sex. He also tries to avoid what he views as haram (that which is forbidden by Shari'a), such as music, and spends much of his time in worship and the study of the religious sciences. He restricts his television viewing to religious and scientific programming.

5. Omar al-Btoush: Turning Against Traditional Salafi Ideology

Omar al-Btoush was indoctrinated into Salafism at an early age. His father was a sheikh who served in the General Fatwa Department of the Jordan Armed Forces, and a teacher at the Prince Hassan Academy for Military Sciences. The academy grants diplomas in Islamic sciences and qualifies graduates to become imams in mosques overseen by the General Fatwa Department in the various sectors of the Jordanian army. Because the academy was (and still is) located in the city of al-Zarqa, al-Btoush lived there until he finished preparatory school and his father retired from service.⁸¹

He completed his high school education in Aqaba, where he had moved with his family following his father's retirement from the military, after which he assumed a position in Jordan's only cement company.

Al-Btoush's father had been a senior member of the Tablighi group, which believes in the importance of traveling in order to spread the word of God, spending days on end in the mosque to realize this objective. In Aqaba, his father's convictions evolved, from Tablighi to something closer to Salafism through the influence of Murad Shukri, Wafiq Naddaf, and Ali al-Halabi. When he spoke with me, al-Btoush vividly recalled his father asking Abdul'azim Badawi (a leading Egyptian Salafi sheikh residing in Jordan) about the Tablighi. Badawi responded that the Tablighi were good, but offered only one stage in religious discovery that should be followed another. This pushed his father to fully adhere to Salafism.

⁸¹ *A personal interview took place with Omar al-Btoush in his house in Tabrbour, Amman, on January 5, 2014.*

His father's transformation coincided with al-Btoush's own increased inclination toward religiosity and religious knowledge. He views this episode in family history as a defining moment in his personal and spiritual discovery. "When I turned to religiosity and religious knowledge," he said, "my father had effectively moved to Salafism. We met at this point. Through his collection of books, I found an incentive to read, especially since I loved to read. Therefore, my early leaning coincided with my father's transformation and his desire for me to have a thorough religious education. Of course, my father's relationship with the sheikhs and scholars of Salafism helped reinforce my propensity toward the movement, and helped me get closer to the Salafi atmosphere and the discussions that took place."

Al-Btoush's early disposition toward religiosity and knowledge in turn encouraged his father to nourish his religious knowledge. He created a special scientific program for his son, balancing the various religious sciences and Arabic-language studies.

Al-Btoush's father gradually directed him in the reading of religious texts, giving him balanced exposure to the sciences. He absorbed his father's instruction in doctrine, Hadith, and the principle of fiqh, while learning Arabic from his father's friend. Among the first books he read were *Fi Usul al-Fiqh* (On the Principles of Fiqh) written by Mohammad Suleiman al-Ashqar, *Mustalah al-Hadith* (The Concept of Hadith) by Mahmud al-Ttahan, and *al-Nahu al-Wadhih* (The Clear Syntax), in addition to the tedious process of memorizing the Quran.

Upon his completion of high school, al-Btoush was employed at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, where his knowledge of religious science qualified him to become an imam. Later, he entered the Prince Hassan Academy for

Military Sciences where his father used to teach, and returned to the city of Zarqa for two more years (2002-2004) to receive his diploma.

The Jordan Armed Forces General Fatwa Department, which was established and developed by Sheikh Noah al-Qudah, a Sufi Ash'arite scholar, was characterized by its commitment to the Ash'arite school of thought. Nevertheless, al-Btoush did not find integration into the new environment difficult. Though his father's training, he had learned to be tolerant and flexible in dealing with those who disagreed with him and to listen carefully to others' opinions.

After he completed his studies at the academy, he returned to the ministry to work as an imam in the Grand Mosque of southern al-Mazar. In 2006, he transferred to the Amman Mosque. All the while, al-Btoush had continued reading, studying and learning and eventually felt the urge to write, a natural inclination among affiliates of the Traditional Salafi trend. This propelled him upwards in the ranks of this trend.

At this juncture, al-Btoush, in his early 20s, developed an idea for a book titled *Kashf al-Astar 'Amma Fi Tanzim al-Qaeda Min Afkar wa Akhtar* (Exposing the Ideas and Risks within al-Qaeda). It was published in 2007, and its arrival was timely. Al-Qaeda was resurgent in Iraq and had become a clear security threat to Saudi Arabia. This Salafi response to al-Qaeda gave Saudi officials, who attached great importance to the book's teachings, ammunition against al-Qaeda. The well-known Saudi anchor Turki al-Dakhil hosted al-Batoush on one of the trend's most important talk shows, called *Ida'at* (Highlights) on al-Arabiya satellite channel, to discuss the ideas within the book.

This episode became more influential than al-Btoush could have imagined. Shortly after the program, he received a phone call from the Saudi Royal Court, extending a personal invitation from King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz to meet. The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques evidently had been impressed by al-Btoush's ideas and his presentation of them. During the several-day visit, al-Btoush also met several senior Saudi officials, among them, Prince Mut'ib, Prince Naif Bin Abdulaziz, and his son Prince Mohammad.

When al-Btoush returned to Jordan, he resumed his work as an imam, but continued to write. His works included a book on the principle of tolerance and a criticism of terrorism, published by Jordan's Ministry of Culture. He then authored another book to explain the 2005 Amman Message, Jordan's response to ideological and sectarian extremism and terrorism. It articulated Jordan's view of pluralism and tolerance among Islam's many sects, as well as between and among the religions of the world. The response was organized by Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed, and enjoyed the patronage of King Abdullah II.

Driven by his success as an author and media figure, al-Btoush established a specialized center for teaching religious science and readings of the Quran in 2010. The Center of Imam Ibn 'Amir al-Shami for Quranic Reading and Religious Sciences was established in Tabarbour near the mosque where al-Batoush gives sermons.

Al-Btoush's trajectory was a well-established one among his peers in Traditional Salafism: traversing learning in religious sciences, scientific research and writing. Throughout his work, he enjoyed good relations with the Jordanian state, which published and circulated his works.

While he never publicly endorsed the sheikhdom of Jordan's Traditional Salafi movement, he also never expressed animosity towards it either, and as his fame grew along with his solid ties with the state, the sheikhdom accepted and claimed him as their own.

The Intellectual Turnaround

A reading of al-Btoush's activity on social media (Facebook) reveals that his intellectual tendencies have recently transformed drastically with regards to Arab politics and the required Salafi approach for change. He writes clearly about the opposition and political activism and is critical of Arab governments. This begs the question of what caused this change in ideology.

Al-Btoush emphasizes that his thoughts are not new, but have been developed over the course of years, beginning with the scrutinization of his own convictions derived from his experience with Traditional Salafism.

A crisis with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs may have brought his convictions to the surface. After al-Btoush clashed with the committee of the mosque in Tabrbour where he works over their dissatisfaction with his Salafi ideology, ministry officials, including Minister Abdusalam al-'Abadi, coordinated al-Btoush's transfer to another mosque. Al-Btoush was defiant, and refused the change. In the end, he lost his job, leaving the mosque where he had been the imam for years. As a result of this situation, al-Btoush voiced his ideas on his website instead. However, he still denies the link between the change in his ideology and the crisis with the Ministry, despite the apparent coincidence.

It is difficult to disentangle al-Btoush's political convictions from his religious ones. His political views are informed by religious texts and fatwas, but his religious views certainly differ in some respects from the traditional Salafi fatwas, which he has made clear in his writings. In fact, he is working on a huge volume criticizing a number of al-Albani's fatwas, which is almost certain to put him in confrontation with the sheikhdom.

The revolutions of the Arab Spring that began in late 2010 expedited al-Btoush's disclosure of his true conviction that while Traditional Salafism may emphasize a Muslim's duty to obey a ruler and offer advice rather than outright opposition to a ruler, "the only way to correct [a ruler's] deviations and errors is through peaceful political activism. In fact, the principle of advice-giving is entirely unconvincing, as it will hardly impact or change the situation." He concluded that political participation is a necessity in contemporary times, which does not contradict the general Salafi approach, according to his own understanding of it. To the contrary, al-Btoush believes political participation "contributes to reducing evil and bringing about benefits."

If democracy is blasphemous, as Salafis believe, al-Btoush wondered how they expect Muslims to "reduce evil". Al-Btoush asserts that even al-Albani's views on the matter are at variance with the Traditional Salafi fatwa forbidding engagement in politics, and cites al-Albani's statement that "if there is a good Muslim, we can vote for him in order to lessen evil."

A more current fatwa from the traditional school permits voting in but not running for elections. Al-Btoush takes the logic inherent in the fatwa a step further by reconsidering the traditional trend's position on partisan activism. He believes that Salafis have conflated the meanings of partisan activism and

intolerance, division and sedition, when in fact partisan behavior is motivated by a desire for political dynamism, social development, and contribution to the public good. He felt the conceptual distinction he had made between partisanship and division was justified after he studied the Muslim Brotherhood's doctrinal sources about political participation, which also made the same distinction.

This standpoint marks a break with Traditional Salafism, within which, al-Btoush believes, the preoccupation with "theories and fatwas with regard to obeying the ruler and the arguments that limit freedom of speech" have constrained Arab societies.

A number of al-Btoush's political opinions have shocked and troubled the adherents of Traditional Salafism. Across Salafi forums, students took issue with his ideas and challenged him.

However, al-Btoush questions the methodological construct on which the ban on defiance is based. He notes that adherents of Traditional Salafism see this principle as an agreed upon matter among Sunna scholars and jurists, which is how it is portrayed in contemporary fiqh literature. However, al-Btoush suggests no such consensus exists, and that there are in fact numerous differing opinions: "It is far from being decided in Salafi doctrine. If we prove the differences, as I did, then we can expand the circle of diversity within the Salafi community itself."

Al-Btoush acknowledges that his opinion has "provoked a stir among traditional Salafis as if there had been an earthquake." Interestingly, he still believes that rebellion is forbidden, but not as a matter of doctrine, which is not settled on the matter. Unlike the traditional sheikhs, al-Btoush differentiates between peaceful activism for positive social change and militant

activism as part of a struggle for power. Traditional Salafism makes no distinction between the two, views those who deploy violence in pursuit of their aims as active Kharajites, and those whose opposition is peaceful as passive Kharajites, which removes them from the classification of Ahl Sunnah wal Jama'a.

Failed Containment and the Intellectual Clash

In articulating these ideas, al-Btoush has put himself on a collision course with the traditional Salafi trend, some of whose leaders have criticized him and even gone so far as to renounce him as a Salafi in online forums. Al-Btoush was told that one Salafi Sheikh, Abu Al-Yusr, took exception to his ideas. One Salafi warned al-Btoush that he risked incurring the wrath of the sheikhdom, as have others who departed from the traditional line.⁸²

Attempts to contain and co-opt the defiant al-Btoush were made. One Salafi volunteered to arrange a meeting between al-Btoush and a traditional sheikh to discuss the former's ideas. Al-Btoush refused on the grounds that "dialogue will be futile because the aim of it would not be a genuine intellectual and scientific discussion, but rather containment."

Criticism of al-Btoush soon became personal. He sent an angry letter to the sheikhs overseeing these forums, threatening to invoke tribal and civil law if necessary to end the attacks on his character. The campaign against him then temporarily came to an end, but he is no longer seen by the traditional trend as one of their members.

⁸²*A personal interview was conducted with a Salafi – who preferred to remain anonymous—in my office at the University of Jordan on December 5, 2013.*

Nevertheless, al-Btoush retains a solid following of sympathizers and students whom he instructs in the religious sciences and who he regards as high achievers. He frequently receives something akin to fan mail from new Salafi students, emphasizing their agreement with his ideas. However, in praising him for having the courage of his own convictions, they also acknowledge their own fear and reluctance to disclose their own views publicly.

He has likewise been somewhat ostracized by the state: as opposed to the friendship and camaraderie of the past, the Jordanian establishment now treats him with antipathy.

In surveying the Salafi landscape in the Arab region, al-Btoush does not conceal his admiration for Osama al-Qawsi, an Egyptian Salafi sheikh who was once aligned with Salafi traditionalism, and enjoyed stature within it, being well-received by its sheikhs in Jordan and in other Arab countries. Today, however, he is remembered for his defiance of previous fatwas and his courageous opposition to some of the general principles of traditional Salafism. Traditionalists no longer recognize him as a leader of the movement. The parallels in the stories of al-Btoush and al-Qawsi are apparent. However, despite the former's admiration for the latter, he disagrees with al-Qawsi's political views. Al-Btoush aligns more closely with the political brand of Salafism and with figures such as Salman al-'Awdah, whom he once regarded as deviant, but today considers an advanced model of the Salafi Call.

Al-Btoush's new intellectual leanings have led him to read the works of Sayid Qutb, Mohammad Qutb, al-Mawdudi, and other Muslim intellectuals whom he had previously disregarded, and he approaches their work from a different perspective. Today, he continues his studies in Islamic Law at the University of Islamic Sciences in Amman.

More so than ever before, al-Btoush feels that he has reconciled his beliefs with his tolerant upbringing, which has granted him the flexibility to adapt and to liberate himself from the stance of others. He is also the director of the al-Imam Center for Religious Studies and Quranic Readings.

Conclusions

By examining various models and experiences within the traditional Salafi trend, one can point to a number of common denominators among them. The most significant is a respect for science and pursuit of scientific learning, which has drawn many adherents to the fold. Second, unlike other Islamic organizations (such as the Muslim Brotherhood) that have an organizational hierarchy and partisan categorizations, Salafism is informally structured by relations among scholars, disciples and students. Finally, Salafism is a proof-based brand of Islamism, and the emphasis on science is key to understanding how many Salafis become involved in this trend.

Science, in the Salafi case, can be understood as authoritative knowledge. Salafism essentially provides a competitive forum in which peers and students strive to obtain ever-greater religious academic knowledge as a means of achieving status and authority within the structure of traditional Salafism. Religiosity functions as a “parallel authority” to the social, political, and financial authorities in Arab societies. It is the basis of Salafi power and influence, just as an official position within the state endows an individual with political authority, or as wealth gives financial authority. This may explain why Salafism in Jordan was initially attractive mostly to those of Palestinian origin, from the lower classes in populous areas. For people with such a background, the “authority of science” could compensate for their exclusion from the other means of authority.

Undoubtedly, there are other reasons to join the Salafi trend. Its strong focus on matters of religion, whether at the individual or collective level, is key to understanding the phenomenon. For many people of faith, religion should not be mixed with organizational or political considerations in order to preserve the sanctity of religious practice. In this vein, Salafism provides a different venue for religion. It centers on pure religious science, fiqh, doctrine, and rectifying Hadith. In their personal lives, Salafis reflect on these matters. Therefore, a Salafi by definition is committed to religion and religious rulings. He prays in the mosque, and lives according to Prophet's habits in terms of worship, dress, and lifestyle. Moreover, a Salafi belongs to a clear religious identity in terms of religious and social values, political positions, and in his private life. The religious fatwa informs all matters of a Salafi's life. These fatwas should be based on the scholarly interpretation of the text of the Quran and the Sunnah.

Mosques are one of the most prominent venues for recruitment to Salafism in Jordan. In particular, the connection is made through the classes given by the more renowned sheikhs. The frequency with which the names such as al-Albani, Ali al-Halabi, Mashhour Hassan were mentioned indicate that they are the stars of Salafism in the country, and are the sources of reference for Traditional Salafism in Jordan. These men enjoy moral authority, and therefore the ability to determine the trend's general ideological course, and the power to include or exclude others.

Since Salafism generally refuses any type of institutionalization or hierarchy to prevent conflict and strife, the role of the "sheikhdом" in the traditional trend has emerged as a substitute for organization and to contain partisanship. Parallel to that, Salafism in Jordan includes a number of rising youth who sense the movement has nevertheless been infected by intolerance through the

“exceptional status” intolerance through the “exceptional status” bestowed upon the traditional sheikhdом. For these youth, the moral authority of the sheikhdом is more damaging to Salafism than organization and partisanship.

Of great importance for many of traditionalism’s followers is the trend’s refusal to enter into a confrontation with the state. Therefore, Traditional Salafis have few worries about threats to their personal security emanating from the state. Contrary to the sentiments expressed by the majority of contemporary Islamic opposition movements, Jordan’s Salafis do not feel their jobs or means of living are threatened by their ideological affiliation. A Salafi can pray at the mosque, attend classes and practice the rituals of Salafism without fearing the government or the security apparatus.

The spiritual and intellectual experience in Traditional Salafism is characterized by simplicity and clarity. It is a “superficial” experience in that few of those interviewed indicated exposure to or encounters with any other cultural, political or intellectual tendencies. A majority of them were acquainted with Salafism at an early age, or after limited experience with other Islamic trends. I have not been made aware of any instance in which an individual with other political and/or religious leanings converted to Traditional Salafism. In fact, in the cases presented, overall previous experiences are limited, as the issue of identity is already clearly decided. No one interviewed for this book expressed a political or personal ambition exceeding what is allowable within the ambit of Salafism: the majority of interviewees aspired only to be recognized as scholars through their rigorous learning and knowledge.

The narrow intellectual and spiritual experience of Jordan's Salafis reflects the prism that defines the Salafi worldview: that text is sacred, that a believer is committed to the appearance and logic of the text and that religious knowledge supersedes reason (in the Western rationalist sense). Salafis are proud to be an extension of Ahl al-Hadith, and view cynically Islam's reason-based schools, such as the Mu'tazilah and others; even in doctrine, they are committed to the literal appearance of the text and avoid interpretation.

The primacy given to the appearance of the text can be seen in Salafi attitudes and daily practices. Salafis show interest in projecting a personal appearance that imitates and emulates the sheikhs in terms of personal grooming, body language, verbal expression and habits. This is apparent in their attire, the maintenance of a beard and their use of classical Arabic, for example.

Followers of this trend lack the organizational or lasting ties found in other Islamic organizations and movements. In this regard, Salafi membership and structure is highly flexible. Its members mobilize each other and do not wait for cues from their loosely defined leadership. Ultimately, Salafis rely on broadcast outlets, online platforms and academic classes given by eminent sheikhs. In the case of private matters coming from within the trend's core circles, messages are often transferred to the second-class ranks across various regions. Those second-tier members then transmit the message to trusted students. Sometimes, meetings are held between senior sheikhs and prominent students in various governorates, during which they convey required messages.

While the trend's outward appearance may seem simple, it has recently suffered from internal crises. Major debates have occurred within the "sheikhdom" concerning disagreements

over moral issues such as embezzlement and plagiarism. Several acrimonious incidents have tarnished the sheikhs' credibility, prompting a number of distinguished figures to leave the group. Additionally, the dissonance between the traditional sheikhdom and Rabi' Bin Hadi al-Madkhali – the heir of the al-Jami school – also has damaged the trend among Salafi circles beyond Jordan.

Nevertheless, the most enduring blow – the consequences of which have yet to surface – comes from the new ascending generation of scholars who are dissatisfied with the “guardianship” role carved out by the sheikhdom and exercised on students and followers. This new generation has gradually called for a review of the convictions that have shaped the sheikhdom's work in recent years, and is apparently on track to ultimately question the leadership's credibility and its ability to continue legitimately in its current position. While the instances of outright defiance have been limited, a broader confrontation seems to be looming. The new generation's heightened awareness could lead them to push for a change in direction that undermines the convictions and indeed the interests of the current sheikhdom.

Chapter Two:

**Paths to and from Jihadi
Salafism**

Salafi Jihadism emerged in Jordan during the 1990s. Jihadist ideas permeated among various Islamic and nationalist movements, and mainly focused on the Palestinian Question but lacked a general ideological and political framework.⁸³

Several factors formed a nurturing environment for jihadist ideology to grow and ascend in Jordan during the 1990s, chief among them, the return of the “Jordanian Afghans” – Jordanian jihadis who fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s against the Soviet Union. They felt pride in the jihadist victory against the USSR, and, energized by their defeat of a superpower, they returned to Jordan with the goal of implementing Shari’a. They espoused violence as a legitimate way to bring about the desired change.

The return of the Jordanian Afghans coincided with the outbreak of the Gulf War of 1991, which triggered a divisive debate among Salafis about the entrance of Western forces into Saudi Arabia, the allied forces’ chosen staging ground from which to dislodge Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Many youth were disillusioned by the US presence and subsequently radicalized by it. Other events during the 1990s, such as the initiation of the Madrid Peace Conference and the Palestinian Liberation Organization’s proclivity towards a peace agreement with Israel further radicalized these groups. At the same time, the Jordanian government began to reverse the process of democratic transition that it had started in 1989.

⁸³ For more details on Salafi Jihadism and its developments in Jordan see Mohammad Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Haniyeh, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 283-311.

The Muslim Brotherhood was a major target of this effort, having been one of the prominent beneficiaries of Jordan's political opening. The Muslim Brotherhood capitalized on their huge presence in the parliament by first participating in the government and then by forming a formidable opposition. Feeling challenged, if not threatened, the regime sought to reduce the Muslim Brotherhood's role and influence in politics through the enactment of the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV).

Also during the 1990s, a loosely arranged group of violent Islamic groups came to the fore, among them the Jordanian Afghans and another known as Jayish Mohammad (the Army of Mohammad). Then, two opposition members of parliament – Laith Shbeilat and Ya'coub Qirash – also were accused of being part of al-Nafir. This case was followed by others involving Islamists – though not Salafis – such as the Mujib case, the case of Ajloun's explosives in 1996, the Islamic Renewal case of 1995 and the 1993 case of the Mu'tah Six, an alleged plot among cadets at the Mu'tah University military academy to assassinate King Hussein.

Jihadi Salafism attracted various youth groups, many of them university students. One group, led by Sheikh Abdulfatah al-Hiyari, surfaced in Salt, a small city north of Amman. Al-Hiyari, who had previously displayed little religiosity, began to espouse radical views and started calling for hakimiyya (total submission to God and rejecting all laws do not stem from Shari'a). A number of Salt youth formed a group to support him. Another group in al-Zarqa cohered around Sheikh Abu Khalid, who was later accused of being part of the Challenge and Reform Organization in 1997, despite the fact that he

migrated to the United States. In Irbid refugee camp, Adnan al-Mansi was frequently mentioned as a leader. There were also scattered groups in the city of Amman.⁸⁴

No profound organizational or political ties are known to have united these groups. However, among them, the ideas of Sayid Qutb were a common influence; particularly Qutb's notion of *hakimiyya*, as well as *mufasalah* (dissociating oneself from infidels, judging rulers as infidels and disobeying them). Expressed differently, all these groups refused the principle of working within established political regimes, rejected democracy and affirmed a belief in the duty of establishing an Islamic state to implement the rulings of the Shari'a.

Another key turning point in the development of Jihadi Salafism was the emergence on the scene of a returnee from the Gulf, 'Isam al-Barqawi, better known as Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi. In 1995, the Jordanian government announced that it had discovered a clandestine group called Bay'at al-Imam. Al-Maqdisi was among its members, along with several others who would become prominent individuals in Jordan's jihadi movement: Ahmed Fadil al-Khalaylah (Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi), Abdelhadi Douglas, Khalid al-'Arouri (al-Qas-sam), and others.

Prior to that date, books written by al-Maqdisi had circulated secretly throughout Jordan to educate the radical Islamic groups. One highly influential book was entitled *Milat Ibrahim wa Asalib al-Taghut fi Tamyi'iha* (The Nation of Ibrahim and Its Deformation by Infidels). Another of al-Maqdisi's core writings was *Al-Kawashif al-Jaliyah fi Kufr al-Dawlah al-Saudiya* (The Clear Indicators of Saudi Arabia's Infidelity). These works informed the ideology of the scattered small groups that later cohered as the new Jihadi Salafist movement.

⁸⁴ *From an Interview with Hassan Abu Haniyeh, a scholar on Islamic movements, Amman, November 12, 2013.*

Al-Maqdisi linked hakimiyya with monotheism and unified the jihadis under the rubric of monotheism and jihad. He restored the relevance of taghut found in the Hadith, meaning he considers those who do not rule according to Shari'a as infidels. He prescribed jihad as the only means of change. Together, jihad and hakimiyya are tantamount to a rejection of other Islamic approaches, including other Salafi approaches.

Although Al-Maqdisi and his comrades were imprisoned from 1995-1999, his intellectual guidance spread beyond the prison walls to reach supporters throughout Jordan. During this time, affiliates of Jihadi Salafism also imprisoned with al-Maqdisi formed the Challenge and Reform Group. Its members included Abu Khalid (who migrated from Zarqa' to the United States), Abu Qutada (who resided abroad) and other groups of youth. They were all tried before the Security State Court but were later exonerated by the Court of Cassation.

Throughout the decade, events on the regional and global stage continued to fan the flames of Jihadi Salafism, and amplified the jihadis' presence on the Jordanian socio-political stage. Declining socio-economic conditions in Jordan, the Algerian military's 1992 coup against democratic elections and the ensuing confrontation between Islamists and the military were defining moments for the emerging movement, as were the massacres of Muslims in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Chechnya. These events reinforced the jihadis' commitment to religion and the necessity of jihad.

The ascendance of al-Maqdisi coincided with the emergence of Omar Mahmud Abu Omar (Abu Qutada). Originally, al-Maqdisi was a resident of Amman's Ras al-'Ain neighborhood, and was seen as a Salafi activist, as recounted by al-Maqdisi's friend Hassan Abu Hanieh and his companions. Al-Maqdisi began to espouse Jihadi Salafist thinking while

living abroad. In London, he became one of the most prominent theorists of this ideology in the Arab world. Jordanian Salafi Jihadists began reading Abu Qutada's al-Minhaj magazine and his books secretly.

A royal pardon in 1999 releasing Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi from prison marked another critical juncture in the development of Jihadi Salafism in Jordan. After his release, al-Zarqawi left Jordan for Afghanistan and, at some point after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, traveled to Iraq where compromised security provided fertile ground for the advancement of jihadism. Al-Zarqawi became the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and from his vantage point, he visited death and destruction on an untold number of Iraqis in dozens, if not hundreds, of terrorist attacks. He also masterminded the largest terrorist attack on Jordanian territory in the country's history: affiliates of his organization traveled to Amman from Iraq and, in November 2005, in a nearly simultaneous attack on three Amman hotels, killed scores of Jordanians. The following year al-Zarqawi was killed by American troops.

At this point, the jihadists of Jordan began to look beyond Jordan's borders, also becoming active on the battlegrounds in Iraq and Afghanistan, both now under American occupation. Today, Syria has become their primary destination. More than 500 are believed to have joined the Nusra Front and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), al-Qaeda affiliates. They have assumed a leading position in the fight against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. At the time of writing, approximately 100 of them are known to have been killed.

Differences between al-Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi emerged during the last days of Zarqawi's life. These differences permeated the Jihadi Salafist movement in the country, even after al-Zarqawi's death in 2006, ultimately fracturing the movement into two groups.

One supported al-Maqdisi, who refused the use of violence in Jordan. Al-Maqdisi developed his position into the Declaration of the Peacefulness of the Call and expressed his rejection of extremism and takfir. He also opposed the use of suicide attacks, which had become the signature tactic of Al-Qaeda in Iraq under al-Zarqawi's leadership. On the other hand, the al-Zarqawi contingent of the movement, led now by Omar Mahdi Zeidan from Irbid, opposed Jordan's exclusion from the jihadi battleground. Zeidan today remains committed to al-Zarqawi's legacy and approach and accuses al-Maqdisi and his followers of abandoning the ideals of Jihadi Salafism.⁸⁵

The advent of the Arab Spring led to new differences between the two groups. The revolutions provided new opportunities for political activism throughout the region, including in Jordan. A group linked to al-Maqdisi – who is still in prison on security grounds – seized the opportunity to organize sit-ins and demonstrations to demand his release. Although there is precedence for this kind of activism in the history of this movement, it is opposed by the group linked to al-Zarqawi. In all events, it ended in the detention of hundreds of activists after they clashed with the security forces in al-Zarqa' in April 2011.⁸⁶

These internal differences coincided with the emergence of the Nusra Front and ISIS in Syria in 2013. Ayman al-Zawahiri, an Egyptian national who assumed the mantle of al-Qaeda after the assassination of Osama bin Laden, expressed his support for the Nusra Front's leader, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, and in

⁸⁵ *On the differences between al-Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi see Mohammad Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Hanieh, The "Islamic Solution," Op. Cit., pp.311-322.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid., pp.379-384.*

a letter published in the Jordanian press, al-Maqdisi and Abu Qutada expressed support for the Nusra Front against ISIS.⁸⁷ But the Omar Mahdi Zeidan group has backed ISIS against the Nusra Front.⁸⁸

The coming pages will present three different examples of Jihadi Salafis in Jordan. The first individual is Munif Samara, a Jordanian doctor who has been active in Jihadi Salafism. The second, Na'im al-Tilawi, was formerly a member of the Palestinian Jihadist movement who sought to rationalize or moderate the jihadi discourse. He later concluded that doing so was easier said than done, abandoned the effort and later founded the Tayar al-Umma (The Movement of the Nation) along with a third Jihadi Salafi, Mu'ayad al-Tirawi. Al-Tilawi's thinking evolved to combine the thought of haraki Salafism and the political thought of the Muslim Brotherhood. This chapter also will present the stories and experiences of others affiliated with this strand of the Salafi movement who preferred anonymity out of concern for their personal security.

⁸⁷ *Abu Qatada was extradited to Jordan by the British authorities and currently is being tried in Jordan after he was convicted in absentia in two cases: Reform and Challenge and the Millennium plot.*

⁸⁸ *For more details, see Tamir al-Smadi in a report published by al-Hayat daily newspaper on January 14, 2014.*

1. Munif Samara: The Gradual Path toward Jihadi Salafism

Munif Samara lives in al-Zarqa', and his medical practice is located in a modest building in the neighborhood of Wadi al-Hajar. It is adorned with minimal decoration and equipped with few technical and administrative facilities, but friends close to him say his clinic is always busy thanks to his reputation for high quality, honesty and modest fees. He has been known to dispense free medication to the underprivileged as well.⁸⁹

Recently, Samara has been fully dedicated to providing relief to Syrian refugees. He offer free treatment and mobilizes other doctors to lend their help as well. He expresses bitterness towards those colleagues who have hesitated to offer medical treatment to the poor who have been forced to leave their country.

Unlike many of members of the Jihadi Salafist movement, Samara is outspoken about his ideological and intellectual leanings. Consequently, he is known as a leading activist and one of the most outspoken advocates of the new intellectual discourse emphasizing the peacefulness of the Salafi Call. He is unequivocal about his belief in the peaceful nature of jihadism in Jordan and he makes a distinction between the fiqh of duties (that which must be done) and of possibilities (that which should be done if it is possible) in dealing with the society and the state.

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⁸⁹ *The interview was conducted in his clinic in the city of al-Zarqa' on November 27, 2013.*

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Samara is married to two women: one from the Philippines and a second who holds French nationality. He emphasizes that he is careful that his sons uphold the same Jihadi Salafist ideology and follow his path. He disagrees with al-Maqdisi's well-known fatwa banning studying in private and governmental schools. He argues that jihadists' should not isolate their sons from society, and stresses the need for learning and academic achievement. As he sees isolation as impractical, he does not adhere to the fatwa.

Samara was born in the West Bank city of Jenin in 1964. His father was an officer in the Jordanian army who moved with his family to al-Zarqa' immediately after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, serving in the army camps. Later on, he moved with his family to the United Arab Emirates. The family eventually returned to Jordan to settle in the southern city of Shobak, where Samara finished high school. From there he traveled to the Philippines to study biology in 1984, completing his degree in 1989 and immediately proceeding to study medicine.

Samara's Salafi journey started when he commenced his medical studies: prior to that, he had not been devout or especially observant. However, he was influenced by the discourse of some of the preachers in the Philippines. At the time, Arab and Muslim students and Islamic associations were active there, as were Salafi preachers who benefited from generous Saudi funding. Undoubtedly, their religious guidance came

from the Saudi Council of Senior Scholars and its sheikhs, such as Ibn Baz and Ibn ‘Uthaimin from Saudi Arabia and al-Albani in Jordan. Samara was in touch with al-Albani to discuss religious rulings.

Before he became religiously committed, Samara had been the head of the Student Union for Arab and Foreign Students. After that he established the Islamic Society for Arab and Muslim Students at the university, and became deeply involved in proselytizing activities outside the university. He established links with a number of Salafi personalities, including some who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood.

At this point, the internal Salafi differences had not yet begun to emerge, though discussions in Salafi circles in the Arab and Muslim world about the best path to bring about change made their way to the Islamists working in the Philippines. This coincided with the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and the emergent feeling of victory among the mujahidin (the Islamists who forced Soviet troops out of Afghanistan). During this era, Samara followed the debates between those recent adherents to Jihadi Salafism and Islamists who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood. He also noticed that Hadi al-Ghoul – an Islamist from al-Zarqa’ who happened to study in the Philippines – was taking his ideas a step further by promoting *hakimiyya* and taking them to their logical conclusion by declaring Arab regimes to be infidels.

Slowly but surely, Samara began to adopt Jihadi Salafist thought. He read al-Maqdisi’s *Al-Kawashif al-Jaliyah fi Kufr al-Dawlah al-Saudiya* (The Clear Indicators of Saudi Arabia’s Infidelity), which pushed him to reassess his estimation of the Saudi ruling regime: he saw in it a regime professing its commitment to Islam, but he fundamentally doubted its Salafi credentials.

Samara points out that many of the youth who returned from Afghanistan were influenced by the ideas of jihad, at a time when hakimiyya became a matter of debate within Salafi circles and led to discord among Salafis about their relationship with the state. He was, in turn, influenced by the youth he encountered.

In 1994, just before he finished his medical studies, Samara was expelled from the Philippines due to his association with Mohammad Jamal Khalifa, the son-in-law of Osama Bin Laden and one of the most prominent supervisors of Salafi charitable and proselytizing activities. The same year, another student, Hadi al-Ghoul, was arrested in the Philippines because of his relationship with Ramzi Yusuf, a Kuwaiti of Pakistani origin who was accused of orchestrating the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993 and attempting to carry out a series of terrorist bombings in the Philippines and Pakistan.

Upon his return from the Philippines, Samara was arrested at the airport by Jordanian authorities. He was detained and interrogated for a week about his relationship with Khalifa, who was detained in Jordan at the same time, as well as about his relationships with jihadist groups in the Philippines or with Ramzi Yusuf. In the end, he was released, and went on to finish the practical requirement to obtain his degree in medicine.

Samara did not have strong ties with Jihadi Salafism in Jordan in the period that followed his return to the country, but he was acquainted with the goings-on within the various Islamist movements, including Salafism, and he followed their debates. He followed the writings of al-Maqdisi, and read Said al-Qahtani's book *Wala' Wal Bara'* (Alliance and Disapproval), so named for a concept that expresses the importance of drawing nearer to what is pleasing to God and the Prophet while eschewing what is not. *Wala' Wal Bara'* is

a key concept in Jihadi Salafi ideology and identity, and is deployed as a tool to reinforce solidarity among those who believe in hakimiyya and jihad. Jihadi Salafis also employ the concept as a means legitimating taghut. Together they formed the foundation of al-Maqdisi's methodology.⁹⁰

Samara's relationship with the leaders of Jihadi Salafism began after he had started working as a medical doctor in Zarqa, when some of the leading Jordanian jihadis became his clients. Upon their release from prison, Abdelhadi Douglas, Khalid al-'Aroui, and Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, in search of a religiously observant and trustworthy doctor, began to attend his clinic.

Client-patron relations developed into more personal bonds, and eventually, Samara joined his patients in various discussions and debates. They, in turn, were delighted to find that this new doctor was not only religious but also shared many of their ideals. He told them that he had good experience with Islamic work in the Philippines, and disclosed to them his belief in hakimiyya and in the basics of jihadi thought.

Just before the American invasion of Afghanistan, the Jihadi Salafis travelled to Afghanistan. Samara became engrossed in the work of his clinic, and his relationship with the group did not develop much. His contact with them remained within the domain of medical treatment and some intellectual discussions. However, as a result of his affiliation to the jihadis mentioned here, he was frequently subject to interrogation and investigation, and, in some cases, detention by the security apparatus.

⁹⁰ On the ideology of the Salafi Jihadism see, see Mohammad Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Hanieh, *The "Islamic Solution,"* Op. Cit., pp.328-347.

Following al-Maqdisi's release from prison in 1999, Samara's relationship with him deepened. They discussed a number of issues about the Salafi approach and their positions on current events. Some Salafis credit Samara with al-Maqdisi's migration towards a more peaceful form of jihadism and his declaration that the jihadist movement in Jordan was a peaceful one. Samara sought to develop Jihadi Salafism's relationship with society and to alleviate the pressure of the security apparatus on its adherents. He believed that the movement should distinguish between its duties specified in doctrine and what is actually possible to orient its movement on the Jordanian stage.

Samara's ideas have not been well received by the Jihadi Salafi movement. Hence, he faces a not small amount of criticism, which he pays no heed. He argues that these new ideas will ultimately prevail. This is evident in Syria today, where differences between the Nusra Front and ISIS are evident. Although he does not delve into the details of these differences, evidence suggests that Samara is more sympathetic to the Nusra Front than the ISIS.

Notwithstanding Samara's rationality and his wise role during crises between the state and the jihadist movement, he is firmly convinced that Jihadi Salafism is the descendant of the Surviving Group, is committed to the principle of *hakimiyya*, certain of the infidelity of Arab regimes, opposes the "un-Islamic" constitutions of Arab states and refuses democratic principles and activism within the framework of the current political regime. Nevertheless, he asserts that Jihadi Salafism in Jordan is a peaceful movement that opposes the use of violence to manage internal conflict. His points of view echo those of al-Maqdisi, and thus Samara's critics within Jihadi Salafism consider them to be a betrayal of the approach, especially since al-Maqdisi's *fatwa* forbidding violence and terrorism has granted the regime

rorism has granted the regime a kind of immunity, in their view. (However, as a *quid pro quo*, followers of the movement are granted the freedom to work peacefully and continue their call without having to confront the state. Samara regards this position as a tactical maneuver that applies only in Jordan: to be sure, the bargain between Jihadi Salafism and the state should not be read as a whole-scale renunciation of armed activism, which remains as a pillar of the Jihadi Salafi approach.

Apart from his interest in Jordan's domestic politics, Samara devotes much thought to Syria, where he believes events will eventually vindicate jihadist ideology and action on the battlefield. He acknowledges that hundreds of the movement's Jordanian followers have crossed the border into Syria; a couple of hundred from Zarqa and Ruseifa in particular. He believes hundreds more wish to travel to Syria to fight alongside jihadi factions, but are not able to.

Samara's assertion about jihadism's infiltration in popular neighborhoods of al-Zarqa and al-Ruseifa is not shocking. Al-Zarqa is the home of both al-Maqdisi and al-Zarqawi, as well as a huge number of the movement's followers in Jordan. Their ranks include Abu Anas al-Sahaba and Abu Jleib (Eyad al-Tobasi), who have assumed leadership positions in the Nusra Front. Dr. Sami al-'Ureidi, who obtained his PhD in Islamic religion in Jordan, is also from al-Zarqa. He was seen as the fiqh reference for the Nusra Front, after he travelled to Syria and joined the front. Meanwhile, some members of the movement have joined the ISIS.

2. Na'im al-Tilawi: A Failed Marriage with Jihadi Salafism

Al-Tilawi was born in Nablus in 1962 and now resides in al-Zarqa. His father served as an officer in the Jordanian army. After the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, his family moved to Jordan, and he finished high school there. He belongs to a conservative, religious family.⁹¹

Upon his completion of his high school in 1980, he traveled to Turkey to study. There, he met members of al-Sulemaniyah, an Islamist group interested in promoting Islamic awareness. Later on, he welcomed the active Islamic movements, including those affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist schools. His political awareness matured in overlapping frameworks. First, his belonging to the Islamist movement in general without having committed to a certain school of thought was the first pillar of his political awareness. The second framework was jihadism, and the third was Palestinian nationalism. Al-Tilawi sought a jihadi movement that gave primacy to the Palestinian cause in confronting the Zionist project, and that would help the Islamists to secure a foothold in Palestine. This was not available among either the Palestinian national factions or the Islamist movements, the latter of which had little presence on the Palestinian stage.

His early engineering studies coincided with the eruption of the confrontation in Syria between the Muslim Brotherhood and the ruling Ba'ath regime in Damascus. Given his religious background, al-Tilawi found himself interested in the development of the crisis, and ultimately supported groups of the so-called Fighting Vanguard, mainly composed of Muslim

⁹¹ *The interview took place in my office at the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan on November 21, 2013.*

Brotherhood members who fought then-Syrian President Hafez al-Assad's troops in Hama in 1982. In due time, he became acquainted with prominent figures of this group and was influenced by them. Simultaneously, he was influenced by the ideas of Sayid Qutb and the Muslim Brotherhood. On a larger scale, he believed in Qutb's vision of *hakimiyya*, Islamic activism and the jihadi philosophy that emphasizes removing obstacles to advancing the Salafi Call, including confronting taghut, and liberating man from slavery to other than God.

In these years, al-Tilawi's understanding of jihad was solidified, informed by Qutb. Al-Tilawi believes that jihad should be part of a strategy to realize a political objective. This contrasts with the typical view of *jihad*, which is premised on *nikaya*, a term that connotes either revenge or targeting of the interests of infidels so as to weaken them.

During his cooperation with the Fighting Vanguard, al-Tilawi developed his Islamic vision based on the ideas of Qutb, al-Mawdudi, Malik Bin Nabi, and other intellectuals and senior Islamic thinkers. He acquainted himself with the discussion and debates within the Islamic community. In doing so, he began to learn about the various proselytizing and intellectual schools of thought. Soon, he began looking for individuals, from within Palestine and from outside of the Arab world, who shared his ideas and convictions, an ideology which folded jihadi thought into Palestinian nationalist cause, at the heart of which is resistance.

In his search, al-Tilawi encountered groups whose thinking was close to his own; for example, Islamic Jihad in Palestine, whose leader Fathi al-Shikaki published the well-known Khomeini and the Islamic Solution, detailing how the Iranian revolution had influenced him. In Egypt, he met members of the

jihadi group Al Jihad and a group of Leftist Maoist Palestinian intellectuals. In 1983, he helped establish *Saraya al-Jihad in Palestine*, which somewhat represented a crystallization of his ideology, as it blended the jihadi project into the project of Palestinian national liberation. Saraya al-Jihad predated the establishment of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), the most recognized Palestinian Islamic resistance organization, which did not cohere until 1987. *Saraya al-Jihad* commenced its military operations under the cover of the PLO's Fateh wing, which provided funds and training. Saraya al-Jihad's members included well-known intellectual leaders such as Munir Shafiq, Walid Seif and others.

Later, al-Tilawi returned to the West Bank to complete his studies at Hebron University. He took advantage of his time there to continue strengthening *Saraya al-Jihad*. But soon he had to leave to Egypt: Saraya al-Jihad's 1986 Bab al-Magharabeh operation – an attack on Israeli personnel that resulted in several casualties – had made him known to the Israeli authorities. In Egypt, he was introduced to a group of jihadists recently released from prison and seeking to join the Afghan *jihad*.

Imprisonment and Alienation

Of these jihadists, al-Tilawi helped members of the al-Najun min al-Nar (Survivors of the Fire) group to travel to Afghanistan by providing the necessary funds. Soon after, the Egyptian authorities arrested him. In prison, he met Seif al-'Adl – a prominent jihadi leader who later would be the military leader of al-Qaeda – and discussed with him and others ideological issues, such as how to prioritize confrontations with the near and far enemies (the Arab regimes and Israel, versus the United States and other Western nations). They also discussed the Palestinian question and its place in Islamic Jihad.

When an Egyptian court exonerated him nine months later, he travelled to Malta after Arab governments refused to grant him entry. Eventually, Munir Shafiq helped him enter Tunisia, then the location of the PLO's headquarters. During his stay there, he was disappointed to witness the deteriorating conditions of the PLO. He then left for Turkey, where he stayed for six months before eventually coming to Amman in 1989. Upon his return to Jordan, he was detained by the General Intelligence Department for three months for interrogation and investigation.

At this juncture, al-Tilawi still embraced the Saraya project, but to his dismay, a number of its intellectual leaders had given up on the organization. Some of them, such as Munir Shafiq, had gravitated towards the Muslim Brotherhood following the establishment of Hamas, attracted by its integration of jihad with Palestinian resistance. Other leaders, such as Walid Seif, began to focus more on literature and writing. Slowly, the organization disintegrated.

To rejuvenate the movement, al-Tilawi helped to establish a new military organization in Jordan. The new organization called itself Jayish Mohammad (the Army of Mohammad) and attracted hundreds of active Islamic youth. The organization's objective was to transfer jihad to Palestine and create a network among jihad-inspired organizations in the Arab world. Nevertheless, a small unit within Jayish Mohammad was discovered, and its members were arrested. They were all tried and convicted of establishing a terrorist organization. According to al-Tilawi, although the membership of Jayish Mohammad numbered in the hundreds, the organization was abandoned after the unit was discovered.

Al-Tilawi remained committed to his jihadist ideas. In 1994, he sought to convince Osama Bin Laden – who at the time lived in Sudan – of the feasibility of global jihad. But Bin Laden was

not yet ready for such a colossal idea, or the deep intellectual transformation it would require. He only arrived at such a frame of mind a few years later, and articulated it in the establishment of the World Islamic Front for Confronting the Jews and Crusaders in 1998.

Al-Tilawi was arrested again in 1995, this time on accusations of membership in the Tajdid Islami (Islamic Renewal) group along with Sabir Muqbil, Khalid ‘Adwan, and ‘Azmi al-Jaiosi. This group was trying to transfer the concept of jihad and its political program to Palestine. Al-Tilawi was later found innocent, and released from prison.

During the 1990s, the Arab political scene underwent profound transformations. The launching of the Madrid Peace Conference, the Oslo Accords, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, and the PLO’s abandonment of resistance, would leave a deep imprint on al-Tilawi. In parallel, Jihadi Salafism began to make headway at the regional level, particularly in Jordan. Al-Tilawi first met Jordan’s Jihadi Salafi leaders in the early 1990s, during his detention.

Al-Tilawi sought to bring about vital changes in the movement’s direction. In his opinion, the movement suffered from significant weaknesses, among which the absence of realistic political objectives. He again sought to link the movement to the Palestinian question and to transfer the *jihad* project to Palestine. In practical terms, he tried to persuade the like-minded to establish groups in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank of a similar disposition.

Finding the Alternative: The Return to Nationalism

Al-Tilawi would not give up. Throughout the 1990s, he worked alongside other Islamists to re-launch the project of jihad based

on the concept of the nation. He adopted a gradual project that put the Palestinian question front and center as a first step. After he failed to persuade the Jihadi Salafists to join him, he established Tayar al-Umma (The Movement of the Nation) in the late 1990s.

Along with Hakik al-Muteiri (a Kuwaiti Salafi preacher who is known throughout Kuwait, Jordan, Palestine, Yemen and Saudi Arabia), he began to establish the philosophical foundation of *Tayar al-Umma*. Its main objective was to confront the international powers supporting the Zionist project and to establish an Islamic state in the region. Tayar al-Umma established branches in a number of Arab countries under its own name.

In 2013, the Tayar al-Umma convened a conference in Turkey attended by hundreds of the movement's key figures. They discussed the Syrian conflict and the conditions of the Islamic nations. According to al-Tilawi himself, Tayar established Liwa' al-Umma to fight the Syrian army (which it is doing today). Today, Tayar al-Umma supports a number of Islamic factions in Syria such as *Ahrar Asham*.⁹²

In our discussions, al-Tilawi stressed that he never belonged to Jihadi Salafism, though the reality of his spiritual and intellectual journey suggests a more complicated relationship. The record shows that jihad has been a near obsession ever since his support of the Syrian Fighting Vanguard in the early 1980s and until the establishment of Tayar al-Umma. He exerted meticulous effort to develop Jihadi Salafism as a movement, trying to persuade both Salafis and jihadis of the ideas he adopted during the 1990s. His attempts were fruitless, mainly due to differences in

⁹² On the Tayar al-Umma and the conference in Turkey, see the article written by Bassam al-Nassir "Tayar al-Umma: mashrou' 'hiya'e wa'id [The Nation Movement: A Promising Revival Project], *The Qatar Al-Raya Daily*, October 10, 2013.

the political readings of both sides. For this reason, he pursued the establishment of Tayar al-Umma to create a wider Salafi framework able to accommodate all those working for Salafism's advancement to reinforce the concept of the Islamic nation and the project of jihad. Criticizing Jihadi Salafism, al-Tilawi argues that it lacked a clear political objective and confined jihad to its narrowest meaning, military activism without political, social, and cultural objectives that would have attracted supporters.

It is possible to see signs of the intellectual divorce between al-Tilawi and Jihadi Salafist leaders in Jordan, not only through al-Tilawi's critique, but also in the attack of supporters of al-Zarqawi against al-Tilawi and the confirmation of al-Maqdisi's supporters that they had no communication with him or with Tayar. That said, sources closer to al-Tilawi point to his vital role in recent years in developing the ideological vision of al-Qaeda to introduce a political horizon. This is evident in the literature of al-Qaeda that focuses on its second generation of adherents and its strategic vision in years to come.⁹³

⁹³ See for example some articles written by supporters of Salafi Jihadism attacking Na'im al-Tilawi. See in particular this report at the following link: showthread.php?p=529760.

3. Mu'ayad al-Tirawi: Safe Exit from Jihadists' Circles

Mu'ayad al-Tirawi originates from the city of Salt. He began journey with Jihadi Salafism early in his life, but later became doubtful of its strategy and philosophy. Of particular importance, he followed the intellectual debate between this extreme Salafi approach and other more moderate Islamic approaches. This period did not last, and he soon became open to the ideas of other Islamic movements, such as Sufism, Reformist Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood. His journey to Salafism began when he was 14. At 31, he shared his experience and explained why he became a Jihadi Salafi, the trajectory of his path to Salafism and the evolution of his convictions and thoughts and the factors that influenced his transformation.

Early Influences of a Young Jihadi

Al-Tirawi was born in Kuwait in 1981 to a simple family with limited income. Ten years later, when the forces of Saddam Hussein's Iraq swept into Kuwait, the young al-Tirawi, along with his family, fled to Jordan. They settled in Salt, a city whose social structure is tribal and composed mostly of East Bank Jordanians. Al-Tirawi's own family is of Palestinian decent, and had nothing to do with tribes of Salt.⁹⁴

Although al-Tirawi had been an observant Muslim, praying since he was a child, he began to be influenced by Jihadi Salafism when he turned 14 years old, approximately four years after his family settled in Salt. He began to attend a

⁹⁴ *A personal interview in my office at the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan on November 11, 2013.*

mosque in the neighborhood of the Maydan, close to his family home. At this mosque, he met Ra'id Khreisat, the imam and a pioneer of Jihadi Salafism in Salt. Al-Tirawi joined the group hovering around Khreisat, some of whose members were as young as 16 years old. Al-Tirawi was the youngest among them.⁹⁵

Commenting on the situation, al-Tirawi says, "They were the first I met at the mosque due to the proximity of our house to the mosque. Perhaps, if they were Muslim Brotherhood, I would have become like them. Nonetheless, they happened to be followers of this ideology, and through them I experienced my first Islamic experiment."

⁹⁵ *It is worth mentioning that Ra'id Khreisat was serving as an Imam for the mosque and works for the Ministry of the Endowment. He finished his high school then he joined the armed forces. He became an Imam when he left the army. In fact, he left the army when he began to be influenced by religious ideas, which began to spread among the youth in the city of Salt. The main themes of these ideas are the Qutbian notions of hakimiyya, rejecting democracy, and judging the legitimacy of rulers according to their commitment to Islamic rule. The irony is that the person to trigger this idea was Abdulfatah al-Hiyari who at the time was not committed to religion but later did become religious. His impact on people around him was soon felt. His house in the city became the meeting point for many university youth and some from the army. Those followers began to reassess their positions, attitudes, jobs, and relationship based on the new ideas of hakimiyya. Interestingly, among this group were some students from Mu'tah University, whose studies were later terminated and who were arrested. Also, there were some people in uniform who refused to serve in the army. Of course there were a number of university students. Al-Hiyari's impact on the youth did not last. Other similar groups began to emerge in various regions in Jordan. Then al-Maqdisi – who had returned from Kuwait – began to make waves. This figure would soon become the leading ideologue of the movement. Along with Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, al-Maqdisi was arrested for his involvement in Bay'at al-Imam (Oath of Allegiance to the Imam) in the mid 1990s. Ironically prison itself became a suitable environment for recruitment. Meanwhile, many in Salt were impacted by the hakimiyya, especially those who were influenced by Abdulfatah al-Hiyari and al-Maqdisi, among them was Ra'id Khreisat. The impact of al-Zarqawi was even greater.*

The legitimacy of the Arab world's rulers is this group's top priority: they believe Arab rulers, including Jordan's King Abdullah II, do not govern in accordance with *Shari'a* and should be considered *taghut*. For this reason, it is not Islamically permissible to accept their governance, nor to support them in any way. Khreisat's group believes this line of thinking should be promoted among people, so that they understand that true monotheism leads to true hakimiyya and therefore, only in practicing true monotheism, can they be true Muslims.

To be sure, Khreisat's group blends al-Maqdisi's ideas (which spread through his banned books) with Sayid Qutb's thoughts expressed in his book *Milestones*, as well as the thought of Islamic groups in Egypt. Al-Tirawi felt the group "was not learning anything new about religion. [*Milestones*] is only one known source that focuses on takfir of the rulers, attacks pro-regime scholars, and of banning the entry to military and security agencies. This ideology was not previously known among Jihadi Salafists. This concept emerged in a later stage. We thought of it as the proper Islam and the only path."

This occurred at the end of al-Tirawi's seventh grade year at school. He attended eighth grade at 'Uqbah Bin Nafi School in Salt, where he started immersing himself in these new religious ideas. He began to promote his ideas at school and in his neighborhood, and changed his attire to reflect the Salafi way of dress. He felt that he was one of the group, and that his Salafi peers and teachers were his new brothers, like family..

This new perspective and the ideas it entailed were not welcomed by the state or by society, which viewed them as threatening. This put the boy in conflict with his family, who began to worry about him whenever he was out and about in the neighborhood. He tried to impose his religious views on his family by demanding they ban TV and asking them to change their way of dress too.

of dress too. The school, meanwhile, also was unhappy to have a boy of this age openly advocating such ideas on the school grounds.

Al-Tirawi spent much of his time with the Salafist group, which had begun to grow in number and included members of various ages. They often prayed together and met for extended periods of time. They played soccer together and went on outings to nearby sites. Equally important, they felt united in the belief that they represented the true Islamic Call and in their sense of responsibility for conveying it to society.

His thoughts and behavior had been entirely revolutionized. He explained that since childhood, all he had known or been taught was that “Jews were the enemy. Then things changed. I started viewing the regime, the armies, and the security apparatus as the enemy.”

He was not without misgivings about the correctness of what he was doing, but these concerns receded as he settled ever more deeply into his friendships forged within the group. The hegemonic idea within it – the state as enemy – was impressed on al-Tirawi at a very young age.

He quickly demonstrated courage in expressing his ideas to the extent that, at the age of 16 and in the tenth grade, he declared King Hussein himself to be an infidel and the Jordanian regime un-Islamic. The General Intelligence Department began to keep closer tabs on the boy, and let it be known through regular questioning and harassment. One year later, al-Tirawi indicated he was open to other Islamic approaches, suggesting that he was beginning to reconsider some of his convictions. He met a member of the Muslim Brotherhood who happened to be a student of religion with Sufi proclivity. Al-Tirawi admired him and his knowledge, ethics, calmness and patience.

At that time too, his relationship with Dr. Abdulrazaq Abu al-Basal – a university professor from Salt – deepened. Abu al-Basal had studied Islamic religion in Saudi Arabia before returning to Salt in the second half of 1990s and taking a job as professor of religion at Yarmouk University in Irbid. He also began to deliver sermons at Salt's Grand Mosque. Though Abu al-Basal belonged to the Salafi school, in political terms, his tendency was towards moderation, striking a balance between fiqh, or the academic dimension, and pragmatism. His Haraki Salafism was such that he did not struggle with challenges whose resolutions exceed his capacity. He sought balance in the social, political and educational aspects of life.

Against this backdrop, al-Tirawi reassessed his thinking and began to compare the words and ideas of Abu al-Basal to his experience with jihadism. The jihadist movement was consumed by the idea of confronting the state; a disposition that exposed its members to harassment and persecution at the hands of the security apparatus.

Not surprisingly, al-Tirawi began to realize the magnitude of the situation. “Despite the difficulty of the path I chose,” he said, “I saw that I had two options: either to continue – meaning that I will face prison, prosecution, and a future without a horizon – or I abandon religion altogether as others did. Fortunately, Abu al-Basal created a third way and a third option for me.”

Years of Intellectual Struggle

When he turned 18, al-Tirawi came to an important conclusion with regard to his jihadist friends. They had strong religious convictions, but they did not align well with contemporary realities and were therefore on a collision course with it. Jihadi

Salafism required complete isolation from public life and society. While al-Tirawi passed through his period of doubt, he was arrested multiple times. He was first detained for four days when he was less than 18 years old; six months later, he was detained for two weeks. A year later, he was arrested for 22 days. The fourth detention came two months into his marriage, when he was just 19 years old. He was detained for four weeks, during which time he claims to have memorized the Quran. During this detention, he felt he had been detained because of ideas and notions in which he no longer believed. But, he did not have the courage to confess as much in front of others.

Al-Tirawi began to feel that the ideals he had held dear were unattainable, and that he desired to associate more with moderate Islamic groups with a more pragmatic outlook. He was reluctant to declare his position openly for fear of fostering the enmity of the jihadi circles with which he was associated. He found balancing these competing impulses extremely difficult, and instead of making a clean break, he gradually withdrew and gravitated toward other Islamists. This intellectual reckoning took some four years, before he was able to fully break both spiritually and intellectually with his previous associations.

Al-Tirawi looks back at this stage of his life (from age 14-19) with bitterness at what was compromised and lost. Namely, he feels he has missed out on his education, and speculates that, had he followed another intellectual track, he may have completed his doctorate studies by now. For this reason, he returned to university to complete his bachelor's degree, an unthinkable aspiration during his days as a jihadist.

Al-Tirawi attributes his early involvement in Jihadi Salafism to the combination of emotional impulsiveness and excessive

energy typical of most teenagers. Due to his religious upbringing, he noted, he did not have the opportunity to explore life the way his peers did. He did not smoke, talk to girls or view pornography or do anything that was ideologically proscribed. In such a constraining environment, it was natural that the energy he possessed flowed into the only available outlet, Jihadi Salafism.

In al-Tirawi's case, the intellectual vacuum left by the absence of moderate scholars was filled by the jihadists. There were no moderate scholars with the ability to address the youth and present to them a modern moderate Islamic vision. Instead, the door was opened wide for the ideology and doctrine of Jihadi Salafism.

Not all young jihadists have been fortunate enough to encounter influences that lead to introspection about their spiritual and intellectual development. Many are swept rapidly onto a completely new and dangerous stage. Mu'tasim Daradkah, for example, left Jordan immediately after graduating from high school in 1999 and headed for Kurdistan to join a Jordanian jihadist group who were in alliance against a group of secular Kurds. The group was led by Ra'id Khreisat, al-Tirawi's former patron. Daradkah was killed within a few short months.

Al-Tirawi called his period of self-reflection one of "intellectual struggle." Interestingly, al-Tirawi notes the psychological pressure that he was subjected to when he married. He worked hard to meet his responsibilities, taking work first in a restaurant, then in an Islamic bookshop, then for a vendor of religious recordings and books. And yet, his ability to provide his family with basic necessities was compromised by the nature of the jihadist approach, which considers much business as religiously banned.

Lacking from his account for the transformation is the absence of Ra'id Khreisat from the scene. Al-Tirawi's revered teacher – along with many youth from Salt – went to Kurdistan of Iraq where they joined jihadist forces and were later killed.

Khreisat had had a great impact, even a dominating one, on al-Tirawi. It was Khreisat who pushed the boy early on to embrace the jihadist ideology. He acted as a brother or a protector who used to defend al-Tirawi whenever he found himself in trouble with the local community or the police. As a resident of Salt without a tribal affiliation, al-Tirawi found in Khreisat a helpful pillar. But at the same time Khreisat was a psychological constraint that prevented the boy from changing his approach, lest he lose a very important person in his life.

Khreisat's departure to Kurdistan gave al-Tirawi the necessary space to reconsider his views. Pushed by the financial obligations of marriage and his internal intellectual tension after his re-evaluation of his jihadist ideas, al-Tirawi sought other moderate Islamic ideas that granted him greater flexibility. His friendly nature did not fit the aggressive nature of the jihadists.

Conclusions

The narratives of personal, intellectual, and spiritual experiences from Jihadi Salafist circles provide unique insights into the personal world of jihadis. Though the cases are limited in number, they reflect common experiences within the movement itself.

Like the traditional and haraki Salafi personalities, the Jihadi Salafi personality is strongly informed by religious identity.

Religion, in this context, forms a significant base in the formulation of the intellectual perspective and the daily practices of the various types of Salafism, but within the context of jihadism, a new dimension is added.

The first dimension of the jihadi personality is introversion. A Jihadi Salafi is a religious person who is strongly committed to the religious texts (the Quran, Sunna, and religious fatwas), as well as to ritual. For instance, he prays in the mosque, adheres to apparent ethics and eschews completely whatever he believes to be in contradiction to Islam.

In the social environment, these beliefs, practices and behaviors can manifest as condescension towards whatever or whoever does not sufficiently believe in or observe the conditions of religious commitment. This trait is known, to use the term coined by Sayid Qutb and reiterated in the jihadi discourse, as “the superiority of belief.” A believer does not succumb to his desires; he does not recognize as legitimate – and therefore is not beholden to – the prevalent cultural, political, and social authorities.

The effect on a Jihadi Salafi is his psychological isolation from the social environment. Although the Salafi Jihadi physically lives in a broader society and tries to bring about change, he is careful not to ascribe to his character anything that violates the Shari’a in his interactions with that society, whether at the level of friendship or even kinship ties. Nevertheless, the Salafi Jihadi cannot be described as introverted; many actively mingle with society and promote their ideology. They attend social occasions; not as participants but as observers who do not identify with their environment.

Taken together, these above-mentioned traits make the Salafi Jihadist personality one-sided. In other words, this

personality relies on one-way communication. He has a closed belief system that can only absorb what already aligns with Salafi doctrine. Seen in this way, his social and psychological participation should be seen within the context of his religious call for God.

The doctrinal dimension is one of the most important pillars that distinguish the jihadi personality. A jihadi's positions vis-à-vis political institutions, values and processes are linked to the doctrine and the concept of monotheism. For a Salafist, other ideologies border on apostasy and open defiance of religious rulings. Adherents to other ideologies are in no way considered to be of the Surviving Group, the closed circle that represents the Jihadi Salafism of today.

Because they espouse and adhere to a strict doctrine that is inherently insular, many jihadists have no interest in following the details of political life unless they directly concern or impact followers of the ideology. Likewise, the only form of public debate of interest is that which reinforces the Salafi doctrine.

Jihadi Salafism's self-imposed isolation have made jihadi virtual forums an important source of promoting jihadism and mobilizing jihadism's ranks without having to violate the principle of *hakimiyya* by mixing with the rest of society. The increasing role played by the Internet in promoting the movement's ideology and in establishing ties among its affiliates in various regions is evident both inside and outside of Jordan; witness the departure of hundreds of jihadists from Jordan to join their co-religionists in other countries, such as Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan. The jihadists' negative attitude toward the otherness of the real world has reinforced the importance of the virtual world. The virtual world is also a convenient conduit through which jihadists worldwide communicate about their experiences.

Jihadist forums are a platform for debate within the movement itself, in particular after differences within the movement emerged. Jihadi Salafists have become divided between those who support the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the general line adopted by al-Zarqawi on one hand, and supporters of al-Maqdisi and al-Zawahiri and the general line of al-Qaeda on the other. Today, one of the most important jihadi sites, the Jarir al-Hasni blog, which is widely believed to be owned Omar Mahdi Zeidan, an heir to al-Zarqawi and a defender of ISIS, who aggressively challenges al-Maqdisi. He opposes peaceful activism as a Salafi principle and is likewise critical of the protests and demonstrations that have occurred in Jordan since the onset of the Arab Spring. All are themes that appear on the Jarir al-Hasni blog.

This is the general framework for the Jihadi Salafist personality. And yet, despite the apparent rigidity, differences exist: between one camp seeking moderation and another seeking extremism and isolation from the outside world. These discrepancies are due, by and large, to what psychologists call “the master character.” In other words, the variations in social, cultural, and psychological conditions and the varying experiences of the affiliates of this movement helped produce the different tendencies.

The examples here represent the diversity that exists within the movement. Some Jihadi Salafis came from a non-Islamic secular ideological and political background; they appear to be more open and less rigid in their relationship to their social environment and more adept at integrating and employing a variety of tools to achieve change.

However, a wide segment of the jihadi movement did come from a Salafi background; among them, Omar Yusuf (Abu Anas al-Shami), Omar Mahmud (Abu Qutada), and other

leaders who spoke to me but preferred anonymity. These jihadis are therefore more interested in society and politics and other dimensions of modern life. But here too, personal experience has played a prominent role in accounting for their adoption of jihadist ideology or even the transfer of opinions and positions within the same jihadist circle.

A third group has no such Islamic or ideological background. Some of them, in fact, gravitated towards jihadism from a background that contradicted the ethical and religious commitments of jihadism. These are more extreme and more closed, having moved from one pole to another, and are zealous in their commitment to jihadism.

Many scholars associate gravitation towards jihadism with particular political, economic, and social conditions. Here, we have seen that jihadi ideology has flourished in lower-middle class and underprivileged neighborhoods and Palestinian refugee camps. Almost certainly, frustration, political exclusion, autocracy, unemployment, poverty, social deprivation, and limited personal freedoms and public liberties fuel this movement. Arguably, the exclusivity of tribal and kinship ties aggravate the situation.

Jihadism's influence has been amplified by a crisis of legitimacy in Arab politics and the inability of Arab political establishments to cope with internal and external challenges. In particular, the Palestinian question has reinforced these sentiments among Muslims in general and Palestinians in particular. Awareness of corruption in public institutions has also fueled the movement's rise. The absence of enlightened discourse has also facilitated the movement as it spreads across the country.

The previously mentioned factors are frequently advanced to account for the emergence and ascendance of the Jihadi

Salafist movement in recent years and they are rarely contested. Scholars frequently elaborate upon these factors with further detail, such as how the social environment in some cities and neighborhood can foster the growth of these ideas. They also describe how the psychological environment can determine the predisposition of individuals to radical ideas and movements. The narratives here attest that these factors, along with personal experiences and individual psycho-social environments, do encourage a tendency towards Jihadi Salafism.

Chapter Three:

**The Quest for a Salafi
“Third Way”**

This chapter introduces a group of Salafis who have migrated between various approaches and groups within the Salafi circles. More recently, one group has attempted to forge a third way between Traditional Salafism and Jihadi Salafism. This group initially identified entirely with the general Salafi ideology and its sheikhs in both Jordan and Saudi Arabia, but later began to converge with Jihadi Salafism. More recently, it has tried to reinforce a Salafi “third way through the media, social work, proselytization and education.

Salafism’s third way is rooted among the Jordanian and Palestinian populations of East Amman, but also extends into other cities, particularly Zarqa’ and Ruseifa. In the 1980s, the founders of the third-way movement were influenced by the ideas of Hassan Abu Hanieh and Omar Mahmud (Abu Qutada), who both lived in the neighborhood of Ras al-’Ain. (The next chapter describes Hassan Abu Hanieh’s journey from Haraki Salafism to Jihadi Salafism to a severing of intellectual and spiritual ties with Salafism entirely.)

Both Abu Qutada and Abu Hanieh were influenced by the literature and thought of Wahabi Salafism in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Both were involved in building the Righteous Caliphs Mosque in Ras al-’Ain. There, they attended classes and gave lessons to introduce Salafi thought. Around them, a circle of youth began to form. After Nassir Eddin al-Albani moved to Jordan and settled in the Jabal al-Nasr neighborhood of Amman in the early 1980s, Abu Qutada and Abu Hanieh sought to spread Salafism throughout Jordan by reaching out to individuals in other governorates. However, differences between Abu Qutada and Abu Hanieh on one hand and al-Albani over the means of change and strategy began to surface. So Abu Qutada and Abu Hanieh looked beyond Jordan, to the countries of the Arab Gulf, Kuwait in particular. In Kuwait, they reached out to Abdurrahman Abdulkhaliq, and in Saudi

Arabia, they embraced Safar al-Hawali, Salman al-'Awdah, and Nassir al-'Amr, who was leading an experiment called the Islamic Revival.

During the 1980s, this group came under the influence of Mahmud Abdulra'of Qassim, better known as Sheikh Abu al-Amin, a Syrian living in East Amman. Abu al-Amin was well published and maintained relationships with prominent Salafi sheikhs. He held classes in his own house, focusing on education, the Salafi Call and the intellectual struggle. He had developed his own theory of international conflict, and critiqued Communism as well as Islamic movements that, from his point of view, were influenced by Communist traditions, such as the Islamic Liberation Party and Sufism.

Abu Hanieh and Abu Qutada and their youthful supporters began to form a new Salafi awareness in the mid-1980s. Their interest in political engagement ran counter to al-Albani's commitment to keep the Salafist movement outside of politics. Against this backdrop, the Ahl al-Sunna Wal Jama'a society came to the fore in the 1990s. It had been established by Abu Hanieh and Abu Qutada with the purpose of creating awareness of the necessity of political involvement. Shortly after, in 1993, Abu Hanieh with a group of other Salafists, established al-Kitab Wal Sunnah, which was to be the organizational framework for their planned political work. But with the ascendance of Jihadi Salafism in Jordan, al-Kitab Wal Sunnah became fraught with an internal struggle. After years of tribulation, the administration managed to re-orient its political direction away from jihadist ideas – a development that became possible after the departure of Abu Qutada and Abu Anas Al-Shami to Iraq to join al-Qaeda in 2003. Al-Kitab Wal Sunnah then repositioned itself within the sphere of charitable, cultural and educational work. With financial support from Qatar and others in the Gulf, it opened branches and centers in Jordan's various governorates.

This chapter introduces the work of Zaiid Ibrahim Hammad, the current head of al-Kitab Wal Sunnah society, and Hisham al-Zu'bi, who after leaving al-Kitab Wal Sunnah became the head of the Salafi al-'I'tisam society. Both are considered among the initial circle of Salafis influenced by Abu Hanieh, Abu Qutada and Abu al-Amin. Additionally, this chapter presents the work of Osama Shehadah, an active member of al-Kitab Wal Sunnah, and Ahmed Abu Rumman, who migrated from Traditional Salafism to Haraki Salafism along with Sheikh Abu Anas al-Shami. The latter was briefly influenced by jihadist ideas, but finally settled within the haraki trend.

In light of this fluid movement, it is difficult to identify a distinct intellectual and ideological system. A diverse range of groups, individuals and associations within the movement represent views that vary in their conception of change and the current political situation. In as much as Haraki Salafism believes in organizational and political activism, this feature is what distinguishes it from Traditional Salafism. In contrast with the Traditional Salafism of al-Jami, Haraki Salafism is not opposed in principle to the establishment of a political party, though the movement has not taken this step in Jordan, mainly due to its members' inability to establish a solid intellectual base upon which to organize and mobilize supporters.

The point of contention between Haraki Salafis and Jihadi Salafis lies in the former's rejection of jihadist activism as the only approach to change. Contrary to jihadists, Haraki Salafis emphasize their belief in peaceful work, even though their positions toward the government are vague. Among them are those whose ideas more closely resemble those of Sayid Qutb, who attached monumental importance to hakimiyya. While they don't regard the region's current leaders as legitimate, they also do not advocate armed activism to displace or replace them, as the jihadists do. Some in the movement refuse

to judge leaders as infidels while also opposing the principle of obedience. In other words, they believe in the legitimacy of political opposition and sanction political activism.

An exploration of the status of this movement in Jordan, its personalities and orientation, reveals an overlapping network of individuals, groups and ideas. But this network lacks unity and intellectual agreement as to the preferred approach to reform and public work. In this context, the following groups are notable:

- First, the al-Kitab Wal Sunnah society, located in the Hai Nazzal neighborhood of East Amman with a number of branches and centers throughout Jordan. The society publishes al-Qiblah magazine and in recent years has focused on charitable and educational work. Among the society's most prominent figures are Zaid Ibrahim, Osama Shehadah, Mohammad al-Dhweib, Bassam al-Nassir and a group of other youth. However, al-Kitab Wal Sunnah does not offer a clear reformist program or intellectual discourse.
- Second, al-'I'tisam society headquartered in al-Zuhur neighborhood of East Amman. It has a number of centers in Amman, though it is smaller in numbers and influence than al-Kitab Wal Sunnah society. It is dedicated to caring for orphans and educational work but lacks the financial resources to expand. One of its most prominent leaders is Hisham al-Zu'bi.
- A third group is known for its affiliation with this movement, though the individuals who identify with it differ in their intellectual and political positions. Examples of such individuals include Ibrahim al-'Is'is, Mohammad Abu Rahim, and some other individuals who are affiliated with Sruri thought.

- The fourth group is composed of academics; professors at Jordanian universities who studied in institutions in Saudi Arabia and were influenced by Salafi thought. Their interest in Salafism is purely academic, and they neither involve themselves in public debates over politics, nor enjoy political prominence.

The vision of the first group, influenced by Abu al-Amin and forming the nucleus of the third way, led to the establishment of al-Kitab Wal Sunnah. However, its key personalities departed the haraki trend in favor of other ideologies and schools. Abu Qutada, for instance, later committed to Jihadi Salafism at the global level. Hassan Abu Hanieh also broke from Salafism altogether. Even Omar Yusuf, who joined the Society of al-Kitab Wal Sunnah and chaired al-Bukhari Center for religious and cultural learning in North Marka, shifted to Jihadi Salafism; he joined al-Qaeda and was later killed in Iraq.

While Haraki Salafism suffered from the tendency of its members to embrace jihadism, many of those of Abu al-Amin's circle gave up entirely on political activism and moved closer to accepting the principle of obedience, a shift that transpired later through the establishment the Center of Imam Abu Abdullah al-Shafi'e, led by Dr. Samir Murad al-Shawabkeh (the imam of the Sunnah Mosque in East Amman). Yet while the haraki movement lacks firm ideological and political footing, it reflects an awareness of a need to be political involved in order to effect change. The following sections introduce those individuals who first experimented with haraki Salafism in Jordan.

1. Zaied Hammad: From Activism to Charity

This section presents Zaied Hammad, who encountered and adopted Haraki Salafist thought at an early age. His spiritual and intellectual journey and commitment to this ideology has spanned three and a half decades, from his school days, through his higher studies, and into his adult life. When this book was being written, Hammad said he had recently concluded that charitable work was important to him, nearly a calling to dedicate more time to helping others. Over the last decade, Hammad restructured al-Kitab Wal Sunnah Society and Haraki Salafism, simultaneously rejuvenating the movement and ending its entanglement with Jihadi Salafism.

Now 46 years old, Hammad's experience with Salafi thought dates back to his time as a secondary school student in Ras al-'Ain in East Amman. At the Righteous Caliphs Mosque – which then had only been recently built – he met Hassan Abu Hanieh and Abu Qutada, both of whom had been involved in the Salafi movement in Jordan since its earliest days. Knowledgeable of Islamic ideas thought, Abu Hanieh and Abu Qutada made a significant impact on the youth around them.

It was Hammad's natural inclination toward research about the opinions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) that attracted him to Salafism early in his life. In his classes with Abu Hanieh at the Righteous Caliphs Mosque, his teacher explained the Salafi doctrine, matters of fiqh and various religious sciences. Hammad and his classmates began to form a distinct group.

Hammad researched the Prophet's opinion concerning controversial issues in the Salafi creed and Shari'a. He sought other

than that which scholars and jurists had to offer on these matters. His studiousness prompted Abu Hanieh to predict that the young Hammad would become a Salafi. This prediction came at an interesting juncture in the history of Islam, when the differences between followers of various sects and schools of thought – particularly al-Shafi’i and al-Hanafi – were acute.

As a student, Hammad was the disciplinary officer at this public school and a member in a students’ group known as the “friends of the police.” He started to promote Salafi thought and distribute Salafi literature among the students. He was joined by his friend Osama Shehadah, who, although younger than Hammad, had also adopted Salafism at a young age.

Completing the Journey Towards Haraki Salafism

Upon his completion of two-year military conscription in 1989, Hammad enrolled in the Arab Community College in Amman to study accounting. Along with Shehadah, Adnan al-Sus and others, he attended the Friday sermons of Mohammad Shaqra, one of the most prominent Salafi sheikhs, and attended classes given by Sheikh Mahmud al-Qassim (Abu al-Amin). Prior to this, he had not identified as Salafi, although he had long ago adopted the Salafi creed. During this period, Islamist movements, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, were very active and had a notable presence on university campuses.

Hammad decided to participate in the student body elections. On the eve of the vote, Hammad had an unpleasant surprise. At the time, he did not feel that he was in disagreement with the school of al-Albani or the Muslim Brotherhood, as they all were in agreement on the Islamic discourse in general. He had

planned to represent the Salafi movement in a joint list with Muslim Brotherhood, but student supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood opposed him, after the organization's leadership ordered them to stop participating in student protests, led by Hammad, against an increase in fees.

Hammad consulted with both Abu Hanieh and Abu Qutada, who advised him to continue with the protest, which was a sit-in. This created the first crack in his relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood's student supporters. The sit-in predated Jordan's initial democratic opening, so at the time, such an act could have resulted in detention and arrest. And yet, Hammad, Salafi students, and other students were adamant about achieving their aims. The university leadership relented. This great achievement distinguished Hammad during his two-year studies in the college.

Buoyed by his success, Hammad led a Salafi list and ran for elections independently of the Muslim Brotherhood student camp. His election platform included demands linked to fees, the establishment of a library and freedom of expression. He was unaware that the members of his bloc belonged to the Sruri School, who believed in political activism and opposition. A majority of them came from Ruseifa, Zarqa', and Sweileh.

Hammad was elected as deputy head of the student union in the college. During this period, he experienced his first encounter with the security apparatus due to his student activism. He was at the forefront of demonstrations and strikes on the college campus. He organized in a soccer tournament carrying the name of the Palestinian Intifada, a phenomenon that had captivated and inspired the Arab street in the late 1980s. On that day, one student asked Hammad pointedly why his bloc did not also organize a tournament in the name of King Hussein Bin Talal. Realizing that the question was meant to

provoke a reaction, Hammad replied, “Why not? We will organize one.” But the student demanded that Hammad change the name of the tournament already underway. According to Hammad, the encounter quickly deteriorated and “a huge fight broke out in which a number of Transjordanian students assaulted me and used racist language. Another Transjordanian group appeared, and the fight came to an end. I was summoned by the General Intelligence Department and asked to resign [from the head of the student union]. Under the shock of the confrontation with the students and the state of frustration, I resigned, and I abandoned student activities for the remainder of my two years in the college.”

When parliament in Jordan was restored in 1989, no candidates represented the Salafi movement. Rather, Hassan Abu Hanieh and Abu Qutada supported the candidates of the Muslim Brotherhood. At the same time, Hammad supported Abdulmun'im Abu Zant, who was a candidate on the Muslim Brotherhood's ticket.

In this period Abu Qutada did not consider democracy or participatory politics as un-Islamic. He put a great effort into his constituency in Ras al-'Ain, where a majority of residents were of Palestinian descent, and turned out voters for the Muslim Brotherhood. His activism in this regard contradicted the hostility toward the Muslim Brotherhood expressed by followers of al-Albani. It was not until later that the Salafi movement developed a more antagonistic position towards the Muslim Brotherhood and moved closer to the government.

In our discussion, Hammad said if he could revisit his 20s, he would moderate his attitude towards others. He suggests that he would have seen to it that his relationship with the students of the Muslim Brotherhood did not devolve into one of enmity and conflict, and would have softened his tone towards student

women. He recalled that when he and his supporters saw a young woman with a young man, they would gather around them to express their surprise and disapproval. If a student organized a co-ed trip, he and his supporters considered it a sin. Looking back, he expressed amazement that women did not react strongly to his censures. "I am surprised that female students were silent in response to our strict and sharp attitude," he noted. "Had they reacted to us back then, I would not have blamed them today."

More often than not, he describes his group's attitude during his college days as confrontational. Hammad says this tendency was due to the sheikhs that his group consulted and supported. These sheikhs did not have knowledge of fiqh relevant to universities and colleges. He adds that his group was insistent in imposing their ideas. For instance, one night they raised too many slogans and signs in support of the Palestinian Intifada. The following day, the dean of the college approached Hammad to advise him that such behavior might backfire.

Hammad and his followers deeply believed they were promoting a more Islamic society on the college campus. At one point, they required segregation by gender during activities they supervised. Despite this, Hammad remained popular among women students, as he always defended student rights in service-related matters. Moreover, his noticeable support for the Palestinian Intifada persuaded many Palestinian supporters to acknowledge him as a courageous Salafi, regardless of any ideological differences.

Upon his graduation, Hammad worked at the Islamic Office, a publishing house owned by Zuhair al-Shawish, one of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood who had some Salafi inclinations. Hammad used his work to develop an in-depth study of the intellectual dimension of Salafism and to acquaint him

self with the in-office discussions among leaders of the Salafi movement, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic figures that visited the office in downtown Amman.

During the 1990s, Hammad joined the Ahl al-Sunnah Wal Jama'a movement, and in 1993, helped establish al-Kitab Wal Sunnah society, where he worked as an accountant. During his period, he combined his extensive reading with participation in activities of the new political Salafi movement in Jordan. This new movement had begun to draw supporters, and it benefited from the experience of the Islamic Revival in Saudi Arabia. In particular, it used the recordings of some of the most charismatic Salafi figures among the opposition in Saudi Arabia, such as Safar al-Hawali, Salman al-'Awdah, Nassir al-'Amr and others. In fact, followers of Haraki Salafism in Jordan considered themselves an extension of the above-mentioned charismatic figures.

The leaders of this emerging movement were Omar Mahmud (Abu Qutada) and Hassan Abu Hanieh. According to Hammad, "The Abu Qutada we knew then was different from the one we know today." In those days, Abu Qutada did not express the same degree of dissonance with the traditional movement that he does today, and was more flexible in Salafism's relationship with other Islamic movements. In this context, Hammad recounts seeking Abu Qutada's counsel on the inclusion of women students on Hammad's election list. Hammad reminded Abu Qutada that this would entail sitting and talking with them. To his surprise, Abu Qutada agreed that women should be included.

Hakimiyya was not a prevalent principle within Abu Qutada's new movement. For example, following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Abu Qutada openly criticized then-Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. This criticism was not rooted in the principles.

of hakimiyya. Nor were Abu Qutada and his new group particularly concerned to appease either the authorities or public opinion, as evidenced by their publication of a paper that contradicted the position of both the state and the Muslim Brotherhood, putting the movement at odds with Jordanian society and sympathizers with the Baathist regime in Iraq

Hammad has a vivid memory of this period. His group sought to emphasize differences rather than commonalities with the Muslim Brotherhood. They reached the conclusion that their emphasis on the issues of creed, religious doctrine, and religious education was significantly greater than that of the Muslim Brotherhood. He added that the group thought that the Muslim Brotherhood was more adherent to the Ash'arite creed, which differed from the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah Wal Jama'a. Shortly after that, the Haraki Salafi movement also began to distinguish itself from other Salafi movements. Their intellectual position contradicted that of the Salafi disciples of Sheikh al-Albani in the sense that they did not directly oppose involvement in politics, even though they did not establish a political party, either before or after the legalization of political parties in 1992.

Hammad worked for the Islamic Office for three years, during which time he read numerous books on Islamic doctrine, Hadith, and Islamic thought. He followed the sermons of Sheikh Mohammad Shaqra and attended the classes of Sheikh Nassir al-Albani. While he did not feel at this point that his differences with the followers of al-Albani were irreconcilable, he began to realize in the mid-1990s that the discord within the Salafi movement was large and growing. Moreover, he reached the conclusion that al-Kitab Wal Sunnah had adopted an intellectual line that had diverged completely from that of al-Albani. Meanwhile, he was close to the group that included Hassan Abu Hanieh, Bassam al-Nassir, Hisham al-Zu'bi,

Osama Shehadah, Mohammed Shattat, Hassan Abdulmanan, Ahmed al-Kuwaiti, Ibrahim al-'Is'is, and others.

For Hammad, the primary difference among Salafis occurred in their views on ruling regimes, sitting governments and armed struggle: one group regarded Arab rulers as Muslims and therefore did not speak of jihad; a second group, such as the Jama'at al-Islamiyyeh in Egypt, considered Arab rulers to be infidels and called for jihad to displace them. Meanwhile, a third group considered Arab rulers to be infidels, but did not regard jihad as a legitimate mode of internal conflict management. Still others said nothing about the qualities of Arab rulers or whether they were in fact true Muslims.

Interestingly, during this stage, even members of al-Kitab Wal Sunnah disagreed over the issues of the legitimacy of the government and jihad. If anything, this particular difference facilitated the emergence of Jihadi Salafism in Jordan. Abu Qutada – a Haraki Salafi – had left the country in 1991, before al-Kitab Wal Sunnah's establishment. He only gained his stature as one of the most important ideologues of Salafi Jihadism and a mufti for jihadist groups in North Africa after he settled in London.

The transformation of Abu Qutada and the emergence of al-Maqdisi on the Jordanian scene, coupled with the imprisonment in Saudi Arabia of the sheikhs of the Islamic Revival (Safar al-Hawali, Salman al-'Awdah, and Nassir al-'Amr) for some years, had confused Salafis as to who was in charge of al-Kitab Wal Sunnah and its activities. As a consequence, jihadist groups came to dominate it and its position vis-à-vis other Islamist movements in Jordan.

Hammad identified more with the discourse of the Saudi strand of Haraki Salafism, especially that represented by the

Saudi revivalist Safar al-Hawali. Hammad read his book on the doctrine of postponement in the Islamic world and he listened to his many recordings. He found him different from both Traditional and Jihadi Salafis. However, Hammad did not concern himself much with these intellectual differences, instead preferring to focus on the practical and administrative aspects of Salafism. He continued to follow the differences within al-Kitab Wal Sunnah, as well as the discussion about al-Kitab Wal Sunnah's future direction, among Abu Hanieh, Ibrahim al-'Is'is, Bassam al-Nassir, and Ahmed al-Kuwaiti. He ultimately concluded that the society lacked intellectual identity and leadership – organizational weaknesses that ultimately put the society in conflict with the General Intelligence Department – and for these reasons, Hammad quietly withdrew from al-Kitab *Wal Sunnah*.

To Be Salafi in Work and Profession

After his departure from al-Kitab Wal Sunnah, Hammad focused on his personal affairs and his work as an accountant in a private company, where he earned a good salary. Part of his job was to deposit the salaries of other employees in bank accounts. To his dismay, al-Albani issued a fatwa citing a religious principle, which essentially forbade Hammad from continuing this work. "I tried to discuss the issue with him," Hammad said, "but he was adamant. People were upset despite the fact all I wanted to know was if having someone else deposit the salaries in bank account would still violate the religious ban."

After al-Albani's fatwa, Hammad left his job and found part-time work as accountant in a number of commercial companies and another night job in a restaurant. But things did not go well. His Salafi friends used to visit the restaurant

to urge him to quit his job, since the proprietor brought in a singer every Thursday to perform. They asked Hammad how he could work in an establishment that permitted singing and dancing. He approached the owner, a Christian, to tell him he wanted to quit. "He asked whether the reason was the singing and dancing," Hammad recounted. "I said yes. He said in this case, he would build a screened cottage [for me to work in] in a corner of the restaurant so that he could still have singing on Thursdays. Then my Salafi friends came again, saying the solution was insufficient, as the restaurant still offered music and singing. They kept coming back until I gave in, and quit the restaurant."

Soon after that, Hammad returned to al-Kitab Wal Sunnah with a number of youth. He was elected to the administration with a mandate to revive the society. He found that it was still fraught with problems and internal conflicts, and that the tug of war between Salafi activists and jihadists continued over who should control the society. Nevertheless, Hammad continued doing what he was best at; mainly fundraising, engaging with society and avoiding conflict. As the next elections approached, the group's young members nominated Hammad as a candidate for al-Kitab Wal Sunnah president. They sought an individual who excelled in administration and leadership, rather than a sheikh. Once Hammad agreed to run for the position of president, the conflicting sides agreed to work with him. He won the society presidency, but he was not the only influential member on the new administrative board. Hammad noticed that some individuals, who were closer to the jihadist movement, including deputy president Mohammad Omar, would come to meetings having already made decisions about matters to be discussed. Hammad endeavored to shift al-Kitab Wal Sunnah away from the influence of the jihadist movement and to mediate differences in a way that would protect the society while avoiding confrontation with the security apparatus.

Hammad's convictions were entirely different from those of the jihadists. After the 2003 assassination of the American diplomat Laurence Michael Foley, al-Kitab Wal Sunnah deputy director Mohammad Omar was accused of being involved in the plot. "I was summoned by the General Intelligence Department," Hammad said. "They told me they knew that I had not been involved in the incident. Nonetheless, they pointed out to me the dangerous situation of al-Kitab Wal Sunnah, especially with the notable presence of the jihadist movement."

In a bold move, Hammad expelled Omar from al-Kitab Wal Sunnah. When he sought to fill his position with another individual, he was surprised that the new candidate was also close to the jihadist movement. Hammad decided to turn the tables and rid al-Kitab Wal Sunnah of the jihadists altogether. In the run up to elections, Hammad registered several new members to regain control of the society. But at the same time, he allowed the jihadists to remain in the organization.

During his second term as president, he began to implement his vision for the society, which was focused on ending the internal intellectual crisis. He also began to expand the society's activities and establish new branches while also developing the society's educational, charitable, and proselytizing work. In a just a few months, he managed to establish four branches and twenty centers. His meticulous work and achievements did not spare him a clash with the jihadists. He often was surprised to find that the majority of centers had been influenced by jihadist thought, leading to several problems with the security apparatus. In the latter half of the decade, the General Intelligence Department advised him that the jihadists were "infiltrating" the organization. In particular, problems arose concerning the role of Omar Yusuf (Abu Anas al-Shami), who had established al-Bukhari Center in North Marka.

Later, al-Shami resigned from al-Kitab Wal Sunnah to travel to Iraq, where he became an ideologue for the al-Zarqawi-led al-Qaeda there.

Frustrated, Hammad decided to expel the jihadists from al-Kitab Wal Sunnah once and for all. Hundreds of members were cast out, and all the society's centers were closed. In particular, he severed ties with the Ruseifa group, which represented the focal point of the jihadist ideology within the society. He then set about restructuring and reorienting it.

According to Hammad, al-Kitab Wal Sunnah suffered from a lack of identity and an imprecise vision of reform and change. For instance, if al-Kitab Wal Sunnah invited a member of parliament for a lecture, society members publicly denounced him as an infidel. This undermined al-Kitab Wal Sunnah's objective to develop its social base by reaching out to the wider society. Against this backdrop, Hammad sought to project a clear identity for the society and a clear reformist agenda within a gradual, rather than revolutionary, context. Also, rather than expending efforts on endless intellectual debate and confrontation with the state and its security apparatus, al-Kitab Wal Sunnah was to focus on charity, volunteerism, and proselytization.

When the crisis in Syria erupted in 2011, sending hundreds of thousands Syrian refugees into Jordan, Hammad seized opportunity to both do good and reorient the society in practice. Al-Kitab Wal Sunnah has since become one of the most active and important organizations addressing the humanitarian crisis resulting from the Syrian conflict at the national level in Jordan. The society has received aid and other funds from charities in Qatar and the Arab Gulf to support the society's work with refugees. So dedicated has al-Kitab Wal Sunnah become to aiding the refugees that this has become a main

component of its work. The society's success in this area has constituted another turning point in Hammad's personal life. Having found himself working on a much larger stage, with a greater and true impact, he began to feel that he wanted to dedicate all of his spare time to voluntary work, in addition to his work as an accountant in a construction company.

Hammad has five children and is an avid boxer. He serves as an international boxing referee. He feels assured about his future. He says that he feels that he finally sees the shore to which he wants to sail. Here, he refers to his deep passion for charitable work – an activity that removes him from the intellectual differences and ideological debate within Salafism. His new domain puts him where he wants most to be: administration and productive activity.

2. Osama Shehadah: The Solid Salafi

This section presents Osama Shehadah, who has much in common intellectually with the model of Zaid Hammad and was active in al-Kitab Wal Sunnah society. Like Hammad, Shehadah encountered Salafism at an early age. Even before he came to Jordan he studied Salafism extensively and developed sound knowledge of the various intellectual schools. Unlike Hammad, however, Shehadah did focus on the intellectual differences among the current schools of Salafi thought.

Shehadah is a Salafi researcher and Islamic writer who dedicates much of his writing to analyzing his experience and discussing the present circumstances and future of Salafism in Jordan. He focuses on the weakness and strengths of a movement that operates in a fluid, divided and non-institutional environment.

The Salafi Industry: The Balanced Structure

Born in 1971 in Kuwait, Osama Shehadah today is married and has a middle class lifestyle, working for the family business. Shehadah encountered the Muslim Brotherhood in an early age in the mosque, but as his father had already imparted Salafism to him, he found little to agree with in the brotherhood's approach. He had been raised as a Salafi, and by first grade he was already attending the classes of Sheikh Abdurrahman Abdulkhalik.

Unlike Salafism in Jordan and the rest of the Levant, the Salafism of Kuwait believed in organizational and institutional activism, a factor that appealed to Shehadah. Through the Kuwaiti Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage, Salafis

took part in elections, as was consistent with the approach and writing of Abdulkhaliq. The Kuwaiti experience left Shehadah feeling that other Islamist movements had no appreciable advantages.

According to Shehadah, Salafism is distinguished from other Islamic groups by its solid spiritual and scientific foundation: the intellectual base provides guidance that discourages deviation from devotion to God and guides pious behavior. It also protects the Salafi Call from entanglement in irrational reactions to political developments. He argues that the Muslim Brotherhood allowed itself to be dragged into the Iranian Revolution and fell under the influence of jihadis who promoted armed activism. In contrast, Salafism is endowed with a tradition of science that places strict constraints in dealing with such events.

Shehadah at first was not preoccupied with matters of reform and change as other Islamic groups were. Instead, he was more interested the movement's intellectual, academic and spiritual foundation and growth. This was a common focus for Salafism in Kuwait during the 1980s. It is worth mentioning that the Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage was established in 1984; hence political activism and participation in national elections had to wait for several years.

Shehadah's spiritual, educational and academic development went through several stages. He learned the basics of the educational and academic Salafi approach by reading numerous books and listening to prominent Salafi Sheikhs. He says the Kuwaiti Salafi experience placed him in the middle of the Salafi environment and the prevailing books and ideas of the movement. Later he read more books on the creed, Hadith, fiqh and education in a gradual and thorough manner.

Shehadah sees an imbalance in the Salafi movement in Jordan, in that it lacked the organizational framework he had become accustomed to in Kuwait; Salafism in Jordan does not permit gradual change, whether at the spiritual, intellectual or educational levels.

The Return to Jordan: Engagement within the Salafi House

Along with his family, Shehadah returned to Jordan in 1987 when he was still a high school student. Not long after, he met Sheikh Mahmud al-Qassim (Abu al-Amin) and he began attending his classes where he met a group of youth – such as Hassan Abu Hanieh, Omar Mahmud, Zaied Ibrahim and others – close to his own line of thinking. He met them in a Salafi mosque in Hai Nazzal.

Sheikh al-Qassim's influence on Shehadah was soon apparent. Shehadah quickly developed an interest in research on contemporary Islamic and Western intellectual thought to complement his already solid foundation in Islamic thought – an asset which gave him the edge over many Salafis.

In addition to that, Shehadah took the initiative to meet prominent figures of the Islamic Call, particularly those with Salafi leanings. This exposed him to an understanding of a variety of models within Salafism, that, taken together with his knowledge of other sects and schools of thought including those beyond the realm of Islam, helped him define the intellectual path he would take later in life.

To his surprise, the general Salafi circles of al-Albani in Jordan were critical of the Kuwait school of thought. “There was a negative attitude on the part of the students of al-Albani toward

Abdulkhaliq,” Shehadah recalled. “The latter believes in political and organizational work and in taking part in elections. This violates al-Albani’s approach. They used to say about us, ‘here come the students of Abdulkhaliq.’ But Sheikh al-Qassim did not have such a negative attitude.”

Shehadah identified two prominent groups in the Salafi community during this period: the students of al-Albani, who rejected organizational and political work and were disinterested in society and politics; and the students of Abu al-Amin – notably, Hassan Abu Hanieh, Mohammad al-Hajj, Adnan al-Sus and Omar Mahmud (Abu Qutada) – who later formed a new movement distinct from al-Albani’s circle. Explicit in the work of the second group was the charitable work of the zakat (alms tax) committees.

But following the eruption of the 1991 Gulf War, the group fragmented: Abu Qutada left Jordan and turned towards Jihadi Salafism; Abu Hanieh was influenced by Abu Qutada. Only Adnan al-Sus and Shehadah remained focused on collective and charitable work.

Soon afterward, what remained of the group established ties with the Kuwaiti Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage. They used to meet in the offices of al-Kitab Wal Sunnah, before Abu Hanieh fell under the influence of Abu Qutada. However, regional events and debates within the Salafi community aggravated the existing cracks in the society. The division at this point became one between Osama Shehadah and Adnan al-Sus on the one hand and those who were influenced by the jihadist thought on the other. At this point Shehadah entered the military as a conscript. After completing his military service in 1995, he worked in business, but the strong jihadist influence in the society led him to alienate himself from it for more than a decade.

He continued his advocacy for Salafism by writing booklets and pamphlets and raising the funds to publish and distribute them. He also took an interest in tashayu' (conversion to Shi'ism), perhaps influenced by his time in Kuwait where the Shi'a sect is large.

The Return to al-Kitab Wal Sunnah Society

Driven by his monumental interest in tashayu', Shehadah began to follow the issue closely in 2002 and began publishing al-Rassid, a magazine specialized covering matters related to tashayu'. In 2003, he established the Cultural Ambition Company to hold classes, courses, and lectures led by Salafi sheikhs. The company closed in 2007 due to financial problems.

After Zaiid Hammad restructured al-Kitab Wal Sunnah society and eliminated its jihadist inclinations, Shehadah returned to it. He also started writing in the press, and continues today to contribute to the religion pages of Al-Ghad daily newspaper. In addition to that, he began publishing on news websites and in other newspapers in Jordan and the region.

Shehadah believes contemporary Salafism it is in a state of flux, especially with the eruption of the Arab revolutions, the Syrian revolt in particular. For instance, Traditional Salafism movement accepts no form of political activism, including rebellion. It also insists on full involvement in the religious sciences. And yet, the movement is fracturing, as some of its youth is putting forward ideas that run against grain of Traditional Salafism.

Also, in recent years jihadist elements within the movement have been in disarray. The same applies to those who refer to themselves as Sruri. Although they differ from other Salafis

in their acceptance of political activism and opposition, Sruris are not prominent in Jordan, and do not project their movement. Some observers believe the group is integrated into al-Kitab Wal Sunnah, but Shehadah says this is inaccurate.

Shehadah believes Salafis should not involve themselves in political movements in Jordan, because they are not qualified to do so as they lack authoritative leadership and mature political practice.

Generally speaking, there is a notable Salafi movement in Jordan. Although it focuses on collective action, it is hobbled by defective administration and organization. It does not have an intellectual foundation that appeals to the wider society. In this context, Shehadah notes that a generation of academics within Traditional Salafism has begun to liberate itself from the clout of the Salafi sheikhs. This generation attaches importance to developing a real Salafi presence in the country. Examples of their efforts include the Takaful (Solidarity) society in Ramtha, which is the largest group belonging to the traditional movement, as well as al-Sahaba (the Prophet's Companion), a society in Karak. A group formed by Dr. Mu'adh al-'Awayishah is another example.

New Salafi Indicators and Directions

Recently, Shehadah has begun to expand his educational, academic and proselytizing activities. Along with his friends in al-Kitab Wal Sunnah society, Shehadah helps organize special sessions for religious reading entitled, Iqra (Read). These sessions study religious texts by focusing on the chain of narrators. To Shehadeh's surprise, attendance at these sessions has far exceeded his expectations. The number of participants has been in the thousands, coming from various Salafi groups

in Jordan, despite the demands they place on an individual's time.

Shehadah admits that Salafis on the whole do not read in-depth books. Shehadah admits that Salafis on the whole do not read in-depth books. Many of them rely on Salafi online forums for their religious learning. Thus Salafi culture has become superficial, with Salafism reduced to minor matters regarding fiqh. Of course, the state plays a role in curtailing Salafism in this regard. A key part of the problem, according to Shehadah, has to do with the fact that al-Albani's followers in Jordan never had a broad horizon. Rather, by following al-Albani on some narrow academic and fiqh issues, they failed to take heed of the huge reformist dimension of the Salafi Call.

Salafism prioritizes fighting heresy, and this accounts for the historical interest of the Salafi Call in religious science and in conveying the correct Islam of the pious predecessors to people in all walks of life. Shehadah asserts the reason for Salafism's clash with Sufism is because the latter fought the correct religious science. He argues that Salafism seeks science in all walks of life, and links it to personal behavior. Unlike other Islamic groups, Salafis argue that work is part of faith.

Shehadah concedes that Salafism does not yet have a fully matured viewpoint on individual liberties and freedom; nor are they a subject of deep research. Rather, Salafis are currently trying to develop their positions and visions on these matters. Given the expansion of the Salafism in the world, fiqh thinking is no longer confined to solving individual problems, but needs to take into account political and social matters. Shehadah sees that contemporary Salafis seek to reconcile belief with pragmatism in their goals and aspirations for today and the future.

Shehadah sees a gap between the religious strength of the Salafi approach and its political vision that can be resolved by a political system that is based on the peaceful rotation of power, pluralism, parliamentary elections, and respect for human rights and public freedom.

Egypt's al-Nour Party most closely resembles his view of Salafism's required direction and thinking if Salafism is to flourish and influence society. But Shehadah notes that Jordan's Salafis lack the political maturity to establish an effective political party. He defines the revolution in Syria as a conflict between Sunnah and Shi'a, and believes the rise of Egypt's Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was a coup by the deep state against the Islamists' rule. In his evaluation of regimes ruled by religion-based parties, movements or establishments, he argues the best model – among Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey – is the Turkish one, due to the Justice and Development Party's actual achievements.

3. Hisham al-Zu'bi: Between What is Political and What is Jihadi

Hisham al-Zu'bi first met Adnan al-Sus in a mosque in Hai al-Zuhur in East Amman in 1989. Al-Zu'bi was attracted to al-Sus' criticisms of the Sufi practice of beseeching entities other than God on issues that Salafis consider profane. He explained that Sufi practices such as *al-Qunut prayer* ("being obedient" or "the act of standing") after the dawn prayer to be heresies. Some years later, al-Zu'bi met a number of Salafi sheikhs such Omar Mahmud and Hassan Abu Hanieh in the Righteous Caliphs Mosque in Ras al-'Ain. He had begun to expand his ties with Salafis and Abu al-Amin in Hai Nazzal.

Prior to meeting al-Sus, al-Zu'bi had not been involved in any group or Islamic movement. His acquaintance with Salafism developed later in his life, some time after he completed his diploma in library management and completed his military service. During this era, he began to work in the central vegetable market in the Wahdat area of East Amman.

Influenced from the outset by the ideas of Hassan Abu Hanieh and Mohammad Shattat, al-Zu'bi believed in the importance of institutional work. He was a founding member of al-Kitab Wal Sunnah in 1993, and later helped relocate it from its base in Ras al-'Ain to Jabal al-Zuhur. *Al-Kitab Wal Sunnah's* key objective was to play a leading cultural and institutional role in society as well as to author an encyclopedia on Hadith.

Salafism as Institutional Work

The work of al-Kitab Wal Sunnah later expanded as the vision for its work developed. The society published Al-Qiblah

magazine and started organizing sessions and lectures. New prominent members joined, lending the society intellectual firepower. It appeared for a time as if the society's institutional work was taking shape and internal pluralism was taking root.

Al-Zu'bi took particular interest in the ideas of Ibrahim al-'Is'is, an influential Salafi leader who gained acknowledgement through the first half of 1990s, especially following his criticism of al-Albani's Salafism. He published a book entitled *Al-Salaf Wal Salafiyun: Ro'ya Min Edakhil* (The Predecessor and the Salafis: A Vision from Within). In that book, al-'Is'is presented ideas that went against the grain of Traditional Salafism. He advanced an approach to Salafism that permitted political participation and activism. He addressed the issues of polytheism of palaces and *hakimiyya*, and he made a distinction with the polytheism of graves, on which al-Albani Salafism focused. Sayid Qutb and al-Mawdudi's thoughts on *hakimiyya* clearly influenced his writing. His work is essentially a reply to al-Albani's Salafism on the matter of labeling rulers as infidels. The ideas of the Algerian thinker Malik Bin Nabi are also woven into al-'Is'is' book. He proposed a cultural approach, which concentrated on personal and social change and liberation from misinformation. He also stressed the importance of building awareness in society about the importance of national change.

Al-Zu'bi felt the power of the ideas proposed by al-'Is'is, who expanded his scope of interest from the closed and limited circle of Salafism to the nation. Instead of confining the reform project to the Salafi circles fraught with internal differences, he believed a national focus would put the reform project on track. This idea was further refined in other Islamist groups a few years later, for example in the *Tayar al-Umma*, led by Kuwaiti preacher Hakim al-Muteiri. Al-'Is'is presented a four-pronged argument focused on the concept of the Islamic nation: political activism; rejecting Western and American hegemony; liberating the Arab people and resisting authoritarianism; and supporting the Palestinian people.

The Haraki Trend and the Crisis of Ideology

When al-Kitab Wal Sunnah moved to Jabal al-Zuhur in 1997, al-Zu'bi's involvement in the society began to decrease until he resigned. In 2000, he was held in administrative detention after being accused by the security apparatus of having ties to active Jihadi Salafis, such as Jawad al-Faqih of al-Qweismeh in East Amman, who was convicted for his role in Jayish Mohammad and other matters. Al-Zu'bi is pictured in a photo, now famous, of a group of Salafis brandishing daggers and swords in the streets of Zarqa' in April 2011. The photo was taken during a confrontation with police, which culminated in the injury of several Jordanian policemen and the detention of hundreds of Salafis. He was also accused of having ties to Khadr Abu Hoshier, who is affiliated with Jihadi Salafism and was convicted of crimes violating state security.

Al-Zu'bi has never publicly disclosed any differences with Zaied Hammad, the president of al-Kitab Wal Sunnah. However, the society considers al-Zu'bi an outlier who does not fit into any of the main Salafi movements; rather he sought to roll haraki and jihadi Salafism into one ideology, especially the concepts of hakimiyya and jihad. Therefore, once al-Kitab Wal Sunnah was restructured and the influence of the jihadist supporters was clipped, al-Zu'bi was one of those was pushed out of the society.

In 2006, he established Al-I'tisam Society in Hai al-Zuhur. The activities of this new society have expanded, and as a result several new centers were opened in al-Wahdat, a Palestinian refugee camp in East Amman, al-Qweismeh, al-Jubeiha and other areas of the capital. The new society has focused its attention on charitable and voluntary work, including caring for orphans and educating young children. It also has taken special interest in building mosques and teaching religious sciences.

Al-Zu'bi is adamant in defining the new society as one that reflects the principles of Haraki Salafism, whose interests are pragmatic and connected to educational and charitable work. In other words, *Al-I'tisam* does not concern itself with ideology. Commenting on the differences between al-I'tisam and *al-Kitab Wal Sunnah*, he explained that the latter is closer to the state, whereas the former is neither close to the state nor antagonizes it. It is a society that focuses on its work and activities without either entering into a confrontation with the state or accepting the state's dictates. Al-Zu'bi is adamant in defining the new society as one that reflects the principles of Haraki Salafism, whose interests are pragmatic and connected to educational and charitable work. In other words, Al-I'tisam does not concern itself with ideology. Commenting on the differences between al-I'tisam and *al-Kitab Wal Sunnah*, he explained that the latter is closer to the state, whereas the former is neither close to the state nor antagonizes it. It is a society that focuses on its work and activities without either entering into a confrontation with the state or accepting the state's dictates.

Al-Zu'bi found himself closer to Sheikh Jamal Pasha (Abu Talha) who is characterized as closer to Haraki Salafism. Upon his return from Kuwait in the early 1990s, Abu Talha became known for his Friday sermons and became influential in Salafi circles. But later on he was banned from delivering the Friday sermon.

In short, the ability of Salafism to mobilize politically has been crippled by ideological questions. For al-Zu'bi and many affiliated with Haraki Salafism, the expression haraki (political) has come to mean collective, institutional, and organized work. But they are yet undecided on the appropriate ideological framework for this work. Would al-Zu'bi, for instance, put the concept of *hakimiyya* at the heart of his focus? Would

his educational, cultural, and charitable work, serve *hakimiyya* or vice versa?

In the face of persistent ideological differences, defining the Salafi activist movement would be difficult. Among the affiliates of the same activist Salafi movement are those influenced by the ideas of Sayid Qutb, others by Malik Bin Nabi, while still others are influenced by Abdurrahman Abdulkhaliq. Not surprisingly, their relationship to the current Arab regimes and their preferred approach for political, cultural and social reform vary widely.

Between Society, Politics and Media

Al-Zu'bi follows the news closely, especially economic programs and talk shows on local TV channels. He opposes co-education in schools and universities. He supports women's inclusion in the work force, but also the segregation of genders. Interestingly, he endorses love as the basis for marriage, and does not favor traditional arranged marriages. While he is not strict about how women dress, he stresses the importance women's commitment to "appropriate dress" but is not concerned about which interpretation of fiqh is used to define their dress code. He opposes singing and other musical forms on religious grounds. He does not smoke, follow football or frequent coffee shops. Instead, he spends much of his time volunteering. For this reason, he participated in establishing Al-Dwaymeh Tribal Council.

Al-Zu-bi sees Salafism's aloofness from society as its main weakness. For example, he notes that Salafis are aware of the importance of the social weight of Jordan's tribes but do not regard them as a vehicle through which their mission could be advanced.

In principle, he supports the establishment of a Salafi political party, but looks askance at the experiment of Salafi political parties in Egypt, asserting that their political experience led to their confusion. On the other hand, al-Zu'bi supports working within the framework of democracy. Given a choice between a civil state or a dictatorship, as was the case in Turkey, al-Zu'bi would choose democracy while pursuing the call in a gradual way.

So while al-Zu'bi supports the exercise of political rights, he does not participate in demonstrations. However, he does not have a detailed position on topics of political fiqh, especially on the issues of women and minorities. Of equal importance, he rejects violence as a means to affect internal change, as the experience of other groups has shown it is possible to achieve salient results without resorting to violence.

4. Ahmed Abu Rumman: Navigating through Confusion in the Salafi Landscape

Born in 1973, Ahmed Abdulhalim Abu Rumman was influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood at an early stage of his life. He spent most of his childhood in Sweileh (a neighborhood in northern Amman), just a few kilometers from al-Baq'a, a Palestinian refugee camp. Sweileh is a stronghold for the Muslim Brotherhood, especially its hawkish elements, such as Dr. Mohammad Abu Faris, Dr. Hammam Said, and Dr. Salah al-Khalidi. Abu Rumman felt he was intellectually and personally closer to al-Khalidi, having been his student in classes at the Abdurrahman Bin 'Awf mosque, next to Abu Rumman's house.

Abu Rumman's journey toward Salafism started during his years of study in financial administration field at a community college. In college, he mingled with many Salafis who had returned from Kuwait. At the time, the government had banned preachers of the Muslim Brotherhood from giving sermons in the mosques and had replaced them with traditional Salafi imams. In college, Abu Rumman began to cultivate ties with this movement. He attended classes led by some Traditional Salafis such as Sheikh al-Masri Abu al-Yusr and Ahmed al-Khashab – disciples of al-Albani. He also attended the classes of Abu Anas al-Shami and Omar Yusuf, who was an imam in one of Sweileh's mosques. Meanwhile, Abu Rumman continued to maintain a cordial relationship with al-Khalidi, who happened to be a member of the Muslim Brotherhood though he followed a Salafi doctrine.

Salafism as a Comfort Zone

Abu Rumman's attraction to Salafism was stronger than to the

Muslim Brotherhood perhaps due to his sense that, in his neighborhood that was predominantly populated by Jordanians of Palestinian descent, the Salafis did not harbor suspicion towards Transjordanians. This was unlike the Brotherhood, where Transjordanians – especially those with tribal origins – are often looked on with the suspicion that they may have ties to the security apparatus. Additionally, Abu Rumman felt more comfortable with the Salafis, lest he get caught between the pressure of the security apparatus and the suspicions of the Brothers.

After graduating college, Abu Rumman worked in an Islamic library on administration, verification and publication. The library was owned by Nizam Sakijha, the son in law of al-Albani, and ultimately provided Abu Rumman a pathway to Salafism. He eventually met Sheikh al-Albani himself, though he was not one of his students. Equally important, his work in the Islamic library directly exposed him to the internal differences within Salafism and the sessions of the inner circles of Traditional Salafism. He grew close to the movement's most influential figures, who were promoting al-Albani's legacy and, in fact, had helped write much of what he said. Indeed, it was the library's mission to do exactly that.

Along with his co-workers in the Islamic library, Abu Rumman contributed to the collection and editing of al-Albani's fatwas and in verifying many of al-Albani's religious books. This gave him a solid knowledge of Hadith and religious science and experience in clarifying Hadith and verifying various fiqh cases.

Being close to the sheikhs of Traditional Salafism did not prevent Abu Rumman from later progressing towards Haraki Salafi thought. When the era of polarization within the sheikhdом came to the fore, Abu Rumman was much more

influenced by Abu Anas al-Shami in Amman and by the figures of Revival Salafism in Saudi Arabia.

Abu Rumman was also close to Omar Yusuf. He listened to Yusuf who had expressed his pain at the positions of Safar al-Hawali – who was the model and the primary reference for Omar Yusuf – with regard to the terrible events of 9/11 and al-Qaeda’s role in it. He was astonished when Yusuf veered towards Jihadi Salafism and joined Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq, and struggles to understand Abu Anas al-Shami’s migration to jihadism as well. “In the days prior to his departure [to Iraq], I had attended his classes, and he had told us about his intention to travel to Saudi Arabia for work, especially after he was detained and harassed in Jordan.”

A Diversion to Jihadism

The story of al-Shami, along with that of Ra’id Khreisat and his student Mu’tasim al-Daradkah, who also met their deaths in Iraq in 1999 in a fight with a secular Kurdish group, left a great impact on Abu Rumman. They sparked in him an inclination towards jihadism, especially after he was detained for ten days in 1998 for security reasons. He was disheartened by the detention and viewed the state negatively.

Between 2004 and 2007, Abu Rumman became closer to the jihadist movement in Salt. He was imam at a mosque in Salt’s Wadi al-Naqah neighborhood and many in the movement attended his sermons. The content of his sermons led to some harassment by the security services. He also worked as a director in an Islamic society focused on Qur’anic instruction.

However, Abu Rumman’s closeness to the jihadist movement did not lead to a full embrace of it. He tried to influence the jihadists’

ideas and positions to more closely align with his own knowledge and understandings gleaned from his religious science studies. But soon he discovered it was neither a simple nor easy undertaking. By 2007, he began to gradually return to Haraki Salafism and again drew closer to the sheikhs of the Salafi Revival, the Saudi sheikh Salman al-ʿAwdah in particular. As a follower of al-ʿAwdah, Abu Rumman collected the sheikh’s sayings and published them in a booklet.

Abu Rumman does not feel that he is in conflict with the jihadist movement. But he is critical of its extremism and propensity for exaggeration in declaring other movements to be heretical. Today, he is not affiliated with any Islamic movement, despite his ties with multiple groups and his immersion in proselytization and voluntary work. Currently, he works as a schoolteacher for the Ministry of Education and serves as an imam in a private mosque in Salt. He is married with one daughter, and resides in a small apartment annexed to the mosque where he preaches.

Conclusions

Unlike the traditional experience, which is characterized by clarity and simplicity, haraki, or activist Salafism – as exemplified in the aforementioned cases – is characterized to a great extent by confusion and ambiguity. Within it are trends that veer towards Traditional Salafism, and others towards Jihadi Salafism, resulting in a confused identity for Haraki Salafism in Jordan.

The “identity conflict” was reflected clearly in the performance of al-Kitab Wal Sunnah, which was meant to express the identity of the trend in the early 1990s, but instead exposed an identity crisis flowing from the intellectual discrepancies within the movement. For this reason, some society members chose to distance themselves from the differences that exhausted

the society and instead focused their energy on charitable and voluntary work.

Unlike the traditional movement, Haraki Salafism is more complex and has several poles. The two individuals who emerged as the leaders of this movement, Omar Mahmud and Hassan Abu Hanieh, eventually abandoned it: the former defecting to Jihadi Salafism and the latter divorcing himself from Salafism altogether. The remaining founders of al-Ki-tab Wal Sunnah and Ahl al-Sunnah Wal Jama'a are divided among the traditional, the haraki and jihadist movements.

The activist Salafi personality is neither shallow nor simple. Among its members are former secularists and leftists, as well as those who have drifted or shifted from one form of Salafism to another. Some individuals quit the movement altogether, and then returned to it, while made a clear and clean break with Salafism. In other words, the personal spiritual and intellectual experiences of these individuals with Salafism are more complicated than is the case with Traditional Salafis.

Among the important leaders of Haraki Salafism in Jordan were those who came from the Gulf, particularly Jordanians of Palestinian decent who came from Kuwait. They provided the jihadi and haraki movements with recruits – whether those influenced by the Kuwaiti experiences (Abdurrahman Abdulkhaliq), or Sruri Salafism, or even the Revival Salafis in Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, they all converge around political Salafism, which has incorporated a wide range of ideas and opinions with regards to governments and democracy. Their thoughts converge around two key points: opposition in principle to the notion of obedience as well as to the use of violence as a tool for change.

The identity of a Haraki Salafi is more readily subject to transformation than other identities because it lacks an intellectual foundation, leadership and a general framework on the Jordanian stage. The result is a shift towards jihadism or defection from the movement. It is notable that the most influential of these personalities – Hassan Abu Hanieh and Omar Mahmud – are no longer part of this movement. Many are still deciding how to position themselves between the jihadist movement and the traditional one.

In addition to the confusion and ambiguity in the identity of the activist movement caused by the differences in views towards the relationship between state and society and governments and the approach to reform, there are also differences with regard to the ideas of Sayid Qutb, in particular about the centrality of *hakimiyya* in the movement's discourse.

Haraki Salafism is more flexible than Traditional Salafism in interpreting and understanding religious texts and in defining the concept of the required and necessary knowledge. It permits the expansion of knowledge beyond the bounds of religious science due to the centrality of the *fiqh* of reality among Haraki Salafis. This *fiqh* permits a concern with current affairs. That said, Haraki Salafism suffers from the frequent disagreement among its numerous intellectual authorities, and simultaneously has no one ideological benchmark against which the trend can measure itself and judge its position regarding current affairs.

Chapter Four:

From the Heart of Salafism to the Outside

This chapter presents two experiences that provide insights into different aspects of Salafism that represent a departure from Salafism toward either secular or more flexible thinking about religion. Nart Khair and Hassan Abu Hanieh, the subjects of this chapter, are individuals who became actively involved in Salafism over several years, during which their spiritual and intellectual experiences ultimately pushed them to leave the Salafi community.

Personal stories outline in earlier chapters have demonstrated the fluidity between Salafi ideas and trends. The experiences of prominent Salafis such as Omar Yusuf (Abu Anas al-Shami), Omar Mahmud (Abu Qutada), and others embody the phenomenon of “internal transformation”. This movement from one strand of Salafism to another is not unnatural. However, this chapter discusses instances in which practicing Salafis move beyond the domain of Salafism, or free themselves from the ideological and practical Salafi influence. These cases offer thorough insights into the Salafi internal transformation.

The cases here are significant because they involve “elite” intellectual and cultural figures from the Salafi community. Both Khair and Abu Hanieh are highly educated and sophisticated men and consequently enjoyed distinguished status among Salafi circles and deep relationships with Salafism. And yet, they began to question their spiritual and intellectual journey as the intellectual and ideological dimensions of Salafism began to confront daily realities. Their experiences, both in adopting Salafism and then leaving it later on, were influenced by the historical moment and the important historical events taking place.

Abu Hanieh, a Jordanian of Palestinian descent, was born in the 1960s. His political awareness was formed on the heels of the Arab-Israeli conflict and his personal experience as a member

of the Palestinian diaspora. His generation naturally observed and absorbed the ideological debates and disputes that have seized the Arab world in the decades since, and he witnessed the transformation of the Arab majority from leftist thought and pan-Arabism toward Islamism. He was also influenced by events such as the Iranian revolution, the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, the three Gulf wars and the terrible events of September 2001.

Khair belongs to a somewhat younger generation. Born in the 1970s, his political awareness was shaped in the wake of Saddam Hussein's defeat in 1991. He felt deceived by the Muslim Brotherhood's fallacious rhetoric about the potential of an Arab victory over the United States, and decided to further engage with that discourse in order to challenge that part of Islamic discourse that was dishonest and contributed to the illusion that such victory was within reach. He also sought a foundation for a cultural renaissance or societal development that would save the masses from their state of "depravity". For this reason, he viewed religion in society, state, and politics critically.

Taken together, these two experiences reflect a crisis among Arab youth, the key features of which are political and ideological confusion, a quest for identity, and a desire to escape the crises, backwardness, and weakness of their countries. Khair and Abu Hanieh sought a way out, first through radical political and religious means and later through secularism, which they believed would produce the intellectual liberation of their society by limiting the role of religion in the political domain.

Theirs are unique spiritual and intellectual experiences that reflect a historical moment that pushed many Arab Muslims toward different forms of Salafism, as well as to entirely different ideological movements.

What distinguishes the experiences of Abu Hanieh and Nart, in their transitions from Salafism to an entirely different trajectory, is their obsession with the intellectual and epistemological questions. Both are greatly concerned with culture and knowledge, not only in terms of religion, but also with regards to the various Arabic and Western cultures and philosophies.

1. Hassan Abu Hanieh: From Salafism to Democratic Leftist Islam

Abu Hanieh can be considered among the founders of Salafism in Jordan. However, the traditional school of al-Albani did not appeal to him: he and other young Salafis were more inspired by the reformist school, and sought to establish a political Salafi trend from the beginning. They planned on transforming the Salafi Call into an institutional and social framework that could be a platform for political opposition.⁹⁶

By all measures, Abu Hanieh was the first to introduce an institutional framework to Salafi activism in Jordan. With the help of his friends, he created a network with the Haraki Salafi trend outside of Jordan. But the events of the 1990s encouraged him in the direction of Jihadi Salafism. Over the course of several years, he became a key contributor to the theoretical and intellectual framework of radical jihadism, which by the end of 1990s had developed global appeal.

However, after September 11, 2001 Abu Hanieh came to the realization that the jihadi trend had strayed too far from the course that he had sought to reinforce in his new strategic outlook as an architect of jihadism. For this reason, he made the decision to liberate himself from Salafism altogether, and instead devoted his time to his own ideas and convictions. In recent years, he has dedicated a great deal of his writing to criticisms of the Islamic movements. He views Islam and democracy as compatible, and he emphasizes the importance

⁹⁶ *This interview was conducted in two stages: the first was in the Crown Plaza hotel in Amman on November 15, 2013, and the second was in the same place on November 16, 2013.*

of political, cultural, and religious pluralism, and urges openness to other politically engaged Islamic movements. He advocates the values of freedom, pluralism, democracy, and justice as the essence of Islamic philosophy.

In Abu Hanieh's deep involvement with Islamic experiments over the last three decades – particularly with developing theory and institutional activism – a number of significant factors have influenced his intellectual and spiritual development. Among the most significant are his leftist background, his immersion in both Western and Islamic philosophy, and significant events at the end of the 1970s (the Iranian revolution, Juhayman movement, the war in Afghanistan, Hama incident in Syria) and during the 1990s (such as the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the victory of the Afghan mujahedin, the Gulf war, the relapse of the Algerian democratic experiment, and the events influencing the ascendance of the jihadi movement throughout the 1990s to its culmination in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States).

Abu Hanieh became a leftist at a young age. His Islamic experiment began with his involvement in Salafism – from traditional to haraki, then to jihadi. Finally, Abu Hanieh left the Salafi circle for a more general Islamic perspective, and he dedicates his time to research and intellectual efforts. Abu Hanieh's rich experience, which combines his institutional political and intellectual endeavors, is detailed in the following section.

Political Salafism: Its Arrival and Institutionalization

Born in 1963, Abu Hanieh was raised in the densely populated neighborhood of Ras al-'Ain in East Amman, an area heavily populated by Jordanians of Palestinian origin and refugees

who came to Jordan from Palestine. He settled with his family in this neighborhood after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. At the time, the neighborhood was largely leftist and pan-Arabist in its ideological leanings, and religion was not as influential. While mosques in Amman now number in the thousands, they only numbered in the dozens when Abu Hanieh first moved there.

In the early stages of his life, Abu Hanieh was raised in the leftism that imbued Arab societies throughout his youth. When he turned 16 in 1979, the spectacular events of that year – the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan – prompted a gradual transformation of the popular mood in the region as a whole. As a result, the Islamic trend gained currency by the late 1970s.

Abu Hanieh was not immune to this atmosphere, and began to doubt the leftist and pan-Arabist ideas that led to a series of defeats. As a consequence, he was propelled towards and attracted by the emergent Islamic discourse, and began attending nearby mosques, seeking to fill the ideological vacuum left by the discredited leftist and pan-Arab ideologies and to acquaint himself with an environment that would soon become conducive to the formation of new ideas. Because there was no mosque in Ras al-Ain, Abu Hanieh joined forces with a number of other neighborhood youths to build a new one that became known as the Mosque of the Righteous Caliphs.

By the end of 1970s, Salafism had yet to emerge in a significant way. Despite the presence of a handful of Salafis, the most active Islamic political movement was the Muslim Brotherhood, which had two currents: reformist and Qutbian. But Abu Hanieh was uninterested in the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Liberation Party, which dominated Jordan's Islamic landscape. For a while, Abu Hanieh became involved with the Tablighi groups, before finally encountering Salafism.

Abu Hanieh was attracted to Salafism's scientific and academic approach, to which other Islamic groups did not attach similar importance. Therefore, along with his neighborhood peers, including Abu Qutada, Abu Hanieh took to Salafism. They approached the Saudi Ministry of Awqaf for books, and received the literature of Salafism's giants: Ibn Taymiyyah, Mohammad Abdulwahab and others. They immersed themselves in their readings and study.

But with the arrival of al-Albani in Jordan in the early 1980s, an important transformation took place. It coincided with the eruption of the bloody confrontation in Hama between the Syrian regime and the Muslim Brotherhood, which propelled thousands of Syrian Islamists seeking refuge into Jordan. Some of them had Salafi leanings, as was the case with Mahmud al-Qassim (Abu al-'Amin), Ghazi al-Toba and others. Others coming to Jordan were Muslim Brotherhood leaders with a Salafi predisposition. Thus, the Salafi ideology gained momentum.

Abu Hanieh and Abu Qutada met Sheikh al-Albani and began to attend his classes, but also sought out those figures belonging to the rising revivalist trend in Saudi Arabia, such as Safar al-Hawali, who represented the politicized opposition Salafi trend. After a few sessions, Abu Hanieh and Abu Qutada clashed with al-Albani, whose brand of Salafism was philosophically apolitical, but hostile to political activism in practice.

Given his rooting in leftist ideology, which encourages political activism, Abu Hanieh found it impossible to accept Salafism's insulation from politics. He and his supporters urged Salafi activism, and unsurprisingly, his advocacy conflicted with the al-Albani school, which had begun to spread across Jordan.

Abu Hanieh and Abu Qutada took their differences with al-Albani to a logical conclusion. Across the country, they immediately began to promote the Salafi Call independently of al-Albani. But Salafism was not yet ready for collective political activism, and instead, the two young men extended their outreach to like-minded Salafi groups outside of the country. In particular, they established relations with the Kuwaiti Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage, which was established in the 1980s as a reflection of the vision of its founder, Sheikh Abdurrahman Abdulkhaliq – a vision which contradicted that of the Arab world’s Salafi sheikhs. Abu Hanieh and his group also reached out to Sheikh Safar al-Hawali and Mohammad Srur Zein al-’Abidin, who represented the Salafi current that later became known as Haraki Salafism.

Driven by common beliefs, Abu Hanieh, Abu Qutada and a group of young followers established a new movement known as Ahl Al-Sunnah Wal Jama’a. Although the headquarters of the new movement were in Amman, it also had satellite offices in the governorate of Zarqa. They sought out those who shared their ideas across Jordan in order to build a reformist Salafi trend focused on political, social and cultural reforms. In tandem with this new thinking, they published al-Manara (Minaret); the magazine used the same name as that issued by the reformist Salafi sheikh of the modern age, Mohammad Rashid Ridha, and they began to organize social, charitable, proselytizing and sporting events and activities.

Their long-term objective was the establishment of an Islamic state. Unlike al-Albani’s Salafi School, however, they viewed the establishment of the Islamic state through a set of integrated ideas and activities related to politics, society and culture. They envisioned the establishment of a political party, yet with the enactment of Jordan’s political party law still in the offing, political parties were not permitted.

But with the abolition of martial law and the enactment of a new political party law in 1992, Abu Hanieh and his group established al-Kitab Wal Sunnah society. Not surprisingly, this emerging society faced enmity. In addition to the government's disdain, it evoked criticism from al-Albani's Traditional Salafi line, and other Islamic groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood antagonized the new society. Meanwhile, the public did not seem ready for the evolution of political Salafism or for al-Kitab Wal Sunnah as an organizational expression of this movement.

Shortly after the formation of the society, Jordan's security apparatus placed members of the society under surveillance and occasionally detained them, Abu Hanieh included. Given this targeting and hostility directed toward the group in addition to the society's fragmentation, some of the members became aligned with the state in some form or another – through regular jobs or working as informers – while others found refuge in Jihadi Salafism, whose presence became known in the early 1990s. Some members also joined al-Jami Salafism, a trend that allows adherents to avoid confrontation with the state, since it demands obedience. Therefore, with Abu Hanieh's society in retreat, it entered into an identity crisis and ultimately divided into groups aligned with the reformist political trend on one hand and jihadism on the other.

During the 1990s, Abu Hanieh continued his reading of various sources, including the Islamic heritage, and tried to verify it. He also dedicated a great deal of time to reading philosophy and al-Kalam science (the science of discourse) in addition to Western philosophy, thus developing a critical approach even toward Salafism, to which he was still affiliated.

Philosophical Participation in the Establishment of Salafi Jihadism

Hassan Abu Hanieh's friend and companion, Abu Qutada, left Jordan for Malaysia, and then traveled to Afghanistan before finally settling in London. During his wanderings, he deserted Haraki Salafism for jihadism. For this reason, both Salafi circles and the security apparatus suspected that Abu Hanieh had ties to the jihadi trend as well. This conviction was reinforced by Abu Hanieh's radical political vision, which had its roots in leftist ideology in which the achievement of social justice emanated from progressive conflict. At that time, Abu Hanieh regarded the Arab regimes as pro-Western, and co-conspirators with Western countries to subvert an Arab renaissance and desired reforms. It was in this aspect that Abu Hanieh's vision converged with the radical ideas adopted by Abu Qutada and the emerging Salafi Call in Jordan during the 1990s. This also coincided with the arrival of al-Maqdisi on the Jordanian political stage.

Abu Hanieh did little to challenge others' convictions that he was aligned with the jihadist movement. To the contrary, his reading of the leftist intellectual Antonio Gramsci – his concept of cultural hegemony in particular – along with the ordeal of the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria and the emergence of Bay'at al-Imam reinforced Abu Hanieh's concept of radical change, and confirmed the futility of trying to "fix" the Arab regimes through democracy or education. Through his good relationship with Abu Qutada and al-Maqdisi and the respect he enjoyed among jihadi circles, he sought to influence and rationalize the rising jihadism and equip it with a theoretical and philosophical outlook. Indeed, he was the first to forward Jihadi Salafism as a concept. Abu Hanieh sought to stress that Salafism was not solely represented by the al-Albani school, but also by several other Salafi approaches such as the reformist trend and jihadism.

Therefore, internal and external developments as well as the emerging conflict between Arab regimes and Jihadi Salafism that pushed Abu Hanieh toward the latter. However, his association with this trend was limited to his philosophical, theoretical, and cultural contributions. When Dar al-Bayaraq publishing house was established in Amman in the late 1990s, Abu Hanieh published a heritage of Jihadi Salafism and reprinted literature focused on mufasalah and armed conflict with Arab regimes. In fact, prior to the advent of the Internet, Dar al-Bayaraq was the only publishing house in the Arab world that published such literature, and it was thus the publisher of the written works of al-Maqdisi, Abu Qutada, al-Zawahiri, and other well-known figures.

Through his work with Dar al-Bayaraq, Abu Hanieh helped contextualize the intellectual theory of Jihadi Salafism. The historical moments of the 1990s transformed Abu Hanieh. The big regional events such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, bloody wars in Chechnya and Algeria, the ascendance of the jihadi trend in Jordan, and setbacks to democratization in the Arab world all left a lasting imprint on his character.

That said, the Arab jihadi movements had a number of successes against Arab regimes in places like Egypt, Libya, and Algeria. These developments compelled Abu Hanieh and Abu Qutada to theorize about a new stage to take the movement to the global level. Rather than exerting all of their efforts on losing battles with the near enemy, they argued, the jihadi movement should focus on the far enemy; the United States – the ally of the Arab regimes – became their target.

In a secret meeting held in 1994, Abu Hanieh and Abu Qutada engineered the “globalization of the jihadi movement”, though Abu Hanieh had, in fact, been the first to advocate such a change in strategy by influencing his friend Abu Qutada.

However, the jihadi factions were initially skeptical expanding their campaign on a global scale, and remained adamant in their focus on the domestic dimension of their struggle against the existing power arrangements. But the failure to convince these factions led Osama Bin Laden to begin advocating global jihad in 1998 when he, along with Ayman al-Zawahiri, announced the establishment of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders, a development that was a turning point in the history of the jihadi movement and the evolution of al-Qaeda.

Yet the events that unfolded did not confirm to Abu Hanieh's initial principles and objectives. In a marked deviation from Abu Hanieh's original concept of jihad, rather than targeting American and Western interests in the region to cause the West to rethink their calculations, Bin Laden and al-Qaeda took the battle to the United States, September 11, 2001.

For this reason, the events of September 11, 2001 provoked another evolution in Abu Hanieh's ideas and intellectual leanings. He was never an advocate of "aggressive jihad" due to the gravity of its potential consequences. He was never convinced that the attacks of September 11 were legitimate within the true framework of jihad. For him, the killing of civilians was unacceptable. Abu Hanieh felt that there was a huge gap between his views and those of al-Qaeda, and he severed his relations with the movement. He increasingly began to view the jihadi movement's religious and intellectual extremism as not only distasteful but entirely incongruent with his political and philosophical vision.

From Salafism to Leftist Democratic Islam

Soon after this realization, Abu Hanieh decided to emancipate

himself from the shackles of Salafism and search for wider horizons. However, he maintained his personal relationships with the leadership of al-Kitab Wal Sunnah, as well as with some of the leaders of Jihadi Salafism. Nonetheless, he stopped describing himself as a Salafi, and has expressed the belief that affiliates of the different Salafi trends likewise would no longer consider him a Salafi.

As Abu Hanieh liberated himself from Salafism, he took unequivocal positions on pivotal issues that had not yet been decided on by Salafism, such as the institution of democracy as a tool of conflict management, or issues of social justice, freedoms, and women's issues. These matters were only at the periphery of Salafi discourse, since Salafi interests were confined to charitable work rather than intellectual and philosophical theorizing.

Against this backdrop, Abu Hanieh began to dedicate a great deal of time to writing and research. In fact, he is known in academia and the media as an expert on Islamic movements, and has published numerous studies and books that reflect his intellectual and spiritual development. In his more current writings, Abu Hanieh has emphasized the significance of democracy and the need to reinforce political, cultural, and religious pluralism. He does not see that pluralism contradicts Islam or its philosophy and objectives. If he were to brand himself intellectually, he would say that he is now more closely aligned with leftist democratic Islamism.

Abu Hanieh has been consistently hostile toward neoliberal discourse, believing that it is at odds with the principle of social justice and has grave consequences for the middle class due to the ways in which it undermines the social balance necessary for democratic success.

None of this, however, should be understood as epistemological break with Islam. Indeed, he is open to the new Islamic experiment, referred to as “post-political Islamic movements”, such as those represented by the Justice and Development Party in Turkey. Although such movements have come a long way towards accepting democracy and pluralism, Abu Hanieh believes that the Arab world still has far to travel in this respect.

While applauding these new Islamic movements, he takes exception to some of their policies, especially their acceptance of neo-liberalism. He remains loyal to his deep leftist leanings, and argues that the adoption of economic liberalism does not fit well with his belief that justice and democracy are intertwined, in keeping with Islamic philosophy. Additionally, Abu Hanieh is open to Sufism, and he published a study on Sufism in Jordan. Sufism and Salafism stand on opposite poles of the Islamic spectrum, and while Salafis therefore view Sufis as a deviant group, Abu Hanieh takes particular interest in Sufism as part of his emphasis on the history of Islamic pluralism.

Pluralism is at the core of Abu Hanieh’s intellectual evolution. In his emphasis on the importance of pluralism and opposition to unilateralism, he refers to the pluralism of cultural, religious, intellectual, and fiqh as a strength rather than a weakness. This goes against the grain of Salafism fixation on past conflicts and absolute and immutable truth. Explicit in his philosophy is the requirement that Islamic thought be forward looking and reinforce the values of democracy, freedom, and justice.

2. Nart Khair: From Salafism to Secularism

The intellectual experience of Dr. Nart Mohammad Khair represents a model of early awareness of Salafism and a subsequent retreat from it toward rationalism, or secular belief. Being open to scientific and intellectual questions in the disciplines of philosophy, linguistics, and religion, Khair allowed his academic and spiritual experiences to lead him to pose questions unattached to ideology. In fact, his capacity for critical thinking and freedom in research and interpretation was boundless.⁹⁷

Salafism represented the first stage in Khair's personal evolution. Though his experience with Salafism only short-lived, Khair advanced among Salafi circles at the academic, intellectual and personal levels. His passion for knowledge and critical questioning nurtured his in-depth exploration of Salafism, and he developed a comprehensive appreciation of the movement before ultimately departing from it. In his case, his intellectual curiosity and constant critical thinking led him to explore Salafism early in his life but later steered him along a path of opposition to Salafi argumentation and thinking.

Khair received his bachelor's degree in religion, and followed it with a postgraduate degree in Arabic literature, focusing on linguistic and interpretive theories. In our interview, he explained how and why he became a Salafi, the prominent characteristics of this trend, his separation from the movement and the reasons for it, and his current spiritual and intellectual leanings.

⁹⁷ *A personal interview with Nart Khair was conducted in my office at the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan on December 24, 2013.*

Khair currently serves as the headmaster of a school run by the Ministry of Education, and is a part-time lecturer at the University of Jordan's language center. When we spoke, he was preparing to defend his doctoral dissertation in Arabic literature. He belongs to the upper-middle class; a class that he believes is eroding. He was born in 1974 to a Circassian family and he lives in the Jandawil neighborhood of Amman.

The First Stage: Feelings of Deception Lead to Salafism

In 1991, Khair graduated from high school and entered university. His political awareness developed in the wake of then-Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. The comprehensive success of the American-led coalition was a tragedy for Khair's generation. After the Muslim Brotherhood had cheered the Saddam Hussein regime's defiance and all but assured the people its ultimate victory, it suffered a humiliating defeat. Khair's generation felt disappointed and frustrated. It was under these conditions that his experimentation with Salafism began.

Khair recalls that that year "saw a general religiosity and religion became more prevalent in society." Furthermore, he explained that aspirations for "liberation" and "fighting the big, decisive war" were high. He recalled that Arab morale then was high, and the setback was "incomprehensible". He recalled that this episode in particular led him to exceed his ritual worship, and attend lectures at the University of Jordan along with some of his older friends. But the defeat of Iraq, he said, "led to a feeling that we had been deceived and that religious discourse was peddling illusions."

Amid this early awareness, and driven by his childhood passion for reading, knowledge, literature, and philosophy, Nart decided to study religious science more seriously. Thus, he changed his focus of study from engineering to the department of science, as he loved physics and mathematics. Meanwhile, Khair made the decisive decision. In his words, “I no longer accepted being the victim of religious discourse and unrealistic dreams.” And so, Nart began his first intellectual attempts to explore religious sciences in order to reach proper knowledge. At the beginning, Nart’s unfamiliarity with the political-religious landscape was a challenge. Other than some general names, he was not able to discuss at length the different movements, their leaders or their philosophies and doctrines. There were Salafis and Muslim Brothers. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Jordanians returned from Kuwait with an array of Islamic leanings.

He began to accumulate books on the religious sciences. He had a budget of approximately 280 Jordanian dinars for this purpose, but lacked the knowledge to make informed decisions as to which texts to buy, so he sought assistance and was guided to a salesperson who had recently returned from Kuwait. The clerk sold him the books at the lowest prices. Coincidentally, he was a Salafi who prayed at a mosque near Khair’s house, so he helped Khair build his own library. At the Osama Bin Zaid Mosque near Khair’s home, a number of other Salafis, who had also returned from Kuwait, worshiped and studied. Nart began to attend lectures there and quickly became acquainted with this Salafi community.

Nart had set out on a quest for religious science and scientific research, driven by his passion for science and knowledge. He sought to be literate and educated in his religious undertaking, so as to avoid being blindly pulled along as he had been before the war. He began to meet prominent Salafi sheikhs such as the founder of the Jordanian Salafi trend, Sheikh al-Albani.

Interestingly, in its recruitment efforts, the Muslim Brotherhood passed over Khair but did target his friend. He was curious as to why he had been ignored by the Brotherhood but had to wait several years, until his friend left the Brotherhood, to learn why. His friend explained that a Brotherhood leader had found Khair to be too inquisitive and that he read too much, a personality type that does not fit well with the Brotherhood and one that signals trouble for the group.

Immersion in Salafism and the Resumption of Epistemological Concerns

Khair immersed himself in religious books and key Salafi resources. In his reading, he concentrated on Ibn Taymiyyah, especially his volume on fatwas and short letters such as the Tadmur Letter. He was particularly interested in books that addressed the roots and origins of religion and fiqh. As time went on, his attention to these types of books may have led him to later undergo another transformation.

Some months after Khair had collected his library, he met al-Albani when the latter visited the neighborhood of Bayadar Wadi Seer to give a lecture. Al-Albani was already an esteemed and glorified scholar among Salafis. But Khair did not find that al-Albani lived up to his reputation, and he was not attracted to his message. Khair, studied in the Arabic language, found al-Albani's diction and science to be average, and his discourse less than profound. "I might be the problem rather than the Sheikh," he thought. A friend convinced him that he was still new to the Salafi fold, and had yet to realize the great scientific value of Sheikh al-Albani.

In addition to his interest in books on the origins of language and Hadith, he began to meet and attend the lectures and classes of second-rank Salafi sheikhs. He quickly became one

of the most prominent students, well-known among senior sheikhs and students alike. The status that took others much time to attain, Khair achieved easily and quickly, thanks to his obsession with science, which expedited his advancement.

As he deepened his knowledge of Salafism and acquainted himself with prominent sheikhs such as Ali Al-Halabi, Salim al-Hilali, Mashhour Hassan, and Mohammad Abu Shaqra, Khair also attended the Friday sermon at the Salaheddin Mosque in Amman, in the neighborhood of the Prime Ministry where Sheikh Abu Shaqra used to preach. Moreover, Khair was acknowledged as a sheikh within just a few years, and he developed his own students and followers. Perhaps his imposing physical appearance, his beard, his Salafi attire and the fact that he looked older than his years helped him attract more affiliates of the trend.

Despite the senior position that Khair achieved among Salafis, he was not yet settled intellectually and epistemologically, nor did he take Salafi thought for granted. As such, his nature of questioning and his way of thinking was unconventional in Salafi circles. He frequently asked provocative questions about basic and key issues in the Salafi approach. Understandably, some Salafi sheikhs warned him that his style was not welcome.

Khair recounted one of the more controversial questions he raised with the Salafi sheikhs concerning the science of Hadith – a question that contradicted common wisdom. Salafism believes all of the Prophet's companions, as the famous scholar Ibn Hajar says, were trustworthy, and therefore their narration of Hadith should be taken for granted. Here, Khair argued that even if they were trustworthy, there is no way to verify that the companions were all capable of controlling and learning the Hadith by heart. Of course, one of the conditions for

the Hadith's accuracy is the existence of a trustworthy chain of narrators. In this context, Khair questioned whether it was possible that some of the companions had forgotten or been distracted.

Once Khair finished his study of physics at the University of Jordan, he decided to continue his religious studies by pursuing a bachelor's degree in Islamic science. He enrolled in the faculty of Usul al-Da'wa wal Din, and later enrolled in the faculty at al-Balqa University. He did not seek religious science per se. In fact, Salafis felt the department did not offer acceptable instruction in the religious sciences. Instead, Khair sought to gain what he called "social legitimacy" by obtaining a bachelor degree in religious science with the objective of stymying criticisms that his opinion and understanding of religious matters was uninformed. Meanwhile, parallel to his studies at the university, he taught physics in order to meet his financial obligations.

Khair came to the surprising realization that the Salafi sheikhs who refer to Ibn Taymiyyah as the most important reference for Salafism in fact knew very little about his ideas. A majority seemed not to be well-acquainted with much of Ibn Taymiyyah's writings, especially with regards to the debatable and controversial issue of Islamic knowledge that Ibn Taymiyyah had with his critics. Khair realized that the sheikhs did not have profound or clear answers about the most controversial issue in Ibn Taymiyyah's thinking, nor were they acquainted with his replies to the well-known scholar of *al-Kalam*. As a consequence, Khair's faith in the Salafi sheikhdom weakened. But his trust in Salafism itself was not yet eroded. At this juncture, he blamed the weakness of the sheikhs rather than the Salafi approach.

As the Salafi movement began to diversify into different trends and immerse itself in internal debates about the approach,

Khair's questions and doubts increased. Meanwhile, he met with the leaders of other Salafi strands. In the early 1990s, he met al-Maqdisi, whose book *Milat Ibrahim* considers regimes, governments, constitutions, and Arab armies to be apostates. It also stresses the centrality of *hakimiyya* as one of the pillars of monotheism, and describes those who do not commit themselves to Islamic rule as *taghut*.

Ultimately, Khair could no longer avoid the conclusion that Salafism as a whole suffered from weak scientific *ta'sil* (rooting), especially in the science of *Usul al-Kalam*, or the origins of *fiqh*, and reason. He noticed the weakness of Salafism's logical structure and indeed its exaggerated belittling of reason in the domain of religious science.

At this point, Khair's convictions combined with another question about the credibility of Salafism. He remembers that at that time, a new book by Safar al-Hawali attracted a great deal of attention. The book discussed the position of Ash'arites on matters of creed, such as the interpretation of names and descriptions of God. Khair found in this book, which was seen as the decisive reply to the Ash'arites, a number of problems. He observed that al-Hawali's writings misquoted the different Ash'arite texts. This observation vindicated Khair's doubts about the capabilities and credibility of Salafism's intellectual leadership. In 1993, he began a new stage of profound methodological criticism of Salafism.

Khair focused again on reading Islamic thought outside of the Salafi domain, and he returned his attention to Islamic and Western philosophy. He read the work of Mohammad 'Imarah, Taha Jabir al-'Ilwanit, Mohammad Salim al-'Awa, and the school of the "Islamization of knowledge." In these writings, Khair found the combination of the constants of Islam and the variables of the modern age. In this vein, he deliberately

reached out to these scholars and met with them whenever they visited Jordan.

Khair was most influenced during this stage by two books: one written by Izetbegovic entitled *al-Islam Bayn al-Sharq Wal Gharb* (Islam between the East and the West), and another by Roger Garaudy entitled *al-Islam al-Hai* (The Living Islam). They opened a new horizon for the re-discovery of Islam and religion in a way that responded to modern life while respecting historical civilizational and philosophical questions. These works opened his eyes to similar literature, while he also returned to the philosophy readings he had consumed prior to his attachment to Salafism.

Consequently, his relationship with affiliates of the Salafi trend began to cool. Its leaders and adherents warned him that he had been “enchanted” by the books he read. This stage lasted for two years, during which he was intellectually redeemed from the Salafism. Eventually, his ties with Salafi circles dwindled to a minimum, limited to those Salafis who were tolerant of different opinions. The majority of them, however, conflated Khair’s intellectual endeavor with personal character, and therefore their attitude towards him naturally grew hostile.

The Resumption of the Epistemological Project and Intellectual Concerns

Khair’s break with Salafism ushered in a new stage in his life, during which he focused more on linguistic studies; he returned to the University of Jordan to study the Arabic language. Realizing the futility of research in religious sciences and the importance of language in dealing with texts, he began to believe that linguistic studies might be more encompassing and enriching. Once he

finished his intellectual journey with modern and traditional books, he became more aligned with the Mu'tazilah school of thought. While he is still influenced by this school of thought, he does not consider himself an affiliate. He regards Mu'tazilah as within the system of Salafism, and therefore too linked to the past. In Khair's thinking, knowledge is influenced by place and time and linked to innovation, development, research and the notion of absolute truth is rejected.

Today, Khair describes himself as "philosophically secular, not only procedurally, but maybe in a radical secular way." He revealed that he is planning to write a book in the future about the controversy between religion and secularism. This book will articulate his approach based on his secular vision as a radical epistemological choice. Khair argues that this is, in fact, the character of the Arab intellectual experiment of today, which is based on combining what is inherently contradictory. He has concluded that "Islamized secularism" is a fallacy, and argues that one must be decisive in one's choices, since it is impossible to combine what is inherently contradictory.

Khair believes obstacles are overcome through logical questioning, and believes Salafism's hostility to logic stems from a lack of understanding of its utility. Commenting on his vision of religion, state, society and the role of religion in Arabs' daily political life, he makes a distinction between secularism – as a radical epistemological position – and pragmatism. He adds that he may have a radical epistemological stance toward religion. But he cites John Dewey's assertion that "God exists if this would lead to the public good and vice versa" as instructional for Arab and Muslim polities, and notes that religion can play a functional or pragmatic role. In his pending book, he proposes a functional role for religion based on its rationalization and spiritualization.

In the same vein, Khair argues that the functional role of religion may not converge with his radical epistemological stance on secularism. Yet, as long as the influence of religion is pervasive, even in the pure sciences, it is hardly possible to deal with it by taking a stance towards it that is equally dogmatic in its espousal of secularism. Therefore, he argues, there is a need to synthesize in discourse the desired secular moment and the current religious moment. He believes this can only happen once religion is rationalized and religion offers to its followers a rational interpretation of its origins.

Khair distinguishes between religious and secular knowledge. The former does not require questioning about the role and exercise of religious knowledge in the political domain. In his opinion, the Islamic political experience – or to be more accurate, Muslims’ political experience – was secular from the beginning. It was an experience that was linked to the time and place. For this reason, he does not believe in the argument of the “Islamic project” as if this project’s roots are truly religious in nature.

This brings us to the middle-of-the-road circle to which Khair refers. Khair views enlightenment not as a final choice, but as a mediating function; one that is a remedy for other problems. There is a need for a cultural model to get rid of the confusion between means and ends. For Khair, the acceptance of enlightenment is transitional, provided that it is accompanied by an attempt to pose radical questions. While Khair advances this as his epistemological plan for the interim, he is not sure where this will lead him in years to come.

Finally, he emphasizes that he has not traveled alone on his intellectual journey; he has been accompanied by friends who have moved with him from Salafism on to new convictions. And yet, he always took the initiative to explore taboos and overcome obstacles. He took the lead in not giving in to comfort zones, and maintains his critical spirit, as knowledge remains his ultimate goal.

Conclusions

Transformation has been the theme of this chapter. In the models presented here, however, this transformation did not occur within Salafi circles, but stepped beyond them.

The term “transformation” in the context of the issue of identity is hardly new in the humanities and social sciences. An entire body of literature has addressed the issue of transformation at various levels: from one religion to another, or from one sect to another, and so on and so forth.⁹⁸ Arab Islamic thought has many of its own examples of this. There have been instances in which Arab intellectuals abandoned secularism for political Islam. Their intellectual journeys have been documented in the writings of Khalid Mohammad Khalid, Sayid Qutb, Mohammad ‘Imarah, Munir Shafiq, ‘Adil Hussein, and others.

The two cases here illustrate that the transformation from Salafism to other ideologies – whether within the framework of Islamic thought or toward secularism – is hardly novel or unique. In Saudi Arabia, a number of Salafi intellectuals have turned towards liberalism and others toward a wider horizon within Islamic thought. An investigative study of those cultural and intellectual figures who have departed Salafism will reveal multiple examples, even in Saudi Arabia where Salafism is a significant political and cultural influence.

⁹⁸ See, for instance, Olivier Roy, *al-Jahl al-Muqadas: Zaman Din Bila Thaqafa [Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways]* translated by Salih al-Asmar (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2012). The majority of this book discusses the phenomenon of the religious transformation and link it with the cultural question. See also Hani Nseirah, *al-Mutahawwulun Diniyan: Dirasa fi Zahirat Taghyeir al-Diyana wal Madhab [Religiously Transformed: A Study in the Phenomenon of Changing Religion and Sect]* (Cairo: al-Andalus Center for Tolerance and Combating Violence Studies, 2009).

In Jordan, also, many Salafi individuals explored Salafism to its core and then opted for other trends. Indeed, the cases of Abu Hanieh and Khair highlight their experiences with intellectual and epistemological questions and their realization that the Salafi approach does not provide answer for the current crisis in the Arab and Muslim worlds of today.

In studying the evolutions of Khair and Abu Hanieh, it would be easy to conclude that contemporary Jordanian Salafism has not provided satisfactory answers to the matters that occupy their minds. Both made a concerted effort to find a marriage between core values, intellectual freedom, critical vision, social justice, democracy, a break with backwardness, and an embrace of the human renaissance and liberation of the self from autocracy at the religious, political, and emotional levels.

The criticism in both cases of the Salafi approach in Jordan has to do with simplicity in the roadmap drafted by Salafism for societies; both in terms of their relationship with religion, and in religion's political, social, and spiritual role in changing the status quo.

In their journey through Salafism, Abu Hanieh and Khair were concerned with the quest for the self and their desired identity. Salafism became their assumed identity at one time in each of their lives, from which they later departed in favor of "leftist democratic Islam" (in the case of Abu Hanieh), or secularism (in the case of Khair). Taken together, they are evidence of a generation on a quest for identity and self-actualization at the human, civilizational, societal, and individual levels. Having examined the required conditions for this, they arrived at different conclusions than others mentioned in this book: they shed their Salafi identity, as did Na'im al-Tilawi mentioned previously. But al-Tilawi had a totally different mode of engaging with the Salafi case and thus came to different results.

Conclusion:

**Questions of Identity,
Crisis and Transformation**

The experiences documented throughout this book reflect several different models of Salafism as well as the factors contributing to Salafi identity. It is safe to say that, as a movement, Salafism is somewhat elusive in the sense that its organization cannot be defined or pinpointed: it lacks the rigid hierarchy and institutionalization typical of political parties and other Islamic organizations. Rather, the Salafi identity is fragmented along the lines of past, present, and future. Yet it is not lacking in moral, scientific or even practical leadership. In fact, it has an indirect, implicit traditional authority, which is its history and methodology, and its sense of community.

The examination of Salafi experiences goes beyond the scope of private identity for individuals affiliated with the movement. In fact, it mainly entails inferring the relationship of individuals with the groups to which they belong, as well as the relationship between these groups and society in addition to the imagined nation. This demonstrates the inadequacy of studying Salafism through the prism of theories of ideology. Rather, understandings of Salafism must be ideated through understandings of ideology as well as of the sociology of identity and culture. Taken together, these two approaches present an integrated framework. They also offer an interpretation for the adoption of the Salafi identity by individuals through their relationship with groups and the cultural milieu to which they belong.

An integrated approach explains why an individual chooses Salafism. It interprets the individual's voluntary quest for identity as something that occurs amid crisis, whether political, economic, intellectual or cultural crisis, the latter having its roots in the confrontation between traditional cultural identity and the pressure to adapt that identity to the demands of modernization and globalization.

In addition to the personal interviews exploring the experiences of Salafi individuals, questionnaires were also distributed among various Salafi groups in Jordan. Although there were only 33 respondents, their answers help shed light on the relationship between personal experience and the prevalent models of Salafism in Jordan: haraki, jihadi and traditional.

This chapter examines the Salafi identity by posing a number of questions: Why did I become Salafi? How did I become Salafi. What does being Salafi mean to me? How do I deal with the question of the other? It also examines the significance of representation, embodiment, and the translation of identity by the portrayal of Salafi traits and their realization, whether by the individual or Salafi groups. It is worth noting that the concept of community or group is not necessarily used in the modern organizational sense. Rather, it refers to the traditional, social sense of the word, meaning the “Salafi society” and its relations with its members and the wider surrounding society.

1. One Unified Identity or Multiple Identities?

Is there one monolithic Salafi identity? Or, are there multiple identities that reflect an identity crisis rather than embodying general traits agreed upon by Salafis?

It is apparent here that religion plays an important and active role in formulating Salafi identity and shaping its direction. A Salafi, by definition, is an individual who believes religion has a decisive role in defining the theological and ideological worldview of individuals. For Salafis, religion also disciplines individuals and regulates their social practices by controlling their moral and ethical choices. Indeed, with respect to the fact that religion is a disciplining mechanism, it is possible

that the identity of Salafis is similar to other Islamic identities found among members of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Tablighi, and other Islamic groups. If this is the case, then what distinguishes the Salafi identity from other Muslim identities? Responses to the questionnaires deepen the understandings already provided by the experiences examined throughout this text, and help define the hallmarks of Salafi identity, allowing us to determine the issues upon which Salafists agree.

As far as impact and recruitment are concerned, one can argue that beyond the Salafi trend, for most communities, the mosque, neighborhood peers, and some Salafi sheikhs play a key role in attracting adherents. Many Salafis say these factors led them to become acquainted with the Salafi Call. But when it comes to involvement in the Salafi trend, the priorities among Salafis differ.

The focus and practices of each particular trend are what appeals. For traditionalists, Salafi sheikhs play a focal role in reinforcing ties with the trend through the demands of religious science, hajj, and even religious TV channels. For harakis, summer camps and Quranic reading centers play a vital role, in addition to the influence of the sheikhs and religious media. The mosque, the neighborhood, the sheikhs and various security considerations frame individual relations within the jihadi trend. The Internet and modern social media networks also play a visible role.

With consideration to political organization of society, the majority of respondents agreed on the objective of an Islamic state in which all aspects of life are governed by Shari'a. Some Haraki Salafis expressed the belief that this state should be committed to the criteria of justice and fairness, as opposed

to those who emphasize the principle of obedience. Jihadis, on the other hand, seek a state committed to jihad. Neither, however, articulates principles related to democracy or public liberties and freedom in their definition of the concept of an Islamic state.

Salafis are divided by ideological orientation with regards to politics, partisan activism, democracy, pluralism and minority rights. Jihadis and Traditional Salafis on the whole reject political activism, political parties (including Islamic parties), and democracy. Meanwhile, Haraki Salafis are divided on issues of democracy, partisanship, and political activism, but give conditional acceptance to these concepts and procedures.

In terms of social issues, the majority of Salafis agree on gender segregation in universities, schools and work places; the minority only conditionally sanctions the mingling of the sexes. Salafis do not listen to music or song, and there is a near consensus on banning these. Only three out of the 33 respondents sanctioned music, but again, only conditionally. The vast majority believes activities such as card or board games or sports are forbidden, while a considerable minority conditionally accepts soccer and chess.

Some Salafis view growing a beard as a duty, while others see it as a Sunnah. By the same token, Salafis agree that religious dress for women is obligatory, but there is less consensus as to what constitutes appropriate religious attire: some believe that a woman's face, arms and palms should be covered, while others do not see this as necessary. The differences in viewpoints on this matter are related to the various fatwas issued by different Salafi sheikhs.

Salafis are selective in their television viewing habits. Some respondents stated that they avoid movies and TV series; some watch news and others scientific programming. Some take no interest in television, and some only view religious programming. A large percentage of respondents, particularly the Traditional Salafis, follow Salafi religious channels *such as al-Athr, Wisal, al-Buseira, Annas, Arrahmah, Arrisalat, al-Majd, Fawr Ashabab, Shada al-Huryiah, and al-Rawdah*. Many also follow news channels such as *al-Jazeera, al-Jazeer Mubashir, al-Arabiya* and the *BBC*. A limited percentage watch scientific channels such as *National Geographic, al-Jazeera Documentary*, and some follow political debate programs on local channels.

On the issue of their relations with Christians, all Salafis believe that Muslims are forbidden from participating in Christian religious celebrations. However, they disagree in their views on friendship, political participation and social events, such as weddings and funerals and other sad occasions.

Salafis' political agendas differ, especially on issues such as the implementation of *Shari'a*. The traditional and haraki trends are divided as to when to implement *Shari'a*. Some make the case for implementing *Shari'a* in the short term, while others advocate implementation over a longer term. This is in contrast to the stance of jihadis, who are impatient to realize the full implementation of *Shari'a*. Salafi trends also vary on their views of enforcing *hudud* (fixed punishments for certain crimes); corporal punishment such as amputation (of a hand), death by stoning, and flogging. They also disagree on the issue of conducting elections for whether presidential, parliamentary or local council. Nonetheless, there is consensus on the need for women to dress according to *Shari'a* and on the establishment of Islamic banks to replace the modern commercial banks that would be regarded as usurious in an Islamic state.

There is a near consensus among Salafis that the war in Syria is a doctrinal one. Yet they have differing views on the participation of Jordan's Salafi youth in the conflict. A clear majority believes that the current revolutions will produce legitimate Islamic regimes, but they are divided over the participation of Egyptian Salafis in partisan activism and politics. Salafis also disagree on the use of demonstrations, protests, political activism, and the media as means of change.

Salafis have varying views towards peace with Israel. Jihadis and harakis are more closely aligned in their rejection of a peace settlement. Traditionalists, however, are divided between those who reject and those who accept it. These groups also differ in their assessment of the Muslim Brotherhood's experience in power. A majority regards their experience as a failure, though a minority believes it has led to some positive outcomes.

After studying the ideologies of Salafism as a whole and among the various Salafi trends, the results of the questionnaires seem logical and were expected: they reinforced the viewpoints disclosed in the individual Salafi experiences presented in the book. Yet, this brings us back to the question raised at the beginning of this chapter: do the common denominators among Salafi trends constitute a general Salafi identity?

Casting aside political matters – which are the most divisive factors among the Salafi trends – and examining the Salafi character from a social and religious perspective, we discover first and foremost the common denominator is a tremendous interest in religious commitments compared to other Islamic trends. A Salafi, by necessity, is religiously committed, is ritualistic and is concerned to project his commitment and belief through outward manifestations that symbolize these, or what some sociologists call “phenotypic traits.” For other Islamic groups, religious commitment is less important than political

activism. In other words, unlike other Islamic groups, Salafis attach a paramount importance to traits. As previously noted, a number of Salafis were driven to Salafism because it is primarily fixated on the quest for religious purification, not politics.

The second trait of the Salafi character is the great importance granted to religious texts and edicts compared to other Islamic trends. Here, texts refer to the Quran and the Sunnah. The latter is of great significance for Salafis, both in terms of their commitment to appearance and attitude, as well as in the concern for the verification of Hadith, to discern the correct from the weak. However, preoccupation with the Hadith is more apparent among Traditional Salafis than haraki or jihadis.

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The Salafi identity is represented by key values, which condition the general Salafi identity. The extent to which *Shari'a* is implemented or adhered to is considered an outward expression of true Islamic values and religious commitment. Of course, there are differences among the various trends in terms of their understanding of how *Shari'a* should be implemented. Although Salafis have differing views of their leaders and politicians, as well as of reform and the legitimacy of activism and forms of activism, all Salafis agree on the importance of implementing *Shari'a* and the establishment of the Islamic state.

Generally speaking, Salafism is about maintaining the heritage of Islam as Salafis understand it, either by defending the doctrine of *Ahl al-Sunnah wal Jama'a*, or by criticizing other doctrines and Islamic and non-Islamic groups (old and new). In an explanation of his self-identification, a Salafi will revisit the era of the Prophet's companions, followers and Islamic scholars. But the question is: who represents this approach? Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Jawziah have a noticeable presence. Interestingly, those who disagree with this approach – such as philosophers and scholars of *al-Kalam* (literally meaning “science of discourse,” or the Islamic philosophical practice of seeking theological principles through dialectic debate and argument) – have either limited presence or negative connotations. The last category includes Ibn Rushd, al-Ghazali, Ibn Sian, the Mu'tazilah, the Kharajites, the Shiites and others, who are perceived as adversaries or shunned for their incorrect representation of Salafi identity.

Having examined the general traits that characterize the common Salafi identity, we now touch on the sources of tension among Salafis, which indicate confusion in the Salafi character, particularly when it comes to political theory and understanding of the current reality. This character is uncertain with regards to the desired Islamic state and the implementation of Shari'a. Should implementation come quickly, or gradually, in the long run? It is also unclear in its position on *hudud*.

Undoubtedly, there is confusion in the Salafi character with regards to the mechanisms of democracy: elections, public freedoms, human rights, political activism, partisan life, and religious and political pluralism. Some reject democracy in absolute terms, while others accept it as a “lessening of evil.” Others consider it to be the best option available; the same applies to political activism. Regionally, some Salafis support

the Egyptian Salafis' involvement in politics, but among Salafis in Jordan, there is far less enthusiasm. Thus, we find that recent Salafi affairs have diminished the unity and cohesion of the general Salafi character.

Equally important, the general Salafi character is also confused with regards to basic priorities. Traditionalists attach great importance the role of religious science in promoting change. Among this trend, it is the benchmark by which it defines its structure of sheikhs and students. Haraki Salafis, on the other hand, have introduced an organizational and proselytizing aspect, while Jihadi Salafis give priority to *hakimiyya* and *jihad*. Therefore, prison experience and *naḡīr* (fighting in available battleground) are the standards that define achievement and rank within this trend.

Will focusing on the Salafi sub-identities reveal more homogenous and consistent identities? In other words, are the haraki, traditional, or jihadi identities more harmonized than the overall Salafi identity?

Starting with Traditional Salafism, both individuals and groups view political activism negatively. Sheikhs enjoy moral and academic authority, followed by students of religious science, then beginners, and finally sympathizers. In sum, the Traditional Salafi character is characterized by simplicity and decisiveness: it relies on religious texts first, and then fatwas issued by the Salafi sheikhdom to inform daily attitudes, practices and behaviors. It has an unambiguous stand on democracy and its institutions, processes, procedures and rights, and when it comes to complex issues, it considers reason a minor influence. Thus, any differences the traditional school may have over religious texts are not about their application to time or logic, but in the science of the chain of narration, which is based on rote learning rather than analysis and innovation.

The Traditional Salafi personality may be creative in various aspects of life, but in religion and society, it is conservative. A traditionalist is not troubled by philosophical questions of the relationship between religion and society, modernity and globalization, the relationship between religion and state, or secularism and Islam. These questions are almost absent from Traditional Salafi society, which centers its attention and priorities on religious science and promoting the Salafi doctrine. It does not engage in either political conflict with established authorities, or profound intellectual discussion about such philosophical questions.

Conversely, the Jihadi Salafi personality is sharp in discourse, politics and social behavior. It views religion in absolute terms, and views confronting deviation within society and the state as integral to religious commitment. In other words, it is in constant conflict with the surrounding environment. It confronts the social environment that is not committed to the perfectly Islamic state envisioned by Jihadi Salafism. Additionally, it actively challenges Arab regimes, the United States, the West, Iran, Shiites, and the Safavid project.

The experience of Mu'ayad clearly exposes the psychological crisis that can lead to a withdrawal from the jihadi trend and the associated traits and commitments. He began to compare the religiosity of jihadis with other Islamic trends that had succeeded in combining religion with contemporary life, as the Jihadi Salafi trend remained voluntarily besieged by its surrounding environment.

Given the discrepancy between the jihadi trend and society, the jihadi nucleus is interested in internal solidarity, cementing the relationship among its followers, cooperation and social participation. Events and occasions are well attended. This is particularly obvious in mourning or celebratory occasions,

or sometimes in what is known as the “wedding of the martyr” for those killed fighting on foreign territory such as Iraq and Syria. Because jihad is the trend’s core value and objective, followers are in constant search of the next battleground. These battlegrounds are well aligned with their psychological and ideological disposition, and are considered to be the ideal environment for their activism. This ideological drive explains the travel of hundreds of Jordanian jihadis to different conflict arenas today, particularly in Syria.

The identity of Haraki Salafis is more confused, as is particularly apparent when it comes to their positions on political theory, democracy or political activism, the concept of the Islamic state, current Arab governments, means of change, reform, other Islamic trends, and openness to Western thought, modernity, globalization and other cultures.

This confusion and tension is reflected in the identity of the al-Kitab wal Sunnah society, which was established in 1993 to express the ideas of this trend. Additionally, the migration of some of the trend’s affiliates toward jihadism and traditionalism, or in some cases, out of Salafism altogether, has become common.

2. Salafis in Crisis or a Crisis of Salafi Identity?

Many Salafis, whether those whose experiences have been described or who responded to the questionnaires, ascribe their turn to Salafism to factors such as a quest for religious purity. Of great importance to them is Salafism’s focus on the purification of religion and religious science, which presents religion as it is or as the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions understood and practiced it. In other words, Salafis focus on “Islam” or “the initial identity,” which should

not be tainted with concepts that have distorted the religion.

This Salafi response represents yet another indirect reason that leads to understanding Salafi identity and accounts for its ascendance and spread during past decades, in Jordan and other Arab countries. In the context of the challenge posed by imported modernity, Westernization, globalization and conflict in Arab societies, Salafism has emerged as a response. The movement speaks to a sense permeating a large segment of society that its religious identity, culture, values and heritage are being threatened: Salafism is an extreme response to real and imagined threats.

According to followers of the Salafi trend, the threats of Westernization and modernity have multiple dimensions. They are political, in the form of non-Islamic ideologies and cultures, secularism, democracy, liberalism, communism, capitalism, and others. They are social, including the Western values, ideas, techniques, and new attitudes that contravene *Shari'a*, apparent in educational systems and the media. And finally, they are economic; represented, for example, in the banks and investments that do not abide by *Shari'a*.

The extent to which Salafis fear modernity, Westernization and globalization varies. To some, they are a challenge; to others an existential threat. The bottom line is that Salafis – though they may have different responses to these phenomena – agree that the “other” is an opponent or an enemy – culturally, politically, and intellectually. Salafis do not see the “other” within the context of diversity that could enrich the “self” by adding new values and other dimensions. Seen in this way, Salafism is a defense mechanism that is inward rather than outward looking.

Given the prowess and strength of the “other,” the pressure on Salafism to respond is enormous. Here, the hegemony, domination and soft and hard power of the “other” serves to emphasize the weakness that characterizes Arab and Muslim societies. This calls to mind Daryush Shaygen’s description of identity as “an ideological cover adopted by weak societies amid international transformations” while at the same time being a “a wrong image of the self.”⁹⁹ In this vein, Salafism is viewed as an alternative to global modernity. But its invocation of the “golden era” of Islamic civilization during medieval times is little more than a dismissal of social and cultural transformations throughout the course of history, the more contemporary of which Salafis seem unable to deal with except through a reactionary and defensive posture. Salafists’ idealistic reliance on and nostalgia for the past yields what Shaygen calls the “worship of beginnings,” which treats modernity as if it is a conspiracy.¹⁰⁰

The persistence of such reactions to crisis – whether at the individual or societal level – in absorbing military defeat or difficult economic, political and psychological conditions, reinforces the feeling that identity is threatened. In the era following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, this manifested in the ascendance of the Islamic revivalist trend, which filled the void left by the defeat of pan-Arabism after its failure to make good on its promises to the masses.

While it is true that the ascendance of Salafism was not independent of Saudi financial support to promote the Salafi Call and its institutions at a global level, it is even more so in the Arab world. However, the existence of a conducive environment, ripe to absorb the Salafi ideology, is what gave the financial support for its advancement such potency.

⁹⁹ Daryush Shaygen, *op. Cit.*, pp.5-31

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Over the past several decades, a new Arab generation has risen on the heels of Arab military defeats and other collective socio-psychological setbacks: the Nakbeh (the Arab-Israeli War of 1948), the Nakseh (the Arab-Israeli War of 1967), the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the Palestinian diaspora, the Iraq-Iran war, the Allied invasion of Iraq in 1991, and the US occupation of Iraqi in 2003. The failure of the Arab states to prevent these disasters was not without price, in the context of their failure, also, to provide an environment of freedom, dignity and justice to their citizens. Not only were paths to peaceful change blocked, political activism was criminalized as well. Therefore, coming on the heels of domestic repression, external failures made questions of regime legitimacy more relevant.

These reactions were not merely to external failures or domestic civil and political rights and freedoms. In the 1990s, the region also entered a phase of economic reforms that valorized the role of the private sector over that of the state in the economy. With an increase in unemployment and poverty, economic crises emerged, deepening the identity crisis. Furthermore, the factors of crisis – linked to issues of cultural identity – imposed difficult questions on these societies, particularly among the youth, who were conflicted about heritage, including the demands of religion, on one hand, and the Western cultural invasion on the other.

Responses of the Arab intellectual and political elite sought to identify the source of the problem: Societies or governments? External or internal? How should Arabs cope with these matters: through social and cultural renaissance, through politics or through militant activism?

Today, the secular response has earned a poor reputation due to the poor performance of conservative as well as revolutionary regimes. Both tried either to exclude religion from the public space or utilize it to serve self-interested political agendas. Not surprisingly, then, religion or political Islam became a logical response for those new generations whose political and social awareness matured amid crisis.

The Islamic interpretation of the recent tribulations unquestionably appealed to the more religious members of Arab societies, as well. This interpretation identifies the reason for the Arab ordeal as the distance between society and God. As such, Salafism's emphasis on tawhid made Salafism especially appealing in the circumstances. As Salafism is far from monolithic, various Salafi trends accounted for different portions of the societal pie. Traditional Salafism spread among the many people who sought to insulate themselves against social and political coercion. Jihadi Salafism took hold among the radical and revolutionary youth, who were influenced more significantly by the pressures of the crises. And Haraki Salafism sought a third way between the other two Salafi trends.

This then begs the question: why did the Reformist Salafi vision fade away? This brand of Salafism emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, and is considered the most engaging and the most open to modernity and contemporary politics, society and culture. This vision was represented in Rashid Rida, who advocated Moroccan nationalist Salafism, and Shami (Syrian) Salafism, and varied greatly from Salafism's current models, which are much narrower in their worldviews.

There are myriad explanations for this question, but at the root is Saudi Arabia's relentless promotion of Salafism, which already enjoyed a synergetic relationship with the Saudi regime. The Saudi government explicitly utilized Salafism to

counter leftist and Pan-Arabist ideologies that dominated Arab societies in the 1950s and 1960s. To that end, the kingdom made a steady flow of funds available to institutions dedicated to education and proselytization, both in Saudi Arabia and abroad. Salafism attracted tens of thousands of workers and students and published books and literature on the movement.

In this context, one can argue that this Saudi Salafism emerged from the Saudi local conditions and the nature of both the state and society. Therefore, Salafism was dominated by the revivalist, rather than the reformist trend, and it upheld the traditional vision until some Salafi groups began leaning towards jihadism or the political course (influenced by Muslim Brotherhood thought). Given its geographical proximity to Saudi Arabia, Jordan was subject to this influence, as well as to the general influence of Salafism in the other Arab Gulf states, as its own nationals were exposed to and immersed in it through migration to Gulf countries in pursuit of jobs or education. Furthermore, the increased participation of Jordanian nationals in the Hajj and *‘Umrah*, along with the return of Jordanian expatriates from the Gulf at the beginning of the 1990s, helped the Jordanian Salafi trend emerge noticeably over the past two decades.

The second facilitating factor is historical. The first Reformist Salafi movement faced different questions and political conditions. Then, questions of renaissance, reform, and progress were primary, and dominated the discussion and debate among the Arab elite. But the questions today have changed: they are influenced by the emergence of the state, the formation of new Arab political regimes in the aftermath of the Second World War, the international contention that ensued with the Cold War, internal conflict, and consecutive defeats. In this new context, the questions involve issues of identity and political struggle between various ideological trends,

relegating questions of renaissance and reform to a lesser importance. Now, the dominant question among the majority of Arab societies is about identity and revival.

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The third factor – linked to the second one – concerns current socio-economic conditions. These have been met with protest and simplified cultural interpretations of the challenges, threats, and dilemmas faced by Arab societies. The Reformist Salafi school does not put forth decisive or simple answers as much as it is involved in self-criticism. Contrary to that, the Revivalist Salafi school offers a conclusive and simple reply that is easily understood by laymen. There is a difference between the prescriptions and solutions of each approach. The revivalists argue the crisis is a function of the distance between society and God, which can be rectified by returning to proper Islam (whether by increasing the mission of religious science or *jihad* in facing military defeat). Conversely, reformists believe societal and cultural problems (including some in the heritage of *fiqh*) must be addressed through a process of enlightenment and perpetual internal religious reform, and compete to use knowledge and technology in order to achieve the desired reform.

This historical background is necessary for understanding the Salafi trend in general, and the Jordanian case in particular. In its current form, Salafism represents a solution to Arab generations' quest for identity in essentially emergency conditions. Yet, the solution is still evolving. It is possible this trend's influence will continue for decades, and may intensify. This is, at least, what is suggested by the case of Hassan Abu Hanieh, whose self-awareness grew from his life as a refugee after the 1967 war, and in the case of Nart Khair, whose realization followed a sense that the Muslim Brotherhood had betrayed society before the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq by promoting the illusion that Iraq's victory was nigh. Consequently, Khair looked within the discourse itself to identify the pitfalls and the source of deception.

This particular background takes us again to the sociology of identity and to the work of Claude Dubar, in his reading of Max Weber in particular. Dubar argues that the identity crisis (associated with depression, nostalgia, and introversion) cannot be attributed to early childhood psychology or personal history alone. Rather, it comes from a "social framework" and objective factors in modern history that are represented in material loss, confusion in human relations, and changes to the self.¹⁰¹

Against this backdrop, Salafism is a reaction to a "difficult stage" through which both societies and individuals pass. It represents a "fraction in the balance of dissimilar components," whether these conditions are political, economic, philosophical, societal, or military etc.¹⁰²

This is not to say Salafism is, in general, merely a negative reaction to interactions with conditions, challenges, or risks that face Arab societies and individuals. In this regard, we

¹⁰¹ Claude Dubar, *Op. cit.*, pp.76-78.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp.76-78

have seen various Salafi responses and interactions, and indeed a process of transformation within the Salafi trends, to varying degrees. Of course, groups and individuals are not one static entity. The intention is not to insulate Salafism from its surroundings. Nor do we want to separate Salafism from the current and historical crises that have contributed to the trend.

3. Between the Past, the Present, and the Future

The term “Salafism” connotes the past as a source of inspiration and a guide to the present; perhaps for the future as well. The word “salaf” refers to the Prophet, his companions, followers, the first golden era of Islam and the proper religion that they upheld. Hence, the task of Reformist Salafis lies largely in the removal of misconceptions that have led to Muslims’ misunderstandings of Islam. A Salafi, as discussed in the introduction, embodies a connection with Ahl al-Hadith, or those who undertook the historical mission of protecting proper Islamic doctrine from the invasion of Greek philosophy.

Today, Salafis have resumed the battle for proper “religious identity” by emphasizing the “completeness of Islam” and by rectifying the misguided, deviant concepts inherited from late Islamic centuries by other Islamic trends, as well as those influenced by “profane” modern ideas such as secularism, Communism, and democracy.

For this reason, heresy is a central matter in Salafi discourse. The term signifies the innovation introduced to the religion by other Islamic groups, outside the domain of the Sunnah. In particular, these groups include the Mu‘tazilah and the Kharajites, Shi’a, and philosophers. It also includes Islamic groups from within the Sunni sect, such as Sufis, scholars of al-Kalam, Ash’arites and Maturidi. Indeed, the most expressive

structural term that represents Salafism is the phrase “following rather than innovating.”

For Salafis, true refusal of heresy and innovation only comes from the discernment of the strong from the weak in the known books on the Prophet’s Sunnah. In particular, they emphasize the science of the chain of narrators (‘Ilm al-Jarh wa Ta’dil), a task that has been particularly undertaken by Traditional Salafi sheikhs.

Islamic doctrine plays a prominent role in Salafi identity construction. For Traditional Salafis, the distinction between who is and who is not a Salafi is largely linked to theory of God. For Salafis, it lies in the question: where is God? If the a person professes the belief that God is in Heaven, he has met one of the most important standards for being identified as a Salafi by the Salafi community. Other questions include whether the Quran is God’s word or created by man; whether God has two hands, can see and can hear, or whether, as the Ash’arites assert, these attributes symbolize God’s abilities.

Differences among Salafi strands deepen when it comes to the legitimacy of rebellion against a leader. Traditionalists view opposition, even through peaceful means, or any political activism as a precursor to sedition and armed rebellion. They consider those who call even for peaceful opposition as the “latent Kharajites” who are outside the Salafi circle, as well as the Sunni domain. In the Salafi view, Kharajites sin in judging others as apostates and sanctioning opposition.

Jihadis, on the other hand, accuse traditionalists of ‘irja’ (postponement). To them, traditionalists misguidedly separate faith from work because they do not regard leaders who do not govern in accordance with Shari’a as infidels. Contrary to traditionalists, jihadis deem governance as integral to the doctrine

and faith; therefore, they view any ruler who does not implement Shari'a as an infidel. They also see the acceptance of man-made laws as a defiance of religion because, according to them, the right of legislation belongs only to God. This understanding is central to the requirements of monotheism.

Matters of doctrine and political theory become significantly more complicated for Haraki Salafis, and there is no consensus among them on these issues. They do not fixate on conclusively defining the legitimacy of Arab governments by their Islamic credentials. But they do agree on the need to be politically active, and they seem more open to other Islamists and accepting of different views. In other words, they are not as doctrinally rigid as jihadis and traditionalists when it comes to politics.

Key to the Salafi doctrine (the social and political dimensions in particular) is the concept of *Al Wala' Wal Bara'*, meaning "alliance and disavowal," or drawing near to what is pleasing to God and the Prophet while eschewing what displeases them. This entails supporting religion, the Prophet and the believers, while antagonizing the enemies of Islam. Salafis today disagree on the correct implementation and interpretation of *Al Wala' Wal Bara'*.

Salafis invoke the differences between groups to demarcate the borders of the Salafi "self" and the "other", as well as to clarify the nature of the relationship between the two. The concept of the Surviving Group discussed in the introductory chapter is the key to understanding and examining the Salafi identity, as it is a central component of that identity. Salafi literature establishes the Surviving Group as the very essence of individual Salafi identity. It helps protect religion against deviations, challenges and threats, both internal and external. Nevertheless, within Salafism there is disagreement as to which group – of among more than seventy – can legitimately claim to be the "surviving" one.

The question is how this is being translated to the Jordanian Salafi scene. Traditional Salafis view themselves as the legitimate heirs of Ahl Al Sunna wal Jama'a, those believed to hold the proper understanding of Islam. They consider everything else to be a deviation from Islam and therefore "other." From this perspective, the "other" embodies a wide swathe of contemporary Muslims: Kharajites, al-Mu'tazilah, and Shi'a, and from within the Sunni world, the Ash'arites, Maturidi, scholars of al-Kalam (rational reasoning or speculative theology), and any other professed Muslim who contradicts Salafi doctrine and rituals. This includes non-Traditional Salafis, such as the modern groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, the Liberation Party, Jihadi and Haraki Salafis, democrats, secularists, communists, leftists and others.

Jihadi Salafis also view themselves as the Surviving Group that safeguards religion. However, for a jihadi, *jihad* is the "apex of Islam" or the "absent duty," according to the former Egyptian jihadi leader Mohammad Abdusalam Faraj. The jihadi worldview is informed by the concept of *jihad*, whose energies are concentrated on a constant struggle against whatever is antagonistic to Islam: the "near enemy" (Arab governments); the "far enemy" (the Western nations, the United States especially). For jihadis, this conflict is a literal one, while for traditionalists, it is intellectual, and therefore their mission is education and proselytization.

Haraki Salafis do not cohere around a single identity. The mainstream group of harakis is more open and less extreme in their definition of the Surviving Group. They are more accepting in their approach to other forms of Salafism and in dealing with the Sunni domain as a whole. Yet they are less tolerant toward non-Salafi groups, and they are confused about their stance toward contemporary schools of thought and their position on democracy in particular.

Salafis consider themselves to be the inheritors of a concrete and unchanging set of ideas and convictions, and, as with every social grouping, Salafis are naturally inclined to probe the facets of their identity and posit it against another. However, this book's focus on Salafi identity helps deduce how this identity is integrated with society and politics; how it directs Salafis to contend with challenges, problems, new ideas and personal orientations.

This examination leads to questions about the social effects of Salafism: does it lead to a closed society, regression, intolerance and exclusion of others? Or does it produce openness, tolerance and dealing with the other based on mutual interests. In other words, does Salafism seek a shared public sphere? The book concludes that the following is true:

- On the whole, the Salafi identity is defensive, and mainly follows the logic of self-defense. It is inward looking, focused on chastity and purity. It is also an insular identity, though the extent of this insularity varies from trend to trend. Haraki Salafism is less internally focused than others, and more properly thought of as a reserved or conservative identity.
- Intolerance is a hallmark of Salafi identity. Salafism's foundation is the dichotomy of right and wrong, good and evil, in accordance with what is or is not deemed to be Islamic in the esteem of individuals and groups – of which there are many – all of whom believe themselves to be legitimate inheritors of the Surviving Group, which itself indicates an exclusivist understanding of the self and other. Salafism therefore passes absolute rather than relative judgment in dealing with the other. It is an identity that is not based on general recognition, but, in the words of scholar Amartya Sen, on exclusion.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence*, *Op. Cit.*, 17-53.

Rather than a belief in pluralism, interaction, and cooperation, Salafism cannot understand these from a core doctrinal and philosophical perspective; it is instead rooted in worry, fear and enmity.

- The Salafi identity is simple and polarized. They emphasize their own otherness in order to draw the borders around themselves to separate themselves from the “other”. This explains the fragmentation of Salafism in Jordan. In this context, Salafis seek divergence and variances in order to outline the borders of “us” versus the “other.”

The traits of Salafi identity do not always accurately reflect the true interaction of Salafi individuals and groups with society. Furthermore, the manifestations of this identity cannot be applied to every group or individual; naturally it varies among individuals and groups. Socio-economic and political conditions play an active role in determining the expression of Salafi identity. Despite the common traits demonstrated among the various trends of Salafism in different countries, they still have their discrepancies.

That being said, a great deal of this book is focused exclusively on Jordan’s Salafi scene and the Salafi quest for identity in particular. Salafis demonstrate characteristics of being attracted to an idealized past and suffering from ego-centricity that rejects the other, socially, culturally and intellectually.

The fundamental predicament of the Salafi identity in Arab societies is that Salafis view the future through the prism of the past. This does not refer to a Salafi’s quest for his roots in terms of heritage or in the earlier idealized centuries. Rather, it means that a Salafi identity is shaped by past presentations of religion and the role of religion in the private as well as the

public domains. Therefore, it cannot adapt to and is inherently incongruous with any cultural, political, and social transformations.

Indeed, this presents the dilemma of the overall Salafi identity. While in principle, it assumes conflict and contradiction, it is not oblivious to the fact that change is not an easy task. Change in fact requires reformulating contemporary circumstances. But as long as this task is beyond reach, the Salafi choice is either to achieve its goals by being open and adapting, or taking the risk of attempting to change by closing itself off to the surrounding reality and achieving its aims by force.

Ultimately, Salafism is distracted by and suffers from the schizophrenia of “imagined identity” versus real identity. Intellectually, it adheres to the former and tries to overcome its social alienation through group membership and relationships, thus forming positions and attitudes. This can be explained by the theory of social interactionism. Yet¹⁰⁴ the real Salafi identity pits the Salafi vision against society and the current reality.

4. Final Remarks

Returning to the debate in the introductory chapter over the study of Salafism through ideology versus sociology, the study of Salafi ideology leads to certain outcomes in terms of Salafi identity production. The link between objective conditions and the formulation of the Salafi identity and its transformation over time is significant.

¹⁰⁴ Ian Craib, *Al-Nazariya al-Ijtima'iya Min Parson Ila Habermas [Social Theory from Parson to Habermas]*, trans. Mohammad Hussein Ulum, ed. Mohammad 'Asfour (Kuwait: Series of 'Alem al'Ma'rifah, 1999), pp. 129-147.

The reformist identity has fundamentally different characteristics from its Salafi counterparts. For instance, it demonstrates a more open position toward contemporary intellectual schools of thought such as democracy, literature, arts, and political activism. That was the case with the schools of al-Manar, Rashid Ridda, Ibn Badis, and the first Shami Salafism.

Rashid Ridda was a jurist and a thinker who is considered the spiritual father of Reformist Salafism. A number of historians regard him as pivotal in leading Salafism's retreat from Sheikh Mohammad Abdu's school of thought. He presented a vision that combined democracy and the Islamic system, and spoke of the necessity of benefiting from Western experience in the development of institutions, social work and public life.¹⁰⁵

Ridda also exhibited flexibility in dealing with the challenges and conditions of his era, and discussed the need for the mind to prevail over the text. He occasionally spoke of the need to accept the existence of usurious banks, for example, arguing that they reflected and answered a true need of the times.¹⁰⁶

He also called for opening the doors to 'ijtihād (interpretation) and self-criticism. He blamed scholars and jurists for the failure to articulate coherent Islamic responses to social and political matters, and said that for this reason, regimes and government enacted man made laws.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ See Mohammad Abu Rumman, *Bayna Hakimiyyat Allah Wa Sultat al-Ummah: Al-Fikr Isiyasi Lisheikh Mohammad Rashid Ridda [Between the Hakimiyya of God and the Authority of the Nation: the Political Thought for Sheikh Mohammad Rashid Ridda]* (Amman: Ministry of Culture, 2010), pp.70-75

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.186-189.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.201-219.

If we examine the approach of Egyptian Salafi trends to the January 25 revolution that led to the downfall of the Mubarak regime, we find that the majority of these trends redefined their ideological positions and political ideas in order to conform to the transforming political reality.¹⁰⁸

The conditions of the contemporary environment indirectly contribute to the formation of the Salafi identity, and help steer its different manifestations. However the most prominent variable here is “crisis.” The way in which Salafis respond and adapt to crisis varies according to differences in conditions reflected across Arab and Muslim societies.

¹⁰⁸ Mohammad Abu Rumman, *al-Salafiyun wal Rabi' al-'Arabi*, Op. Cit., pp.113-127.

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Salafism represents an answer to the question of searching for an identity and self among Arab generations in light of dramatic conditions. Yet, this situation is not fleeting or temporary, rather it remains still influential, and will perhaps expand over the decades and take on a wider scope. In fact, these conditions began to present themselves over past generations. The Six Day War in 1967 led to a high number of refugees and the sense of defeat, but gave also birth to a new political awareness. Similarly, in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War, a generation was disheartened by the impact of this crisis and felt deceived by the Muslim Brotherhood's rhetoric, which presented illusions of victory. They sought to find the source of misguidance and latent flaws within this discourse, as well as the correct path.

This book argues that Salafism is a reaction to the difficult conditions that Arab societies and individuals have experienced. In essence, these conditions arise from an imbalance among various political, economic, psychological, social, or military factors. However, Salafism cannot generally be assessed as a negative reaction to the conditions, challenges, and risks faced by societies and individuals in the Arab world. Individuals and groups are not static entities. Therefore, this book presents a variety of Salafi experiences, different forms of interaction, and the transformation processes within these currents. Through this socio-political perspective, the book assesses Salafism in the context of its surrounding conditions, both positive and negative, and in the light of the historical crisis from which it has emerged.

