

"SALAFIST TRANSFORMATIONS" SIGNIFICANCE, IMPLICATIONS AND PROSPECTS

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الجامعة الأردنية



Center for **Strategic** Studies
University of Jordan



"Salafist Transformations"

Significance, Implications and Prospects

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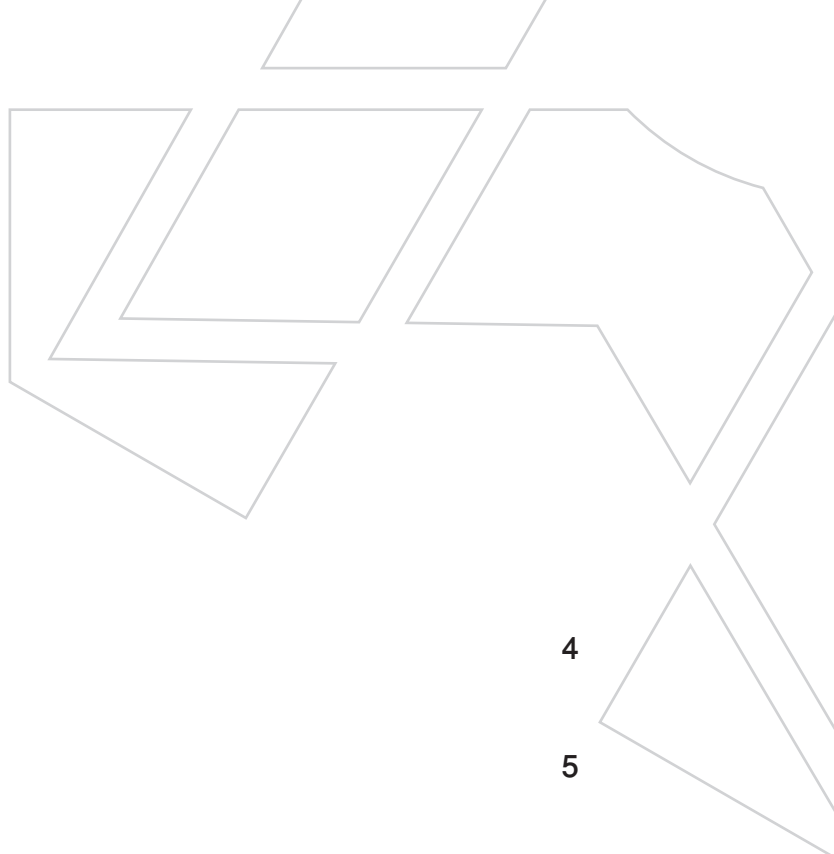


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Foreword

Anja Wehler-Schoeck

Resident Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Jordan & Iraq

Without a doubt, Political Islam is one of the most controversially discussed issues in the MENA region. With the aim of providing information, which both satisfies academic standards and at the same time is accessible and understandable to a non-expert readership, FES Amman launched a series on Political Islam in 2007. Since then, FES Amman has published eight widely received books covering different streams, tendencies and developments with regard to Political Islam.

One of the topics, which has been followed with increasing interest against the backdrop of the developments throughout the Middle East in the past few years, is that of Salafi movements, especially with regard to their political agendas and influence. In October 2012, FES Amman and the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) brought together experts on Salafism as well as members of moderate Salafi groups from different Arab countries to discuss the different movements' discourses towards democracy and political participation. As this conference was met with extraordinary interest and since the topic remains most critical regarding political developments in the entire region, FES Amman and CSS continued their cooperation on this project. In July 2013, a second conference with both experts and moderate Salafis focused on the transformations, which Salafi movements have undergone since the start of the "Arab Spring" with regard to political participation.

It is our pleasure to present you with the collected papers prepared for this conference as well as with a summary of the proceedings and conclusions. We will continue the discussion of this most timely topic. Thank you for your interest in the events and publications of FES Amman.

Foreword

Dr. Musa Shteivi

Director of the Center of Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan

Salafists – aside from their ideological, institutional, and mobilization differences, are currently considered amongst the major Islamist participants in the overall Arab scene. Whether political, social, or cultural; it is especially so in the era of popular Arab demonstrations that grew and developed since early 2011 and are still unfolding up till this day.

Contrary to other Islamist groups and movements, Salafists didn't capture much of specialized research and studies in the fields of social sciences. This topic still presents an open space for a great number of questions and research inquiries related to Salafist ideology, the social and political roles Salafists assume, and their views on vital issues, such as: democracy, public and individual freedoms, minority rights, the relation between religion and state, and the issues of arts, literature and social peace.

Considering the significance of this movement, the second annual conference was held under the title "Salafist Transformations: Indications, Consequences, and Prospects" on July 1st, 2013 in coordination between the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan and Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung, Amman Office, taking into account that we had cooperated before in conducting the "Salafists and Democracy" conference to shed light on the "Salafist Case" from its different dimensions.

This book includes the proceedings of the "Salafist Transformations: Indications, Consequences, and Prospects" conference, with all its valuable working papers, discussions, background papers, and executive summaries that address the nature of transformations Salafists have gone through during the Arab demonstrations era. Primarily of course is moving into political and party activities and joining parliamentary and public space in Egypt, and observing similar signs in other Arab countries such as Tunisia and Yemen among others.

Researchers and specialized experts discuss in this book these transformations its nature, size, depth, and different dimensions, as well as its consequences on the Salafists' currents itself and the Arab societies as well, with what it invokes of important discussions and arguments at the level of dialectical and problematic spheres.

We hope that this book and the fruitful cooperation between our research institution the Center for Strategic Studies and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung with its Director Anja Wehler-Schoeck represent a value added to the field of knowledge of Islamist movements at large, and Salafist movements in specific.

Background Paper

The Salafists in the Arab Spring: Challenges and Responses

By Dr. Mohammad Abu Rumman

(Translation from Arabic: Banan Malkawi)

The Arab democratic revolutions represent a historic turning point in the general contemporary path of Salafi currents, with groups espousing Salafi orientations deciding to venture into political activity and participate in media and cultural discussions in the public domain, starting with the scene in Egypt, and passing through similar transformations in the scenes in Tunisia and Yemen.

Prior to that, the Salafi current in general – with a few exceptions in the Arab and Muslim Worlds – refrained from political participation and political party work, focusing its efforts instead on education and Islamic call (*Da'wa*), and refusing to partake in the “political game” under various pretexts and reasons.

The new phase did not come about without a cost. In return for political gains and prominence in the media, and for the new influence in the public sphere, particularly in the “Arab Spring” countries, these revolutions put the Salafis in the spotlight. On the one hand, they became the “hot topic” in the media. Their prominence increased the political opposition against them in the Arab World as well as the fear factor, which was propagated with regard to their social and cultural projects and their political objectives.

On the other hand, the democratic revolutions and transformations witnessed in most Salafi movements brought about heated internal debates and disputes regarding the legitimacy of these changes. Accepting democracy and the political game, its conditions and entitlements, as well as the fundamental differences between the nature of *Da'wa* work and political party work, were a subject of controversy in Arab Salafi circles. There remained some Salafi orientations that rejected these transformations, insisted on rejecting political participation altogether, or aimed at bringing about change from avenues other than democracy, as does, for example, the *Jihadi* Salafi current.

All this reflected on the nature of the new Salafi commitment to the democratic process: The Salafis tried to distinguish between the philosophical foundations of democracy, and democratic mechanisms by announcing their commitment to the latter rather than the former, and through their acceptance of ballot boxes and the principle of the alternation of power, while not backing away from their higher objective of “Islamizing public life” or the goal of establishing an Islamic State. This raised concerns and doubts from other political currents on whether these Salafi transformations serve the

transitional phase towards inculcating pluralistic democratic systems in the Arab world, or whether they pose a challenge to it instead.

This paper aims to delineate the transformations that occurred within the Salafi trend in a brief and concise way, by providing an overview of the status of Salafi currents prior to the Arab revolutions, of the transformations that occurred in the course of these revolutions, and of the changes they stirred within the Salafi trend, in addition to its impact on the Arab politics in general.

Salafis on the Eve of the Arab Revolutions

What distinguishes the Salafis from the Muslim Brotherhood is that the former are closer to being an “intellectual school of thought,” which traces its roots to the early Islamic eras, reaching back to those that came to be known as “*Ahl al-Hadith*,” (People of the Tradition of the Prophet) with its bases found in the heritage of Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah (661-728 AH) and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241 AH), and in a distinct doctrinal, epistemological, and intellectual system. The intellectual heritage in the modern era is also traced to the *Da'wa* of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, stretching from the later decades of the 19th century to the early decades of the 20th century in Salafi formulations that attempted to integrate this intellectual, doctrinal, and *Da'wa*-based heritage on the one hand, and the culture of the contemporary world on the other. This later approach was espoused by the likes of Muhammad Rashid Rida and Abd al-Hamid ibn Badis, formulations that came to be known as “Nationalist Salafism” or “Rational Salafism.”

But the prevalent contemporary image of Salafism came about in the second half of the 20th century, and even more since the 1970s, through the influence of the Saudi Salafi currents, which extended widely beyond the Saudi Arabian and Arab Gulf scene and into the Arab and Muslim worlds with the momentum of the alliance between *Dawla* (State) and *Da'wa* (Islamic call) in Saudi Arabia, and by means of the oil wealth that enabled the establishment of scientific institutes and that brought about influential Saudi preachers and religious leaders with a large impact on the global Salafi circles, which consequently contributed to the wide permeation of Salafi thought.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the influence of the “Council of Senior Scholars” in Saudi Arabia began to expand and grow through the “official religious establishment” there, with its most prominent figures being Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz and Muhammad ibn Uthaymeen. This approach is manifested in the focus on the religious, doctrinal, and *Da'wa* fields, while abstaining from indulging in politics, establishing political parties and from exercising political opposition. This trend came to be known as “Traditional Salafism,” “Conservative Salafism,” or “Scientific Salafism” as the latter is known in North Africa. The Council of Senior Scholars, headed by Ibn Baaz and Ibn Uthaymeen, came to represent the religious-intellectual frame of reference for this trend, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s.

Despite the Council’s perpetual emphasis on the principle of “obedience to the ruler”, the Salafis’ continued refusal to engage in politics, and their judgment of the opposition in Saudi Arabia as “misguided,” a trend to the right of the Council rose in the 1980s, and became even more stringent in the early 1990s, rejecting political participation,

attacking Islamist parties and accusing them of outstepping rulers and misguidance. Among the spearheads of this trend in Saudi Arabia is Muhammad Amaan al-Jammi, who came from Abyssinia and studied in Saudi Arabia, settling there since the 1970s, teaching at the Islamic University in Madinah and at the Prophet's Mosque.

Al-Jammi and his followers, who came to be known as "*Jammiyyah Salafis*," were renowned for their strict adherence to Salafism and for taking stern positions against other Islamist groups, emphasizing the principle of obedience to rulers in Arab countries, and categorically rejecting any opposition, dissent, and the establishment of political parties as "innovations" that are alien to the religion.

The influence of this school of thought is clearly seen in Yemen, espoused by Muqbil ibn Hadi al-Waadi'i, a Yemeni who studied in Saudi Arabia before he was expelled over claims of his participation in the Juhayman movement in 1981 – a matter he categorically denies – before he settled in Yemen in the early 1980s and began to propagate Salafism there, gaining supporters and followers who adopted his thought and opinions.

In Jordan, Nasser al-Din al-Albani, one of the most prominent sheikhs of "Contemporary Salafism", remained closer to the line of Ibn Baz and Ibn Uthaymeen on the principle of non-interference in politics. His famous expression was: "It is politics to refrain from politics". However, his school of thought and followers leaned closer to the line of *Jammiyyah* Salafism regarding the relationship with the government and towards other Islamists. The latter approach also extended to other Arab countries.

In the 1980s, other Salafi approaches began to emerge, integrating belief in doctrines and Salafi intellectual and epistemological positions towards religious rulings and methodology of religious science, yet differing in their positions towards rulers and engagement in politics. The new approaches rejected the Salafis' abstinence from political affairs under the pretext of "obedience to the ruler" as well as the opinion that such institutions are un-Islamic Western "innovations".

One of the most prominent figures of the new Salafi trend (latter dubbed *Harakiyyah* "Movement/Activist Salafism") is the Syrian national Muhammad Surour ibn Nayef ibn Zayn al-Abideen, who was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood before he left to Saudi Arabia in the late 1960s following restrictions against the Brotherhood in Syria. In Saudi Arabia, Zayn al-Abideen worked as a teacher in the city of Al Buraydah before moving to Kuwait in the 1970s. He later settled in London where he founded the "Islamic Forum" and published "*Al Sunnah*" journal, which became a media and political platform for this trend, gaining popularity in Salafi circles during the 1991 Gulf War. Several Arab governments banned the distribution and circulation of the journal.

Opponents of Surour (mainly followers of Muhammad al-Jammi and Rabie' al-Madkhali) dubbed those who adopted Surour's thought on integrating Salafism and politics as "*Surouriyeen*." Zayn al-Abideen's thought, political analyses, and vision for change began to spread in Saudi Arabia and other countries, and influenced a number of scholars and preachers who later came to be known in Saudi Arabia as "Awakening Sheikhs" (*Mashayekh al-Sahwa*).

In the 1970s, and more pronouncedly during the 1980s, the name of Shaykh Abd al-Rahman Abd al-Khaliq began to emerge. Abd al-Khaliq is of Egyptian origin and studied at the Islamic University in Madinah. In the mid-1960s, he moved to Kuwait to teach there. He contributed to the establishment of the Salafi Heritage Revival Society along with a number of Salafis there, and presented a new Salafi approach on issues of change, reform, and the position towards political participation.

Although Abd al-Khaliq early on paved the way towards political engagement from within the Salafi circle and took part in the Salafis' engagement in political party activities in the 1980s away from the slogans of "obedience to the ruler" and "abstinence from politics," he nevertheless stood against the principle of going against the ruler, which governed the *Jihadi* Salafism ideology in general. Abd al-Khaliq wrote against the use of arms and violence, and called for a commitment to the peaceful means of the Islamic call "*Da'wa*."

Despite the belief adopted by both Zayn al-Abideen and Abd al-Khaliq regarding political participation, their rejection of *fatwas* on "obedience to the ruler," and their positions against *takfir* (excommunication) of other Islamic political parties, Zayn al-Abideen was more akin to the approach of combining the Salafi and the *Qutbiyyah* schools of thought, and appeared more stern in his criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood. Abd al-Khaliq, on the other hand, was more open towards Islamists in general. The difference between the ideologies of the two men later became more clearly reflected in the Yemeni Salafism, where the *Ihsan* Association – which was influenced by Zayn al-Abideen's thought – broke away from the Yemeni *Al Hikma*, which was more influenced by Abd al-Khaliq.

In the early 1990s, and amid varying positions towards the Iraq War, internal Salafi debates intensified with the emergence of a new trend, which announced the inadmissibility of the use of Western armies to liberate Kuwait from the Iraqi army, a position that went counter to the fatwa issued by the Saudi Council of Senior Scholars. Among the prominent figures in this trend were Safar al-Hawali, who wrote a book entitled "The Kissinger Promise and American Objectives in the Gulf," and presented numerous lectures on the rejection of foreign intervention. Further figures were Salman al-Odeh, A'iedh al-Qarni, and Nasser al-Omar, all of whom came to represent a trend known as the "Awakening Current" (*Tayyar al-Sahwa*).

The discourse of the new trend at the time blended between *Da'wa* and a more serious implementation of the Islamic *Shari'ah*, defended the country's identity in the face of liberals, and called for political reforms that would enhance the climate of public freedoms and political participation, and would limit rampant corruption. They addressed letters to the Saudi King calling for political and economic reforms, while simultaneously demanding greater adherence to Islamic *Shari'ah*.

With al-Hawali and al-Odeh leaving the trend, features of their intellectual and political thought began to change and a tendency towards containment of Saudi authorities developed, particularly with the emergence of what came to be known as "*Jihadi* Salafism" and the rise of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia (especially after the September

11th 2001 attacks). Al-Hawali and al-Odeh took to criticizing Al-Qaeda, its discourse, and operations. Along with others, they distributed a letter entitled "On What Basis Do We Coexist?" in response to a letter by American intellectuals following September 11th events entitled "Why Do We Fight?"

For a realistic impression of the spread of *Harakiyyah* (Movement/Activist) Salafism, it is helpful to look at the Salafi groups that have ventured into politics:

- in Kuwait: for example, the Heritage Revival Society (which leaned closer to the *Jammiyyah* Salafism in recent years),
- in Bahrain: the Education "*Al-Tarbiyyah*" Society, with which the *Asalah* Bloc is affiliated (a society that is closer to a blend between *Harakiyyah* and Traditional Salafism),
- in Jordan: the *al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah* Society,
- in Lebanon: the Muhammad Khader group (The Lebanese Islamic Forum for Dialogue),
- in Yemen: the Yemeni *al-Hikma* and *al-Ihsan* societies,
- in Algeria: the followers of Muhammad Ali bal Hajj, one of the leaders of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS),
- and in Saudi Arabia: the Islamic Awakening Current, with figures like Safar al-Hawali, Salman al-Odeh, A'iedh al-Qarni and others.

In the 1990s, another pairing between *Jihadi* and Salafi thought occurred, emerging more clearly in its "activist" form through Al-Qaeda, fostered by what came to be known as the "*Jihadi* Salafi" current. It combined Salafi religious doctrines, which were influenced by the thought of Sayyid Qutb and his emphasis on the concept of *Hakimiyyah* (God's sovereignty), and which chose the path of "*Jihad*" as the legitimate and effective means for change. This trend integrated the internal battle for change (with Arab regimes as the near enemy) with the external battle (the United States, Israel, and the West as the distant enemy) in accordance with a basic premise that there is complicity and support from the United States and the West for the Arab regimes and Israel. This emphasized that victory and earning the legitimacy of the public requires attacking the major powers that support these regimes.

Despite these four basic tributaries in contemporary Salafism (the Traditional-tamed, the *Jammiyyah*, *Jihadi*, and *Harakiyyah* streams), it remains difficult to reduce and classify Salafi groups and trends within specific frameworks, for there is fluidity and overlap, which creates a fragmented image of Salafism, where subsidiary and internal approaches agree on some issues and disagree on others. This phenomenon may be more clearly observed in Egypt, Lebanon, and Kuwait, where we find various associations, groups, and figures that disagree on many of the political positions and peripheral issues.

Salafis in the Wake of the Democratic Revolutions

The Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions sparked fundamental debates and heated discussions in the Arab Salafi circles in general. These revolutions, the essence of which was peaceful populist activism to topple and get rid of despotic regimes, constituted a great shock to the Salafi maxims, which espouse focusing on *Da'wa*, nurturing (*Tarbiyah*) and educational activities, refraining from politics and the media. It pushed the followers of these currents to overturn the debates on political activism. The revolutions imposed a new reality that necessitated different answers than those that were presented in the previous eras, pushing the Salafis towards the recent

transformations, which could be observed.

Egypt became the hotbed for these new climates, shifting the dominance to the Egyptian Salafi current for the first time in the Arab and Muslim context in the past few decades. The Egyptian Salafi current seized this opportunity to move away from Saudi Salafism, becoming the source of inspiration for the new Salafi experience. This result constitutes in-and-of-itself a significant transformation of Arab Salafism, even before the contagious trend spread to Tunisian and Yemeni Salafism (the countries of peaceful Arab revolutions), resonating among Salafis in most Arab countries with its intellectual and political extent.

The Egyptian Salafi scene on the eve of the revolution was split between historical (*Tarikhiyyah*) Salafi associations, which played a role in introducing and disseminating Salafi thought away from the "political game," and a large movement based in Alexandria represented by Salafi *Da'wa*, as well as other Salafi trends, such as the Cairo Salafism, which were closer to the *Harakiyyah* or *Qutbiyyah* frameworks, with some manifestations of the *Jammiyyah* trend (obedience to rulers). There were also renowned independent Salafis who were backed by Salafi satellite TV networks and enjoyed a wide audience, in addition to the *Jihadi* Salafis who re-evaluated their positions and abandoned armed struggle, sanctioning peaceful action while at the same time preserving the foundations of Salafi *Da'wa*.

Despite the differences and the varying positions among Salafis regarding the Egyptian revolution, which was started on January 25th, 2011, the general Salafi current embarked on political involvement and political party activities in the wake of the revolution. The greatest weight that emerged during the elections was the share of *al-Nour* party (with its base being the Salafi *Da'wa* of Alexandria). Among the other political parties that also emerged were *al-Asalah* (which is closer to Cairo *Harakiyyah* Salafism), the Building and Development Party (*Hizb al-Binaa' wa al-Tanmiyah*) with its base in *al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyyah*, and the Safety and Building Party (*Hizb al-Salamah wa al-Binaa'*) with its base being the *Jihad* organization.

It was not possible to embark on this historic turnaround towards engagement in politics without carrying out serious revisions of the Salafi ideological heritage concerning democracy, political parties, alternation of power, and a number of the conditions of entering the "political game" and abiding by its general rules.

However, the Salafi revisions were not complete, and left a wide gray area as well as substantial questions and doubts over the extent to which Salafis would adhere to democracy, pluralism, respect for individual rights and public freedoms. Moreover, there remained concerns about the "Islamization" project insisted upon by Salafis.

Despite this new Salafi theorization, along with their announcement of sanctioning notions of democracy and alternation of power as well as their level of flexibility in dialogue and alliance with various other political forces, the overall Salafi movement refused to acknowledge the concept of a "Civil State," and insisted on the objective of establishing an "Islamic State" instead. Salafis engaged in heated debates with secular currents regarding the constitution and the *Shari'ah*, which became a central factor in

the polarization that engulfed Egypt and Tunisia regarding the identity of the state as well as the relationship between religion and the state in the public sphere.

In the meantime, the lure of Egypt's Salafi transformations stretched across the countries of the Arab Spring, mainly Yemen and Tunisia, where Salafi groups proceeded in forming political parties and engaging in political life and public affairs. Simultaneously, Salafi groups from different walks attempted to grasp the inspiration of this experience, particularly in Arab kingdoms such as Jordan and Morocco, to establish or engage in political parties. Yet this historic moment later came to be laden with differences, disparities, polarization, and heated debates, and the rush was curtailed. What happened to Egypt's Salafis in terms of disagreements and schisms reduced this inspiration and became instead an obstacle in its way.


In the context of overall Arab Salafism, the echo of the era of Arab democratic revolutions found its greatest intellectual extent in an important conference held by Salafi leaders from various Arab countries in Istanbul, Turkey in November 2011, which aimed at deliberating the future of the Salafi current. Despite the fact that the general mood, which prevailed at the conference, was in favor of bringing about a great transformation towards political engagement, the opposition towards accepting democracy and the rules of the political game, as well as the concern over the Salafi approach remained present in the internal debates and deliberations. Perhaps the most important perspective came from Shaykh Abd al-Rahman Abd al-Khaliq, one of the earliest Salafis to theorize on the need for political participation (since the 1970s and 1980s). Abd al-Khaliq spoke about sanctioning democracy as a "transitional phase" (to get rid of dictatorial regimes) towards the establishment of an "Islamic State".

A Hazy Phase and Legitimate Questions

The path of Arab change, later on, did not remain on the same track. What began as peaceful revolutions ended with armed uprisings in Libya and Syria. The new phase in the earlier "Democratic Spring" countries, i.e. Egypt and Tunisia, was not smooth or ripe enough to establish stable democratic systems, particularly with the emergence of an Islamist-Secularist polarization.

At a point when many observers and researchers were on the verge of assuming the death of *Jihadi* Salafism, the new climate, which the Syrian revolution created in the Arab world reeked of divergence, dispute, and sectarian confrontation. The scene looks very different today from the time of the early days of the Arab Democratic Spring era. In such a climate charged with sectarian, doctrinal, and ideological fraught, the spirit of *Jihadi* Salafism thrives, arousing a strong sense of doubt, uncertainty, and haziness not only regarding the future of the Salafi current, but also regarding the reverberations of this new Arab political era and what its consequences are in terms of new maps and features.

Yet the issue of the dimensions of the new Salafi political role remains valid, urgent, and debatable regarding, whether in the Arab Spring countries (Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen), or in those witnessing sectarian tensions (Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq), or even in the kingdoms (Jordan, Morocco, and the Arab Gulf states) that appear – up until now – distant from such severe storms.



PROGRAM
Regional Conference

**“Salafist Transformations”: Significance,
Implications and Prospects**

Amman, Landmark Hotel
Monday, 1 July 2013

9:30 – 10:15: Opening

- H.E. Taher Al-Masri, President of the Senate, Jordan
- Mrs. Anja Wehler-Schoeck, Resident Director of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Jordan and Iraq
- Dr. Musa Shteivi, Director of the Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan

10:15 – 12:30: Salafis in the Countries of the Arab Spring

Egypt

- *Speaker:* Mr. Ahmed Zaghloul Shalata, Researcher on Islamic Movements, Egypt
- *Commentator:* Mr. Nabil Abdel Fatah, Senior Adviser, Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Egypt

Tunisia

- *Speaker:* Mr. Fathi Saidi, Researcher on Salafi Movements and Head of Al Khair Islamic Association, Tunisia
- *Commentator:* Mr. Slaheddine Jourchi, Researcher and Political Analyst, Tunisia

Chairman: Dr. Musa Shteivi, Director of the Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan

13:30 – 15:00: Salafis in Arab Countries of Sectarian Strife

Lebanon

- *Speaker:* Dr. Abdul Ghani Imad, Researcher on Salafi Movements, Lebanon

- *Commentator:* Dr. Mohammad Abu Rumman, Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan

Syria

- *Speaker:* Dr. Abdul Rahman Al Haj, Member of the Syrian National Council, Researcher on Islamist Movements, and Lecturer at the International Islamic University in Malaysia (IIUM)
- *Commentator:* Mr. Ahmad Aba Zeid, Researcher on the Syrian Revolution

Chairwoman: Mrs. Mays Nawayseh, FES Amman, Jordan

15:30 – 17:00: Salafis in Arab Kingdoms

Jordan

- *Speaker:* Mr. Osama Shehada, Researcher on Islamic Movements, Jordan
- *Commentator:* Mr. Hasan Abu Hanieh, Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan

Saudi Arabia

- *Speaker:* Mr. Nawaf Al-Qudaimi, Researcher on Salafi Movements, Saudi Arabia
- *Commentator:* Mr. Saud Al Sarhan, Senior Fellow, Contemporary Political Thought Unit, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Saudi Arabia

Chairman: Mr. Feras Kheirallah, FES Amman, Jordan

17:00 – 17:30: Closing Remarks

- Mr. Nabil Abdel Fatah, Senior Adviser, Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Egypt
- Mr. Slaheddine Jouchi, Researcher and Political Analyst, Tunisia

Chairman: Dr. Mohammad Abu Rumman, Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan



Summary of the Conference Proceedings

By Banan Malkawi

Researchers and experts as well as representatives of Salafi movements from various Arab countries convened in Amman in a conference that examined and scrutinized the transformations witnessed in Salafi movements, particularly in the post-Arab revolutions era. The discussions culminated in recognition of the dire need for adopting substantive and frank dialogue as the best means to dealing with Salafi movements' agendas and visions as well as with their political and social co-existence with other forces in the Arab political scene.

In a regional conference held in Amman, Jordan on Monday, July 1st, 2013, entitled "Salafi Transformations: Significance, Implications, and Prospects," the convening researchers and guests deliberated on the transformations and shifts witnessed in the Salafi current's discourse and its stance towards political participation, with a focus on Salafism in six different Arab countries. The conference was organized by the German Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and the University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies.

The conference analyzed the transformations of Salafi movements and their implications on the Arab political scene in a scholarly and objective manner, away from merely positing political stances for or against Salafism. The conference focused on the Salafi movements in the Arab Spring revolutions countries (Egypt and Tunisia), in the countries battling with the specter of sectarianism (Syria and Lebanon), and in Arab kingdoms (Jordan and Saudi Arabia).

The conference was held under the patronage of the Speaker of the Jordanian Senate, Taher al-Masri, who, in his opening speech, referred to the original meaning of Salafism in Arabic, which derives from the endeavor of real and correct understanding of Islam drawn from its fundamental origins and bases. "We are proud of our *Salaf* (predecessors) who established the Islamic civilization and adopted a progressive civilized life with *Shura* (consensus) and true democracy," he said. Al-Masri nonetheless noted that there is a rising phenomenon of violence and of the practice of *Takfir* (labeling others as infidels) by Salafi movements. Al-Masri stressed the need to study the method of the Prophet Muhammad and the *Salaf* to derive the correct and sound meaning of Islam and its applicability today, and the need to found and preserve the "civil" nature of the state, a matter that ought to be considered by all political groups regardless of their ideological or religious orientations.

On her part, the Resident Director of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in Jordan and Iraq, Mrs. Anja Wehler-Schoeck stressed the necessity of a dialogue, which does not

merely debate about a group of political actors, but includes those representatives who are interested in a constructive discussion on finding peaceful solutions to the challenges currently faced by the MENA region. She pointed out that this conference comes as the sequel to a first one held in October 2012, which had debated the political influence of Salafi movements in the MENA region and had revealed the need for further analysis and discussion on this pressing topic.

The Director of the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, Dr. Musa Shteivi, drew attention to the new shifts and transformations in Salafi movements in the Arab world, which pose important questions about the role of these movements in politics as well as with regard to their views on public freedoms, human rights, and civil liberties, as well as other controversial issues that emerge with the increasing influence of Salafi movements in the Arab public sphere.

Salafism: The Question of Democracy and Political Participation in Arab Spring Countries

The first session discussed Salafi movements in what came to be dubbed as countries of the "Arab Spring," mainly, Egypt and Tunisia, where they witnessed tangible transformations and shifted positions vis-à-vis political participation. The popular revolutions that ousted decades-long rulers in Egypt and Tunisia early in 2011 caused structural and ideological changes in the discourse of Salafi movements in Egypt and Tunisia, which brought about a more robust political engagement as well as the formation and activism of a number of Salafist political parties and movements.

Ahmad Zaghloul Shalata, an Egyptian researcher on Islamic movements, argued that the 2011 Egyptian revolution triggered major structural and intellectual changes in the discourse and activism of Salafi movements in the public sphere. Despite previously holding steadfast to the principle of abstinence from political participation, the revolution brought about Salafi trends and political parties that not only engaged in politics, but also came to influence and dominate the political debate in the country, or in Shalata's words: "Salafi entities have become a substantive part of the political equation."

Egypt's Salafi movements engaged in the democratic process that emerged from the revolution, participated in parliamentary elections, and took an active role in political debates and coalition formation, signaling a dramatic transformation from a focus on social and *Da'wa* (Islamic propagation) work to more political activism and influence on the overall political Egyptian scene.

Shalata noted that the Salafi trends prior to the 2011 revolutions were not unified, but represented various schools within the Salafi spectrum, most of which focused on social and *Da'wa* work. The transformations witnessed in post-revolution days underscored internal divisions and disagreements, which culminated in the formation of several – often diverging and competing – Salafi political parties.

Despite a previously united ideological stance towards non-participation in politics across the Egyptian Salafi spectrum, the revolution prompted several Salafi trends to review their stances vis-à-vis the legitimacy of political parties and democratic

processes, in addition to slight – if any – shifts in Salafi movements' stance towards women's rights and Coptic Christians in leadership positions.

Shalata pointed to the dialectic, if not problematic, relationship between the Salafi trends and the Muslim Brotherhood, highlighted by Salafist concern that their currents would be submerged within a wider mainstream Brotherhood movement. The Salafi movement also fears the Brotherhood's imposition of its own agendas on the Salafis by emboldening certain trends at the expense of others, further exacerbating fragmentation and dissent within the overall Salafi movement. Salafis, Shalata said, are in competition with the Muslim Brotherhood and not in an alliance. Salafis worry of being seen as under the umbrella of the Muslim Brotherhood, which considers itself the "mother" movement that has the political experience and vision required to lead.

The concept of the "sheikh" in contrast to the "politician" was also controversially discussed within Salafi political parties. Certain figures and "sheikhs" dominated rather than people chosen on the basis of their work in political platforms and the institutionalization of political party work. Such dichotomies were most pronouncedly manifested in Al Nur Party, the biggest Salafi party, which made an abrupt and swift decision to engage in politics as a result of revolutionary conditions. This came amidst a lack of strategic planning, signaling a possible crisis within the movement, further fragmentation and dissent, and amid an absence of what Shalata described as "the political brain" in Salafi political parties.

Shalata concluded by noting that the state of fragmentation and disarray within the Salafi movement is contributing to removing the "sanctity" from the Salafi experience. The previous two years serve as a "political exercise" that would eventually lead to the refining and sharpening of the Salafi experience in politics, ushering in further political maturity. The most important accomplishments have been the politicization of the majority of the Salafi movement and its push towards political engagement after decades-long absence from the public sphere, Shalata added. Two years after the Salafi movement entered politics, there is strong need to open a serious dialogue on stalled Salafi positions towards religious and ideological pluralism, individual freedoms, women, the arts, and other controversial issues.

Commenting on Shalata's paper, Nabil Abdel Fatah, the Senior Advisor at Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, highlighted the multiplicity of Salafi currents in Egypt. He stressed that the political role of Salafis did not emerge on the eve of the Arab Spring, but that there rather has been a notable Salafi influence throughout the past decades, which impacted on the Egyptian public – if not the political – sphere. Hassan al-Banna himself, for example, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement, was a student of Muhammad Rashid Rida, one of the most prominent and earliest advocates of Reform Salafism in Egypt. Such representatives of Salafi trends were active and involved in politics, particularly in anti-colonial efforts. Abdel Fatah noted that other earlier Salafi literature, such as the writings of Ahmad Shaker and Mahmoud Shaker, contributed in supplementing the ideology of radical Islamist movements through *fatwas*, which supported religious fanaticism and rationalized the use of violence. Another example is the 1980s literature of *Al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyyah*, whose key publications and writings provided a framework for violence-based activities.

Furthermore, Abdel Fatah described the social and economic strategies used by Salafis to extend their presence and influence in Egyptian public life.

Abdel Fatah noted that there are significant shifts in the political discourse of the Salafi current, which signal a possibility of further revisions and the development of Salafi thought regarding their role in the upcoming phase, an example being recent “moderate” positions adopted by Salafi trends towards the current state of political polarization in Egypt. The current challenges would force any movement to change some of its positions, for example regarding constitutional and legal controls, women’s rights etc. The further complication of the Egyptian situation will undoubtedly increase the pressure on Salafi trends to reconsider some of their positions, Abdel Fatah asserted.

Abdel Fatah nonetheless critiqued Shalata’s paper for what he considered “unobjective” judgments, such as his reasoning regarding the dramatic changes of the structure of political regimes caused by the “Arab Spring.” In Abdel Fatah’s view, this is inaccurate because the “despotic structures of the regimes in Egypt and Tunisia are still very entrenched.” He noted that the former regimes have not collapsed completely; the “power houses” are still there, although figures were removed. He further stated that Shalata’s paper disregarded some smaller Salafi groups. Furthermore, in his opinion, the progress achieved in the political discourse and activism of the Salafis is much more notable and tangible than Shalata’s paper gave credit for.

Abdel Fatah indicated the rise of new Salafi “elites” among Salafi technocrats and businessmen, which further pushes Salafi trends towards the middle of the political spectrum and increases their influence in the public sphere. Such transformations manifest new visions that may be in contrast with those of traditional sheikhs of *Da’wa*-based Salafism. There is a gap, he stated, between Salafi theory and the political practice of Salafi technocrats, businessmen, and followers. This “elite” may lead the Salafi trends in the upcoming phase towards greater transformations in the new political path of Salafism, Abdel Fatah finds, noting that the tendency towards involvement in politics was not anticipated by the Salafi theoretical framework, but that there rather was the “ex-post” effort by Salafis to establish the theory after the revolution.

Comments from the audience on the first session noted that Salafi movements have a “silent consensus” on contemporary issues, such as women for example, and base their theoretical framework on medieval jurisprudence. Others stressed the need to better define Salafism, as the concept remains vague, particularly amid the multiplicity of trends within the movement. Another commentator noted that the judgment of the lack of a political platform within Salafi political parties may be virtually extended to all Arab political parties, who tend to center around figures rather than around political, economic, or social agendas. Commentators also highlighted the question of whether Salafi parties in Egypt will be able to deal with contemporary challenges and whether for the Salafis democracy is a real option or a mere means to an end.

Salafism in Tunisia

Discussing the state of Salafism in Tunisia, Dr. Fathi Saidi, Head of *Al Khair* Islamic Association in Tunisia, argued that despite the variety of Salafi trends in Tunisia, the experience of *Ansar al-Shari'ah* stands out, which dominates with regard to Salafi engagement in politics, representing an emerging force in the Tunisian scene. The Salafi current, Saidi claimed, is the most flexible and adaptable current in Tunisian politics, due to what he considers the "clarity and comprehensiveness of its ideological vision."

Saidi, who is close to *Ansar al-Shari'ah*, rejected the claim that there are significant transformations and shifts in the thought of Jihadi Salafism in particular, highlighting instead that the changes are happening in the current reality of the public sphere surrounding Salafis. This enables Salafi currents to take big strides in moving towards the now-open public sphere, and towards the masses, and public activism, and in opening up towards other various political forces – shifting from the rather secretive, underground, and confrontational stances. These changes in the current Tunisian reality are enabling the more radical trends within the Salafi movement to more clearly express their thought, discourse, and agenda to the Tunisian public. The speed with which the Salafi movement restructured itself in an institutional manner, and the fast and widespread dissemination of its thought, particularly among the youth following the revolution in Tunisia is indicative that the transformations were caused by the development outside the Salafi movement. The swift rise and spread of Salafi movements in post-revolution Tunisia indicates that there is a huge human capacity behind this previously marginalized group.

Commenting on the antagonism by secular movements, which are aided by the West in general and the United States in particular, towards the Salafi current, Saidi said that secular movements in Tunisia "crossed all red-lines" and dealt violently with the Salafis there, out of a fear of the rise to power of an Islamist stream. These attempts aim to create an exaggerated conflict to undermine the Salafi trend. The Jihadi Salafi current, nonetheless, stood its ground in the face of such confrontations, manifested most clearly in the strength of *Ansar al-Shari'ah*, Saidi argued.

The *Ansar al-Shari'ah* Jihadi Salafi movement in Tunisia is the first Jihadi movement to arise from a "civil" origin and operate in a wide populist base, Saidi stressed, noting that the movement has become an "institutionalized organization" and is "smart in reading situations and events – resulting in a studied and systemized field work and indicating that there is an intellectual elite within the movement that directs the political decisions on the ground." Other Islamist movements, Saidi argued, are governed by "pragmatism," rather than ideological directives, through which the Salafi trend distinguishes itself.

Revolutions produce their figures, Saidi stressed, and in the Tunisian scene, the newly emerging forces and figures will have a Salafi tendency, reflecting the Tunisian public mood which is in tune with the intellectual, ideological and political agenda propagated by the Jihadi Salafi movement in Tunisia. The experience of the Jihadi Salafi current in Tunisia has been "very successful," he asserted.

Saidi pointing to “historical inevitabilities and prospects” regarding the Salafi experience in Tunisia; the secular orientation in the region is now “dying,” as becomes evident through the clear populist polarization towards the Islamists, and through the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood experience and similar organizations such as Al Nahda. The latter were albeit presented with the opportunity to engage in political work, but they will inevitably fail because, according to Saidi, “social work does not produce sound political entities, but military or political movements do.” The Salafi current, Saidi asserts, is the incubator that produces future leadership, and is the force that will confront the “other,” i.e. the current regimes.

Salaheddine Jourchi, a Tunisian researcher, journalist, and political analyst and a prominent figure in what came to be known in Tunisia as the “Progressive Islamist Current,” commented on Dr. Saidi’s paper. He reiterated that in Tunisia, the Salafi current is not one harmonious stream, but is rather represented now by at least three distinct trends: one composed of followers of the Saudi Salafi school of thought, which espouses non-confrontation with the rulers and avoids violence; a reformist stream, which reconciles the Salafi message with a methodology of gradual reform; and the now most prominent stream, that of *Ansar al-Shari’ah*, which enjoys clear engagement and scope in Tunisia. There are different “Salafisms” and not one stream of Salafism, despite the fact that the dominant force among these trends is the Jihadi Salafi stream, which emerged most prominently following the Tunisian revolution, having been “underground” during the era of the Ben Ali regime.

In critiquing Saidi’s paper, Jourchi praised the “clarity” of the arguments made, noting nonetheless that it was full of generalizations, which reflect the essence of Salafi thinking: extreme self-confidence, considering themselves the true illustrators of the spirit of Islam, and seeing themselves as the best “alternative.”

A major challenge facing the Jihadi Salafi current in Tunisia today regards its relationship with Al-Nahda movement, which – before the revolution – used to see the entire Salafi movement as a natural extension of itself. Jourchi clarified that the transformations heavily impacted on the relationship between the Salafi current in general and Al Nahda movement in particular. Despite the Salafis’ initial attempts to present a conciliatory rhetoric with other political forces and its support for Al Nahda movement, later developments witnessed conflicting visions that reached the level of clash, confrontation, and strong disagreement between the two trends. It is difficult for Al Nahda to build a sustainable dialogue with *Ansar al-Shari’ah*, Jourchi noted, because of the difference in the nature of each movement’s agenda and ideology.

Jourchi also highlighted that despite *Ansar al-Shari’ah*’s rejection of “pragmatism,” they nonetheless manifest it within the framework of their politics, which is an essential element in their methodology of politics and change. This, according to Jourchi, is a fundamental contradiction in the movement’s discourse. The confrontational discourse of *Ansar al-Shari’ah*, Jourchi stated, will put it in direct conflict with most other political forces. He questioned their refusal of dialogue with opponents, such as Al Nahda and the secularists, which contrasts with their openness for dialogue with the West.

Commentators from the audience felt that Saidi’s presentation revealed the seriousness

and dangers of the Jihadi Salafi agenda, its exclusionary spirit towards others, and its sanctioning of violence. The “dogmatic” discourse of the Jihadi Salafi current, as presented by Saidi, led one commentator to say that he felt that his citizenship was in danger.

Salafis and the Sectarian Question in Lebanon and Syria

The second session deliberated on the Salafi presence in Arab countries facing the specter of sectarian strife, particularly Lebanon and Syria. Dr. Abdul Ghani Imad, researcher on Islamist movements, presented his analysis of the evolution of the Salafi current in Lebanon, particularly over the past few years, pointing to the Salafi movement’s inability to unify its frames of reference and organizational frameworks despite repeated attempts. Imad presented the movement as rather diverse and heterogeneous, with many groups being organized around particular Sheikhs, and religious figures and charitable organizations spread in different regions of the country. The groups lack a clear ideological or political discourse, particularly towards the socially and religiously diverse, and sectarian nature of Lebanese society.

Imad noted the significant impact of the Syrian revolution on the Salafi current in Lebanon, as seen through the rise of a phenomenon of *Umara’* (princes), such as Salem al-Rifa’i and Ahmad al-Assir, – figures that have come to be associated with strong support for the Syrian revolution, and their political and ideological clash with Hezbollah. Ambiguously, the confrontations recently escalated into direct clashes between Al Assir and the Lebanese Army.

Imad indicated that Salafi trends in Lebanon are in direct antagonism towards the dominance of Shiite Hezbollah in Lebanese politics, this “super power,” which constitutes a worrisome force for Sunnis as a whole in Lebanon, and for Salafis in particular.

Dr. Muhammad Abu Rumman, researcher on Islamist movements and Islamic thought at the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, commented on Dr. Imad’s paper, elaborated on the strong impact of the Syrian revolution on the Lebanese Salafi current and on the dominance of the sectarian tendencies and the confrontation with Hezbollah.

Abu Rumman noted that the emergence of Salafi trends in various cities such as Tripoli and Sidon, and in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon is more profound than the Salafi presence in the capital Beirut, where the Sunni bourgeoisie remains closer to the approach and discourse of *Al Mustaqbal* Current. Abu Rumman finds that the Salafi option remains secondary for the Sunni community in Lebanon, despite its recent impact and activism vis-à-vis the Syrian revolution and the Sunni “solicitude” with it.

The Lebanese Salafi current, in Abu Rumman’s opinion, represents the Sunni far-right and radical path in the face of the Shiite right, represented by Hezbollah. Salafism, until now, does not represent a substantial choice for most Sunnis in Lebanon. The internal structure of the Salafi current in Lebanon remains fragile, particularly regarding the challenge of what Imad called “*Umara’*” (princes), or in the words of Abu Rumman, war lords of Salafi trends. Salafi currents in Lebanon have yet to present a clear vision for Lebanon and its future, Abu Rumman added.

Salafism in Syria

Dr. Abdul Rahman al Haj, a member of the Syrian National Council, a researcher on Islamist movements, and a lecturer at the International Islamic University in Malaysia (IIUM), presented an overview of the Salafi trends in Syria, distinguishing between the Jihadi, *Harakiyyah*, and *I'lmiah* (rational/traditional) Salafi streams. The Syrian Revolution, argued Al Haj, has prompted large numbers of Syrians to lean towards Salafism.

The “neo-Salafi” trends in Syria are a rather fragile and unfixed phenomenon that emerged as a result of the conditions in the country. The exceptional circumstances of the Syrian Revolution pushed masses towards Salafism without solid conviction or a clear understanding of Salafi thought.

Despite the bitter defeat of Salafi fighters in the early 1980s at the hands of the late Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, the actions of the regime in the past decade have created a ripe climate for the rise of radical Salafi groups, particularly in rural and peripheral areas that suffered from marginalization and later became a hotbed for Jihadi Salafi resistance to regime forces in the ongoing Syrian revolution today. He noted that most members of Al Nusra Front are from rural areas.

The Syrian regime attempted from the onset to smear the revolution with a sectarian nature and militarize it, manifested in its release of Jihadis and Salafis from Sudnayah prison in the early months of the revolution, in an effort to divert the revolution’s track from being a popular uprising towards it becoming a sectarian and civil war. The regime, Al Haj argued, marketed itself as a champion and defender of the “civil” Syrian state against extremism and terrorism.

With the apparent fragile and unstable make-up of Salafi movements in Syria, Al Haj anticipated that the future of Salafism in Syria will depend on the development of the organizational differences between the various groups. The rising association of armed conflict with “religion and politics,” Al Haj argued, may inevitably lead to a greater role for military coups and interventions. Hence, the future of Salafism may be wagered upon the stability of the country and the return of civilian life.

Commenting on Al Haj’s paper, Ahmad Aba Zeid, a Syrian researcher with a focus on the Syrian revolution, discussed the Salafi intellectual map, particularly the armed factions within the Syrian scene, highlighting the emergence of *Jabhat al-Nusra* (Al Nusra Front) as a representative of Jihadi Salafism, and *Ahrar al-Sham* as a faction closer to local Syrian Salafism. He pointed to the emergence of various other Salafi orientations and channels, classifying the Salafi trends into local, national, and international orientations. Aba Zeid agreed with Al Haj that the majority of the new Salafi trends and orientations are “fragile,” directly related to and impacted by the extraordinary circumstances created by the Syrian revolution.

Commentators from the audience critiqued the papers on both Syria and Lebanon as “politicized,” mainly because of the nature of the ongoing conflict and the impact of sectarianism in the two countries. Audience members agreed with the researchers

and commentators that the problematic “security” situation in both Syria and Lebanon created a ripe environment for the rise of militant forms of Salafism.

Political commentator Lamis Andoni noted that sectarianism is present even in mainstream Sunni and Shiite discourses, not only in Salafi discourse. Hassan Abu Hanieh asserted that the sectarian discourse is “purely political,” used and exploited in reaction to Hezbollah’s and Iran’s interference in Syria. Sectarianism, Abu Hanieh argued, is a “façade political identity commonly used in the instigation and mobilization in conflicts.”

Salafis in the Arab Kingdoms

The third session focused on the theme of Salafi experiences in Arab monarchies, particularly Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Salafi researcher and columnist Osama Shehada noted that the Salafi current in Jordan interacted and engaged with the events of the Arab Spring, which led to the emergence of new opinions within Salafi circles, who are deliberating on and reconsidering their positions towards political engagement and participation in elections. Yet the internal conditions within the Salafi current in Jordan are not yet ripe for such an experience, notwithstanding the official opposition towards Salafi engagement in the public sphere, Shehada argued.

The reaction of the Jordanian Salafi current towards the Arab revolutions varied, with trends such as the Imam Al-Albani Society remaining apprehensive regarding the conflict over governance between Islamists and secularists, both of which the trend finds unwelcome. This trend considers the Arab revolutions as a *fitna* (strife). The society nonetheless supports the Syrian revolution, due to its sectarian nature. Regarding political engagement in general, the Al-Albani Society continues to reject participation in local and parliamentary elections.

The Qur’an and Sunnah Association, another Salafi trend, does not reject political participation, and welcomed the Arab revolutions, despite choosing to continue focusing on *Da’wa* and charitable work, and most prominently, on humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees in Jordan. Independent Salafis – or what the media, sometimes mistakenly according to Shehada, dubs “Jihadi Salafis” – supported the revolutions, and came to take a keen interest in political participation and regional affairs. Despite minor differences between the groups, the common ground in frames of reference and ideology outweigh the differences, Shehada stated.

The Salafi current in general did not take any interest in political participation before the revolutions, Shehada noted. The political climate in Jordan as a whole is not fruitful and lacks the prospects for serious political work, Shehada remarked, citing the lack of accomplishments by Jordanian pro-reform activists after two years of continuous protests, and the general political stalemate by both the regime and the opposition.

Despite the clear lack of motivation and action towards political participation in recent years, Shehada delineated more recent developments in the political discourse of Jordan’s Salafis and a greater involvement in the public sphere. He cited the example of the statements issued by the Jordanian Salafi movement regarding important political events in the region and their infrequent endeavors to partake in local and parliamentary elections.

Tangible transformations within the Salafi thought in Jordan, impacted by events of the Arab Spring, manifested themselves through the establishment of societies and institutions pushing more Salafis towards volunteer and community work. There were also some shy initiatives to establish Salafi political parties, which did not succeed because of resistance to the idea from within the current and official regime interference to abort the attempts. For Salafis, politics is only a part of the religious and intellectual *Da'wa*, not the whole of their interest, Shehada noted. Most Salafis in Jordan prioritize the reform of the individual and the society first and foremost, rather than the reform of the state.

Shehada anticipates a new role for Salafis in Jordan in the future, but such developments require time and the emergence of new young leaderships that may present new visions and initiatives. Furthermore, most importantly, this needs a healthy overall political climate in the kingdom. Shehada stressed the need to deal with the Salafi movement objectively. Moreover, the concepts of democracy and secularism, and the identity of the *Ummah* and society, must be better defined and conceptualized in support of freedom, dignity, and justice rather than laying the groundwork for secular-military versions that would lead anew to despotic regimes. The “negative” position of Salafis in Jordan regarding democracy has not changed, Shehada asserted, noting that the Islamic-Secular clash in Egypt played a major role in reinforcing this position.

It is expected of the Salafis to change and make concessions – however, this contradicts the very nature of pluralism and of the freedoms espoused by secularists and forces antagonistic to Islamist movements, Shehada argued. Openness towards Salafi movements ought to be expressed without preconditions or imposition of special agendas, if there truly is a genuine vision towards pluralism. Attempts to contain Salafism and subject it to certain conditions will only produce a “valueless deformed entity.”

Commenting on Shehada’s paper, Hassan Abu Hanieh, a Jordanian researcher in Islamic philosophy and Islamist movements, questioned Salafi acceptance of democracy, pluralism, and the “other.” Speaking about the wider Salafi spectrum across the Arab World, Abu Hanieh argued that Salafi thought would not develop as long as they considered themselves the “Redeemed Sect” or the “Victorious Sect,” and their thought harbored the sense that only the Salafis represented the “truth.” Such a unilateral exclusionist thinking may not develop to accept pluralism, except as a means of tactic, Abu Hanieh said.

Abu Hanieh charged Salafi movements and thought with “ideological dogmatism and rigidity,” which contributes to further divisions and fragmentations within the movement. Abu Hanieh argued that Salafi trends have not succeeded in Arab kingdoms such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco, despite the fact that these countries are a ripe environment and a depository of great numbers of Salafi followers, including Jihadi Salafis. He stated that the Salafi principle of obedience to the ruler, coupled with the fact that regimes in such kingdoms enjoy a “religious legitimacy” contributed immensely to the marginalization and failure of these movements to build a solid ground, whether on the Jihadi front or on the reform and traditional *Da'wa*-based levels.

Commentator Muath Awaysheh questioned Abu Hanieh's argument that Salafis have failed in Arab kingdoms, questioning the standard of "success" in his argument. Similarly, Osama Shehada asked that if Salafis did not succeed in the Arab kingdoms, then what ideology did indeed succeed. He noted that all other ideologies, such as liberalism, Nasserism, communism, etc. did also not found ripe ground in Arab monarchies, considering the nature of the political regimes. The ideologically rigid nature of Salafi thought, coupled with the internal divergences and disagreements, resulted in a fragmented makeup of the Salafi movement, Abu Hanieh said. The sociology of change affects the Salafis, but in a very slow manner.

Salafism in Saudi Arabia

Moving on to Saudi Arabia, Nawaf al-Qudaimi, a journalist and researcher on Salafi movements, gave an overview of the evolution and development of Salafism in the Kingdom, noting that there are various trends, including traditional Salafism, Jihadi Salafism (linked to Al-Qaeda), and *Harakiyyah* Salafism, which believes in political participation and the importance of political engagement. This latter trend, Al-Qudaimi stated, interacted most with the Arab democratic revolutions, and their impact was most clearly reflected in its political discourse.

Al-Qudaimi noted that the Salafi movements throughout the Arab world bore many similarities, even in their divisions and trends, and in the level of influence they exerted as a result of contemporary developments in the post-revolution era. He presented a classification between Salafi movements in countries that witnessed revolutions and were directly impacted by dramatic changes, compared to Salafi movements in other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, which were impacted by proxy from a distance.

The abrupt and sudden emergence of Arab revolutions caused a sense of confusion to everyone, including Salafis, on a political, intellectual, and a theoretical level. Pressing and important questions of democracy, political participation, citizenship, international relations, etc. moved from the theoretical sphere to the practical sphere. This inevitably had an influence on the intellectual discourse of Salafis, Al-Qudaimi argued.

He argued that such transformations in Salafi discourse were not natural shifts as a result of study, revision, and religious and jurisprudential (*fiqhi*) deliberations, but rather a sharp transformation in the political scene itself. Several Saudi Salafi figures had earlier stated that elections as a democratic tool were a manifestation of *kufir* (disbelief). However, they shifted their positions following the Arab revolutions to call on Egyptians to partake in the voting process.

In Saudi Arabia, it is difficult to classify Salafi trends mainly because there aren't any public movements, organizations, or political parties or blocs, compared to countries such as Egypt and Tunisia, Al-Qudaimi explained. Contrary to other Arab countries, the Salafi movement in Saudi Arabia is not as fragmented, with only minor internal divisions. An exception is the Salafi trend in Saudi Arabia, which is independent from the power structure; most of this revolves around the *Harakiyyah* Salafism rather than the traditional form of Salafism espoused by the state itself.

Al-Qudaimi argued that the *Harakiyyah* Salafi school of thought in Saudi Arabia witnessed the most tangible change and transformation in its stance towards political issues, particularly after the emergence of the Arab Spring. Salafi figures previously disagreed with concepts of democracy and its tools and mechanisms, such as elections, separation of powers, and alternation of power – rejecting them as un-Islamic methods of choosing the political form of governance and instead leaning more towards the traditional heritage of *Al-Siyasah al-Shari'iyah* (Islamic theory of governance) that are espoused by the *Salaf* as concepts disassociated with the notions of the modern nation-state.

The revolutionary atmosphere of change that caused an intellectual and even spiritual shake-up created somewhat of a responsive stance towards acceptance of such concepts, Al-Qudaimi noted, which could be witnessed in the discourse of Salafi figures such as Safar al-Hawali. Al-Qudaimi argued, however, that such figures did not present a theoretical ground for such transformation of thought and discourse.

Highlighting the changes in *Harakiyyah* Salafi discourse towards the “political game,” two phases could be observed following the Arab revolutions: The first phase witnessed steps towards a more “civil” and democratic discourse. The second phase, however, saw a clear regression in this “civil” discourse, particularly with the impact and influence of the Syrian revolution and the military and sectarian nature it has taken lately. The growth of Jihadi discourse particularly after the “peaceful” Syrian revolution turned into violent strife, along with the complex and confused state of politics in Egypt, contributed to this counter-shift in Saudi Salafi discourse, and as Al-Qudaimi expressed it, “these factors reignited the Jihadi discourse in both its classical and global formulations, a discourse we thought we had relatively overcome.”

Saud Al-Sarhan, Senior Fellow at the Contemporary Political Thought Unit of the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies in Saudi Arabia commented on Al-Qudaimi’s paper, arguing that there are indeed multiple variations of Salafi trends in Saudi Arabia, which “may only have the name in common, but in fact are substantially diverse” – ranging from *Takfiri* extremist trends to more placid forms of Salafism. In explaining that the Saudi state is a “Salafi” state, Al-Sarhan distinguished between the *Harakiyyah* Salafism, which espouses a *Qutbiyyah* ideology, which integrates the thought of Ibn Taymiyyah and Sayyid Qutb and the traditional Salafism in Saudi Arabia, represented by the Council of Supreme Scholars as authoritative body.

Al-Sarhan suggested that there are multiple contradictions and paradoxes in the *Harakiyyah* Salafi movement vis-à-vis Arab democratic revolutions and the ongoing political events in the region. He accused *Harakiyyah* Salafism in Saudi Arabia of being “opportunistic and hypocritical,” manifested in their acceptance of elections and political participation only if they guarantee their success. The same Salafi figures who called on Egyptians to vote in favor of the constitution, would consider the move forbidden and *Kufr* if called for within Saudi Arabia. This explains the dramatic transformation in their discourse from a “civil” to a “jihadi” one, Al-Sarhan argued.

In conclusion, commentators from the audience found that the transformations witnessed in Salafi discourse vis-à-vis politics and public engagement as indicative

of Salafism being prone and ripe for accepting the “other” and accepting the rules of the “political game” and democracy, irrespective of the labels, which would render the argument that Salafi discourse is “ideologically rigid” unsubstantiated.

Several commentators argued that the status of Salafis is dependent on the level of openness presented to them. In countries that have experienced revolutions and political breakthrough, Salafis have emerged as substantial political and social forces. A member of the audience argued that the “opportunistic” label given by Al-Sarhan to Saudi Salafis may be extended to all Arab political forces; secularists themselves would dismiss those who vote for their opponents, a process he dubbed as “human political nature.”

Conclusions

In conclusion, it was understood that throughout the Arab and Muslim World various manifestations of Salafism can be observed rather than a homogenous Salafi movement, which represents unified perspectives and discourses. Salafism did not spring from the recent Arab revolutions; the current with its ideology and followers have been present for centuries. However, the Arab revolutions undoubtedly created an opportunity for Salafis to become more influential in the public scene. The transformations, which have been witnessed in Salafi discourse, particularly regarding political participation, prompted significant questions and apprehensions regarding Salafi ideology and thought.

The shifts in Salafi discourse are not uniform among various Salafi currents and not all currents witnessed transformations. There rather has been a great level of variance among ideological trends and also between Salafi movements in different countries. Salafi discourses were influenced by the actual political and social conditions and the transformations in the countries they operate in. Future developments are highly dependent on the stability and maturity of the overall political climate in each country. There are neither clear definitions nor a stringent conceptualization of modern notions of democracy and its tools in the Arab political “mindset,” particularly with regard to pluralism amid competing and divergent political ideologies.

In the closing session Nabil Abdel Fatah of Egypt and Salaheddine Jourchi of Tunisia both concluded that Salafism represents an important part of Arab and Muslim societies that ought not be overlooked or denied, but rather be granted the right to express its positions and thought. The Salafi movement is part and parcel of the intellectual, cultural, and political make-up of the Arab world, and hence, ought to be dealt with – and integrated – as a structural component of the overall social, political, and religious mindset. Both emphasized that the only option in the relationship with the Salafi movements is substantive and objective dialogue aimed to instill understanding regarding the rules of the political equation that governs all parties, whether Islamist or non-Islamist.

Jourchi stressed that Salafis, like everyone else, are prone to political engagement, and are influenced by the political climate around them. As part of the Arab Muslim society, they should be integrated into its political and social cycles; any approach to antagonize and annihilate them would only prompt them to retaliate with more

radicalism. "We want Salafis to be part of the transformations, rather than being a threat to these transformations," Jourchi said. Salafis ought to take measures to avoid disconnecting the ties with the general public and other political forces, according to Jourchi, which includes the willingness to listen to different perspectives and to renounce violence.

On his part, Abdel Fatah highlighted the importance of liberating the overall Arab "mindset" vis-à-vis the other in dealing with religious and political ideologies, and stop the tendency of demonizing the Salafi movement based on negative stereotypes – the latter, particularly considering the multiplicity of Salafi orientations. He stressed the necessity of changes in the discourse and the approach to public affairs among Salafi currents. They need to rid themselves of the discourse of *Takfir* and their sanctioning of physical, verbal and symbolic violence.

Salafis, Abdel Fatah said, ought to live up to the challenges facing them, which includes the bridging of the gap between traditional (*Fiqhi* and religious) discourse and a progressive contemporary reality. They need to rethink and define their position towards the state and their relationship with the religious, sectarian, and ideological other, with an understanding that in countries such as Egypt, Lebanon and Syria there is pluralism within society. There is also a need to encourage and promote new upcoming figures and generations to develop contemporary Salafi thought with a social, economic, and political platform. They need to find answers to the monumental problems facing several Arab countries in rebuilding and renewing the concept of state, and they need to develop a real model and platform for economic development.

Abdel Fatah and Jourchi also called on the Salafi movement to adopt more open channels and listen to the perspectives and opinions of others, and to recognize that political work requires concessions as well as intellectual and political flexibility, and most importantly, the rejection of violence in all its physical and symbolic and verbal manifestations. Dialogue, finding common grounds, and the toning down of discourses may facilitate the integration of Salafism within the overall structure of Arab political life.

The key question that remains to be answered is how to agree on a formula for solving political disagreements in a peaceful manner, in a way, which the various political forces in the Arab world, including Salafis, can accept. The answers to this will depend on the developments and ramifications of the ongoing transformations in the Arab world as a whole. It is a question, which needs to be addressed by all political actors in building a political culture, regarding the extent to which the latter will be founded on notions such as alternation of power, pluralism and democracy.