

# Salafi-Jihadism: A 1,400-Year-old Idea Rises Again

A Monograph

by

MAJ Jacob M. Teplesky  
United States Army



School of Advanced Military Studies  
United States Army Command and General Staff College  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

2016

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

**REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE**

*Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188*

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.  
**PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 02/18/2016	<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> SAMS Monograph	<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b> JUN 2015 - MAY 2016
--	---	--

<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> Salafi-Jihadism: A 1,400-Year-old Idea Rises Again	<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>
	<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>
	<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>

<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> MAJ Jacob M. Teplesky Major, United States Army	<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>
	<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>
	<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>

<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> School of Advanced Military Studies 320 Gibson Avenue	<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>
---	---

<b>9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027-2301	<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>
	<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>

**12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**  
Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited.

**13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES**

**14. ABSTRACT**  
Studying the history and evolution of Salafi-Jihadism provides insight into how its followers behave. This monograph asserts that to understand the Salafi-Jihadist movement, two historical time periods must be examined: 1960–1978 and the year 1979. The former period marked the era of the Arab cold war, a zero-sum struggle between Egyptian-led Pan-Arabism and Saudi-led Pan-Islamism. However, no single year in the post–World War II era was more important to the Middle East than 1979. In that year, the Iranian revolution, the Salafist seizure the Grand Mosque in Mecca, and the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan significantly altered the political landscape of the Middle East and also led to the militarization of Salafism.

**15. SUBJECT TERMS**  
Salafi-Jihadism, Saudi Arabia, Islam, Pan-Islamism, al-Qaeda, ISIS

<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b>	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
<b>a. REPORT</b>	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b>	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b>			MAJ Jacob M. Teplesky
(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)		<b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)</b>

Monograph Approval Page

Name of Candidate: MAJ Jacob M. Teplesky

Monograph Title: Salafi-Jihadism: A 1,400-Year-old Idea Rises Again

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Monograph Director  
Alice Butler-Smith, PhD

\_\_\_\_\_, Seminar Leader  
Paul G. Schlimm, COL

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies  
Henry A. Arnold III, COL

Accepted this 10th day of May 2016 by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, Graduate Degree Programs  
Robert F. Baumann, PhD

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the US Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

Fair use determination or copyright permission has been obtained for the inclusion of pictures, maps, graphics, and any other works incorporated into this manuscript. A Work of the United States Government is not subject to copyright, however further publication or sale of copyrighted images is not permissible.

## **Abstract**

Salafi-Jihadism: A 1,400-Year-old Idea Rises Again, by MAJ Jacob M. Teplesky, United States Army, 62 pages.

Salafi-Jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, and ISIS threaten US national security and the stability of the Middle East. The ongoing fighting in Syria and Iraq and Salafi-Jihadist global terrorist attacks from Paris to Mali show that we understand relatively little about how this radical ideology propounds violent goals and propels its followers to devise strategies to achieve them. The United States has fought al-Qaeda affiliates and ISIS for fifteen years without preventing them from plotting and executing attacks against the interests of the United States and its allies. For a military approach (i.e., an organized, executable degrading strategy) to be effective in countering an unconventional threat such as Salafi-Jihadism, it must be based on the richest possible profile of the group's mindset.

This monograph asserts that to understand the Salafi-Jihadist movement, two historical time periods must be examined: 1960–1978 and the year 1979. The former period marked the era of the Arab cold war, a zero-sum struggle between Egyptian-led Pan-Arabism and Saudi-led Pan-Islamism. The defeat of Pan-Arabism resulted in a seismic transfer of power from Egypt to Saudi Arabia, which remains unchallenged today in its dominance of the Sunni world and unhindered in its financial support to Salafi-Jihadi groups. However, no single year in the post–World War II era was more important to the Middle East than 1979. In that year, the Iranian revolution challenged Saudi Arabia for control of the Muslim world, Salafis tested the Saudi regime by besieging the Grand Mosque in Mecca, and Muslim nations worldwide reacted violently to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. The historical events that transpired from 1960 through 1979 significantly altered the political landscape of the Middle East and also led to the militarization of Salafism.

## Contents

Acknowledgments .....	v
Introduction .....	1
The Roots of Salafi-Jihadism .....	8
Tenets of Salafi-Jihadism: Sources of Sunni Belief and Islamic Law.....	8
Subgroups of Salafism: Common Creed, Different Method .....	11
Salafi-Jihadi Ideologues: Scholarly Consensus among Jihad’s Intellectual Godfathers ...	15
Pan-Islamism .....	20
Combatting the Spread of Pan-Arabism with Pan-Islamism.....	21
The Influx of the Muslim Brotherhood: The Militarization of Salafism.....	24
The Salafist Awakening Movement: The Emergence of Salafi-Jihadism.....	29
1979 .....	33
The Iranian Revolution: A Threat to Sunni Dominance of the Muslim World.....	34
The Siege of the Grand Mosque: 100,000 Hostages Catch al-Saud’s Attention.....	39
The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, and the Birth of Al-Qaeda .....	46
Conclusion.....	54
Bibliography .....	59

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to gratefully acknowledge my family and monograph director, who have journeyed with me throughout the monograph process. This product could not exist without them. First, I owe an enormous amount of gratitude to my wife, Lindsay, and my three children, Sasha, Rose, and Isaac. Without your constant support and happiness, this project would not have been possible. Lindsay, thank you for your patience, support, and reassurance. Your passionate dedication to parenting our children while I was at the library or in the “fortress of solitude” reminds me how blessed I am to be married to you. Second, to my parents, Daniel and Barbara Teplesky, thank you for your commitment to your children’s education. Your sacrifices and encouragement provided me with the educational foundation that drives me as a soldier and scholar. Finally, I am deeply grateful for the tireless support and dedication of my monograph advisor, Dr. Alice Butler-Smith. Thank you for believing in me as a researcher and writer and for the vast amount of time you spent explaining Middle East history to me. My academic encounters with Islamic and Middle Eastern history have prepared me well as an operational planner. Thank you.

## Introduction

Historian Peter Stearns argues, “People live in the present. They plan for and worry about the future ... and given all the demands that press in from living in the present and anticipate what is yet to come, why bother with what has been?”<sup>1</sup> But history enables us to interpret the present. The thirty thousand Iraqi soldiers and policemen guarding Mosul, Iraq in June 2014 understood the history and culture of Salafi-Jihadism, and that is why they fled when the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) overran the city; they knew that the alternative was to be butchered. The entire history of the Salafi nexus is soaked in the blood of military conquest as part of a theology of death.<sup>2</sup> From the mid-eighteenth century to the end of the 1920s, the Saud family used Salafi warriors, whose preachers spread the gospel of jihad, to seize territory in wars of religion and implement *sharia* (Islamic law). Salafi warriors killed fellow Sunnis whom they viewed as not fully embracing the rigors of the only true faith, targeted the Shi’a as legitimate prey, and burned non-Salafi mosques. After Salafis razed the city of Karbala in 1802 and killed four thousand of its citizens, in 1803 the citizens of Mecca surrendered to them without a fight.

Using the same merciless tactics as their ancestors, ISIS represents a reincarnation of the nineteenth-century Salafi warriors. Exploiting Twitter and Facebook one week prior to the assault on Mosul, the Salafi-Jihadists of ISIS posted a video called *Saleel al-Sawarim* (“Clanging of the Swords”), which threatened with death any who resisted ISIS’s advance and ended with scenes of ISIS Salafi-Jihadists gunning down Shi’a soldiers and former members of the Sunni Anbar

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Stearns, “Why Study History,” American Historical Association, accessed December 23, 2015, [https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/archives/why-study-history-\(1998\)](https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/archives/why-study-history-(1998)).

<sup>2</sup> Laurent Murawiec, *The Mind of Jihad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 27.

Awakening Council.<sup>3</sup> More than three hundred years after the citizens of Mecca surrendered without a fight, the citizens of Mosul did the same.

Should political leaders and media pundits be baffled and shocked by the flight of Iraqi security forces and the citizens of Mosul in the face of ISIS? A brief study of Middle Eastern history would have sufficed to familiarize them with the vicious Salafi-Jihadist ideology that legitimizes the actions of ISIS, dispelling the common, simplistic view of today's jihadists as medieval apocalyptic fanatics who kill for the sake of killing. Salafi-Jihadist ideology provides just cause and proper authority for waging war against apostate governments and Western targets. If we fail to understand the history and theory underlying Salafi-Jihadist groups' use of violence to topple regimes and impose *sharia*, we will not grasp the current operating environment or enemy doctrine. As Stephen Coughlin has said, "The United States is currently fighting this war according to Barnes and Noble standards," implying that an introductory book available at Barnes and Noble does not provide adequate insight into the threat drivers of Salafi-Jihadist groups or an understanding the doctrinal writings that explain their violent actions.<sup>4</sup>

Studying the history and evolution of Salafi-Jihadism provides insight into how its followers behave today. This allows for a better understanding of the cultural patterns, intentions, and ontological structure of current Salafi-Jihadist groups destabilizing the Middle East. Violent behavior is a staple of Salafi-Jihadism's past and a key part of their current strategy, as highlighted in Abi Bakr Naji's *Management of Savagery*, a document that explains how to establish a caliphate. Justifying beheadings as recommended by God and religiously permissible, Naji contends, "One who previously engaged in jihad knows that it is naught but violence, crudeness, terrorism, frightening others, and massacring—I am talking about jihad and fighting,

---

<sup>3</sup> Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Regan Arts, 2015), 171.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Coughlin, *Catastrophic Failure: Blindfolding America in the Face of Jihad* (Washington, DC: Center for Security Policy Press, 2015), 33.

not Islam.”<sup>5</sup> Only by studying the history of Salafi-Jihadism can we properly understand the emergence of violent groups like al-Qaeda (1998), Boko Haram (2002), al-Shabaab (2006), and ISIS (2006). As Stearns stated, “Only through studying history can we grasp how things change.”<sup>6</sup> Studying the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism will build a foundation for understanding how our enemy’s ideology-based strategy evolved from targeting apostate Muslim governments to attacking the United States and its allies

Ideological movements do not function in a vacuum; rather, they belong to a broader social environment affected by change. To understand the Salafi-Jihadi movement, two historical time periods need to be evaluated: 1960–1978 and the year 1979.<sup>7</sup> The former period marked the era of the Arab cold war, a zero-sum struggle between Egyptian-led Pan-Arabism and Saudi-led Pan-Islamism. The defeat of Pan-Arabism resulted in a seismic transfer of power from Egypt to Saudi Arabia, which remains unchallenged today in its dominance of the Sunni world and unhindered in its financial support to Salafi-Jihadi groups. However, no single year in the post–World War II era was more important to the Middle East than 1979. The Iranian revolution challenged Saudi Arabia for control of the Muslim world, and Muslim nations worldwide reacted violently to the perceived encroachment of Western countries on Muslim soil. The historical events that transpired during these years significantly altered the political landscape of the Middle East and also led to the militarization of Salafism.

Why should readers care whether Salafism is expressed violently or not? First, Salafi-Jihadism is an ideological offshoot of Salafism that is driven by and highly values violence as the means of achieving its goals. Promoting jihad as a holy obligation for struggle or as just war,

---

<sup>5</sup> Abu Bakr Naji, “Management of Savagery,” in *The Canons of Jihad: Terrorists’ Strategy for Defeating America*, ed. Jim Lacey (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 64.

<sup>6</sup> Stearns, “Why Study History.”

<sup>7</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 12.

Salafi-Jihadism justifies violence in order to restore Islam's golden age. Muslims contributing to this total war, such as the Salafi-Jihadist groups ISIS and al-Qaeda, are part of a long tradition of using armed conflict to achieve political aims. Second, as Sun Tzu stated, "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."<sup>8</sup> Since Salafi-Jihadism grew out of the Pan-Islamic movement in the 1960s, the United States has failed to understand its enemy's ideology, which has embodied the incarnation of transnational religious militancy with a global reach. Throughout its war on terror, the West has failed to understand how Salafi-Jihadi ideas are influenced by regional and international dynamics that reveal historical and cultural particularities.<sup>9</sup> By understanding how Salafi-Jihadism was formed and is currently transforming regional environments throughout the Middle East, the United States can develop an effective strategic response to the threat.

Moreover, Salafi-Jihadism threatens the national security of United States and the stability of the Middle East. The United States has fought al-Qaeda affiliates and ISIS for fifteen years without preventing them from plotting and executing attacks against the interests of the United States and its allies. For a military approach (i.e., an organized, executable degrading strategy) to be effective in countering a threat such as Salafi-Jihadism, it must be based on the richest possible profile of the group's mindset. Graeme Wood has observed, "Muslims can reject the Islamic State; nearly all do. But pretending that it isn't actually a religious, millenarian group, with theology that must be understood to be combatted, has already led the United States to

---

<sup>8</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (Minneapolis, MN: Filiquarian Publishing, 2007), chapter 3.

<sup>9</sup> Jeevan Deol and Zaheer Kazmi, *Introduction to Contextualizing Jihadi Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 3.

underestimate it and back foolish schemes to counter it.”<sup>10</sup> The ongoing fighting in Syria and Iraq and Salafi-Jihadist global terrorist attacks from Paris to Mali show that we understand relatively little about how this radical ideology propounds violent goals and propels its followers to devise strategies to achieve them.

The most intolerant and ambitious Salafi-Jihadist groups are Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab, all of which continue to justify indiscriminate killing through the form of offensive jihad as a legitimate expression of Islam. As ISIS declares a caliphate in Iraq and Syria and seeks to extend *sharia* worldwide, its actions force us to ask what historical events have transformed Salafism into an ideology so willing to embrace violent expansion.

This monograph seeks to identify how historical events shaped Salafi-Jihadism and caused Salafi-Jihadist groups to elevate jihad as the greatest virtue of Islam, and to understand the violent actions of current Salafi-Jihadist groups such as ISIS, Boko Haram, and al-Qaeda in terms of these events. My interpretation of the unfolding evolution of Salafi-Jihadism will show why and how al-Qaeda and ISIS came to be transnational Salafi-Jihadist groups. To do this, it is also necessary to grasp which tenets of Salafism support Salafi-Jihadism, the differences between Salafi-Jihadism and Salafism, identification of the Salafi scholars who were influential in the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism, and the manner by which the Salafist movement in Saudi Arabia and Egypt created conditions for the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism.

The Pan-Islamist movement of 1960–1978 and three pivotal events in 1979 served as a catalyst for the evolution of the most recent manifestation of Salafi-Jihadism. The Iranian (Persian-Shi’a) revolution, the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, and the Soviet invasion of

---

<sup>10</sup> Graeme Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants,” *The Atlantic*, March 2015, [www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980). Although Wood said that nearly all Muslims reject ISIS, a November 2015 Pew poll ([www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/17/in-nations-with-significant-muslim-populations-disdain-for-isis](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/17/in-nations-with-significant-muslim-populations-disdain-for-isis)) showed a frightening level of tacit approval of ISIS, finding that an estimated 63 million Muslims in the eleven countries polled supported ISIS.

Afghanistan gave Salafi-Jihadist groups an opportunity to branch away from the Salafist movement and employ armed jihad to promote fundamental Islamic law.<sup>11</sup> Pan-Arabism and the theocratic Shi'a empire in Iran threatened Saudi Arabia's control of the Muslim world and fostered the growth of Salafi-Jihadism. When they seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Salafists exposed the vulnerability of the Saudi Arabian royal family to domestic terrorist attacks and their inability to protect Islam's holiest shrine. The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan globalized a Salafi-Jihadist movement by attracting holy warriors throughout the Islamic community who eventually formed the Salafi-Jihadist group Al-Qaeda.<sup>12</sup> Al-Qaeda emerged from war with the Soviets in Afghanistan, furthering the Salafi-Jihadist cause; however, the ideology changed far less than the context, which demanded a strategy to implement transnational jihad.

The scope of this research has several limitations. First, it addresses only the time period from 1960 to 1979; as such this monograph does not cover additional historical events outside this time frame that may have contributed to the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism, such as the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) or the influence of 9/11.<sup>13</sup> Second, this monograph focuses only on Salafi-Jihadism in Saudi Arabia, because the Saudi Salafis had the most direct influence on the militarization of Salafism, even though extensive Salafist networks existed in India, Libya, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Finally, this monograph examines closely only those Salafi

---

<sup>11</sup> David W. Lesch, *1979: The Year That Shaped the Modern Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>12</sup> John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 73.

<sup>13</sup> Lesch, *1979*, 67-69. The Iraq-Iran War, which began in September 1980 and lasted for eight years, was a repercussion of the Iranian Revolution, and its effects were felt throughout the Middle East. Saddam Hussein's attempt to fill the role of the Sunni standard-bearer of Arab nationalism in the inter-Arab arena—a role essentially left vacant after Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat signed a peace treaty with Israel in March 1979—brought Iraq into direct conflict with Iran's Shi'a theocracy. Shi'a threats emanating from Teheran regarding Saddam's legitimacy and secular rule erupted into a Sunni-Shi'a war. Twenty-five years after the Iraq-Iran War, sectarian enmity continues to reverberate throughout Iraq and cripples the Iraqi government, while Salafi-Jihadist groups combat the same Iranian forces who fought against Saddam Hussein.

scholars (ancient and modern) who had a significant impact on the rise of Salafi-Jihadism as observed during the time period from 1960 to 1979.

The monograph contains three main sections. The first section focuses on the tenets of Salafism that promote Salafi-Jihadism, the ways in which Salafi-Jihadism differs from Salafism, and the Salafi scholars who were influential in the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism. This is necessary in order to understand how Salafi-Jihadism differs from mainstream Islamic thought, and I outline the principal beliefs of the Salafist sect that motivate the key actors in this narrative. I also introduce the three subgroups of Salafism and the significant Salafi ideologues who promoted Salafi-Jihadism.

The second section addresses how the Pan-Islamist movement in Saudi Arabia created the conditions for the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism. It examines the movement's origin and the consequences of Saudi Arabia's competition with Egypt's Pan-Arabism. It also describes how the influx of the Muslim Brotherhood into Saudi Arabia contributed to the formation of the Salafist Awakening movement, which led to the militarization of Salafism.

The third section explains how the three pivotal events of 1979 (the Iranian revolution, the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan) served as catalysts in the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism. First, I examine how the February 1979 Iranian revolution encouraged a Salafist group to employ violent jihad and seize the Grand Mosque. Second, I analyze the factors motivating that seizure, which occurred in November 1979 as the first Salafist group attack on Saudi Arabian foreign and internal policy. Finally, I consider the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which eventually demonstrated that a global superpower could be defeated through jihad and, along the way, strengthened the network of extremists within Salafi-Jihadism. The seizure of the Grand Mosque and the Saudi response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan are interconnected and part of an inter-Sunni competition that

arose as a chain reaction from the Sunni-Shi'a competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran after the Iranian Revolution.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Roots of Salafi-Jihadism (1910–1959)**

Tenets of Salafist Doctrine: Sources of Sunni Belief and Islamic Law

In order to identify how the Pan-Islamist movement of 1960–1978 and three pivotal events in 1979 (the Iranian revolution, the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan) served as catalysts for the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism, we must first understand the principal beliefs of Salafism that motivated the actors involved in these historic events. Western observers see Salafists as narrow-minded, violent, fundamentalist extremists and terrorists, but for many Muslims, Salafists pursue an authentic form of Islam that aligns with the literal word of the Quran.<sup>15</sup>

A Sunni sect, Salafism traces its origin to the Abbasid caliphate of 750 A.D. Salafism emphasizes studying the Quran and the *hadith* (account of things said or done by Muhammad or his companions), which are believed to be the basic sources of Islam and a reflection of the Salafist principle of *tawhid* (the unity of God).<sup>16</sup> For the Salafist, the writings of the Quran are the direct word of God and are to be taken literally. Following this strict approach, Salafists live by

---

<sup>14</sup> Lesch, 1979, 34-45. In March 1979, when Anwar al-Sadat signed a peace treaty with Israel, he shocked the entire world, as Egypt was the first Arab state to acknowledge the state of Israel. Not only was Egypt expelled from the Arab League, but it was ostracized by Arab states. The peace treaty highlighted Egypt's foreign policy as it moved closer to the United States and away from Arab interests. Since Egypt was no longer perceived as fundamentally Islamic, its Arab neighbors isolated the country, leaving Saudi Arabia as the primary Sunni superpower in the Middle East. After their Islamic revolution, the Shiite Iranians challenged Saudi's Pan-Islamic leadership and created a Sunni-Shi'a competition that engulfed Iraq and Iran. Salafi-Jihadists converged in Saudi Arabia, where the Salafi-Jihadist movement was preparing to start an inter-Sunni competition by lashing out against its allegedly apostate rulers.

<sup>15</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Roel Meijer, ed., introduction to *Global Islam's New Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 4.

the values and teaching of the Quran and try to replicate in their own lives the life of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>17</sup> They seek a return to Islamic practice as it existed during the life of Muhammad and his followers, the *al-salaf* or so-called “ancestors.”<sup>18</sup> This commitment to pure Islamic practice and *tawhid* tends to carry with it a feeling of superiority over non-Salafists that stems from a historical perception of being the first Muslims, a religious interpretation that sets aside reason as a matter of principle to pursue strict rules, and a profound anti-Shi’a sentiment.

The Salafists see themselves as the purest Muslims, thoroughly dedicated to replicating the life of Prophet Mohammad is significant to the competition between Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism that assimilated Salafism into Saudi Arabian society. Competing for Sunni dominance in the Muslim world, King Faisal countered Egyptian President Nasser’s Pan-Arabism by embracing Pan-Islamism’s Salafist fundamental roots, including devotion to *tawhid* and to Quranic literalism.

Salafists “believe that by strictly following the rules and guidance in the Quran and Sunna they eliminate the biases of human subjectivity and self-interest, thereby allowing them to identify the singular truth of God’s commands.”<sup>19</sup> They reject as possible sources of truth human reasoning, man-made religious law, and innovative religious thought; human innovation and interpretation are deviant behaviors that threaten *tawhid*. They further claim that theirs is the only true and guiding interpretation of God’s message.

According to Salafist belief, three components of *tawhid* define a true Muslim’s core beliefs. First, there is only one true God who created the universe. Second, God is a supreme

---

<sup>17</sup> Meijer, introduction to *Global Islam’s New Religious Movement*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Genevieve Abdo, *Salafist and Sectarianism: Twitter and Communal Conflict in the Middle East* (Center for Middle East Policy, 2015), <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2015/03/salafism-sectarianism-social-media>, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29 (2006): 207.

being; therefore, God is the sole legislator for humankind and that true Muslims must obey *sharia*, since any laws created by human beings represent a rejection of the authority of God. Finally, a true Muslim can only worship God, and to worship others is *shirk* (intolerable).<sup>20</sup> To protect *tawhid*, Salafists believe human conviction and behavior must adhere to the doctrine of the Quran and *Sunna* (the path or example of the Prophet Muhammad), because any other alternative violates the Quran, Sunna, or Islamic law and strays from the prophetic model.

*Tawhid* was a motivating factor behind the Salafist group called *al-Jama al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba* (“The Salafi Group That Commands Right and Forbids Wrong”), or JSM, which besieged the Grand Mosque in Mecca. According to Juhayman al-Utaybi, the ringleader of the siege, the Al-Saud family disobeyed *tawhid* by incorporating man-made laws into Saudi society that supported expansion of Western culture throughout the holiest land in Islam. As further explained in the next section, Saudi Arabia’s status as the global leader in oil production heightened the consternation in the Saudi Salafist community over King Faisal’s alleged violation of *tawhid* and capitulation to Western culture.

Salafism is intolerant of the Shi’as, a competing sect whose interpretation of Islamic history and tradition of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) conflicts with Salafist core beliefs.<sup>21</sup> Salafism’s anti-Shi’a sentiment dates back to the founder of the eighteenth-century Wahhabi movement, Ibn al-Wahhab, who declared the Shi’a to be *kufar* (unbelievers), considering them a corrosive danger to Islam and a greater threat than even Jews or Christians.<sup>22</sup> Because of the Shi’a refusal to accept *hadiths* transmitted by companions of the Prophet Muhammad, and their legitimization of Ali as the rightful heir to Muhammad, Salafists refer to Shi’a as infidels.

---

<sup>20</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Anatomy of the Salafi Movement*, 209.

<sup>21</sup> Abdo, *Salafist and Sectarianism*, 10.

<sup>22</sup> Guido Steinberg, “Jihadi Salafism and the Shi’is: Remarks about the Intellectual Roots of anti-Shi’ism,” in *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 113.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Salafist scholars reiterated Ibn al-Wahhab's teachings, promoting anti-Shi'a discord that Salafi-Jihadist organizations exploited to justify sectarian violence.

The Salafist intolerance and threatening attitude toward Shi'a was displayed after Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini seized control of Iran in 1979. Khomeini's public desire to spread his revolution across the Islamic world instigated a Shi'a uprising in Saudi Arabia's eastern province in late November 1979. As this province was home to 350,000 Shi'a and Saudi oil reserves, the non-violent Shi'a uprising symbolized a threat to the Saudi kingdom. Through the influence of Salafist doctrine, incorporated throughout Saudi domestic policy after the spread of Pan-Islamism, the Saudi National Guard suppressed the uprising with ruthless force and "showed no mercy against the infidel Shiites of the east."<sup>23</sup> Additionally, another motivating factor behind al-Utaybi's decision to besiege the Grand Mosque was Saudi Arabia's tolerance of the Shiite communities in its eastern section. The Saudi government was perceived as failing to combat apostate "polytheism" because the putative heretical worshippers of Ali and Hussain were allowed to openly practice in the country possessing the two holiest cities in Islam.<sup>24</sup>

#### Subgroups of Salafism: Common Creed, Different Method

Since Salafi Muslims believe that political issues stem from a gradual compromise of faith, they contend that in order to regain preeminence, Muslims must return to a puritanical application of Islam, reverting to the behavior of the original followers of Mohammed.<sup>25</sup> Salafists share common religious and political viewpoints, but they disagree on how to achieve their ends. Quintan Wiktorowicz and Thomas Hegghammer, academic specialists on violent Islamism, have

---

<sup>23</sup> Yaroslav Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca: The Uprising at Islam's Holiest Shrine* (New York: Doubleday Broadway Publishing Group, 2007), 184.

<sup>24</sup> Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Anatomy of the Salafi Movement*, 216.

distinguished three subgroups of Salafism: purists, politico-Salafists, and Salafi-Jihadis. Purists are committed to protecting the purity of Islam in nonviolent fashion,<sup>26</sup> promoting Salafist beliefs through propagation and religious education, and adopt a quietist posture by shunning politics. Politico-Salafists believe that due to their knowledge on current events, they are best suited to interpret Salafi belief and to use this influence to impose Islamic reforms upon a state structure. For example, politico-Salafis engaged in nation building in Saudi Arabia after Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser drove the Salafist Muslim Brotherhood out of Egypt in 1962.<sup>27</sup> Finally, the Salafi-Jihadis are the most notorious of the three subgroups because they “call for violent action against the existing political order and for the establishment of a unitary state in the form of a caliphate.”<sup>28</sup> According to Wiktorowicz, “although there is consensus among Salafis about this understanding of Islam, there are disagreements over the use of violence.”<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, some within the Jihadi faction do not hesitate to employ violence to confront their enemies and pursue the political goal of establishing an Islamic state.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Anatomy of the Salafi Movement*, 218.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 222.

<sup>28</sup> Bernard Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,” in *Global Islam’s New Religious Movement*, ed. Bernard Haykel (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 48.

<sup>29</sup> Wiktorowicz, *A Genealogy of Radical Islam*, 75.

<sup>30</sup> S. K. Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War* (New Delhi, India: Himalayan Books, 1986), 58-60; Naji, *Management of Savagery*, 48-57. Salafi-Jihadist groups have embraced the use of violence in accordance with Pakistani Brigadier General S. K. Malik’s “The Quranic Concept of War” and Abu Bakr Naji’s “Management of Savagery,” using the calculated application of fear. Pursuant to Malik’s decision cycle for the employment of violence and establishment of *sharia*, Salafi-Jihadist groups engage in violent jihad in the *Dawah*, or the preparation stage. Salafi-Jihadist groups target a nation’s sense of security, laying the groundwork for the implementation of *sharia*. Following Naji’s operational framework for the use of violence, Salafi-Jihadist groups direct their violence against the United States and Muslim states in an attempt to overstretch and exhaust their military and monetary capabilities, thus creating chaos or savagery. When nation-states’ vital economic resources are inadequately defended, Salafi-Jihadist groups advocate attacks on these resources in an attempt to cripple and weaken apostate governments by unsettling the faith of the target state’s population.

This combination of ultraconservative doctrinal elements and violence distinguishes Salafi-Jihadis from other two subgroups of Salafists. Salafi-Jihadis deny the legitimacy of any Islamic government that contradicts Islamic law. Political authorities who do not abide by Salafism are unlawful state leaders, a crime for which the penalty is death.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Salafi-Jihadis reject traditional rules of jihad in favor of a policy of “total war.” According to traditional Islamic practice, jihad can be declared only when invaders pose a threat to Muslim property or lives.<sup>32</sup> Traditional jihadists are expected to demonstrate mercy, as they are “forbidden to slay women, children, and old people, to kill the wounded, or to disturb monks, hermits, and the peaceful who offer no resistance.”<sup>33</sup> In contrast to this dictum, Salafi-Jihadis indiscriminately kill men, women, and children. They also embrace destructive suicide as an acceptable tactic.

According to Jarret Brachman, a terrorism expert formerly employed at West Point’s Combating Terrorism Center, the term jihadism “refers to the peripheral current of extremist Islamic thought whose adherents demand the use of violence in order to oust non-Islamic influence from traditionally Muslim lands en route to establishing a true Islamic governance in accordance with *sharia*, or God’s law.”<sup>34</sup> In this sense, jihadism is distinct from jihad. Jihad is expressed in terms of strife. The obligation of jihad may be fulfilled in four different ways: by the heart, tongue, hands, and sword.<sup>35</sup> Jihad is primarily defensive in nature and is justified to repel

---

<sup>31</sup> Vincenzo Oliveti, *Terror’s Source: The Ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism and Its Consequences* (Birmingham, UK: Amadeus Books, 2002), 45.

<sup>32</sup> Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law*, ed. Nuh Ha Min Keller (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 1994), 599; Oliveti, *Terror’s Source*, 46.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller*, 603; Hasan Al-Banna, “Jihad,” in *The Canons of Jihad: Terrorists’ Strategy for Defeating America*, ed. Jim Lacey (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>34</sup> Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 4.

<sup>35</sup> Al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller*, 744; Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), 56.

aggression against Muslim lives or property and to prevent the oppression and persecution of Muslims living outside Islamic territory.<sup>36</sup> Salafi-Jihadist organizations differentiate themselves from other Muslims by focusing on the violent aspect of jihad, which they consider an obligation of every individual.<sup>37</sup> In Hanafi Islamic Law, the rights of individuals are recognized before the collective rights of a community or state, thus prioritizing individual jihad over communal jihad. For Hanafi jurisprudence, jihad is a personal obligation to Islamic law and a duty of all Muslims to Allah. As a result, Salafi-Jihadis were able to recruit Sunni Muslims in the 1980s to conduct violent jihad against Soviet occupiers of Muslim land in Afghanistan by elevating jihad as the sixth pillar of Islam and promoting the claim that jihad represented part of Allah's most perfect justice according to Hanafi Islamic law.

But is there a historical background within Islam for this commitment to unlimited, merciless violence? The Salafi-Jihadi version of global jihad is linked to the teaching of Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), who offered a legal and religious justification for overthrowing unjust and non-Muslim rulers.<sup>38</sup> Believing anyone who rejected Islam should be opposed, Taymiyya thus rendered jihad an offensive as well as a defensive action. Taymiyya's principles of jihad, "particularly the permissibility to overthrow a ruler who is classified as an unbeliever due to a failure to adhere to Islamic law, the absolute division of the world into *dar al-kufar* [land of unbelief] and *dar al-Islam* [land of Islam], the labeling of anyone not adhering to one's particular interpretations of Islam as an unbeliever, and the call for the blanket warfare against non-Muslims, particularly Jews and Christians," became the doctrine of Salafi-Jihadis during the Salafist Awakening movement.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller*, 599; Natana Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 235.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller*, 601; Brachman, *Global Jihadism*, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 249.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 256.

The concept of jihad became central to the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism ideology at least in part when al-Utaybi and his followers employed jihad against a political regime and intentionally against innocent Muslim bystanders during the November 1979 siege of the Grand Mosque. Prior to the seizure of the mosque by al-Utaybi's Salafi group, al-Jama al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba, Salafis were purists or pursued their goals by political means. But because he interpreted the actions of the al-Saud regime as anti-Islamic, al-Utaybi called for armed jihad. According to al-Utaybi, not only did the Saudi government live in a state of *jahiliyya* (ignorance or exhibiting un-Islamic behavior), but so did its willful followers, and the rejection of faith is punishable by death. Furthermore, some Salafi theologians have declared that dying in jihad against foreign invaders allows entry into heaven as a martyr.<sup>40</sup> This mindset motivated thousands of Salafis to fight the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in December 1979. The Salafi-Jihadis' Afghanistan battlefield jihad experiences solidified and emboldened their rejection of the purists' academic interpretation and the politico-Salafis' more peaceful approach.

Salafi-Jihadi Ideologues: Scholarly Consensus among Jihad's Intellectual Godfathers

*Jahiliyya*, as a justification of jihad, has been propagated throughout the Salafist community by leading Salafi ideologues—most notably Rashid Rida (1865–1935), Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949), and Sayyid Qutb (1903–1966)—and it contributed significantly to the later empowerment of the Salafi-Jihadis. The evolution of Salafi-Jihadism can be traced to the early years of the twentieth century as an Egyptian intellectual reformist movement. Triggered by anticolonial sentiment after the fall of the Ottoman caliphate, the former standard bearer of Islam, Salafists desired to reconstruct the golden age of first-generation Muslims. Egypt, one of the first countries to feel the effects of Western culture and political power, was also among the first to

---

<sup>40</sup> Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 17.

experience Muslims' yearning for a return to Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>41</sup> The adaptation and modernization of the Islamic world dominated intellectual discussion among senior Islamic leaders who sought to reconcile Western culture to Islam through various passages in the Quran and hadiths. In response to this growing spirit of Islamic reform, Rashid Rida, a Salafist from Cairo, chastised Muslims for their subordination to colonial power, condemned secular governments, and contended that only Salafism could remove the impurities of Western influence.

Rida's belief in an Egypt characterized by authentic Islam inspired a disenchanted youth, Hassan al-Banna,<sup>42</sup> who formed the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 1928. Al-Banna was motivated by the 1924 abolition of the Islamic caliphate in Turkey by President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a political decision that projected the aura of a lost Islamic identity. Until his death in 1949, al-Banna rejected Western democracy's separation of church and state on the grounds that it was incompatible with Islamic principles. He prepared the Muslim Brotherhood for war against apostate Arab regimes. Additionally, al-Banna's political goal for the Muslim Brotherhood was the restoration of the Caliphate, declaring that it "would fight any politician or organization that did not work for the support of Islam or restoration of its glory."<sup>43</sup>

By telling the Muslim Brotherhood that it was "the army of liberation, carrying on your shoulders the message of liberation," al-Banna would lay further rhetorical groundwork for the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism.<sup>44</sup> His writing described jihad as an obligation of every Muslim and interpreted it in the sense of *qital* (fighting), contending further that those who minimized the

---

<sup>41</sup> Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002), 55.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>43</sup> Benjamin and Simon, 58.

<sup>44</sup> Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 207.

importance of *qital* were not true Muslims. Al-Banna encouraged armed jihad against the “people of the book” (i.e., Christians and Jews) as he routinely referenced the Quaranic verse 9:29, “Fight against those who believe not in Allah, nor in the last day, nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and his Messenger and those who acknowledge not the Religion of Truth (*Surat at-Tawbah*)” (i.e., Islam).<sup>45</sup> Al-Banna linked jihad with martyrdom, thus death became an important end of jihad and his phrase “death is art” implied that victory would often come at the price of death.<sup>46</sup> Such militancy would later inspire the Salafis who died in the siege of the Grand Mosque and on the battlefields of Afghanistan. It was also an idea that the Egyptian government could not tolerate, detaining members of the Muslim Brotherhood and eventually forcing them to flee to Saudi Arabia, where they sparked the Salafist Awakening movement.

Continuing Rida’s Salafist rhetoric and al-Banna’s political involvement, Sayyid Qutb denounced human government. Also a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Qutb believed that Western values were contrary to Islamic belief and defined *jahiliyya* as a rebellion against God’s sovereignty and a representation of a pre-Islamic time period void of *sharia*. Moreover, Qutb concluded, “Arab leaders who claimed to practice Islam faithfully while allowing tidal waves of godless secularism, exploitative capitalism and the perverse, barbaric Western culture to drown their countrymen and women must be ousted.”<sup>47</sup> The only way to fight *jahiliyya* was to free oneself from such ignorance and devote oneself to the worship of God and to jihad against apostate governments.<sup>48</sup> Viewing contemporary Muslim society as *jahiliyya*, Qutb further nudged

---

<sup>45</sup> Al-Banna, “Jihad,” 7; al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller*, 600; *The Koran: A New Translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 118.

<sup>46</sup> Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 208; Coughlin, *Catastrophic Failure*, 161.

<sup>47</sup> Brachman, *Global Jihadism*, 23.

<sup>48</sup> Coughlin, *Catastrophic Failure*, 142; Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Damascus: Dar al-Ilm, 1964), 11.

Salafist ideology toward militancy, calling for jihad to establish a social order based on Islamic law and justifying the overthrow of *jahiliyya* governments. In this interpretation, jihad was no longer purely a defensive war because this meaning was too narrow, in that it applied only to those under the pressure of a direct attack. Instead, jihad defended Salafism against all things threatening to restrict one's right to practice Islam. According to Qutb, "This movement uses the methods of preaching and persuasion for reforming ideas and beliefs; it uses physical power and jihad for abolishing the organizations and authorities of the *jahili* system which prevents people from reforming their idea and beliefs but forces them to obey erroneous ways."<sup>49</sup> For Qutb, the existence of *jahiliyya* necessitated the maintenance of jihad as a permanent state of being, one that would prevent Muslims from being led astray.

Qutb's writings, most notably *Signposts* and *Milestones*, had a profound effect on the Salafist group that seized the Grand Mosque and on al-Qaeda's founding fathers, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama Bin Laden. Even today, these writings continue to influence younger Salafi-Jihadis.<sup>50</sup> In Ayman al-Zawahiri's personal manifesto *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, not only does al-Zawahiri call Qutb "the most prominent theoretician of the fundamentalist movement," but he also refers to Qutb's devotion to *tawhid* as "the spark that initiated Islamic revolutions against enemies of Islam."<sup>51</sup> Qutb believed that offensive jihad was the tool needed to instill Islamic order and establish an Islamic state, and these beliefs became the ideological underpinnings of the Salafist group that seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca and of al-Qaeda.<sup>52</sup> In *Milestones*, Qutb argued that authoritarian Muslim governments' failure to apply *sharia* was a

---

<sup>49</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 55.

<sup>50</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam* (New York: Random House, 2003), 77.

<sup>51</sup> Laura Mansfield, *His Own Words: Translation and Analysis of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al Zawahiri* (Old Tappan, NJ: TLG Publications, 2006), 52.

<sup>52</sup> Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 51.

source of grievance and labeled them as *jahiliyya*, thus again justifying the use of force as necessary to liberate Muslims living under such oppression. Qutb's writings led to a massive crackdown on Egyptian Salafis, which forced them to flee to Saudi Arabia, an environment that nurtured the formation of the Salafist movement. Thomas Hegghammer and Stephane Lacroix noted the influence of Qutb's writings on al-Utaybi, who "accused the Saudi regime of making religion a means to guarantee their worldly interests, putting an end to jihad, paying allegiance to the Christians (America) and bringing over Muslims evil and corruption."<sup>53</sup>

Understanding the fundamental beliefs of Salafi-Jihadists and intellectual architecture of Salafi-Jihadism and the ideologues who expounded this ideology helps us to understand more clearly the thought processes underlying current Salafi-Jihadist groups. For example, Sayyid Qutb is frequently cited by Salafi-Jihadis, al-Qaeda, and ISIS when they advocate the removal of *jahiliyya* government based on the Quranic verse, "Whoever does not rule by what God hath sent down—they are unbelievers" (5:48).<sup>54</sup> The target of jihad has evolved from one's near enemy (*jahiliyya* Muslim regimes) for Qutb to Western targets for Bin Laden and others, but the concept is being used essentially as earlier ideologues dating back to Ibn Taymiyya intended. As a global enterprise applicable to all situations and circumstances, jihad as holy war is the ultimate logical extension of Quran 5:48 for Salafi-Jihadists. The bombing of a Russian airliner, suicide bombings in Chad, Beirut, and Nigeria, and simultaneous attacks in Paris in October and November 2015 all demonstrated the call of Salafi-Jihadi Abu Musab al-Suri (regarded as al-Qaeda's foremost strategic thinker) to global Islamic jihad by using "all available means, all the strength we can muster, and resisting them until the last spark of life."<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Stephane Lacroix and Thomas Hegghammer, *Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman al-Utaybi Revisited* (Bristol: Amal Press, 2011), 17.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller*, 599; *The Koran*, 72; Quintan Wiktorowicz, "A Genealogy of Radical Islam," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28 (2005): 80.

<sup>55</sup> Abu Musab al-Suri, "The Call to Global Islamic Resistance," in *The Canons of Jihad*, 164.

The next section analyzes in detail how the Saudi Pan-Islamist movement of 1960–1978 contributed to the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism. Toward the end of the 1950s, turmoil erupted between Egypt and Saudi Arabia over control of the Sunni Muslim brand; Egypt promoted Pan-Arabism while Saudi Arabia promoted Pan-Islamism. Although mindful of the Islamic heritage, Pan-Arabism was a secular ideology promoted largely by Egyptian President Gamal Nasser, placing it in conflict with Islamic-oriented political movements. Led by King Faisal, Saudi Arabia countered Pan-Arabism by embracing Pan-Islamism and its Islamic fundamental Salafi roots, awakening a Wahhabi-Salafist revolutionary vanguard also known as the Salafist movement.

### **Pan-Islamism (1960–1978)**

Salafi-Jihadism emerged as a side effect from the struggle between Saudi Pan-Islamism and Nasser’s Pan-Arabism, because this ideological confrontation created the social conditions in Saudi Arabia that offered a sanctuary to the Muslim Brotherhood. Saudi Arabia’s Wahhabism and the Muslim Brotherhood had a great deal of ideological affinity; indeed, both were Salafi movements with the end state of restoring Islam as it had been under the Prophet Mohammed.<sup>56</sup> The term *Salafism* is often used to denote Wahhabism itself and the other intellectual hybrids that sprouted from the Saudi Arabian Wahhabi structure.<sup>57</sup> As Wahhabism and the Muslim Brotherhood’s militant Islamic reforms cross-fertilized, Sayyid Qutb’s writings spread throughout the Saudi Arabian educational system. The call for violent jihad was renewed by the Muslim Brotherhood in accordance with the pronouncement by Sayyid Qutb’s brother Mohammed, “He who understands the nature of this religion [Islam] will understand the need for the activist push of Islam as a jihad of the sword alongside a jihad of education.”<sup>58</sup> The Pan-Islamist ideology and

---

<sup>56</sup> Dore Gold, *Hatred’s Kingdom* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2003), 91.

<sup>57</sup> Lacroix and Hegghammer, *Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia*, 36.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

the teachings of the Muslim Brotherhood were fused in the Salafi-Jihadist group *al-Jama al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba* (the Salafi Group that Commands Right and Forbids Wrong, or JSM), whose brand of Salafism was integral in shaping the Saudi political landscape.

#### Combatting the Spread of Pan-Arabism with Pan-Islamism

The Pan-Islamism and Pan-Arabism competition stemmed from the impact of the two world wars. The previous Islamic caliphate before ISIS, the Ottoman caliphate, controlled swaths of land in western Asia, southeastern Europe, and North Africa, but in the late nineteenth century, European empires began eroding its territory and influence, forcing Arab Muslims to face the imposition of Western culture by European nations.<sup>59</sup> With its strongly confrontational stance, Salafist doctrine influenced the religious perspectives of Arab Muslims inside and outside the Ottoman Empire, most notably in Saudi Arabia. After the Ottomans' defeat in World War I, the Treaty of Sevres in 1920 abolished the caliphate, which had symbolized Sunni power and dominance over the Middle East.<sup>60</sup> The treaty allowed British and French authorities to form Sunni nation states' political identities using a Western model of government.<sup>61</sup>

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Sunni nation-states struggled to adopt a secular government because they were no longer governed by the Islamic law of the former caliphate. Israel became the shared enemy, as secular nationalism became transformed into Pan-Arabism. Although the creation of Israel in 1948 united Arab nations, a series of failed attempts to seize Israeli land over twenty-five years exhausted Pan-Arabism and sparked tensions between Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

After Nasser came to power in Egypt in 1952, his message of secular nationalist revolution gained a following from sources promoting the ideology of Pan-Arabism.<sup>62</sup> After

---

<sup>59</sup> Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (New York: Warner Books, 1991), 306.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 316.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*.

nationalizing the Suez Canal in 1956, Nasser emerged as a hero of Arab nationalism and immediately formed the United Arab Republic with Syria to overthrow Arab monarchies and conservative regimes in a quest for Arab unity.<sup>63</sup> Advocates of Pan-Arabism did not believe in a peaceful coexistence with Arab monarchies and conservative regimes; instead, they sought to foment revolutions within these countries in order to install a political structure that would support Pan-Arabism. Revolutionary Pan-Arab nationalists viewed Saudi Arabia as an artificial state created by colonial forces to benefit Western imperialism, giving Nasser a basis to challenge its custodianship of Mecca and Medina. Consequently, Arab monarchies, led by Saudi Arabia, were threatened by Nasser's claim to leadership of the Arab world. Less popular Arab leaders in the Middle East, like al-Saud, resented Nasser's prestige and disapproved of his relationship with the Soviet Union and its atheistic, communist ideology that was strictly opposed to Wahhabism. By 1957, King Saud and Nasser's cordial relations deteriorated, marking the onset of the Arab cold war that remained intense until Nasser's death in 1970.<sup>64</sup>

Nasser led a progressive bloc of Arab countries aligned with the Soviet Union, while Saudi Arabia led an Islamic bloc of Arab countries that favored American interests. Furthermore, Nasser's secular Arab nationalism was a challenge to Saudi Arabia's Islamic identity, as Saudi Arabia is the historical birthplace of all Arabs. According to Yaroslav Trofimov, "Nasser's ideas of secular Arab nationalism ... viewed Saudi Arabia as a feudal relic that should dissolve into a

---

<sup>62</sup> Tarek Osman, *Egypt on the Brink: From the Rise of Nasser to The Fall of Mubarak* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 58-62. Endorsing a secular Arab nation free from alliances with the West as an alternative to political Islam, Nasser sought to unite Arab countries under Pan-Arabism. Nasser responded to his loss in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War by thrusting Egypt into the forefront of Arab unity and politics. Nasser's Pan-Arabist foreign policy sought to create a nationalist Arab identity, Arab unity, and Egyptian hegemony while minimizing Islam's political identity.

<sup>63</sup> Abdullah Sindi, "King Faisal and Pan-Islamism," in *King Faisal and the Modernization of Saudi Arabia*, ed. William Beling (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980), 185.

<sup>64</sup> Stephane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 40.

single pan-Arab state sharing oil riches equally among all its citizens.”<sup>65</sup> In 1960, in response to the threat posed by Arab nationalism and socialism, Prince Faisal (not king until 1964, but intermittently in charge from 1958 forward) realized that he needed an Islamic counter-ideology to oppose Pan-Arabism.

According to Thomas Hegghammer, Pan-Islamism “dates back to the late nineteenth century, and is based on the idea that all Muslims constitute one people or nation and should unite to face the challenges of the modern world.”<sup>66</sup> The only viable alternative to Pan-Arabism was to promote a global Islamic nation, or Pan-Islamism. Why unite all Arabs, some of whom were not Muslims, when the opportunity to unite under a shared faith existed? By focusing on an Islamic identity, Prince Faisal asserted global leadership as keeper of Islam’s two holy cities of Medina and Mecca, greatly influencing how the Muslim faith was practiced around the world.

Realizing that the traditional Wahhabi *ulema* (scholars of Muslim law) were incapable of political debate at the national level, Prince Faisal turned to the Egyptian Salafist group, the Muslim Brotherhood, to denounce Nasser’s Pan-Arabism. The Wahhabi *ulema* and the Salafists of the Muslim Brotherhood bonded over a shared religious vision calling for a return to fundamental Islam and identifying common enemies—secularism, Nasserism, and communism.<sup>67</sup> According to Khaled Abou El Fadl, “when wedded to Wahhabism, Salafism gave birth to the vigorous, potent, and at times lethal, puritan movement” known as Salafi-Jihadism.<sup>68</sup> Anchored in a feeling of frustration and alienation, traces of Salafi-Jihadism emerged in Saudi Arabian society because of the Pan-Islamist movement’s acceptance of the Muslim Brotherhood. After Nasser’s

---

<sup>65</sup> Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca*, 21.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, “Islamist Violence and Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia,” *International Affairs* 84, no. 4 (2008): 703.

<sup>67</sup> Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 41.

<sup>68</sup> Khaled Abou El-Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 44.

death in 1970 eliminated the only major opposition to Faisal's Pan-Islamic movement, the Salafi-Jihadism infused doctrine of pan-Islamism rapidly spread throughout the Muslim world.

#### The Influx of the Muslim Brotherhood (1968–1973): The Militarization of Salafism

Pan-Islamism served as a catalyst for the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism because it injected the Muslim Brotherhood into Saudi society and provided it with the freedom to promote a militant version of Salafism influenced by Sayyid Qutb's publications. After Egypt gained its independence from Britain following World War II, the Muslim Brotherhood was no longer a clandestine organization, but its rallying cry of Islamic orthodoxy ran counter to President Gamal Abdel Nasser's vision of Egypt's future—Arab nationalism.<sup>69</sup> Nasser restructured the Egyptian government into a presidency supported by a parliament, but his ambitious desire for regional hegemony led to virulent opposition from the Muslim Brotherhood, who believed that *sharia* should be imposed on Egypt through violent jihad. Since Islamic law does not approve of democratic governance, the Muslim Brotherhood repeatedly challenged Egypt's political order and its leaders for adopting a Western-inspired form of government. Killing Egyptian Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi al-Nuqrashi in 1949 and attempting to assassinate Nasser in 1954, the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrated its profound commitment to restoring *sharia* and ultimately an Islamic caliphate. In response, Nasser imprisoned, tortured, and killed many members of the Muslim Brotherhood, eventually expelling the organization from Egypt as part of his effort to firmly establish support for Pan-Arabism among Egypt's citizens. As a result, by the end of 1962 the Brotherhood's surviving members had fled to sanctuary in Saudi Arabia, a country ruled by *sharia*.<sup>70</sup> A symbolic relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood appealed to Saudi Arabia, since it served Riyadh's interest in combating Egypt's secular influence and Arab nationalism.

---

<sup>69</sup> Benjamin and Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, 64.

Through its alliance with King Faisal, the Muslim Brotherhood reshaped Saudi society along Salafist lines through Islamic organizations and the Saudi educational system. With support from the Muslim Brotherhood, King Faisal created state-financed, international Islamic organizations to promote his Pan-Islamic vision and ideology.<sup>71</sup> In response to Nasser's intervention in the 1962 Yemen civil war, King Faisal, again with the assistance of the Muslim Brotherhood, formed the Muslim World League, which funded the construction of mosques, schools, and libraries equipped with Salafi-approved translations of the Quran. The Muslim World League, run by Salafi leadership, became an instrument for spreading Salafi doctrine throughout Saudi Arabia and for fighting secularism in the Arab and Muslim worlds.<sup>72</sup> In 1972, King Faisal created the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) to educate the new Saudi generation against worshipping false ideologies. Responsible for compiling the assembly's reading list, the Muslim Brotherhood included works from Sayyid Qutb, Mohammed Qutb, and Hassan al-Banna. Besides introductory religious books, the Muslim Brotherhood disseminated works on specialized subjects like jihad. Using the financial backing of the Saudi regime, it was able to promote throughout the country the significance of *tawhid* and *jahiliyya*.<sup>73</sup> The stated

---

<sup>70</sup> Coughlin, *Catastrophic Failure*, 164-182; *Jihad in America: The Grand Deception*, directed by Steven Emerson (2012; The Investigative Project on Terrorism, 2012), DVD. To date, the Muslim Brotherhood remains an Islamic movement with the goal of implementing *sharia*; however, violent jihad is no longer its primary method. Globally engaged throughout the Middle East and the United States, the Muslim Brotherhood remains a threat to democratic governments. Through non-violent and subversive civilization jihad, i.e., war by the tongue and the pen, Muslim Brotherhood organizations such as the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the North American Islamic Trust (NAIT) penetrate US governmental institutions in order to create dependency on the Muslim Brotherhood. Controlling the Islamic narrative in the United States is designed to enable the buildup of an Islamic society seeking to implement Islamic law.

<sup>71</sup> Esposito, *Unholy War*, 107.

<sup>72</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 127.

<sup>73</sup> David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 153.

objective of WAMY was to “serve the ideology of Islam through the propaganda of *tawhid*,” and its efforts incorporated the writings of Qutb and his colleague Abdullah Azzam (described later in this section) into the message of Wahhabism.<sup>74</sup>

From their arrival in Saudi Arabia in 1960, the Egyptian influx of Muslim Brotherhood members filled Saudi mosques and schools, hybridizing Saudi Wahhabism under the Salafist brand.<sup>75</sup> With many university graduates in its ranks, the Brotherhood placed faculty members in three of Saudi Arabia’s largest universities, primarily presiding over legal and graduate studies. Not only did they teach courses, but they reconfigured and redefined the Saudi educational system by introducing essential Salafi elements into its curricula. By 1970, the Muslim Brotherhood was writing curriculum for and teaching Islamic culture courses in major Saudi universities. This development would become significant for the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism because the Salafis who seized the Grand Mosque and fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan were products of mainstream Saudi institutions who had been educated and inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Controlling the Islamic cultural curriculum was an especially significant factor in the growth of Salafi-Jihadism. For example, appointed a professor in the faculty of Islamic law at King Abd al-Aziz University in Mecca, Mohammed Qutb disseminated his brother Sayyid’s rhetoric and shaped the fundamentalist beliefs of his students, who included Osama Bin Laden and many of the Salafis who later seized the Grand Mosque.<sup>76</sup> As Stephane Lacroix explained, “Even though Osama Bin Laden majored in economics, he was exposed to his earliest political influences, Mohammed Qutb and Abdullah Azzam, in the required Islamic culture courses.”<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Gold, *Hatred’s Kingdom*, 100.

<sup>75</sup> Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism*, 24.

<sup>76</sup> Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 44.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

Mohammed Qutb distributed his brother's literatures, which, like his own works, contained strong anti-Western themes, referring to Christians as *salibi* (Crusaders) and insisting that only by regaining a disciplined faith could Muslims overmatch the West.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, Qutb's writings on Saudi sensitivity to Christians proselytizing on Arab soil inspired al-Utaybi's aggression against the Saudi government and provided ammunition for Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's ridicule of the Saudi royal family.

The subject of Wahhabi creed remained outside the Muslim Brotherhood's control until 1971, when Mohammed Qutb was selected as the first Muslim Brotherhood member to hold a position in the Saudi government's department of creed. There he emphasized the significance of *tawhid* and *jayhiliyya* in creed curriculum.

The combination of the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood and Saudi Wahhabism drew the attention of influential Islamic fundamentalist thinkers who sought refuge in Saudi Arabia. Perhaps the most significant of these was Abdullah Azzam, who moved to Saudi Arabia after being dismissed from his university teaching position in Jordan due to his membership in the Muslim Brotherhood. Joining Mohammed Qutb as a professor at King Abdul Aziz University, Azzam worked to restore the idea of jihad. Referred to as the "Emir of Jihad," Azzam proclaimed to his students that "anybody who looks into the state of Muslims today will find that their great misfortune is their abandonment of jihad."<sup>79</sup> Azzam's book, *Defending the Land of the Muslims Is Each Man's Most Important Duty*, made jihad a priority for all Muslims and shaped the outlook of his students, including one Salafi-Jihadi named Osama Bin Laden. Senior Wahhabi *ulema* agreed with Azzam's writings and declared in the mosques of Mecca, Riyadh, and Jeddah that every Muslim has an obligation to engage in jihad. Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bin Baz, one of the highest religious authorities of Saudi Wahhabism, even wrote the introduction to Azzam's

---

<sup>78</sup> Gold, *Hatred's Kingdom*, 93.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 95.

booklet. Furthering his message of jihad, Azzam elevated the importance of defending Muslim lands, making it second only to the Salafi creed. According to former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations Dore Gold, Azzam stated, “If the enemy enters a Muslim land, there is no doubt that it is obligatory for the closest and then the next closest to repel him, because the Muslim lands are like one land.”<sup>80</sup>

Azzam’s emphasis on repelling a non-believing enemy as the most important obligation after the Salafi creed contextualized Salafi-Jihadism. According to his doctrine, those who neglected jihad as the vehicle for protecting Muslim land were living in sin. He classified Muslims unwilling to fight as guilty of syncretism, a religious danger that Salafism strove diligently to eradicate. The December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan caused Salafi-Jihadists like Azzam to call for jihad in response to this attack on the Islamic world. After preaching the significance of jihad at a Saudi university throughout the 1970s and building up an enthusiastic following, according to one of his biographers, Azzam “brought the spoiled Saudi youth from the streets of Riyadh and Jidda to the hills of the Hindu Kush.”<sup>81</sup> Azzam’s writings transformed Salafis into Salafi-Jihadists capable of defeating a world superpower; moreover, he advocated that armed operations had no geographic limits and that there was no need to cease an attack against infidels if non-combatants (women and children) were present, providing a religious justification for killing of civilians. This view laid the ideological foundation for Salafi-Jihadist groups to carry out indiscriminate mass murders of innocent bystanders. What started as a geographic basis for combatting Pan-Arabism, the Muslim Brotherhood’s flight to Saudi Arabia, enabled its members to spread Azzam’s belief that “those who believe that Islam can flourish and be

---

<sup>80</sup> Gold, *Hatred’s Kingdom*, 95.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

victorious without jihad (fighting) and blood are deluded and have no understanding of the nature of this religion.”<sup>82</sup>

#### The Salafist Awakening Movement (1973–1978): The Emergence of Salafi-Jihadism

Followers of the Salafist Islamic Awakening (*Sahwa al-Islamiyya*) movement represented the mainstreaming of the puritanical and fundamentalist strain of Sunni Islam that took place from the late 1960s to the late 1970s. According to Robert Rabil, “The ideological foundation of the Salafi-Jihadists can be traced to that of the Sahwa and the ideology of the Salafi-Jihadists has its roots in the hybrid ideology that was born out of the fusion of the Muslim Brotherhood’s political and cultural outlook and Wahhabism’s creed in Saudi Arabia.”<sup>83</sup> The Salafist Awakening movement stemmed from the hybridization of the ultraconservative Wahhabi interpretation of Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood’s highly politicized form of Salafism.<sup>84</sup> It merged Sayyid and Mohammed Qutb’s political dimension of the Salafist ideology, revolving around *jahiliyya*, with Wahhabism’s emphasis on *tawhid* into the ideological hybrid of Salafi-Jihadism. Rabil noted that Salafi-Jihadism “established the ideological correlation between the application of *sharia* and the purification of the Salafi creed,” and this concept came to occupy a central position in the ideology of the Salafist Awakening movement.<sup>85</sup>

Additionally, this movement promoted *al-wala wal-bara* (loyalty and disavowal) as a prominent principle in the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism. The concept of *al-wala wal-bara* charged Muslims to exhibit unity among Salafists and enmity toward non-Muslims, as well as toward

---

<sup>82</sup> Abdullah Azzam, “Join the Caravan,” in *The Canons of Jihad: Terrorists’ Strategy for Defeating America*, ed. Jim Lacey (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 125.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Rabil, *Salafism in Lebanon: From Apoliticalism to Transnational Jihad* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 44.

<sup>84</sup> Brachman, *Global Jihadism*, 53.

<sup>85</sup> Rabil, *Salafism in Lebanon*, 45.

Muslims not living in accordance with the Salafi creed.<sup>86</sup> The concept took on a political meaning after Salafists like al-Utaybi began to openly oppose the Saudi monarchy over its relations with the West. Salafi-Jihadism interprets *al-wala wal-bara* as an extension of *tawhid*, in that it sanctions the disavowal of rulers who fail to apply *sharia*, and as an instrument to separate the faithful from the *kafir* (infidel), thus making them subject to jihad. According to Rabil, “A Muslim cannot profess his belief in *tawhid*, and by extension Islam, if he does not demonstrate his enmity toward non-Muslims.”<sup>87</sup> During the Salafist Awakening movement, Salafi-Jihadism emerged as a religious-political doctrine aimed at combatting regimes that failed to rule by *sharia* and all those whom Islam disavowed—whether artificial Muslims, dissenters, or non-Muslims.

The Salafist Awakening movement legitimized the exercise of jihad as an acceptable means to attain goals within and for the Salafist community. Inspired by Sayyid and Mohammed Qutb’s and Azzam’s message to wage a defensive war against foreign influences penetrating the governments of Arab nations, JSM seized the Grand Mosque, thus becoming the first Salafist group to turn its violence against the Saudi monarchy. Additionally, by 1973 the Salafist Awakening movement had created a more xenophobic form of Pan-Islamism throughout Saudi Arabia.<sup>88</sup> Salafists became convinced that the Muslim world was being oppressed by Western forces and developed a sense of responsibility to help other Muslims. This outlook created a tendency toward perceived victimization and emphasized the defense of territory, which during the Afghan war caused the Saudi government to praise jihad and encourage Salafis to combat Soviets in Afghanistan.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Rabil, *Salafism in Lebanon*, 45.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>88</sup> Hegghammer, *Islamist Violence and Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia*, 704.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 703.

According to Jarret Brachman, the Salafist Awakening became a “Salafist assembly line” that heightened the political and Islamic awareness of Saudi youth, contributing to the formation of the JSM.<sup>90</sup> JSM’s view of Saudi Arabian social conditions by the mid- to late 1970s emphasized the need to defend the Muslim community against Western ideological attack. Al-Utaybi, the JSM member who coordinated and led the seizure of the Grand Mosque, considered the Saudi regime no longer Islamic and claimed that instead of supporting the tradition of jihad against infidels, the regime was actually cooperating with infidels. Grounded in Salafist tradition and Sayyid Qutb’s teachings, Juhayman al-Utaybi’s Salafist group was prepared to fight *jahiliyya* Muslim regimes to the point of martyrdom.

While enjoying enormous revenue from petroleum exports, Saudi Arabia also claimed an esteemed religious position as guardians of Islam’s two holiest sites and the sole defender of the Arab and Muslim cause; however, this monopoly would be short-lived.<sup>91</sup> Salafist ideology opposed King Faisal’s modernization and human-rights initiatives. Oil revenues transformed the Saudi social landscape, creating an abundance of low-paying jobs filled by foreigners from Third World countries. The Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) employed half of the Saudi labor force and a third of the nation’s population.<sup>92</sup> Social conflict arose over the treatment of women, slavery, and the introduction of modern technology. Relenting to Western business associates, King Faisal ignored the guardians of Salafist ideology and westernized the kingdom by endorsing women’s rights, abolishing slavery, and founding Saudi television.<sup>93</sup> These actions fueled Salafist enmity toward the king, since the Salafists rejected modernization, despised rulers who failed to strictly enforce Islamic law, and perceived capitalism as a threat to God’s law.

---

<sup>90</sup> Brachman, *Global Jihadism*, 55.

<sup>91</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, 105.

<sup>92</sup> Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca*, 22.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 22-23.

With regard to Western encroachment on Arab soil, Salafi-Jihadi Ayman al-Zawahiri noted, “It helped the Islamic movement to know and define its enemies as it helped it to realize that the internal enemy was not less dangerous than the external enemy was and that the internal enemy was a tool used by the external and a screen behind which it hid to launch its war on Islam.”<sup>94</sup> The Salafists, inspired by Sayyid Qutb’s writings, contemplated armed jihad against the Saudi regime which they viewed as in *jahiliyya* - refusing to apply Islamic law. The West was seen as a threat to Islamic legitimacy, an enemy of Islam with whom the Salafists could see no possibility of co-existence. The publication of several anti-Western books—*The Methods of the Ideological Invasion of the Islamic World* and *The Facts That the Muslim Must Know About Christianity and Missionary Activity*—stamped with the seal of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s General Presidency for the Directorate of Religious Research echoed the militant hybrid Salafism spreading throughout Saudi Arabia; these books have frequently been referenced and their themes articulated by Salafi-Jihadist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS.<sup>95</sup> The arguments constructed by militant Salafis in the Saudi kingdom during the early 1970s enabled the leap to jihad as reflected in the siege of the Grand Mosque.

In response to three critical events in 1979: the Iranian Revolution, the seizure of the Grand Mosque, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Salafism evolved from a non-violent political movement into a jihadist global enterprise. The first was undertaken by the Salafists themselves. King Faisal’s actions to secularize and modernize Saudi society outraged Saudi Salafists, of whom a minority were jihadists prepared to violently implement their vision. As a target, they selected the Grand Mosque in Mecca, a symbol of King Faisal’s promotion of the Pan-Islamic movement and the Saudis’ Islamic supremacy. Juhayman al-Utaybi, preaching

---

<sup>94</sup> Mansfield, *His Own Words*, 47.

<sup>95</sup> Gold, *Hatred’s Kingdom*, 102.

Salafist doctrine and urging Islamic purification, established a small cadre, recruited several hundred followers, and ignited a Salafi-Jihadist uprising.

However, before al-Utaybi seized the Grand Mosque, another dramatic overthrow rocked the politics of the Muslim world, as the Shi'ite mullahs overthrew the Shah of Iran. Through this Revolution, the Shi'ite mullahs gained control of a platform by which to globally broadcast their form of Islam, export Shi'a religious ideology, and challenge the Sunnis for control of the Muslim world. Sunnis then faced internal discord as Salafi-Jihadists revolted against the Saudi state and besieged the Grand Mosque. To defuse the internal Salafi-Jihadist threat after the siege ended, the Saudi government helped to supply both financial resources and fighters to the battlefields of Afghanistan to combat the Soviet Union military invasion. Subsequently, Afghanistan became the training site where thousands of Salafi-Jihadis acquired experience in combat and a new understanding of Islam in a context of violence.<sup>96</sup>

### 1979

“My contention is that a number of noteworthy happenings occurred in 1979 that caused dramatic change in the Middle East and beyond.”

—David Lesch, *1979: The Year that Shaped the Modern Middle East*

The events of 1979 marked a watershed in the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism ideology. The political and social repercussions of the Iranian revolution, the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan created a power struggle between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shi'a Iran over supremacy of the Muslim world. The overthrow of the Shah transformed Iran into a Shi'a theocracy that threatened Saudi Arabia's control over the Muslim world, a position the Saudis had held since overcoming Nasser's Pan-Arabism in 1967. Years of enmity towards the al-Saud regime culminated in a Salafist act of jihad against the Saudi monarchy. Both the Shi'a revolution in Iran and the siege of the Grand Mosque directly

---

<sup>96</sup> Mansfield, *His Own Words*, 35.

challenged the legitimacy of the al-Saud regime by denying that it was as devout as the Salafis or the Iranian Shiites. Such pressure forced the Saudi government to support puritanical Salafi education and to finance the export of Salafi-Jihadism to Afghanistan as evidence of its dedication to pure Islam. The Islamic opposition to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan eventually mutated into al-Qaeda and inspired the growth of a Salafi-Jihadist ideology the might of which has been felt throughout the globe.

#### The Iranian Revolution: A Threat to the Sunni Dominance of the Muslim World

Arab-Persian ethnic hostility predates Islam and has been a fixture in the Middle East since the Battle of al-Qadisiyyah (636 A.D.), which further escalated after the Persian Shah adopted Shi'a Islam as the religion of the Safavid Empire in the sixteenth century.<sup>97</sup> The Iranian revolution of 1979 added more tension to the long history of Sunni Arab conflict with Shi'a Iran. After King Faisal's Salafist-infused foreign policy neutralized Nasser's Pan-Arab ideology, the hegemonic ambitions of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, also known as the Shah of Iran, challenged Saudi Arabia for leadership in the Gulf region. Starting in the 1950s, the United States provided Iran with military aid in the form of equipment and training. Iran emerged as a US proxy in the fight against communist expansion in the Middle East. In an attempt to balance power between Iran and Saudi Arabia, King Faisal strengthened his alliance with the United States throughout the 1960s. Recognizing the heavy US dependence on the Persian Gulf region's oil supplies as a strategic opportunity, King Faisal and the Shah put aside their historical, political, and religious differences and focused on their common interest in exporting oil.<sup>98</sup>

The foundation of the United States's twin pillar policy rested on Iran and Saudi Arabia, as both countries were anti-communist, conservative, and beneficiaries of US political,

---

<sup>97</sup> Roby Barrett, *Saudi Arabia: Modernity, Stability, and the Twenty-First Century Monarchy* (Tampa, FL: Joint Special Operations University Press, 2015), 64.

<sup>98</sup> Henner Furtig, *Iran's Rivalry with Saudi Arabia between the Gulf Wars* (London: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2002), 8.

diplomatic, and economic support.<sup>99</sup> Despite their differing internal policies, both monarchs agreed that open Saudi-Iranian confrontation would strengthen foreign challengers to oil production, destabilize prices, and threaten their export market. In his memoirs, Shah Reza Pahlavi summarized his relations with Saudi Arabia in this way: “We also had friendly relations with our neighbors on the other side of the Persian Gulf—Kuwait, the Emirates, and especially Saudi Arabia.”<sup>100</sup> Pahlavi ensured that Pan-Iranism, or the spread of Persian history and culture, never threatened King Faisal’s Pan-Islamism. According to Henner Furtig, “One can say that the cooperative elements that Faisal and Mohammad Pahlavi had managed to distil from the apparently contradictory concepts of Pan-Iranism and Pan-Islamism prevailed.”<sup>101</sup> This sense of common interests between the rulers of Iran and Saudi Arabia maintained regional stability until the Iranian revolution.

On February 11, 1979, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, motivated by religion, nationalism, and authoritarian power, overthrew Pahlavi; two months later, he declared Iran an Islamic republic. The principles of the revolution that brought Khomeini to power were based on Shiite political philosophy and power structure. Ray Takeyh explained, “Khomeini radically departed from prevailing Shiite traditions; his concept of *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurist) called for direct assumption of political power by the clergy.”<sup>102</sup> The religious aspect of establishing Shi’a clerical rule in Iran highlighted potential hostility with Saudi Arabia’s Sunni Salafis, who saw the Iranian revolution as a way to impose Shiite ideological hegemony and criticized the Shi’a clergy’s role in the new republic. Saudi Salafis accused Khomeini of attempting to gain

---

<sup>99</sup> Furtig, *Iran’s Rivalry with Saudi Arabia*, 6.

<sup>100</sup> Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Answer to History* (New York: Stein and Day, 1980), 134.

<sup>101</sup> Furtig, *Iran’s Rivalry with Saudi Arabia*, 18.

<sup>102</sup> Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 61.

power within the Middle East by converting people to Shi'a Islam. According to Walid Abdelnasser, "His [Khomeini's] attempts to bridge the gap between Sunnis and Shiites were no more than conspiracies aimed at converting Sunnis to Shiism."<sup>103</sup> Moreover, Khomeini preached mistrust of foreign elements, especially American imperialists and corrupt leaders like Pahlavi whose politics were driven by concern for personal gain.<sup>104</sup> By verbally insulting America and its allies, Khomeini also targeted Saudi Arabia, further intensifying the Salafists' negative view of the Iranian revolution.

More threatening to Saudi Arabia than Khomeini's rejection of the Shah's pro-American foreign policy was the potential reemergence of a Shiite Persian Empire. Although his early speeches emphasized Sunni-Shi'a unity, Khomeini's rhetoric, actually inspired by Sunni fundamentalism, brought internal Shiite opposition that caused him to change his stance.<sup>105</sup> The Iranian revolution reignited the Sunni-Shi'a competition for the Muslim world. As Furtig observed, "Iran's strong-universalist approach and her demands for a leading position within the *umma* [Muslim community] as well as its assumed role as a model for the world's Muslims challenged the very roots of her identify of the Saudi Arabian state and its ruling family as the heart of the Muslim world."<sup>106</sup> Because of Saudi Arabia's dependence on the United States, the Islamic Republic of Iran challenged Saudi credibility as a guardian of Islam's holiest places, going so far as to call for the placement of Mecca and Medina under international control. Khomeini referred to the Saudis "as a bunch of pleasure-seekers and mercenaries and asked how

---

<sup>103</sup> Walid Abdelnasser, "Islamic Organizations in Egypt and the Iranian Revolution of 1979: The Experience of the First Few Years," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1997): 32.

<sup>104</sup> Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 61.

<sup>105</sup> Mohammad Mohaddessin, *Islamic Fundamentalism: The New Global Threat* (Washington, DC: Seven Locks Press, 1993), 56.

<sup>106</sup> Furtig, *Iran's Rivalry with Saudi Arabia*, xiv.

long must Satan rule in the house of God.”<sup>107</sup> Khomeini’s foreign policy further targeted the Saudi Arabian monarchy by postulating that monarchical rule was incompatible with an Islamic state and that a republic was the only acceptable form under Islam. By asserting that a monarchy was a non-Islamic government, the Iranians directly challenged the Saudi dynasty. Iran chastised Saudi Arabia as a lackey of the Americans, referring to Saudi faith as “American Islam.”<sup>108</sup>

The Iranian revolution and the subsequent attacks on the Al-Saud family’s prestige and legitimacy throughout the Muslim world catalyzed the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism in three ways. First, the revolution exposed the disconnect between the Al-Saud family and its citizens, thereby fomenting the first major explosion of Sunni Islamist violence. Reacting to Saudi Arabia’s modernization throughout the 1960s and 1970s and its association with the United States, the Salafist group JSM, led by Juhayman al Uteybi, blasted the Al-Saud family for partnering with Christians who were plundering the legacy of Islam.<sup>109</sup> Prior to and after the assassination of King Faisal in 1975, the Saudi Crown Prince Fahd “was gaining a reputation as a pro-American playboy who escaped Wahhabi restrictions in the French Riviera, where stories proliferated about his gambling, drinking, and whoring exploits.”<sup>110</sup> For al-Utaybi, the discourses of Iranian leadership after the Iranian revolution further emphasized the Saudis’ departure from the traditions of the Prophet Mohammad. This distaste for the al-Saud regime led al-Utaybi and 200 of his supporters to seize the Grand Mosque in Mecca on November 20, 1979, as further discussed below.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 234.

<sup>108</sup> Furtig, *Iran’s Rivalry with Saudi Arabia*, 40.

<sup>109</sup> Benjamin and Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, 89.

<sup>110</sup> Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca*, 27.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

Second, the Iranian revolution placed intense pressure on the Saudi regime's own religious bureaucracy to emphasize the prevalence of the clerical Salafist class. The revolution put the Saudi royal family at risk of being perceived as impious, and the fall of the Shah demonstrated the potentially violent response that could be expected for such transgressions by Islamic societies.<sup>112</sup> The rapid and sweeping modernizations that occurred under King Faisal isolated the *ulema*. Threatened by Khomeini's confrontational narrative, the al-Saud family expanded the *ulema*'s role in Saudi affairs.

Lastly, Khomeini, seeking to spread revolution throughout the Muslim world as part of his grand strategy, instigated an uprising in eastern Saudi Arabia, causing the Salafis' anti-Shiite sentiment to become the face of Saudi domestic policy. As repressed Muslims began to absorb Khomeini's message, the 350,000-member Shiite minority occupying the Saudi eastern province revolted against the Saudi regime.<sup>113</sup> Occupying an area that contained the major part of Saudi oil reserves and accounted for one-third of the country's oil field workers, the Saudi Shiites looked to Khomeini for leadership. As the Saudi regime attempted to retake the Grand Mosque from JSM, Saudi security forces and the Shiites also found themselves in a week-long standoff that the latter had initiated by an assault on Saudi forces. With Iranian radio broadcasts urging Saudi Shiites to overthrow the tyranny in Saudi Arabia, the Shiite uprising provoked a backlash of resurgent Salafi anti-Shiite sentiment that had been dormant during Saudi Arabia's cordial pre-revolution relations with the Shah. This became evident when Saudi security forces disregarded rules of engagement governing excessive use of force and collateral damage, instead dispersing rioting Shiites by firing machine guns into the masses of demonstrators.<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> Frederic Wehrey, *Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2009), 14.

<sup>113</sup> Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca*, 179.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

This renewed Salafi anti-Shiite sentiment quickly spread throughout the Middle East as Sunnis felt threatened by the Shiites' unyielding force. The Iranian revolution offered a Pan-Islamic ideology for neglected Shi'a Islamist groups and shattered the existing Pax Islamica, with the firebrand Khomeini ready to challenge Saudi Arabia for Islamist leadership. With ideological roots in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the Salafis accused Khomeini of condemning all Sunnis.<sup>115</sup> Salafi-Jihadis used the Iranian revolution as a sounding board to highlight the differences between Shiites and Sunnis, portraying Khomeini's attempts to bridge the gap as a ploy aimed at converting Sunnis. Rejecting Khomeini's fatwa that called on Shiites to perform the *Hajj* (pilgrimage) in 1980, the Salafist movement openly criticized Shiite clergymen in Khomeini's Islamic Republic. The Iranian revolution thus intensified Salafism's rejection of Shiites and validated the pathological hatred that Salafi-Jihadis hold for the Shi'a sect—a distaste that has been amply displayed by al-Qaeda in Iraq and by ISIS.

#### The Siege of the Grand Mosque: 100,000 Hostages Catch al-Saud's Attention

For Juhayman al-Utaybi and his followers, the Saudi regime's close ties with the West, its movement away from the traditions of the Prophet Mohammed, and its failure to rule under *sharia* were evidences of Saudi weakness that had enabled the Iranian revolution. Inspired by the writings of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, most notably Sayyid Qutb, JSM seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca because "the responsibility of jihad would fall to a vanguard of true believers, who would kill the *jahili* rulers and lead fellow Muslims into a new golden age."<sup>116</sup>

On the morning of November 20, 1979, the dawn of Islam's fifteenth century, forty thousand worshippers gathered for prayer in the largest and holiest Islamic shrine—the Grand Mosque in Mecca—for prayer. Minutes into the 5:30 am prayer, al-Utaybi and hundreds of his JSM followers took control of the mosque, killing the security guards and trapping worshippers

---

<sup>115</sup> Walid Abdelnasser, "Islamic Organizations in Egypt and the Iranian Revolution of 1979: The Experience of the First Few Years," *Arab Studies Quarterly* (Spring 1997): 32.

<sup>116</sup> Benjamin and Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, 63.

inside by locking the mosque's gates. Al-Utaybi's objective was to establish a just kingdom and to dethrone the apostate Saudi rulers who were luring Muslims away from the path of God.

After gaining the worshippers' attention, al-Utaybi demanded that a true Islamic leader replace the Saudi monarchy, one who would end Al-Saud's close alliance with the United States, whose Western influence corrupted the land of Allah. Al-Utaybi's Salafi ideology rang out as he declared "obedience only to those who lead by God's book. Those who lead the Muslims with differing laws and systems and who take only from religion what suits them have no claim on our obedience and their mandate to rule is nil."<sup>117</sup> Al-Saud's leadership, the Salafi ideology urged, had "betrayed the faith, siding for reasons of political expediency with a regime they clearly knew to be violating Islamic rules."<sup>118</sup> Inspired by Ibn Taymiyya and Sayyid Qutb, al-Utaybi declared Islam to be in a disastrous state of *jahiliyya*. Forming an alliance with Christians, who had been welcomed on Muslim soil and were plundering the legacy of Islam, brought all Muslims into corruption and evil; therefore, the Saudi rulers were apostate and needed to be abolished. Furthermore, al-Utaybi wrote in his many letters prior to the attack, the Al-Saud family did not satisfy one criterion for a Muslim ruler, because they were not members of the Prophet Mohammed's tribe (al-Quraysh).<sup>119</sup> Al-Utaybi also demanded the reversal of Al-Saud's tolerance of Shiism throughout the kingdom. Upholding his Salafist background, al-Utaybi despised the Shi'a sect and believed that they should convert to Sunnism or face extermination.<sup>120</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> Rifat Sayyid Ahmad, *Letters of Juhayman al-Utaybi, Leader of the Invaders of the Holy Mosque in Mecca* (Cairo: Madbuli, 2004), as quoted in Marisa Allison, "Militants Seize Mecca: The Effects of the 1979 Siege of Mecca Revisited" (unpublished paper, University of Mary Washington, n.d.), 2, <http://cas.umw.edu/dean/files/2011/08/Allison.-metamorphosis-version.pdf>.

<sup>118</sup> Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca*, 33.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 13.

Formed in the 1960s, JSM emerged in Medina as a remedy for the alleged failure of Saudi religious police to enforce Islamic injunction of “commanding right and forbidding wrong.”<sup>121</sup> JSM saw it as its duty to enforce Salafi religious obligations. For example, JSM members confronted store managers who allowed the display of female mannequins. Formally recognized by Sheikh Bin Baz, a senior member of the Saudi *ulema*, JSM experienced rapid growth in the early 1970s and opened offices in Mecca, Riyadh, and Jeddah. Ideologically, the group focused on issues of moral and religious freedom until 1976, when tension with the Wahhabi *ulema* surfaced. Advocating for a literal interpretation of the Quran and Hadith, al-Utaybi, JSM’s leader, refused to accept such more moderate views as a *fatwa* (Muslim legal opinion) authorizing continued eating after the first call to prayer during Ramadan. This schism focused al-Utaybi’s attention on the legitimacy of the Saudi state, which he believed to be too close to Christians. He wrote, “Is it possible to declare jihad on the *kufar* [infidel] states while we maintain our ambassadors in their territory, and keep their diplomats, experts, and professors in our countries?”<sup>122</sup> No longer pietist and apolitical, by 1977 JSM actively and openly opposed the Saudi state.

The siege at the Grand Mosque lasted three weeks and required the Saudis to employ 10,000 security forces from the Saudi National Guard and Regular Army, Pakistani soldiers, and French commandos to regain control of the Grand Mosque.<sup>123</sup> The Al-Saud regime failed to expel JSM forces from the Grand Mosque despite employing all its internal resources, and King Fahd reached out to the United States for security assistance. Desecrating the mosque and causing hundreds of deaths in the process, Saudi security forces finally suppressed the JSM militants

---

<sup>121</sup> Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 89.

<sup>122</sup> Ghassan Salame, “Islam and Politics in Saudi Arabia,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1987): 243.

<sup>123</sup> Sherifa Zuhur, *Saudi Arabia: Islamic Threat, Political Reform, and the Global War on Terror* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), 22.

using armored personnel carriers and tear gas. Al-Utaybi and his followers tactically embarrassed Saudi security forces, exposing their inability to defend against internal attacks. On December 4, Saudi forces captured al-Utaybi, signifying the end of the bloody standoff. Saudi security forces had lost 127 men, and the regime had needed to let non-Muslim French commandos enter one of the holiest sites in Islam to vanquish JSM. The crisis had identified problems—and created new ones—within Saudi leadership that were solved through increasing the *ulema*'s authority in government affairs.

The success of a few hundred militant Salafists in storming and capturing the Grand Mosque served as a catalyst for the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism in several ways. First, al-Utaybi's defensive jihad involved killing other Muslims who were considered apostate. His ideology applied Sayyid Qutb's core elements of jihadism: the concept of *jahiliyya* combined with Ibn Taymiyya, Rashid Rida, and Hassan al-Banna's interpretation of jihad.<sup>124</sup> According to Salafism, human government was apostate because human rule denied God's authority over mankind, and it was the Salafi-Jihadis' responsibility to target *jahili* governments through jihad. JSM was the first Salafist group to use jihad against an arguably illegitimate Muslim regime.

Second, Ayman al-Zawahiri, a close confidant to Osama Bin Laden and member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 1979, admired the writings of al-Utaybi on the failure of the Saudi monarchy. According to Yaroslav Trofimov, "Egyptian radicals were in total agreement with Juhayman that the current rulers of the Arab world—be it the Egyptian or the Saudi King—were no longer legitimate because of their failure to defend the true faith and stand up to the West."<sup>125</sup> Traditionally, as long as Arab leaders called themselves Muslims, they could not be declared *kufar* or be made subject of violent attacks through *takfir* (excommunication). However, al-Zawahiri and Bin Laden, in assessing the legitimacy of Arab governments, advanced the

---

<sup>124</sup> Benjamin and Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, 61.

<sup>125</sup> Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca*, 43.

concept of *takfir* by ignoring tradition. In this way, Salafi-Jihadism reached the point where its members believed that they have the right to judge who is a nonbeliever or apostate, even within the Muslim community, and kill them. A number of other violent actions following the Grand Mosque incident revealed the inspirational power of al-Utaybi's attack. The idea that a relatively small group could violently overthrow a government deemed illegitimate was a novel idea among Islamic movements. After the attack at the Grand Mosque, Salafist groups began to confront other governments they deemed illegitimate. For example, after witnessing JSM's takeover in Mecca, an Egyptian student named Mohammed Islambouli shared with his brother al-Utaybi's writings and the epic tale of the mosque takeover. Eighteen months later, in 1981, that brother, Khalid Islambouli, a member of the Egyptian Salafist group Jam'at Islamiyya, assassinated Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.

Islamic revolutionary Salafi-Jihadist groups formed all over the Middle East in the aftermath of JSM's actions in Mecca. As the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood moved toward a more nonviolent and political path, it rejected Qutb-inspired extremism. On the other hand, Salafi-Jihadist groups like Jama'at al-Muslimin (Society of Muslims), Takfir wal Hirjra (Excommunication and Flight), and Jama'at al-Jihad (Group of the Holy Struggle) sought to overthrow governments and create a true Islamic society under a restored caliphate.<sup>126</sup> Inspired by Sayyid Qutb and Juhayman al-Utaybi, Muhammad Faraj formed his own cell of Jama'at al-Jihad and wrote "The Neglected Obligation," arguing that Muslim society had been lulled into believing that jihad was nonviolent and that violence was the only way to restore the Muslim world. Using the verse of the sword (Quran 9:5) as his theme, Faraj stated that jihad is an individual duty to be carried out against apostate rulers (who deserve to lose their lives), that Islamic states can be only established through militant jihad, and that every Muslim is obligated

---

<sup>126</sup> Esposito, *Unholy War*, 62.

to strive for the return of the caliphate.<sup>127</sup> As the vanguard in the fight against unbelief and apostasy, Faraj highlighted the Salafi-Jihadist groups that sought to topple Middle Eastern regimes. Faraj's work became another integral narrative in the spread of Salafi-Jihadism and was used in promoting the growth of Salafi-Jihadist networks during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Third, as protector of the two holiest sites of the Islamic world, the Saudi government suffered great embarrassment due to the security breach, which led it to initiate a wide array of reforms as the monarchy tried to bolster its legitimacy as a source of Islamic leadership. Although the Saudis defeated JSM at the Grand Mosque, they adopted JSM's ideas by enforcing a more stringent code of Salafist ideology. For example, women were banned from television, stores were closed during daily prayer, and music was barred from the media.<sup>128</sup> As a result, the Saudi population and government became more religiously conservative and the *ulema* gained greater authority in the affairs of the kingdom. Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bin Baz, who advocated the use of the sword to spread Islam and who echoed the writings of Abdullah Azzam, became one of Saudi Arabia's highest official authorities. According to Bin Baz, "Only through jihad against infidels could the Muslims remove all obstacles and spread the *da'wa* [Islamic mission] worldwide."<sup>129</sup> He validated the use of jihad in this way by citing historical Islamic conquests.<sup>130</sup> Bin Baz understood that jihad needed to be decentralized from authoritative leadership in order to spread the *da'wa* globally. He transmitted this understanding of jihad to his former student, Osama Bin Laden, who would form Al-Qaeda with Abdullah Azzam in Afghanistan.

---

<sup>127</sup> Muhammad Faraj, "The Neglected Obligation," in *The Canons of Jihad: Terrorists' Strategy for Defeating America*, ed. Jim Lacey (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 36.

<sup>128</sup> Gold, *Hatred's Kingdom*, 109.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

The years following the siege at Mecca were the most financially prosperous in Saudi history. Now more strongly committed to Islamic revival than ever, the Saudi monarchy allocated a significant portion of its oil money to Islamic universities in Riyadh and Mecca that spread Salafi ideas around the world and to the Salafi-Jihadis in Afghanistan. According to Trofimov, “Many of these official missionaries preached hatred of the infidel and dedication to global jihad,” which included declaring opposing ideals to Salafism as apostate.<sup>131</sup> Bin Baz promulgated a message of *jihad bi-al-mal* (financial jihad), encouraging the Saudi government to finance the Salafi-Jihadist fight in Afghanistan. Between 1979 and 1990, the Saudis provided nearly \$4 billion in aid to the anti-Soviet resistance.<sup>132</sup> In addition, Saudi money financed the construction of Quranic study centers and Islamic schools for Afghan students, which were headed by Saudi disciples of Abdul Azzam.

Finally, al-Utaybi’s “The Seven Epistles” circulated across the Middle East, stating, “The current rulers of the Arab world—be it the Egyptian President or the Saudi King—were no longer legitimate because of their failure to defend the true faith and to stand up to the West.”<sup>133</sup> Al-Utaybi’s writings, which accused the Saudi regime of trying to discourage jihad, influenced Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, who circulated them throughout Afghan training camps in the 1980s, indoctrinating thousands of Salafi-Jihadis. Additionally, Salafi-Jihadi clerics borrowed expressions from al-Utaybi. Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, considered one of the most widely respected Salafi-Jihadist clerics, argued that by sending Saudi soldiers against al-Utaybi’s men, the Saudi state violated the Quranic concept that forbade “waging warfare in the holy precinct.”<sup>134</sup> Maqdisi selected specific writings from al-Utaybi to influence the new generation of

---

<sup>131</sup> Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca*, 243.

<sup>132</sup> Gold, *Hatred’s Kingdom*, 127.

<sup>133</sup> Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca*, 44.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 249.

Salafi-Jihadis, identifying political rulers whom he considered *takfir* (worthy of excommunication) and calling for jihad against them.<sup>135</sup> Forming an organization called Jama'at al-Tawhid in Jordan, al-Maqdisi applied the Salafis' ideas and their disapproval of political leaders to his own work. Abu Musab al Zarqawi, a cellmate and eventual member of Maqdisi's group, heeded al Maqdisi's writings and later implemented them as the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, paying homage to Juhayman al-Utaybi by adopting the call sign Abu Juhayman.

#### The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and the Birth of Al-Qaeda

As Soviet officials watched the unfolding of the Iranian revolution and the mayhem caused by al-Utaybi's uprising in Mecca, they were mobilizing their own army against an Islamic insurgency that threatened the Soviet-backed government in Kabul.<sup>136</sup> The Soviets wanted to implement a communist reform program in a traditional Sunni Muslim society whose citizens rejected the proposed rapid and arbitrary changes; the result was civil war and bloodshed. By summer 1978, the acts of violent jihad committed against Soviet military advisors and their families were demonstrating the vehemence of the Sunni Afghan opposition. In response, Afghan President Nur Muhammad Taraki only emboldened the counterinsurgency campaign as the Afghan armed forces suppressed the Sunni *mujahidin* through ruthless violence.

Perceptions of Saudi or US weakness in the zero-sum game of the Cold War encouraged the Kremlin to take military action in Afghanistan, where the Soviet-backed government in Kabul was also talking with the US relations between Moscow and Amin had worsened after a failed

---

<sup>135</sup> Joas Wagemakers, "Biographies of Salafi Thinkers and Leaders," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 438.

<sup>136</sup> Lesch, 1979, 52–56. The uprising and insurgency took hold in the Heart and Panjshir provinces and quickly spread throughout the Afghan countryside after Afghan President Taraki imposed a series of socialist reforms on a largely Sunni, tribal-based society. Prior to the Soviet invasion of 1979, the Afghan *mujahedeen* were fighting the Taraki regime as fragmented, independent ethnic Sunni groups without centralized leadership; however, they consolidated into a larger formation to battle the Soviets.

assassination attempt, and the Soviets worried that Amin would turn to the United States for protection. After President Carter posted the USS Kitty Hawk battle group to the Persian Gulf on the day of al-Utaybi's seizure of the Grand Mosque, the Soviets fretted over the proximity of US carriers to their border.<sup>137</sup> On Christmas morning 1979, Soviet armies rolled across the Amu Darya River and into Afghanistan, where they installed another Afghan communist president, Babrak Karmal. More than eighty thousand troops were mobilized, indicating the perceived urgency of suppressing the Sunni insurgency. The Soviets feared that the unrest and resistance to Soviet control in Afghanistan could trigger the same reaction in the Muslim-populated Soviet republics of south central Asia. The Saudis, meanwhile, feared that if the Soviets found military success in Afghanistan, Moscow's dream of access to the Indian Ocean could spawn an attack on Saudi oil fields.

The Soviet invasion gave Saudi Arabia an opportunity to export the Salafi-Jihadis, who had become an internal threat to the kingdom, and to restore its Islamic credentials, shaken by the rise of Khomeini's Shiite theocracy. Prince Turki bin al-Saud, the director of Saudi Arabia's intelligence agency, resourced a Saudi Afghan jihad campaign financed through Saudi's oil-based wealth with the intent of injecting Saudi-style Sunni Islam (Salafism) into other Muslim countries.<sup>138</sup> Led by Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, the Muslim World League, and the Islamic Relief Agency donated large quantities of money in support of the Afghan jihad. This financial support allowed Salafi-Jihadis to establish secure bases for jihad training, which could also be used to target Western nations or apostate Muslim rulers. Steeped in a narrative echoing Sayyid Qutb's vision of global jihad, Salafi-Jihadis coalesced around revolutionary Salafists and traveled to the Afghan battlefields to fight for Islam against atheist communism. The guerrilla war against the *kufar* occupiers in Afghanistan became a rallying cry and recruiting tool for Salafi-Jihadism

---

<sup>137</sup> Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca*, 235.

<sup>138</sup> Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*, 60.

while serving as an incubator for the evolution of Salafi-Jihadist doctrine and strategy, which continues to threaten global security today.

How did the Soviet invasion contribute to the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism? First, Salafi-Jihadis consecrated jihad into the tool “that provided Muslims to liberate oppressed peoples from the control of those who worship the false Gods of modernist and postmodernist cultures.”<sup>139</sup> For the first time, the Afghan jihad took to a global scale the operational framework described in Sayyid Qutb’s *Milestones* of engaging in the *da’wa* (spreading the call of Islam), working to establish *sharia*, and engaging in jihad. Al-Qaeda’s founding members, Abdullah Azzam, Bin Laden, and al-Zawahiri, witnessed firsthand how the milestones process facilitated common reference points in the establishment of *sharia*, thus scaling the application of jihad.

Muslim clerics and scholars agreed that jihad against the Soviet invaders of Muslim land was a legitimate defensive jihad, therefore legitimizing it as a community or collective effort on behalf of Afghan Muslims. As thousands of Islamists responded to the call to expel non-Muslims from the *dar al-Islam* (house of Islam), Salafi-Jihadis promoted the individual duty of jihad and glorified all contributors. In his book *Join the Caravan*, Azzam argued that “anybody who looks into the state of Muslims today will find that their greatest misfortune is their abandonment of jihad due to their love of this world and hatred of death. Because of that, the tyrants have gained dominance over Muslims.”<sup>140</sup> To avoid sin, invasion, and oppression, jihad became an obligatory *fard ‘ayn* (individual duty) for each Muslim, especially if another group of Muslims was unable to repel an aggressor. Azzam and later Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri broke from classic Islamic jurisprudence when they considered jihad an individual duty for those residing outside a country of occupation and prioritized it as the first Islamic duty, even before the five pillars of Islam.<sup>141</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> Stephen Coughlin, *Catastrophic Failure*, 158.

<sup>140</sup> Abdullah Azzam, “Join the Caravan,” in *The Canons of Jihad: Terrorists’ Strategy for Defeating America*, ed. Jim Lacey (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 124.

<sup>141</sup> Lesch, 1979, 105.

The resistance leaders cited the language of self-defense to justify their actions. For example, Osama Bin Laden framed al-Qaeda's actions as follows: "We ourselves are the target of killing, destruction, and atrocities. We are only defending ourselves. This is defensive jihad. We want to defend our people and our land." Bin Laden added the ominous warning that "if we don't get security, the Americans, too, would not get security."<sup>142</sup> This same defensive argument would legitimize the Salafi-Jihadist attacks on 9/11 and against coalition soldiers during Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, as well as ISIS's series of attacks on civilians across Europe.

Jihad in defense of Muslim land was not the only ideological concept attracting young Arabs to the Afghan jihad. Abdullah Azzam emphasized the eternal value of martyrdom as a recruiting tool in his books, videos, and cassette tapes that circulated in mosques and bookstores. Martyrdom promised Arab men living under government oppression and economic deprivation a glorious alternative to their life of declining opportunities. Drawing authority from foundational sources of Islamic law such as *sunnas* from the Hadith collections of Bukhari, Azzam promoted martyrdom as a glorious death that assured sinners of forgiveness and reserved a place in paradise for them: "Allah guarantees that he will admit the Mujahid in his cause into paradise if he is killed; otherwise he will return him to his home safely with rewards and war booty."<sup>143</sup> This pageant of martyrdom in the Afghan jihad campaign became a foundational principle in Salafi-

---

<sup>142</sup> Esposito, *Unholy War*, 24.

<sup>143</sup> Coughlin, *Catastrophic Failure*, 83. Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 27–29; Mehran Kamrava, *The Modern Middle East: A Political History since the First World War* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 179–80. Ayatollah Khomeini elevated the virtue of martyrdom during the Iranian Revolution. Shi'a Muslims revere Imam Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's last descendant that died in Karbala, Iraq in 680 AD. As Khomeini gained support before and during the Iranian Revolution, he referred to Iranians oppressed and killed by the Pahlavi regime as martyrs to inspire political revolution and restore theocratic political order. Khomeini's rhetoric that vindicated and promised blessing to martyrs swelled the ranks of the Iranian military and undergirded its successful campaigns against Iraq during the first two years of the Iraq-Iran war (1980–1988). Iranian soldiers inspired by this martyrdom syndrome routinely disregarded threats to their own life and executed valorous tactics that ultimately led to operational victory.

Jihadist groups and a motivating factor for the Salafi-Jihadis who would carry out suicide attacks with improvised explosive devices (IED) concealed in their vehicle or on their body—a staple of al-Qaeda and ISIS strategy.

Second, as the United States was focused on winning the Cold War rather than on the rise of Salafi-Jihadism in Central Asia, it overlooked the Salafi-Jihadist indoctrination taking place in training camps and madrasas. Throughout the duration of the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, it is estimated that more than thirty-five thousand Muslims from forty-three countries were indoctrinated in Salafi-Jihadism.<sup>144</sup> According to Jarret Brachman, Salafi-Jihadist groups came from various Arab countries “to rebuild their organizations from abroad before returning to strike those countries with a vengeance.”<sup>145</sup> These groups included the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which sought to overthrow the apostate Qaddafi government; the Algerian Armed Islamic Group, which waged a violent assault on the Algerian government in the mid-1990s; and the Egyptian group al-Jama’ a al-Islamiyya, which reorganized in Pakistan under the direction of Ayman al-Zawahiri after its members were released from prison for the assassination of President Sadat. Although each group had its own specific issues, their common goal was to overthrow their existing *jahiliyya* governments via armed jihad and replace them with Islamic states. The Salafi-Jihadi global vision also fomented civil wars and armed insurrections in Algeria, Uzbekistan, and Chechnya, targeting repressive non-Islamic governments.<sup>146</sup>

Fighters from Syria, Tunisia, Malaysia, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, and Sudan also traveled to Afghanistan to train for waging war against their own governments. For example, the Jordanians Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Muhammad al-Maqdisi arrived in Afghanistan just in time

---

<sup>144</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 130.

<sup>145</sup> Brachman, *Global Jihadism*, 48.

<sup>146</sup> Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 268.

to see the defeat of the Red Army. Instead of returning to Jordan, both men remained in Afghanistan for three years, attending a series of training camps and forming the Salafi-Jihadist group Bayat al-Imam (the Pledge of the Imam) before returning to Jordan to launch attacks against the Jordanian kingdom.<sup>147</sup> Bayat al-Imam was the precursor to Zarqawi's Salafi-Jihadist terrorist cell in Iraq, Tawhid wal-Jihad (Monotheism and Jihad), which eventually renamed itself as al-Qaeda in Iraq. The Afghan jihad campaign globalized Salafi-Jihadism as thousands of hardened war veterans, trained in the art of combat and dedicated to the strict Salafist covenant, returned to their native countries to attack *jahiliyya* governments. As a result, the decade following the end of the Afghan jihad saw Salafi-Jihadist attacks in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kenya, Morocco, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia.

Lastly, the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan was a crucial catalyst in the creation of al-Qaeda. Managing the Saudi funds supporting the Afghan jihad campaign, Bin Laden partnered with the Jordanian Palestinian Sheik Abdullah Azzam and formed the Afghanistan Services Bureau in Peshawar, Pakistan. Serving essentially as den mothers to the thousands of arriving Afghan Arabs, Bin Laden and Azzam provided Salafi-Jihadis with food, money, and housing.

After forming separate training camps for Arabs, which separated them from the Afghan environment, Bin Laden formalized the idea of an independent Arab *mujahidin*.<sup>148</sup> Bin Laden capitalized on the Arab Salafi-Jihadis' self-portrayal as *ansars* (helpers) who, like the original converts to Islam during the time of the Prophet Muhammed in Medina, were the vanguard of the Islamic army, committed to fighting until all Muslim lands were under Islamic reign.<sup>149</sup> Most of

---

<sup>147</sup> Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Regan Arts, 2015), 8.

<sup>148</sup> Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 113.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 115.

the Arabs who enlisted in the Afghan jihad campaign were unwanted renegades in their own countries. Unable to return to their native country, these abandoned idealists and stateless Salafi-Jihadis yearned for leadership; as a result, Bin Laden had a disenfranchised, desperate Salafi-Jihadi posse, which viewed itself as empowered by God to fight on behalf of the Muslim people, at his disposal.<sup>150</sup> It was just what he craved. Bin Laden and Azzam formed al-Qaeda in August 1988, and it remained the Saudi-backed Sunni Islamic faction until the Red Army withdrew from Afghanistan. Bin Laden envisioned al-Qaeda as the backbone of a close-knit Salafi-Jihadi network “defined primarily by a shared identity, the fruit of common experiences and influences, and based on personal connections developed in Pakistan and on the Afghan battlefield.”<sup>151</sup>

Interestingly, this shared identity that Bin Laden envisioned for al-Qaeda was inconsistent with the view of Azzam, who opposed Muslims killing Muslims. After Bin Laden befriended al-Zawahiri, an Egyptian emir of the Salafi-Jihadist group Jamaat al-Jihad, which sought a coup and the establishment of *sharia* in Egypt, Bin Laden’s Salafism grew more extreme. Exposed to the concept of *takfir* (excommunication of fellow Muslims based on their heresy, an injunction that carried a death sentence) after al-Utaybi’s seizure of the Grand Mosque, Bin Laden inculcated this ideology over Azzam’s objections. A native Palestinian, Azzam wanted to target the irreligious West and the state of Israel, whereas Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri’s priorities targeted apostate Arab regimes. Their differences in strategy cost Azzam his life as he was assassinated in 1989. For Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, Afghanistan was not a matter of geopolitics but an Islamic fight against unbelievers and, consistent with Sayyid Qutb’s milestones, to abolish the rule of human-devised law through jihad.

Arab Afghans interpreted the Soviet Union’s withdrawal in 1989 as a victory and associated the Afghan campaign with the Sura 2:249 of the Quran: “Many a small band had, by

---

<sup>150</sup> Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 106.

<sup>151</sup> Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 115.

God's grace, vanquished a small army with God's permission."<sup>152</sup> The idea of a small group of militants employing violence to overthrow a numerically superior group or seize control of a state became a battle cry for al-Qaeda and other Salafi-Jihadist groups. Their righteous struggle and sense of God's favor created in the Arab Salafi-Jihadis a belief that they were primarily responsible for vanquishing the mighty Soviets. Bin Laden and his fellow combatants thus expected a hero's welcome upon their return to Saudi Arabia and were disappointed to discover that the Saudi public did not share the same euphoria. The growing sense of betrayal grew when Iraq threatened to invade Saudi Arabia and, instead, of calling upon the Salafi-Jihadis to defend the homeland and particularly the two holiest cities in Islam, the al-Saud family turned to the United States. Bin Laden was infuriated by this invitation of non-Muslim troops to fight Muslim Iraqi soldiers, as "an alliance between Muslims and non-Muslims to fight Muslims was also specifically forbidden by the teachings of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab."<sup>153</sup>

By 1990, Saudi Arabia had become a target of al-Qaeda, a group whose leader was inspired by al-Utaybi and JSM's seizure of the Grand Mosque. After he broke with the Saudi regime following the deployment of non-Muslim soldiers in the kingdom, Bin Laden's hatred of the royal family started to echo al-Utaybi's earlier repudiations.<sup>154</sup> As a result, the ongoing strategy of Salafi-Jihadist groups changed to include the far enemy (i.e., Western targets). In Bin Laden's eyes, by maintaining an alliance with *kufar*, the Saudi regime had abdicated its religious legitimacy and could no longer claim to be Muslim.

The influence of Ibn Taymiyya, Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Juhayman al-Utaybi was apparent when Bin Laden, reiterating the Quranic view, categorized civilization into the *dar*

---

<sup>152</sup> *The Koran: A New Translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 28.

<sup>153</sup> DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 268.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, 247.

*al-Islam* and the *dar-al Harb*, with no in-between classification. Treating Western targets as its distant enemy, Salafi-Jihadism promotes transnational jihad fueled by Sayyid Qutb's belief in an American-Zionist conspiracy against Islam; it glorifies the passion of fighting until the enemy is killed or defeated, seeking to incite a cycle of violence that will rally Sunni masses.<sup>155</sup> Twenty-three years after the death of Sayyid Qutb, Bin Laden's Salafi-Jihadist group, al-Qaeda, formed a new vanguard setting out to march through the vast ocean of *jahiliyya*, abolish all Satanic forces, and reestablish *sharia* and an Islamic caliphate.<sup>156</sup>

### Conclusion

The paradigm in the Middle East changed dramatically with the rise and fall of Nasser's Pan-Arabism, the influx of the Muslim Brotherhood into Saudi Arabia, the emergence of the Shiite Islamic Republic of Iran, JSM's seizure of the Grand Mosque, and the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. Salafi-Jihadism, the ideology that emerged from these events, increased tension and chaos both within and beyond the Islamic world. This historical monograph shows when and how Salafi-Jihadism formed, highlighting the key turning points that allowed this ideology to globalize and motivate thousands of Muslims to take up arms against their own government or Western targets.

The competition between Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism (1960–1978) served as a catalyst for the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism because the writings of the movement's ideologues spread throughout Saudi society as the Muslim Brotherhood combatted Pan-Arabism. Saudi Arabia entered a zero-sum Arab cold war with Egypt, the winner of which would gain custodianship of the two holiest sites in Islam and dominance over the Muslim world. Armed with the writings of Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, the Muslim Brotherhood helped Saudi Arabia to defeat Pan-Arabian secular Islam while gaining privileged access to the World Islamic

---

<sup>155</sup> Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 277.

<sup>156</sup> Coughlin, *Catastrophic Failure*, 144.

League and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth. Steeped in the narrative of *tawhid* and *jahiliyya*, the Muslim Brotherhood followed Sayyid Qutb's milestones framework and began indoctrinating Saudi society before eventually moving on to state officials.

A secondary effect of the Muslim Brotherhood's influence in the Saudi educational system was the Salafist Awakening movement. Merging Sayyid and Mohammed Qutb's political dimension of the Salafist ideology, revolving around *jahiliyya*, with Wahhabism's emphasis on *tawhid* led to the creation of an ideological hybrid, Salafi-Jihadism. As the Saudi regime transgressed by entering close relations with the West, the roots of a Salafi-Jihadi movement capable of engaging in jihad formed in response to the apostate, *jahiliyya* Saudi regime. With the near enemy (moderate Muslim governments) in their sights, Salafi-Jihadis adopted *takfir* doctrine and prepared to reinstate *sharia*; however, the Iranian Islamic revolution (not a direct result of the prior competition between Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism) pushed Salafi-Jihadis to take action.

The year 1979 brought Salafi-Jihadism into the Middle East's regional spotlight, with three events serving as political and cultural turning points but also as catalysts in the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism. First, the expansion of Shiite power after the Iranian revolution was the second event in fifteen years to threaten Saudi dominance of the Muslim world. Capitalizing on the Sunni nations' failure to defeat Israel and their relations with the West, Ayatollah Khomeini raised fervor among Saudi Arabia's Sunnis and Shiites alike. As a result, the disdain toward the Shi'a sect felt by Salafi-Jihadis only metastasized and erupted into a violent suppression of Shi'a uprisings in Saudi Arabia's eastern province. The Shi'a threat to the al-Saud regime only strengthened the bond between the monarchy and its Salafist *ulema*; however, Khomeini's anti-Saudi rhetoric convinced al-Utaybi and his Salafi-Jihadist group to attack the *jahiliyya* regime.

In the first significant attack against the Saudi monarchy, al-Utaybi and his Salafi-Jihadist group took over the Grand Mosque. Salafi-Jihadist groups throughout the Middle East took notice as the Saudis used the help of non-Muslims to end the siege. Al-Utaybi justified to the Salafi-Jihadist community the use of violent jihad to overthrow illegal Muslim regimes, and he validated

the practice of killing Muslims in the process (*takfir*). Inspired by JSM and by al-Utaybi's writings, Salafi-Jihadi groups formed throughout the Middle East.

Aware of the growing number of violent extremists, Saudi Arabia exported its Salafi-Jihadis to fight in the Afghan campaign against the Soviet Union. During their years of waging jihad against the Soviet occupiers, Salafi-Jihadis transformed jihad from a community duty into a personal obligation and attracted thousands of fighters while offering the promise of glory should they be martyred. Salafi-Jihadist groups from across the globe converged on the Afghan jihad campaign to replenish their numbers, train recruits, and eventually return to their native country to attack *jahiliyya* governments. Under the tutelage of Osama Bin Laden, Abdullah Azzam, and Ayman al-Zawahiri, Arab Afghans brought al-Qaeda into the Muslim world. After the defeat of the Soviet Union, Saudi Arabia lost control of its Salafi-Jihadis, who were transformed from a small band of fighters in Peshawar into an Islamic state and a caliphate.

Some thirty years later, it seems that barely a day goes by without something in the news that recalls these dramatic events and their long-term impact. The emergence of the Salafi-Jihadist group ISIS can be interpreted as a direct outgrowth of the events that began with the competition for Muslim supremacy between Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism. As David Lesch stated, "The links in the chains from important events and situations can be clearly traced backward in time to their points of origin in the events of 1979."<sup>157</sup>

The Jordanian Salafi-Jihadi Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) or what is today known as ISIS, migrated to Afghanistan in 1989 to join the Afghan jihad campaign. Zarqawi attended a series of Bin Laden-financed training camps in Pakistan and, in 1992, joined Jama'at al-Tawhid, where the group's leader, an Afghan jihad campaign alumnus named Abu Muhammad al-Maqdid, advocated al-Utaybi's message. After the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Zarqawi formed the Salafi-Jihadist group Jama'at at-Tawid wal-Jihad (Monotheism and

---

<sup>157</sup> Lesch, 1979, 58.

Jihad), which later became AQI, and stayed true to his Salafi roots by ruthlessly attacking Iraq's Shi'a population. Zarqawi's organization grew in size due to the extensive Salafi underground network that had ties to Saddam Hussein's regime and that holds key leadership positions in ISIS today.

King Faisal's Pan-Islamic movement extended into Baathist Iraq, reconfirming and strengthening the faith of Iraq's Salafi Muslim population. Iraqi Salafis participated in the Afghan jihad campaign and, upon their return to Iraq after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, found Saddam Hussein implementing a campaign of "Islamization." Although Saddam did not formalize Iraq's Islamic Faith Campaign until 1993, it actually began after the 1979 Iranian revolution, when Khomeini referred to Iraq's Baath party as an atheist regime and Saddam responded by encouraging a Sunni uprising in Iran's Khuzestan Province.<sup>158</sup> By 1989 Saddam, claiming that the founder of the secular Baathist movement had converted to Islam on his deathbed, turned to Iraqi's Salafist community to form a religious movement independent of his government.<sup>159</sup> Saddam's Salafist realignment imposed *sharia*, built mosques, subsidized imams, sponsored pilgrimages to the *hajj*, and added the phrase "God is great" to the Iraqi flag. Intent on infiltrating the Salafist movement to control its progress, Saddam placed Baath party intelligence officers in Salafi mosques; however, as they were introduced to Salafism, they became more loyal to that ideology than to Saddam.<sup>160</sup> The effects of the Faith Campaign were evident within the Iraqi security forces; in particular, as Saddam slipped into further into Salafism, the Fedayeen Saddam became a religious police force imposing *sharia*. Barbarous acts, such as public beheadings of

---

<sup>158</sup> Kyle Orton, "Saddam's Regime: From Baathist to Salafism," podcast, *Jihadology*, last modified 2015, accessed December 29, 2015, <http://jihadology.net/2015/09/17/jihadology-podcast-saddams-regime-from-baathis-to-salafism/>.

<sup>159</sup> Joel Rayburn, *Iraq After Saddam* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2014), 101.

<sup>160</sup> Kyle Orton, "Saddam's Faith Campaign and the Islamic State: The Syrian Intifada," 28 September 2015, <http://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2015/09/28/saddams-faith-campaign-and-the-islamic-state/>.

women accused of prostitution, and videos of Sunni children conducting military training were broadcast on Iraqi television, making an interesting foreshadowing of ISIS.<sup>161</sup> During the US invasion in 2003, the Fedayeen organized the foreign Salafi-Jihadis with many veterans of the Afghan jihad campaign, and after the fall of Baghdad, they either joined Zarqawi's Salafi-Jihadist group affiliated with al-Qaeda or fled to Syria, only to return to Iraq in 2014 as members of ISIS.

Fourteen centuries after the creation of Salafism, Salafi-Jihadis fight under the black banner of ISIS to implement their vision of God's rule on earth. An ISIS propaganda video, "No Respite," echoes the teachings of Salafi-Jihadi ideologues Ibn Taymiyya, Hassan al-Bana, Sayyid Qutb, and Juhayman al-Utaybi as ISIS claims to have formed a caliphate based on the Salafi-Jihadism ideology and following the Quran and Sunna, in contrast to secular states built on manmade laws. "No Respite" emphasizes ISIS's uncompromising call to *tawhid*, mocks the *jahiliyya* politics of the United States, and proclaims the establishment of *sharia*. Looking backward in time to find the origin of the extreme ideology of ISIS, we can find it in the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism from 1960 to 1979.

---

<sup>161</sup> Kyle Orton, "A Case Study of the Islamic State as the Saddam Regime's Afterlife: The Fedayeen Saddam, the Syrian Intifada," 31 August 2015, <https://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2015/08/31/a-case-study-of-the-islamic-state-as-the-saddam-regimes-afterlife-the-fedayeen-saddam/>.

## Bibliography

- Abdelnasser, Walid. "Islamic Organizations in Egypt and the Iranian Revolution of 1979: The Experience of the First Few Years." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 25–39.
- Abdo, Genevieve. *Salafist and Sectarianism: Twitter and Communal Conflict in the Middle East*. Center for Middle East Policy, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2015/03/salafism-sectarianism-social-media>.
- Abrahamian, Ervand. *Khomeinism*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993.
- Al-Banna, Hasan. "Jihad." In *The Canons of Jihad: Terrorists' Strategy for Defeating America*, edited by Jim Lacey, 4–10. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008.
- Al-Misri, Ahmad ibn Naqib. *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law*, edited by Nuh Ha Min Keller. Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 1994.
- Al-Rasheed, Madawi. *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- . *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Azzam, Abdullah. "Join the Caravan." In *The Canons of Jihad: Terrorists' Strategy for Defeating America*, ed. Jim Lacey, 123–37. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008.
- Bakhash, Shaul. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs*. New York: Basic Books, 1984.
- Barrett, Roby. *Saudi Arabia: Modernity, Stability, and the Twenty-First Century Monarchy*. Tampa, FL: Joint Special Operations University Press, 2015.
- Benjamin, Daniel, and Steven Simon. *The Age of Sacred Terror*. New York: Random House, 2002.
- Bergen, Peter L. *Holy War, Inc.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002.
- Brachman, Jarret M. *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Burke, Jason. *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*. New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003.
- Cockburn, Patrick. *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution*. London: Verso Publishing, 2015.
- Commins, David. *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2006.
- Coughlin, Stephen. *Catastrophic Failure: Blindfolding America in the Face of Jihad*. Washington, DC: Center for Security Policy Press, 2015.

- DeLong-Bas, Natana. *Wahhabi Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Deol, Jeevan and Zaheer Kazmi. Introduction to *Contextualizing Jihadi Thought*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
- El-Fadl, Khaled Abou. *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*. New York: Harper Collins, 2005.
- Esposito, John L. *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Faraj, Muhammad. "The Neglected Obligation," In *The Canons of Jihad: Terrorists' Strategy for Defeating America*, edited by Jim Lacey, 35–47. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008.
- Furtig, Henner. *Iran's Rivalry with Saudi Arabia between the Gulf Wars*. London: Garnet Publishing, 2002.
- Gold, Dore. *Hatred's Kingdom*. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2003.
- Haykel, Bernard. "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action." In *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, edited by Roel Meijer, 33–51. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Hegghammer, Thomas. *Islamist Violence and Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia*. *International Affairs* 84, no. 4 (2008): 701–15.
- . "Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries." in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, edited by Roel Meijer, 244–66. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Hourani, Albert. *A History of the Arab Peoples*. New York: Warner Books, 1991.
- Jihad in America: The Grand Deception*. Directed by Steven Emerson. 2012. The Investigative Project on Terrorism, 2012. DVD.
- Kamrava, Mehran. *The Modern Middle East: A Political History since the First World War*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005.
- Khadduri, Majid. *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1955.
- Lacroix, Stephane. *Awakening Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Lacroix, Stephane, and Thomas Hegghammer. *Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman al-Utaybi Revisited*. Bristol: Amal Press, 2011.
- Lesch, David. *1979: The Year That Shaped the Modern Middle East*. Cambridge, MA: Westview.
- Lewis, Bernard. *The Crisis of Islam*. New York: Random House, 2003.

- Mansfield, Laura. *His Own Words: Translation and Analysis of the Writings of Dr. Ayman Al Zawahiri*. Tappan, NJ: TLG Publications, 2006.
- Malik, S. K. *The Quranic Concept of War*. New Delhi, India: Himalayan Books, 1986.
- Meijer, Roel. *Global Islam's New Religious Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Mitchell, Richard P. *The Society of Muslim Brothers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Mohaddessin, Mohammad. *Islamic Fundamentalism: The New Global Threat*. Washington, DC: Seven Locks Press, 1993.
- Murawiec, Laurent. *The Mind of Jihad*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Naji, Abu Bakr. "The Management of Savagery," In *The Canons of Jihad: Terrorists' Strategy for Defeating America*, edited by Jim Lacey, 48-87. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008.
- Oliveti, Vincenzo. *Terror's Source: The Ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism and its Consequences*. Birmingham, UK: Amadeus Books, 2002.
- Orton, Kyle. "A Case Study of the Islamic State as the Saddam Regime's Afterlife: The Fedayeen Saddam, the Syrian Intifada," 31 August 2015, <https://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2015/08/31/a-case-study-of-the-islamic-state-as-the-saddam-regimes-afterlife-the-fedayeen-saddam/>.
- . "Saddam's Faith Campaign and the Islamic State: The Syrian Intifada," 28 September 2015, <http://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2015/09/28/saddams-faith-campiagn-and-the-islamic-state/>.
- . "Saddam's Regime: From Baathist to Salafism." Podcast. *Jihadology*. Last modified 2015, accessed December 29, 2015, <http://jihadology.net/2015/09/17/jihadology-podcast-saddams-regime-from-baathis-to-salafism/>.
- Osman, Tarek. *Egypt on the Brink: From the Rise of Nasser to The Fall of Mubarak*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010.
- Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza. *Answer to History*. New York: Stein and Day, 1980.
- Qutb, Sayyid. *Milestones*. Damascus: Dar al-Ilm, 1964.
- Rabil, Robert. *Salafism in Lebanon: From Apoliticism to Transnational Jihad*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014.
- Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001.
- Rayburn, Joel. *Iraq after Saddam*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2014.

- Salame, Ghassan. "Islam and Politics in Saudi Arabia." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1987): 243.
- Sindi, Abdullah. "King Faisal and Pan-Islamism." In *King Faisal and the Modernization of Saudi Arabia*, edited by William Beling, 184–201. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980.
- Stearns, Peter. "Why Study History," American Historical Association. 1998. Accessed December 23, 2015, [https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/archives/why-study-history-\(1998\)](https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/archives/why-study-history-(1998)).
- Steinberg, Guido. "Jihadi Salafism and the Shi'is: Remarks about the Intellectual Roots of anti-Shi'ism." In *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, edited by Roel Meijer, 107–25. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Takeyh, Ray. *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006.
- Trofimov, Yaroslav. *The Siege of Mecca: The 1979 Uprising at Islam's Holiest Shrine*. New York: Doubleday Broadway Publishing Group, 2007.
- Wagemakers, Joas. "Biographies of Salafi Thinkers and Leaders." In *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, edited by Roel Meijer, 437–38. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Wehrey, Frederic. *Saudi-Iranian Relations since the Fall of Saddam*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2009.
- Weiss, Michael, and Hassan Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York: Regan Arts, 2015.
- Wiktorowicz, Quinton. "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (April-May 2006): 207-39.
- . "A Genealogy of Radical Islam." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28, no. 2 (July-August 2005): 75-97.
- . *Islamic Activism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Wood, Graeme. "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic*, March 2015, [www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archieve/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archieve/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980).
- Wright, Lawrence. *The Looming Tower*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.
- Zuhur, Sherifa. *Saudi Arabia: Islamic Threat, Political Reform, and the Global War on Terror*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005.