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Editor's Note

PREVIOUS ISSUES OF *ARAB INSIGHT* FOCUSED on a range of deep-reaching social and cultural transformations taking place in the Arab world, such as women's economic and social roles, the changing nature of religious leaders and institutions, and the impact of expanding Internet access on democratization and youth values. Our interest in these sweeping trends is due to two main factors.

Firstly, this type of transformation tends to be rapid compared to the relatively slow pace of political change in the Arab world, whether this is regarding transitions of power, political party evolution or the undemocratic nature of political interaction inside Arab regimes. The very vitality of the sociocultural trends only widens the gap between the citizens caught up in them and the more static regimes, a dynamic which could conceivably force the latter to open up and change the state-society relationship.

The second factor is related to the fact that many American and other Western analyses tend to overlook the sociocultural domain in favor of a focus on politics, specifically democratization. Though the importance of the political sphere is undeniable, a deeper understanding of the Arab world, including political change or the lack thereof, requires a grasp of the changing sociocultural situation.

Without then diminishing the importance of the various sociocultural changes which the Arab world is undergoing, the revisionism within some of the jihadist movements is arguably the most striking and potentially significant transformation currently

underway. One must take into consideration the size and reach of these groups, as well as the extensiveness of the revisions, which do not merely renounce violence but also question and reinterpret the theoretical basis they had used to justify violence or their "jihad" over the past decades. Last but not least, these revisions could have a long-term impact on the future of the relationship between the state and these jihadist groups, or the groups and the religious movements with a political agenda (such as the Muslim Brotherhood) or on the Salafist current in general, which is the most active of the violent Islamist movements. Thus, these revisions will remain one of the foremost transformations in the Arab and Islamic world in upcoming years, and need to be thoroughly analyzed for a deeper and fuller understanding of their dimensions and repercussions.

The revisions gained traction after Sayyed Imam al-Sharif, a former leader of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, published "Rationalizing Jihad in Egypt and the World" in which he tackled the theoretical justifications for Islamist violence, as discussed in an article in ***Arab Insight***'s fourth issue. The publication of this document was deemed threatening enough to al-Qaeda that Ayman al-Zawahiri responded with his book Exoneration, attacking Sayyed Imam's revisions, prompting the latter to pen "Denudation of the Exoneration." Thus, a furious debate has been raging within jihadist Salafism, with one side represented by a local jihadist movement (Islamic Jihad, and before it the al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, both in Egypt), whereas the other side is the leading international jihadist movement, al-Qaeda.

As has been said before, this debate created questions about the revision's impact on the Salafist current with its various factions, whether peaceful or violent, local or international. The future of the revision process itself also looks less certain, especially after in "Denudation of the Exoneration" Sayyed Imam al-Sharif slipped from his previous well-thought-out theoretical and religious arguments into ad hominem attacks, declining the opportunity to further break down the theoretical justification of jihad.

Thus we are faced with a pair of important new questions regarding the Islamist phenomenon in the Arab and Islamic world. Will the revisions which a group of Islamist movements are undertaking, and the transition of these movements from violent local jihadist Salafism to nonviolent Islamism, create fissures in the violent jihadist Salafist organizations, whether local or international? And will the peaceful Islamist movements take the necessary steps to be in harmony with the principles and values of democracy and liberalism, with their political, social and cultural dimensions?

Arab Insight tries to offer some answers to these two questions by dedicating five articles to the question as the focus point of this edition. Four of these give specific answers on the revisions' expected impact on the Salafist jihadist current, while the

other article looks at whether one of the largest and most important moderate Islamist movements, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, could become a liberal force.

In addition to this important topic, this edition of ***Arab Insight*** also addresses a range of important social phenomena, including challenges to higher education in the Arab world and the Arab presence on Facebook. Finally, it would have also been difficult to publish this edition without airing an Arab perspective on the causes and consequences on the recent Israeli assault on Gaza. ■

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Liberalizing the Muslim Brotherhood

Can It Be Done?

MOHAMED FAYEZ FARAHAT

Researcher, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Egypt

Firstly, we must note that some object to the very question over whether the Muslim Brotherhood is turning into a liberal force. The notion contains a crucial flaw, since religious groups cannot be assessed based on shifting ideological frameworks. In other words, they argue that these groups be judged based on standards taking into consideration both the groups' characteristics and the characteristics of the cultural framework in which they operate. Most likely, this reservation is due to the debate in the Arab and Islamic world over the relationship between liberalism and secularism, and the substantial overlap between the two concepts. At its essence, these people do not believe that the Islamist movements – including the social movements – have truly accepted secularism as a prerequisite of becoming a liberal movement. They argue that there is a limit to how far the Islamist movements can go with regards to secularism, and so we should not expect the Islamist movements to become completely liberal in the Western understanding of liberalism, since they will not give up their religious nature which distinguishes them from nonreligious political movements.

However, with all due respect to this point of view, there are still others firmly believing in the compatibility of liberalism with a social movement retaining its religious character. One of the main prerequisites to transitioning from being a religious movement to a liberal religious movement is distinguishing between what is religious or evangelical, and what is political. This distinction is still lacking among many Islamist movements, including the Muslim Brotherhood. In this article, we evaluate

the Brotherhood in Egypt from this angle, through an analysis of a set of vital documents it has issued over the past five years.

From March 2004 to August 2007, the Muslim Brotherhood released four crucial documents dealing with the contemporary issues of political reform and elections in Egypt. The first is the Muslim Brotherhood Reform Initiative, declared on March 3, 2004. Coming second was the Brotherhood's electoral platform on the occasion of its participation (as independents) in the parliamentary elections in late 2005. The subsequent Shura Council elections prompted the Brotherhood to make public another electoral platform in May 2007. Finally, in August 2007, the Brotherhood gained attention with its draft party platform.

These documents are significant considering two factors, the first being the general context of heated debate on reform and electoral competition in Egypt in which the documents were created to help lay out the Brotherhood's stance on these issues. The second is the content of these documents, which incorporated a number of important concepts at least on the rhetorical level. The May 2007 Shura Council electoral platform was especially significant in two regards: firstly, because it was openly announced under the slogan "Islam is the Solution," despite the constitutional restrictions on using religious slogans in politics. The text of Article 5 of the constitution after being amended in March 2007 stipulates that "it is not permitted to pursue any political activity or establish political parties within any religious frame of reference (marja'iyya) or on any religious basis, or on the basis of discrimination due to gender or origin." Secondly, this document was released after the Brotherhood had begun discussing publicly issuing a party platform.

At the same time, a precise reading of the four documents – despite the key positive indicators they include – shows a degree of uncertainty and confusion within the Brotherhood. Also, none of the documents managed to solve the two fundamental problems lingering over the group: the suspicion towards them on the part of most political players in Egypt and the vagueness in its positions towards a list of crucial issues. Furthermore, the documents were unable to provide a solid reason for the Brotherhood to keep creating electoral platforms under the slogan "Islam is the Solution," since they had little to distinguish themselves from the other reform initiatives from political opposition groups, with the exception of a handful of economic and social points, or spiritual and religious aspects.

The previous shortcomings can be traced back to a number of factors, most prominently the fact that the Brotherhood still does not draw a line between its religious and political functions, as we will discuss in more detail.

Political Reform as Part of the Brotherhood's Religious Function

Despite the broad consensus between the Brotherhood and the other political parties in Egypt on the centrality of reform, a close reading of the documents, statements and interviews by the Brotherhood's leading figures reveals that there is still a good deal of overlap between its religious and political functions, such that political reform is viewed as part of religious reform. This is illustrated by the following:

1. The 2004 reform initiative was launched on a religious basis and described as being part of its duty to "pass on advice to society." Even though the Brotherhood did not deny that national and patriotic duty was also an important motivation for the initiative, this still came in second place beyond religious responsibility. With the initiative's religious basis, the Brotherhood missed a chance to refute one of the central critiques of the Islamist movements in general, namely that they claim to hold a monopoly over the truth. Even though the initiative reaffirmed the Brotherhood's faith in democratic and liberal ideas, it was introduced "out of faith that we are calling God's call, the most divine call, and championing Islam, the most correct philosophy, and we are presenting to the people the legislation of the Quran, which is the most just legislation – '(Our religion is) the Baptism of God: And who can baptize better than God? And it is He Whom we worship' (the Quran, 2:138). We believe that the whole world in general, and ourselves in particular, are in need of this call and anything which can pave the way for it." At another point, the initiative reads: "Taking as a starting point the verse 'I desire nothing but reform so far as I am able' (the Quran, 11:88), we argue that the goal of our call is true, comprehensive reform on which we must all cooperate….in order to set up God's law and in that is the welfare of the world and religion. 'Then we put thee on the (right) Way of Religion: so follow thou that (Way), and follow not the whims of those who know not' (the Quran, 45:18)." Thus, we can see that the initiative blurs the line between political vision and religious preaching.

2. Regarding the outlines of the Brotherhood's conception of political reform, it is based on four points: (i) the rejection of externally imposed reform initiatives, or measures taken under foreign pressure. The Brotherhood is deeply suspicious of the real goals behind foreign-imposed reform programs and does not believe them to be in the interest of the region's peoples so much as they "primarily aim to continue U.S. hegemony and control over the region's

wealth and destiny, the supremacy of the Zionist entity which is usurping the land of Palestine, and planting governments that are more cooperative with it in its overall strategy."

3. The final goal of reform is setting up God's law through developing the Muslim individual, household, government and state to lead the other Islamic states. This was also affirmed by the draft party platform, which mentioned that one of its goals was having the constitution's second article "include all levels of legislation" (Muslim Brotherhood Draft Party Platform, Chapter 2).

Unclear Understanding of the Civil State

It should be noted that the 2004 reform initiative avoided openly using the concept of the "Islamic state" or "Islamic government," but that the idea was still implicitly present in the initiative's discussions of "the state which leads the Islamic states" and "Muslim government." However, the Shura Council electoral platform was blunter in its use of the term "the Islamic state," which it labeled as a fundamental ends and means, and necessary to "protect [Islam], and stick to its program." In this regard, Islam is no different from "the liberal solution, which must have a state to enact it, protect it and stick to its program."

The draft party platform aggravated suspicions about the Brotherhood's understanding of a civil state when it proposed a "body of senior religious scholars" as a supreme independent source of reference reviewing all legislation to make sure that it is compatible with Islamic Shariah.

Nonetheless, all of the Brotherhood's documents were careful to assert the civil nature of the state, described in the 2007 Shura Council electoral platform: "Its official religion is Islam, and Islamic Shariah is its principal source of laws and provisions…a state in which the rulers and the umma [Islamic nation or community] are integrated, for it is the umma which puts the rulers in power, holds them accountable, and can remove him whenever it is in its interest. For he is a civilian ruler in all aspects, and its government is civil, unrelated to the theocratic state."

In the 2007 electoral platform, the Brotherhood also went out of its way to emphasize three other important guarantees: that Islam by nature rejects religious authority, "since the state in Islam is a civil state with its systems and institutions put in place by the umma, and in which the umma represents the source of authority," and human ijtihad [independent reasoning] within the framework of the immutable points

of Islamic Shariah is not forbidden. The second guarantee is that "Islam does not have religious authority for anyone." Finally, the third is that "the ruler's authority is derived from the social contract between the ruler and subject, enacted by the umma." In addition to the draft party platform reasserting these guarantees, the draft also promised that the application of Islamic Shariah itself would take place through "the vision which the umma agrees upon, through a parliamentary majority in the freely elected legislative authority."

Despite all of these guarantees, the draft party platform aggravated suspicions about the Brotherhood's understanding of a civil state when it proposed setting up a "body of senior religious scholars" as a supreme independent source of reference reviewing all legislation to make sure that it is compatible with Islamic Shariah. This idea triggered sharp debate and fueled suspicions of the Brotherhood, since the political system which the Brotherhood was proposing in this regard resembled the Iranian *wilayet al-faqih* jurisprudential system: the body of religious scholars would be independent from the legislative and executive branches, and its decisions would be binding, without the option of the legislative branch overriding its veto except in cases where Shariah has no clear, final and fixed rulings. Naturally, determining whether or not Shariah has these precedents is left up to the religious body, not the legislative or executive branch.

With the exception of some fundamental points such as rejecting interest rates, the Brotherhood's vision for addressing nonpolitical issues differed little from that of many political players, especially those left of the center on the political spectrum.

Meanwhile, despite the draft party platform reasserting that the head of state and legislative branch are entrusted with the application of Islamic Shariah throughout domestic and foreign policies, the draft also gives any stakeholder the right to appeal before the constitutional court that "any of these laws, decisions, and policies contradict the rulings of Islamic Shariah agreed upon by modern jurisprudents." Without a doubt, this huge expansion in the right of appeal would create chaos in decision-making, especially given the range of interpretations of Quranic verses and varying jurisprudential opinions on any given article.

Economics: Reducing Islamic Regulations to Banning Interest

All four documents to varying degrees also addressed the Brotherhood's stances on nonpolitical (economic, social and cultural) issues, though the Shura Council electoral platform and the draft party platform were the most comprehensive. Nonetheless, with

the exception of some fundamental points such as rejecting interest rates, the Brotherhood's vision for addressing nonpolitical issues differed little from that of many political players, especially those left of the center on the political spectrum.

The draft party platform was more explicit in discussing the Islamic economic system. In general, the Brotherhood's economic system can be outlined in the following points:

- Restructuring the financial system through two principal mechanisms: abolishing the "usury system" (the interest rate) and converting the banks and financial institutions into investment institutions, such that their function is to invest deposits and other financial instruments, rather than trading in money through interest rate-bearing loans. The platform reaffirmed the Islamic investment models, particularly ***musharika*** (venture capital), ***al-buyu'*** (sales) and ***al-ijara*** (leasing) contracts. The Brotherhood's stance is based on the belief that profit is the product of the relationship between capital and labor, i.e. the product of investing capital in economic work, and consequently it rejects the idea of profiting by trading in money and currency.

Belief in the idea of class distinction within society, and even "making sure to protect the wealthy and poor classes alike."

- Preserving the state's socioeconomic role, since the state is "the guider, planner, completer, and responsible for handling crises," and in charge of fighting exploitation, monopolies and scams, as well as controlling prices, safeguarding the poor and managing Islamic endowments. The state is responsible for generally achieving balance in the economic system (public/private, manufacturing/service, agriculture/industry, heavy/consumer industry, rural/urban areas, allowing imports and developing exports, and finally Arab integration/Islamic integration).

- Belief in the idea of class distinction within society and even "making sure to protect the wealthy and poor classes alike." The state ensures that the wealthy fulfilled their obligations to the poor through zakat, charity and taxes, as key financial tools not with the goal of achieving class equality in society but rather so as to ensure a dignified lifestyle for the poor. With this exception, the Brotherhood's economic position is hardly different from the leftist political parties, which generally believe in an interventionist state cooperating with

the private sector, inspired by the experiences of East Asia in the second half of the 20th century.

"Islam is the Solution": Questions and Gray Areas

Despite some positive developments on reform in the four Brotherhood documents, and an attempt to give the slogan "Islam is the Solution" a practical meaning, they still revealed the continued existence of significant problems and gray areas. These issues, some related to the Brotherhood itself and others to the word choice and content within its reformist rhetoric, were tied to the fundamental point of contention – the secular political forces' instinct that the Brotherhood was not ready to adopt a rhetoric that was more political than religious. The encouraging aspects in these documents included the following:

- the vow to maintain a democratic, parliamentary political system;
- promising to work through legal and constitutional channels;
- acknowledging that the people are the source of authority;
- rejecting the idea of the absolute right of any group or party to assume power or stay in power without the will of the people;
- the principle of the transition of power through direct, free elections;
- other related issues such as freedom of belief, opinion, assembly, formation of political parties and ownership of the media;
- a shift in thinking from didactic religious content to a more comprehensive approach to reform addressing politics, the economy, the state's role in production, unemployment, civil society, health, education, research, youth, women, children, Copts, culture, media, foreign policy, etc.

Despite some positive developments on reform and an attempt to give the slogan "Islam is the Solution" a practical meaning, they still revealed the continued existence of significant problems and gray areas.

In general terms, the ideas discussed in the Brotherhood documents revealed the evolution of a comprehensive, multidimensional program to handle the problems in Egyptian society in general, and reform in particular. However, this upside does not negate the fact that the documents failed to overcome the negative perceptions about the Brotherhood held by the other political players, or lurking suspicions that the Brotherhood has a hidden agenda on various issues. These issues include some addressed in the documents, but the occasional contradiction between the Brotherhood's

written and verbal rhetoric, stemming from sharp internal disagreements, damaged the credibility of its reformist rhetoric, or at least delayed its completion until any possible evolution within the organization is complete.[1]

The following are the most significant problems raised by the Brotherhood's rhetoric:

(1) The stance towards political and religious diversity. The Brotherhood's electoral platform only addressed religious diversity, represented by the Copts, by backing some general principles (such as considering the Copts part of the fabric of Egyptian society allowed to carry out their lives in peace; affirming freedom of belief and worship; emphasizing the spirit of brotherhood; and asserting the importance of national unity). However, this did not rise to the level of controversy over the broader religious current's stance towards Coptic-Muslim relations, not only should the Brotherhood come to power, but also given some of the problems in the relations which have arisen from time to time, as well as the discrepancies between written documents and verbal statements. The initiative's position towards Copts' political rights in general remained murky, particular the ceiling to those rights and the stance on some specific Coptic demands.

The deputy guide, Mohamed Habib, assured that "the Copts have all rights, duties and citizenship rights, as they are first-class citizens... with the exception of holding the president of the republic, who must be a Muslim since we are an Islamic country, in keeping with Article 2 of the constitution."

This rhetoric, combined with the results which the Brotherhood achieved in the parliamentary elections, quickly prompted tough Coptic counter-rhetoric against the Brotherhood initiative's basis for Muslim-Coptic relations, "brotherhood" (since the initiative's section on Copts was entitled "the Coptic brothers," and the initiative repeatedly spoke of inter-religious "brotherhood"). The Coptic response argued that there was a big difference between the "brotherhood" proposed by the Brotherhood, and the "citizenship" that should govern the relations between Muslims and Copts.

Some Coptic figures also question how committed the Brotherhood would be to the principle of citizenship in its relationship with the Copts should it come to power, seeing as religious affiliation is more important for the Brotherhood than national af-

1 Some argue however that the relative contradiction between the statements of Brotherhood figures on the political party's issues, the slogan "Islam is the Solution," and the stance towards the West and Israel does not reflect internal division as much as it reflects a distribution of roles to preserve the group's balance. See for example: "Al-tasrihat al-mutadariba li-qiyadat al-ikhwan..inshiqaq am tabadul adwar" ("The Contradictory Statements by Brotherhood Leaders: Split or Exchange of Roles?"), Al-Masry Al-Yaum, January 7, 2006, 5.

filiation, and the Copts would turn "either into ahl al-dhimma [protected religious minorities] or second or third-class citizens."[2] A number of Coptic leaders have even advocated emigration should the Brotherhood come to power.

The Brotherhood had tried in a subsequent stage to deal with the weaknesses of these two reformist documents, responding to the criticism directed at the Brotherhood in a number of statements. The deputy guide, Mohamed Habib, said that "the Copts have all rights, duties and citizenship rights, as they are first-class citizens,"[3] and "they have all citizenship rights and are part of this society's fabric and we have shared decisions and destinies, and the standards through which positions are assumed is according to competence and ability, not religion, creed or gender, with the exception of the president of the republic, who must be a Muslim since we are an Islamic country, in keeping with Article 2 of the constitution."[4] Habib also said that the ahl al-dhimma question had ended with the official ID card given by the state to citizens. Finally, the general guide also stated that Coptic issues would be taken up within the new parliament.

The 2007 Shura Council electoral platform did not make much progress in this regard, since the section on Copts within the first chapter of the platform simply reasserted the content of the reform initiative, only shortening the headline from "Regarding the Coptic Brothers" to "Copts," perhaps in response to the aforementioned criticism. There were also some limited other amendments, such as removing Article 3: "They have what we have, and they have to do what we have to do" and adding in an article: "They are equals to their Muslim brothers in all rights and duties, and in assuming government jobs on the basis of competence and specialization." The other items, meanwhile, remained the same without any pivotal changes, including the article on preserving the spirit of brotherhood, which was changed to "Egyptian brotherhood." In the platform, the term "citizenship" remained absent from the section on the Copts.

Contrary to the issue with religious plurality, Brotherhood rhetoric saw noticeable positive development regarding political diversity, whether for parties in the opposition or the government. The Brotherhood has been critical of an important segment of the cultural elite, blaming it for perpetuating the political deadlock in Egypt, and either

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2 Henna, Milad. "misr wa hukm al-ikhwan..hal sayadi' amal al-ta'ayush bayna al-muslimeen wa al-aqbat?" ("Egypt and Brotherhood Rule: Will Hopes for Coexistence between Muslims and Copts be Lost?"), Al-Sharq al-Awsat, November 27, 2005, 14.

3 Al-Sharq al-Awsat, December 6, 2005, 8.

4 Al-Masry al-Yaum, December 6, 2005. Also see Mohamed al-Sayyed Habib, "Hukm al-ikhwan ghayr warid.. wa lakin hakadha natasawwar al-hukm," ("Brotherhood Rule is Out of the Question, But this is how We Envision the Rule would be"), Al-Sharq al-Awsat, November 27, 2005, 14.

avoiding constitutional reforms or voiding them of their content. However, this did not prevent the Brotherhood from calling on the various political forces and cultural elite across the spectrum to play their role in managing the constitutional amendment process, as well as using different constitutional rights for peaceful political action and freedoms of opinion and expression.[5]

Contrary to the issue with religious plurality, Brotherhood rhetoric saw noticeable positive development regarding political diversity, whether for parties in the opposition or the government.

The Brotherhood went even further when it acknowledged the difficulty of a political force taking up the responsibility of governing Egypt or managing the political reform process alone, and that the practical alternative is ruling the country with a "coalition incorporating all of the political factions."[6] However, this stance, in combination with what was mentioned in its reformist initiative, which called upon action based on the common denominators between all of the political forces, did not eliminate some political players' mistrust of the Muslim Brotherhood.

An important question can be asked in this context: Do the positive developments in the Brotherhood's rhetoric towards political pluralism reflect liberalism taking hold within the group, and seeing itself as just one of many political alternatives? Or is it merely a political tactic – resorting to using liberal terminology given internal political transformations and an international environment which accepts no alternative to this liberal rhetoric - from a religious movement still looking for a legitimate political existence?

In reality, we still cannot offer a precise answer to this crucial question, as can be shown by two fundamental points. Firstly, there are important transformations within the Brotherhood and a faction trying to renew its political and religious rhetoric, while confronting a more conservative faction. Secondly, the Brotherhood has clearly fathomed the nature of the current political balances and that it cannot come to power in the foreseeable future. Proving this understanding, Dr. Issam el-Aryan argued that the Brotherhood at present is not trying to gain power, but rather wants a transitional stage and clear timetable for comprehensive economic and political reform, and is aspiring through that transitional stage to not ignore any of the other political move-

5 "Al-ikhwan yutalibun bi-tashkil lajna 'ulya min al-fuqaha' li-ta'dil al-dustour" ("Brotherhood Demands Formation of Supreme Jurists' Council to Amend Constitution"), Afaq 'Arabiya, no. 702, March 31, 2005.

6 "Hukm misr yahtaju ila tahaluf watani min jami' al-fasa'il al-siyasiya" ("Governing Egypt Requires a National Coalition of All the Political Factions"), Afaq 'Arabiya, no. 702, March 31, 2005.

ments.[7] Mohamed Habib also asserted that the Brotherhood could not rule Egypt any time soon.[8] This recognition of the Brotherhood is significant because it makes it difficult for it to use exclusionary rhetoric against the political other.

(2) The second problem is the stance of the Brotherhood's reformist rhetoric towards the outside world, since it is still based on suspicion towards foreign intentions in promoting reforming. In the Brotherhood's view, reform from abroad could only aim at "U.S. hegemony and control over the region's wealth and destiny, the supremacy of the Zionist entity which is usurping the land of Palestine, and planting governments that are more cooperative with it."[9]

Meanwhile, this rhetoric still has strong elements of conflict with the West, as seen by the initiative retaining the idea of freeing occupied Arab lands through Islamic jihad, making it difficult to create an objective dialogue between the Brotherhood and the West – assuming that the United States and the West aspire to mold the Brotherhood in the model of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey. The sources of conflict are not restricted to political sources only, but they include economic sources also, in light of the argument by some Brotherhood leaders that foreign economic choices should be linked to national security considerations, especially when looking at the proposed U.S.-Middle East free trade zone, American aid and the QIZ agreement.

Conclusion

Based on the previous, we can say that it is unlikely that the Muslim Brotherhood itself will transform its rhetoric or even itself into that of a liberal party. This conclusion is backed by two facts:

1 – Comparing the Brotherhood's reformist rhetoric with liberal rhetoric in general, we note the relative rapprochement between the two sides – at least on the rhetorical level – regarding accepting the principles of democracy, the peaceful change of power, considering the people the source of authority, accepting the principle of utilitarianism (meaning here acknowledging individual rights and class differences). However, disagreement remains regarding two important principles. The first is the

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7 "Qiyadat al-ikhwan: ladayna jadwal zamani lil-islah al-iqtisadi" ("Brotherhood Leaders: We have a Timetable for Economic Reform"), Al-Masry Al-Yaum, December 18, 2005, 5.

8 Habib, Mohamed Al-Sayyed. "Hukm al-ikhwan ghayr warid..wa lakin hakadha natasawwar al-hukm," ("Brotherhood Rule is Out of the Question, But this is how we Envision the Rule would be"), Al-Sharq al-Awsat, November 27, 2005, 14.

9 Muslim Brotherhood Reform Initiative, ibid. See also Dr. Issam al-Eryan's view in "Qiyadat al-ikhwan: ladayna jadwal zamani lil-islah al-iqtisadi" ("Brotherhood Leaders: We have a Timetable for Economic Reform"), Al-Masry Al-Yaum, December 18, 2005, 5.

principle of secularism, meaning the separation between religious institutions and the other political, economic, judicial, administrative and civil society institutions as civil, not religious institutions. The second principle is the principle of rationalism, meaning marginalizing texts, utilizing the human mind, and submitting everything to the logic of reason, based on the view that the human mind has reached a level of maturity allowing it to look after its interests and worldly activities without outside tutorage. This is one of the fundamental principles of the liberal school of thought, and is difficult to expect from the Muslim Brotherhood in the near future. This brings us back again to the stipulation mentioned at the beginning of the article, namely that the transformation of the Muslim Brotherhood to a liberal movement must be based on a specified understanding of liberalism taking into consideration the intrinsic nature of the Islamist movements compared to the secular political movements.

The Brotherhood has not yet succeeded in applying liberal principles to its own internal mechanism, especially in selecting the general guide.

2 – Comparing the Brotherhood's reformist rhetoric with the reality of the reform process within the group itself, we notice that even though its reform initiative labeled "political deadlock, corruption and social oppression, and scientific and technical backwardness" to be "the destructive trinity for the umma," the movement itself suffers from the same political immobility. The Brotherhood's old guard maintains its tight grip on power even as the group criticizes political immobility in Egypt and tries to adopt open, liberal rhetoric asserting its commitment and respect for the principle of the transfer of power through direct, public elections.

The Brotherhood has not yet succeeded in applying those principles to its own internal mechanism, especially in selecting the general guide. The process is actually quite similar to the election of the Egyptian president through referendum. The decision-makers within the Brotherhood choose the candidate according to their calculations (much as the Egyptian People's Assembly used to meet to name the presidential candidate, until the recent constitutional amendment to Article 76). Next comes the process of proclaiming loyalty by the movement's rank and file (like the general referendum for the People's Assembly's candidate). Perhaps it would be wiser for the Brotherhood to begin applying democratic mechanisms within its internal structure.

Likewise, when the group started an internal debate over reform on the shared basis of liberal values, it should have allowed leaders to emerge from the middle generation which has built up crucial political experience in unions, syndicates and the

People's Assembly, so as to add more credibility to its reformist rhetoric, instead of the old guard maintaining its grip on power. (The current general guide is Mohammed Mahdi Akef, born in 1928, and a longtime Brotherhood powerbroker.) Additionally, there is a worrisome lack of self-criticism and review within the Brotherhood, though this process is underway with other Egyptian Islamist groups known for greater ideological and organization centralization (al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and Islamic Jihad). ■

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Literature Review Challenges Its Authority

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As a phenomenon, jurisprudential revisions implemented by contemporary jihadist Salafist groups have garnered the attention of observers and analysts in the recent past. This is largely because these revisions emerged from within jihadist Salafist groups themselves following their entry into violent and armed conflicts with all political regimes, ranging from Arab and Islamic non-Arab regimes to powerful non-Islamic countries, particularly the United States and Western countries. Such conflicts have been established on an ideology based on takfir (labeling other Muslims as kuffar or disbelievers) and the violent combat strategy adopted by these groups during the past decades. These groups have posed a major challenge for Arab and Islamic political regimes. In addition, large numbers of Arabs and Muslims have fallen victim to these clashes, exceeding the number of victims of the Arab-Israeli wars.

Throughout their history, jihadist Salafist groups have committed the most despicable deeds in the name of jihad by expanding the circle of violence and the practice of takfir. This expansion was based on a series of fiqhi (jurisprudential) concepts and traditions such as "martyrdom operations," "al-tatarrus" (taking of human shields by the enemy), "reciprocity," the distinction between "dar al-Islam" (home of Islam) and "dar al-kufr" (home of kufr or disbelief), "al-wala` wa al-bara`" (loyalty towards the believers and disavowal of the disbelievers), and "the near enemy and the far enemy." These and other concepts have been employed by jihadist Salafist groups during the past decades to justify their violent actions against Arab and Islamic states or societies,

as well as against foreign countries.

This expansion implied more targets for the jihadist Salafist groups. Since the events of Sept. 11, the world has witnessed a change in the combat strategy of the global jihadist Salafist movement, which placed the West entirely at the core of its "jihadist" operations. The movement has employed a rule stating that jihad against the far enemy takes precedence over the near enemy. Nonetheless, the movement has not necessarily ceased the fight against the near enemy of Arab and Islamic regimes that the movement considers regimes of "kuffar" and "apostasy." This ideology and strategy led to armed operations open-ended in terms of time and place. In addition to the violent tactics that have spread in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan over the past seven years, incidents of gratuitous killings emerged inside the United States and Europe, as well as throughout the rest of the world. Examples include the attacks on New York and Washington in 2001, the bombings in Bali in 2002, Casablanca and Riyadh in 2003, Madrid in 2004, Amman in 2005, and London in 2007.

Throughout their history, jihadist Salafist groups have committed the most despicable deeds in the name of jihad by expanding the circle of violence and the practice of takfir.

However, contrary and parallel to this trend, which is mainly associated with a certain faction of the global and domestic jihadist Salafist movement, in recent years the arena of Islamic movements has witnessed the emergence of a countertrend founded on a revision of all the concepts and ideas that laid the foundation for killings and violence in the name of jihad. As previously stated, these revisions are significant because they emerged from within the violent jihadist Salafist organization itself. The most prominent and oldest revisions are those conducted by the leaders and historic figures of the Egyptian "al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya" (the Islamic Group). The group produced more than 14 books addressing the theoretical and practical foundations of this jurisprudential revision that covered most importantly the abandonment of violence, of jihad as the only way to advance change, and of the overall traditional arguments of the jihadist Salafist movement that call for labeling the state and society as kuffar (disbelievers).

At a later stage, another significant revision process began within the al-Jihad Organization, the second largest jihadist Salafist organization in Egypt that produced al-Qaeda's number two figure, Ayman al-Zawahiri. Although al-Jihad Organization renounced violence over a decade ago, this cessation did not transform into a comprehensive and systematic revision of the organization's theoretical and practical foundations until the November 2007 manifesto by al-Jihad's former commander

Sayyed Imam al-Sharif.

Consequently, two significant revision experiences materialized within the two largest and most important domestic violent jihadist Salafist organizations. Principally, this article attempts to identify the potential effects of such revisions on the fiqh (jurisprudence) and practice of al-Qaeda.

Revisions lead to revision attempts within the violent jihadist Salafist movement

The initial impact of the revisions conducted by al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya in Egypt was that they triggered a series of revisions – varying in maturity and comprehensiveness – within the violent jihadist Salafist movement in the Arab world. Such revisions have encouraged many prominent leaders within the movement to revisit their overall arguments. The most widely known revisions were conducted by key figures of jihadist Salafism in Saudi Arabia including Sheikh Ali al-Khudair, Nasser al-Fahd, and Hamoud al-Khalidi. These revisions played a significant role in the decline of al-Qaeda's influence in Saudi Arabia, and culminated in the publication of two books by al-Sharif on rationalizing jihadist activities. One cannot understand the motives of al-Sharif (better known within the group as "Abd al-Qader," "Abd al-Aziz" or "Dr. Fadl") and of al-Jihad Organization in general for conducting such revisions in isolation from the successful revision experience of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya. Undoubtedly, this success was a key factor behind al-Jihad Organization's adoption of its own revision experience.

The most important impact of revisions on the violent jihadist Salafist movement is the creation of confusion within the movement, particularly within the mother organization al-Qaeda, which rejects these revisions.

In Jordan, Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi, one of the most prominent theorists of the Jordanian and the global jihadist Salafist movements, expressed several reservations regarding the approach adopted by al-Qaeda, particularly its branch in Iraq under the command of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Al-Maqdisi started his revisions late into his prison term by authoring "al-risala al-thalathiniyya fi al-tahdhir min al-gulu fi al-takfir" (The Thirty-Part Letter Warning against Exceeding the Bounds of Takfir). In his book, al-Maqdisi criticizes the intellectual errors and wrongful conduct of the followers of his movement. However, his criticism touched a nerve as he spoke of the errors of al-Zarqawi and his group in Iraq, as well as his methodological differences with al-Zarqawi. In his famous letter "al-Zarqawi: munasara wa munasaha" (al-Zarqawi: Support and Advice), al-Maqdisi summarized his sharp critique to al-Zarqawi's ap-

proach. The letter caused wide controversy within al-Maqdisi's movement to the point that some followers even threatened the theorist while he was in Qafqafa prison in northern Jordan. This occurred a few months before he was released after Jordan's state security court decreed that he was not responsible in a case involving an armed faction.

The highlights of al-Maqdisi's revisions are reflected in his criticism of al-Zarqawi's increased use of suicide operations, targeting of civilians and acute hostility toward Shiites. He also criticized al-Zarqawi's media discourse, which involved videos of beheadings carried out by his organization. Furthermore, al-Maqdisi criticized al-Zarqawi's involvement in planning to conduct armed operations in Jordan. He reiterated that despite his refusal to accept the political process and recognize the legitimacy of Arab governments he, nonetheless, rejects armed action in Jordan because the conditions for such action are not met and it would imply annihilation for his movement's followers. It is true that al-Maqdisi's revisions neither yielded complete results nor created a profound imbalance within al-Qaeda in Iraq or within his movement, which turned against him until he was in de facto isolation, despite the fact that his followers continue to draw from his books and literature. Nonetheless, al-Maqdisi's revisions are a manifestation of the existing imbalance within the jihadist Salafist movement, and of the ongoing revision therein.

Revisions and the deconstruction of the jurisprudential foundations of al-Qaeda and the violent jihadist Salafist movement

The second most important impact of such revisions on the violent jihadist Salafist movement is the creation of confusion within the movement, particularly within the mother organization al-Qaeda, which rejects these revisions. This confusion is caused by the revisions' important role in deconstructing the jurisprudential foundations upon which the jihadist activities of al-Qaeda are based. This impact evidently manifested as al-Qaeda's number two issued a book titled "tabri`at `a`imat al-qalam wa al-sayef min manqasat tuhmat al-khawar wa al-da'f" (Vindicating Masters of Pen and Sword from the Demeaning Accusation of Weakness and Inanition), best known in the media as "al-tabri`a" (The Vindication). In his book, al-Zawahiri focused on refuting the jurisprudential foundations of the revisions presented by al-Jihad Organization and outlined in Sayyed Imam's manifesto "tarshid al-'amal al-

Al-Qaeda's response to these revisions and to Sayyed Imam al-Sharif's manifesto was significant for several reasons.

jihadi fi misr wa al-'alam" (Rationalization of Jihad in Egypt and the World). He also attempted to invalidate the content of those revisions and rebut them. In addition, other al-Qaeda leaders issued numerous statements and audiotapes as they realized the hazards of such revisions for the future of the organization.

Al-Qaeda's response to these revisions and to Sayyed Imam al-Sharif's manifesto was significant for several reasons, the first of which being the status of Sayyed Imam himself within the violent jihadist Salafist movement. Sayyed Imam is a founder and former Amir of the Egyptian al-Jihad Organization that produced al-Zawahiri. Nonetheless, he resigned as leader of the organization in the early 1990s because of disagreements with al-Zawahiri regarding al-Jihad's practices at the time, particularly its operations in Egypt under the directives of al-Zawahiri. They included most importantly an attempt to assassinate the then interior minister, Hasan al-Alfi, and Prime Minister Atef Sedki. Sayyed Imam worked as a doctor at a hospital in Yemen until he was arrested in 2001, eventually being extradited to Egypt in 2004. Until this date, he had supported the overall jihadist Salafist argument in theory and practice as well as from the Shariah (Islamic law) perspective. He also supported the Sept. 11 attacks. However, he began opposing the expansion of jihad based on the rule of "fighting the far enemy." While in prison, he embarked on a jurisprudential revision of al-Jihad's overall jurisprudential arguments that he himself helped construct. In this sense, al-Qaeda's negative reactions to al-Jihad's revisions could be partially explained by the rivalry and personal sensitivities between Sayyed Imam and al-Zawahiri within the jihadist Salafist movement. Perhaps this explains why the reaction came from al-Zawahiri specifically rather than al-Qaeda's leader Osama bin Laden.

The second reason involves Sayyed Imam's scholarly status within the jihadist Salafist movement. His writings, especially his two major books: "al-'Umda fi 'Idad al-'Udda" (The Essentials for Making Ready [for Jihad]), and "al-Jami' fi Talab al-'Ilm al-Sharif" (The Compilation on Seeking Honorable Knowledge) are key sources of jurisprudence for the violent jihadist Salafist movement. According to many sources, the two books are among the primary sources being taught within the organization and even surpass al-Zawahiri's writings, which are limited in nature. Therefore, for Sayyed Imam to retract his principles and fatwas (religious decrees) outlined in these two books that provided the foundation for the activities of al-Jihad Organization would certainly create a state of confusion within the jihadist Salafist movement that rejects those revisions. His retraction of what he had previously stated in his books will undoubtedly weaken the argument that others should continue to depend on their content for the jurisprudential and Shariah-based justifications for practicing

that which was termed jihad.

The third reason is related to the considerable attention the "Rationalization of Jihad" document by Sayyed Imam received from scholars, media and the security apparatus. This amplified al-Qaeda's fears of the long-term effects of this document and the other revisions on its future on both the ideological and organizational levels.

The impact of such revisions on al-Qaeda and the violent jihadist Salafist movement includes deconstruction of the theoretical and jurisprudential foundations of many concepts applied by the followers of this movement to practice violence, which they termed "jihad," that claimed the lives of many civilians (Muslims and non-Muslims).

1 – The concept of "al-wala` wa al-bara`," according to al-Qaeda and the violent jihadist Salafist movement, refers to the commitment of the Muslim to loyalty towards the believers and disavowal of the kuffar (disbelievers) and mushrikin (polytheists). Al-Qaeda and the violent jihadist Salafist movement also divide kuffar into occupiers (in cases of occupation perpetrated by actual kuffar, i.e. non-Muslim occupation of Muslim lands) and apostates, a term used to describe Muslim regimes that do not enforce the rule of God on earth. They believe that Muslims who ally with either of these two categories lose immunity against having their blood spilled and wealth confiscated. The immunity condition is met, from their point of view, if the Muslim person does not ally or aid the occupier or the regimes that do not enforce the divine law. This classification corresponds with their categorization of enemies who are either the near enemy represented by Arab and Islamic regimes that do not apply the rule of God, or the far enemy represented by the West in general and the United States and its allies in particular.

The concept of al-wala` wa al-bara` and the subsequent classification of kuffar have had a direct impact on the theoretical and practical approaches of contemporary jihadist Salafist movements. According to this concept of kufr, the world was divided into two parties: Dar al-Harb [home of war] and Dar al-Islam [home of Islam]. This division entailed several crucial statements: a fundamental rule was formulated by these groups, which stipulates that kufr per se is a sufficient reason to kill. Also, "the world, for committing kufr and apostasy, must be battled and eliminated" in order to establish a caliphate and impose divine governance by force. The third statement says that there is "no way to reclaim the caliphate system except through jihad and warfare."

According to these rules, the world has become a stage for a multitude of combat operations that begin with direct engagement and end with suicide, or martyrdom, operations, depending on available capabilities and the ability to make change. In the same fashion that conventional warfare applies to armies and states, guerrilla warfare

applies to contemporary jihadist Salafist groups, particularly al-Qaeda.

Sayyed Imam's revisions retracted the legitimacy of kufr-based killings by setting several key constraints and conditions to determine the kufr of a Muslim. These made it difficult to label Muslims as kafirs, or unbelievers. The first constraint states that the perpetrator of the action in question must be a legally competent adult. The second condition involves examining the text upon which a Muslim is judged to be a kafir. In this regard, Sayyed Imam explains that Quranic texts mention two types of kufr: al-kufr al-Akbar (major kufr), which drives a Muslim out of Islam; and al-kufr al-Asghar (minor kufr), which does not render Muslims kuffar. The second type involves deadly sins called kufr for emphasis; therefore, the texts that describe certain actions as kufr do not necessarily indicate that their perpetrator is a kafir. Moreover, there are differences between the texts that mention kufr in the Quran and those in the Sunnah (the ways and the manners of the Prophet).

"Martyrdom operations" is a concept associated with al-tatarrus and is part of the jihadist combative doctrine and tools used by jihadist movements.

The third constraint is to investigate the state of the perpetrator of a kufr act, since it is possible that perpetrators commit kufr acts absent-mindedly, by force or out of ignorance. The fourth constraint involves calling on the perpetrator of kufr to repent after ensuring that all the above-mentioned exceptions are inapplicable and the conditions are duly met. The fifth constraint entails considering the capacity to punish the perpetrator of kufr. In this respect, Sayyed Imam distinguishes between takfir and punishing a kafir, in that the punishment cannot be executed unless there exists a capacity to do so. The sixth constraint involves contemplating the advantages and disadvantages of punishing the kafir after the capacity to do so is proven.[1]

2 - The second concept that Sayyed Imam criticizes is al-tatarrus, an important concept in the context of the combative jihadist doctrine of al-Qaeda and the violent jihadist Salafist movement. Al-tatarrus refers to enemy soldiers' practice of using innocent Muslim civilians as shields directly or indirectly during confrontation, which entails, in cases of clashes with non-Muslim soldiers, killing the civilians. Historically, Muslims experienced al-tatarrus in many battles, and therefore scholars determined precise conditions for permitting the killing of shielded soldiers. They also obligated

1 See: Chapter 9 entitled "Takfir Controls," "Rationalization of Jihad in Egypt and the World," ***al-Jarida*** newspaper, Kuwait, November 27, 2007.

military leaders not to expand the application of this concept themselves, i.e. not to use non-Muslim civilians as shields for Muslim soldiers in order to preserve human life. Scholars classified al-tatarrus under the "necessities" that can only be resorted to in cases of absolute need. However, al-tatarrus has been greatly abused by contemporary jihadist groups who ignored most of the constraints and conditions that scholars agreed upon unanimously. Killings started to target innocent civilians without observing those restrictions and conditions or considering the preventions that guard against the spilling of "protected" blood based on insubstantial excuses and arguments. Perhaps all post Sept. 11 bombings involved lack of commitment on behalf of these groups to the concept of al-tatarrus and its constraints.

3 – "Martyrdom operations" is a concept associated with al-tatarrus and is part of the jihadist combative doctrine and tools used by jihadist movements. After a long-standing debate with their various religious authorities, armed Islamist groups have arrived at the conclusion that such operations are permissible, especially considering the imbalance of power between warring parties. The permissibility of suicide – martyrdom – operations witnessed heated extensive debates among scholars and thinkers from jihadist movements in the Islamic world. Jihadist Salafist groups carried out suicide operations systematically and frequently before 1998, with the exception of individual cases such as the al-Khobar and al-Riaydh bombings in 1994 and 1996. In addition, the arenas of jihad, particularly Afghanistan, Kashmir, the Philippines and Chechnya had not witnessed martyrdom operations on a large scale because of their disputed legitimacy. Most theorists of those groups viewed such operations as haram (forbidden in Islam) and bid'ah (innovated matter in the religion).

The first to use martyrdom operations in the Arab world were nationalist movements like Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Subsequently, Islamist nationalist movements, such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine, adopted this practice after 1987 and issued several books demonstrating its permissibility. In light of the Zionist occupation, many contemporary scholars, notably Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, upheld the permissibility of these operations. In contrast, several other scholars, especially Sheikh Ibn Baz, strongly opposed them.

Before 1998, jihadist Salafist movements had not viewed such operations as permissible and used the word suicidal to describe them. Among those theorists were Sheikh Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi, Abu Qatada al-Falastini, Ayman al-Zawahiri, 'Abd al-Qadir bin 'Abd al-'Aziz and others. However, this attitude on the part of the jihadist Salafist movements started to change in the mid-1990s as they zealously began to explore the permissibility of such operations. This led to a radical change, permit-

ting those operations that later became a duty and a desirable act to seek proximity to God. The imbalance of power probably forced these movements to permit martyrdom operations. Consequently, these operations have become the most widely used combat technique because of their low cost and great effectiveness in causing extensive losses to the enemy (not to mention the ease of execution), the inability of enemies to detect or repel them, and the ability to attract media attention given their dramatic display.

Sayyed Imam rejected the aforementioned theoretical and jurisprudential grounds to expand the circle of violence and killings whether targeting non-Muslims in their countries or in Muslim countries.

Sayyed Imam rejected the aforementioned theoretical and jurisprudential grounds to expand the circle of violence and killings whether targeting non-Muslims in their countries or in Muslim countries, and whether in accordance with the al-tatarrus concept or judgments of kufr. He reiterated that "it is not permissible to kill Muslims mixed with kuffar on grounds of al-tatarrus because the killing of Muslim shields is not permitted by a text but rather by ijtihad (independent reasoning in Islamic jurisprudence)…Combat operations in the lands of kuffar are not a necessity because they fall under offensive operations (jihad al-talab, or offensive jihad) which do not harm Muslims if abandoned or deferred… Scholars who permit killing Muslim shields only do so in case of jihad al-daf' (defensive jihad) when necessary." Sayyed Imam refused to draw an analogy between the operations taking place today and the situation for which scholars permitted the killing of Muslim shields (the situation involves the image of the kuffar army using Muslim captives as a front shield to compel the Muslim army to shy away from killing them and thus be protected by human shields. However, Muslims today are mixed with the kuffar in their countries and are not their captives, but rather their fellow citizens or residents among them. In this situation, the Muslims are not with an army in a battlefield so they may shelter themselves by escaping the battleground; they are rather suddenly killed without prior warning from the attackers.[2]

Sayyed Imam not only rejected fighting kuffar in their own countries but also rejected betraying them. He says "whoever enters the countries of kuffar after being granted security has no right to betray them in any respect. Today, the visa is an entry permit and definitely constitutes a covenant of security that these countries give to

2 See: Chapter 7 entitled "Betraying Foreigners in their Countries," "Rationalization of Jihad in Egypt and the World," *al-Jarida* newspaper, Kuwait, November 25, 2007.

those admitted to work, trade, study, tour and travel, and the like. The covenant of security is basically a guarantee of immunity against appropriation of life and wealth."

Furthermore, Sayyed Imam rejected the killing of noncombatant civilian kuffar in the countries of kuffar that some deemed permissible on the grounds that killing "kafir shields" (human shields) is permissible if the need arises. He says "this understanding is erroneous because whoever enters their (the kuffar's) countries after being granted their security may not betray them and may not kill their military or civilian populations, even supposing that the Muslim in question is not bound by a covenant of security with kuffar and is absolutely certain of the civilians' kufr. Killing those civilians on commercial airplanes and trains, as well as in buildings and hotels is not the permissible form of killing kafir shields because such facilities are not military installations; they are rather civilian installations the bombing of which implies killing civilians directly and deliberately, and therefore does not fall under al-tatarrus in any way and is not permissible. This applies to both times of war and peace." Accordingly, Sayyed Imam rejects the killing of tourists. He concludes that targeting foreigners and tourists in Muslim countries, conducting combat operations in dar al-harb (foreign countries), and killing civilians in the fashion prevalent in recent years are all "forbidden sins that involved unlawful bloodshed and destruction of wealth, as well as treachery and aggression, all of which are major sins that Muslims may not celebrate or take pride in."[3]

There is no doubt that these groups' expansion of the concept of al-wala` wa al-bara', the permissibility of kufr-based killings, al-tatarrus and martyrdom operations has led to grave errors, forcing the jihadist Salafist movement to admit for the first time in its history to the mistakes committed by followers and branches especially in Iraq. In his letter "To Our People in Iraq," (dated Oct. 22, 2007) al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden mentioned those errors and urged the mujahideen to avoid mistakes and deviation and correct their course because of the declining power of the jihadist Salafist movement in various regions of Iraq.[4] This compelled Sheikh Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, amir of the so-called "Islamic State of Iraq," to outline the mistakes of his state, and strongly defend his ideology and practices that primarily target the occupier and secondly its allies who are involved in the political process. Despite their attempt to regulate jihad activities within al-Qaeda and among its followers in the jihadist Salafist movement, these calls fall short of being jurisprudential revisions of the foundations of "jihadist" activities, such as those conducted by the Egyptian al-Gama'a

3 See: Chapter 8 entitled "Ruling on the Killing of Civilians," "Rationalization of Jihad in Egypt and the World", ***al-Jarida*** newspaper, Kuwait, November 26, 2007.

4 See letter content on Aljazeera.net, http://www.aljazeera.net/News/archive/archive?ArchiveId=1072551.

al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad Organization. In the final analysis, however, they do reflect the impact of these revisions on the "jihadist" attitude of al-Qaeda and the jihadist Salafist movement.

The impact of the revisions on the popularity of al-Qaeda and the global jihadist Salafist movement

In addition to creating disorder and imbalance within al-Qaeda and the violent jihadist Salafist movement on the levels of ideology, intellectual construction, and jurisprudential and conceptual structure, the revisions are expected to play a vital role in curbing the movement's ability to recruit new members because they stripped many of the movement's ijtihad of their legitimacy on the jurisprudential and practical levels. This stands in contrast to the military and security approach, which, although it has achieved short-term concrete results, played a conflicting role in the long and medium terms. The experience of the past decades teaches that a large part of the recruitment process into the violent jihadist Salafist movement took place in prisons because of the arrest campaigns that targeted affiliates with this movement, as jails provided a suitable environment to raise new generations. The recruitment process also depended on the enmities created by security persecution against the state and in favor of the violent jihadist Salafist movement and its jurisprudential position.

Sayyed Imam criticizes al-tatarrus, an important concept in the context of the combative jihadist doctrine of al-Qaeda and the violent jihadist Salafist movement.

The wrongful practices of these movements and their expansion of jihad and warfare by resorting to suicide bombings and killing people in the name of al-tatarrus have incited strong popular anger against them and made them lose credibility in various places including Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Algeria and Egypt. In Egypt, for example, where jihadist movements, notably al-Jihad and al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, emerged in the 1970s and included among their ranks senior first generation theorists and scholars, random and undisciplined combat operations provided a broad framework for revision and rationalization. Following the Luxor massacre in 1997, al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya embarked on revising its intellectual foundation, leading to a unilateral cessation of all combat operations against the Egyptian regime. This effort culminated in the issuance of more than 20 books pointing out the errors inherent in expanding the concept of kufr, killing, suicide operations and al-tatarrus. Following the bombings that took place after the events of Sept. 11 in various parts of the Arab and Islamic world, al-Jihad Organization embarked on its revisions that culminated

in the "Rationalization of Jihad in Egypt and the World" document. Such revisions continue to be pursued by followers of these movements as a natural response to developments and the grave mistakes that Salafist movements made in the world. These revisions are expected to have a significant impact on third generation jihadist Salafists within al-Qaeda and its adherents from the jihadist Salafist movement.

However, it should be noted that the manifestations mentioned above do not necessarily indicate inevitable influence. The magnitude and course of this impact remain very controversial and disputed among those influenced by the revisions. There are many, particularly activists in the global jihadist Salafist movement, who argue that the revisions' impact on al-Qaeda and the movement is limited and that probably the revisions are insignificant in themselves for several reasons. They argue that the revisions surfaced under supervision from the security apparatus and the severe pressures of imprisonment and detention, in addition to the fact that they do not provide explicit answers to an array of precise questions on governance, political construction, and the obligation of jihad. Al-Zawahiri's book "al-tabri`a" expresses this trend outright.

Advocates of this trend believe that the revisions will lose their importance among the supporters of global jihad, and among Arabs and Muslims, in view of the thematic conditions that produced this phenomenon. Most notable is the international arena under United States dominance, the continued occupation of Muslim countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq and bias towards Israel. Another condition is the lack of fundamental reforms of political regimes in the Arab and Islamic world that enhance democracy, pluralism and political participation, as well as the inability of such regimes to meet citizens' basic needs. The advocates also cite other reasons that incite large segments of angry youth to join the ranks of the jihadist Salafist movement and resistance movements. Therefore, the desired effect of these revisions will not materialize without real political and economic reforms on the ground.

Perhaps the points raised by al-Zawahiri in "al-tabri'a" in response to the "Rationalization of Jihad in Egypt and the World" document pushed Sayyed Imam into a corner whereupon he issued yet another document entitled "al-ta'ria li-tabri`a" (Deconstructing the Vindication). However, he transcended the scholarly dispute by turning to personal ethical matters related to al-Zawahiri and bin Laden, which weakened his document and diminished its influence in contrast to his "Rationalization of Jihad in Egypt and the World" document. ■

Another Wave of Jihadist Adjustment

Internal Debates of the Movement

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A year after releasing the Egyptian Islamic Jihad's first self-evaluation, "Advice Regarding the Conduct of Jihadist Action in Egypt and the World," Sayyed Imam al-Sharif has produced the "Treatise on Exposing the Exoneration."[1] We do not know why the author called his "second debate" with al-Qaeda the "Exposure," but it appears from our reading that the "regressive change" he presents in this piece is of lesser importance than the contents of the first self-evaluation. The first document elucidated a new foundation for "building on new traditions for a local jihadi movement," characterized by an internally stable organization committed to changing the political system through peaceful means, not violent confrontation. The new foundation also relied on the use of methodological tools in understanding religious texts, drawn from the schools of Islamic philosophy and jurisprudence established by prominent religious jurists. This is what has been referred to as Islamic Jihad's transformation from the Islamic jurisprudence of the necessary and exceptional to the jurisprudence of the organization and primary movement.

It appears that Sayyed Imam has this time written a book from which the purity

1 Translators note: Ayman al-Zawahiri answered Sayyed Imam's "Advice Regarding the Conduct of Jihadist Action in Egypt and the World" (the "Advice") with a refutation entitled "A Treatise Exonerating the Nation of the Pen and the Sword from the Blemish of the Accusation of Weakness and Fatigue" (the "Exoneration"). Sayyed Imam responded to Zawahiri with his "Treatise on Exposing the Exoneration" (the "Exposure"), the subject of this article.

of religious science and the caution of the theologian have been removed. The original and important debate over jurisprudence and religious science in the first book has sunk to a level of triviality unbecoming of a theologian and philosopher. Sayyed Imam's debate over methodology and controversial issues has been reduced to a personal quarrel between his new jihadi current and the old movement represented by al-Qaeda's Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden.

In this second self-evaluation we have moved from the level of ideas to the level of personalities, from the level of sources and derivations of religious law to the level of slander, accusations of treason, lies and deception. The tone of the "Exposure" connotes a sense of "regressive change." Instead of continuing the debate from "Advice" on those issues for which no conclusion was reached, Sayyed Imam has resorted to personal and verbally abusive attacks, calling into question the entire revisionist project.

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The most-telling sign of the gap between the first and second self-evaluations (as of this writing the second was still being serialized) is the difference in their respective reception and stimulation of public debate. The first document was well-received and stimulated a broad public debate on the issues, with many experts weighing in about their meaning and significance; the second document has been met on all sides with silence, disinterest and even annoyance and resentment. To confirm this one needs only review the displeasure and anger expressed in readers' comments in the newspapers which published the "Exposure."

First: The Psychological World of Sayyed Imam and his Self-Evaluation

The psychological change that drives a religious person toward a critical self-evaluation of his ideology is among the most complex and difficult types of change, as he moves from a position thought to bring him closer to God to a new and different stance. Revising one's religious ideas is among the most challenging processes for the human psyche, much more significant than any re-evaluation of nonreligious ideas. Through an in-depth understanding of the psyche of Sayyed Imam, we will find that he has a capacious and potent mind, evidenced by his interactions with the religious world.

In his memoirs, he recalls joining Islamic Jihad forty years ago as a comrade of Ayman al-Zawahari, adopting the most strict and harsh interpretations (ijtihadat) of Islam. Although jihad and its precepts fall under the rubric of religious jurisprudence and were dealt with by the old religious jurists as matters of religious law, Sayyed

Imam elevated jihad to the level of doctrine. Therefore, with jihad he was not confronting an issue of religious law, but rather a pillar of doctrine.

Doctrinal issues by nature tend to favor a consensus opinion, leading to the exclusion and possibly the expulsion of those whose opinions diverge from the norm. One who takes refuge in doctrine actually seeks a psychological state that enables him to envision the world in an abbreviated and simplistic fashion. This state allows him to take the reigns in his own hands, as it becomes he who rules the world, not he who is subject to its rules. He becomes both the judge and the ruler, the one who knows, explains and interprets all matters. One who views the world through the perspective of doctrinal adherence enjoys a feeling of supreme confidence. He sees himself as the embodiment of the "complete person," striving to restore the Caliphate and the rule of Islam.

The dispute that erupted between Sayyed Imam and the Islamic Jihad — of which he was at one time the emir — was both sharp and very violent before Sayyed Imam adopted his new philosophical position. Sayyed Imam wrote in his famous "Compendium of the Pursuit of Divine Knowledge," one of the principal sources rationalizing the violence of Islamic Jihad, that some Islamic organizations considered Islamic Jihad are illegitimate. When Islamic Jihad tried to omit the parts of his book that discussed this, Sayyed Imam launched a campaign of critiques against al-Zawahiri's character. The extent of his anger far outweighed the mere excision of parts of his book; Sayyed Imam was reacting in an almost narcissistic way.

In reality, many who pursue religious knowledge tend to be overly sensitive about the scope and value of their effort. Even though their effort is noteworthy their self-perception is greater; hence the origin of Sayyed Imam's anger and harsh campaign against Islamic Jihad. His move, from supporting an organization in which he spent the greater part of his life, to a new position of militant opposition challenged and complicated his psychological perspective. Additionally, his transformation into an opponent of Ayman al-Zawahiri, a friend with whom he had lived for a long period of time, likely signals a degree of personal stress. Sayyed Imam's religious world is replete with both terrible suffering and dramatic human dimensions. He was certainly under no duress while writing his book freely and with full conviction, yet his "violent and extremist" psychological nature made him subject to wild fluctuations and reversals in his personal dealings and writings. Thus, he went from one extreme philosophical position to the opposing stance on the extremist spectrum. Sayyed Imam's self-evaluations, in my view, play out a reflection of the perpetual plight of man.

Born in 1951, Sayyed Imam is now nearly sixty years old, the same age as Zawahiri. The first self-evaluation maintained Sayyed Imam's status and prestige among the new

generations of the jihadi culture, but an invisible hand then pushed him toward an unprecedented war of words with Zawahiri. It would appear that the disputatious nature of groups such as Islamic Jihad make them unable turn a blind eye toward any perceived encroachment on their ideas, beliefs and visions.

In this second analysis, Sayyed Imam remains imprisoned and subject to psychological duress. Although not necessarily forcing him to write anything oppositional to his beliefs, this potentially steers him in a certain direction. With the second self-evaluation the security services apparently saw an opportunity to discredit Zawahiri and bin Laden that they did not wish to pass up; but the victim here became Sayyed Imam's reputation among the people and the new generation of jihadists. However, Sayyed Imam's current psychological state had no impact on what he wrote in the "Exposure," as it represents his seizure of a chance to address new issues he wishes to see reformed.

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The Meaning of the Second Self-Evaluation

Sayyed Imam's second self-evaluation, "Treatise on Exposing the Exoneration," contains a number of themes:

1 – Identifying the first self-evaluation as an opening statement to set forth the general contours of the new approach embodied in the new jihadi current. As a result, there is still a need for a second self-evaluation to confirm, remind and promote for readers the principles set by the first self-evaluation. The second self-evaluation also preludes further revisions on these issues to come in the future.

2 – These ideas had a major effect on the debates within the Islamic jihadi currents of the world. Because of this, Zawahiri cannot ignore Sayyed Imam's first self-evaluation. Likewise, it has not been possible for Sayyed Imam to ignore what al-Zawahiri wrote in his own "Exoneration."

3 – Ideological disputes remain a deep-rooted characteristic of these organizations, which elevate the authority of their ideology to the level of doctrine. As such, the principle arena in which each group can prove its relative worth and following is in the ongoing ideological debate.

4 – The ideological line represented by al-Qaeda still poses a major challenge to

the new jihadi ideological project that Sayyed Imam is trying to forge. As such, the second self-evaluation is part of the psychological campaign launched against al-Qaeda's partisans to shake their image and prestige among the Egyptian and Arabic circles that are their audience.

5 – Although those undertaking the self-evaluations are still in great need of a foundation and frame of reference on which to build the new ideological project, emotion remains predominant and there is a lack of realistic future planning. The legitimacy of the new framework of authority, derived from the old ideology, requires a great amount of concerted, intelligent effort.

6 – Islamic Jihad's self-evaluation project is currently limited to the level of elites, with only Sayyed Imam taking up the burden of ideological confrontation with the old jihadi project. At the level of individual issues, the project is still in its infancy, and has not moved on toward deeper and more complicated issues like al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya has.

7 – The violent discourse of the second self-evaluation and its outpouring of insults, curses and defamation represent a diminishment of both its author and the self-evaluation project as a whole.

8 – The second self-evaluation challenges the ideas of Zawahiri and bin Laden but also distorts their character. However, due to the religious and emotional character of the Arab and Islamic people, this strategy may backfire. The youth might end up supporting Zawahiri and al-Qaeda because of their uncertainty about the level of discourse presented in the "Exposure," even sensing that security elements might be behind its argumentation.

9 – The growing importance of issues such as national security, democratic change, defusing internal conflict and building new generations capable of understanding and coexisting with the age, while at the same time capable of navigating issues pertaining to religious law and legitimacy, necessitates that the self-evaluation file be at the center of attention for Arab and Islamic regimes. Yet there is still — at least in the Egyptian case — a security file that state security officials wield at the expense of self-evaluation, preventing movement toward the building of a true revisionist current. Arab countries must deal with the self-evaluation file within the framework of politics, not security.

10 – The self-evaluation movement must stress the importance of liberating revisionist discourse, and those who propagate it, from the bonds still imposed upon them by the security agencies. These forces prevent Islamic Jihad's leadership from interacting freely with society, the elite and the media to explain their ideas and interact with the youth — to whom this discourse is directed. There must be confidence in this new discourse and those who propagate it, so that they may present it, defend it and play the role of a legitimate component of the public Islamic culture for the youth and the community. The Egyptian state has made great strides in this regard in the case of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, and it is expected that it will at a later stage follow up with progress on Islamic Jihad's revisionist process. Nonetheless, there are still important steps that must be taken to integrate the members of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya—and Islamic Jihad later on if the success of its current self-evaluation continues—into society and into political life. This issue still requires creative ideas.

11 – In this context also lies the importance of integrating the representatives of this revisionist discourse into the local foundations and institutions responsible for guiding and creating public opinion. This includes ministries responsible for religious propagation, such as the Ministry of Religious Endowments and the departments of al-Azhar, and even religious newspapers and satellite television stations. It is likewise important to find satellite television stations via which they can express themselves ideologically and resume calling others to the faith (da'wa), since their ideological power cannot be restricted at all times.

Third: The Content of the Second Self-Evaluation

The content of the "Exposure" does not differ greatly from the "Advice," except that the latter was both broader and more comprehensive. The author now defines the bin Laden/Zawahiri approach as "the criminal al-Qaeda ideology," which he says undertakes wholesale murder. Likewise, he portrays bin Laden and Zawahiri with a number of negative attributes he did not use in his previous work, to such a degree that we could call this document an organized campaign to stain and distort their reputations. This is the first time that such an organized campaign has been launched against the two most important figures in al-Qaeda, along with a warning to

For the first time an organized campaign has been launched against the two most important figures in al-Qaeda, along with a warning to the youth and all Muslims against being tempted by their ideology.

the youth and all Muslims against being tempted by their ideology; it even goes so far as to liken them to the devil. This campaign conforms with the security agencies' view of al-Qaeda's ideology as an obstacle to the self-evaluation of other Islamic organizations, as well as a source of social tension and political anxiety that could potentially lead to a return to religious violence. It also conforms to the international campaign against terrorism launched by the United States on al-Qaeda, which still represents its primary threat. For Sayyed Imam, this campaign is above all a response to the psychological wound inflicted on him by Zawahiri's "Exoneration."

The contents of the "Exposure" comprise the following:

1 – The author does not use a table of contents in the introduction to this book as he had done in the previous one. However, he concludes the "Exposure" with an outline of its contents:[2] "this treatise comprises, in addition to the introduction, four chapters: the first is 'exposing the lies and slanders of Zawahiri,' the second is 'exposing the errors in religious law made by Zawahiri,' the third is 'exposing Zawahiri's obfuscation of the issues for the reader," and the fourth is 'exposing Zawahiri as a seeker of fame and stardom.'"

2 – In the second chapter,[3] Sayyed Imam calls Zawahiri an "international liar," because he said the "Advice" was supervised and financed by the U.S. Embassy and intelligence services. Sayyed Imam confronts Zawahiri with Quranic verses with proclamations such as "those who fabricate lies are those who do not believe in the verses of Allah." He also accuses Zawahiri of being an agent of the Sudanese intelligence services because he promised to carry out ten operations in Egypt on their behalf. Sayyed Imam describes Zawahiri as a traitor and of giving false testimony while a sinner, accusing Zawahiri of striving to save himself at the expense of his brothers. According to Sayyed Imam, Zawahiri and al-Qaeda's claims that they are resistors against the American-Jewish campaign and a symbol of popular resistance against the Crusader-Zionist campaign on the Islamic community are nothing but lies.

3 – In the third chapter,[4] Sayyed Imam continues to pass judgment on Zawahiri for lying, immorality and depravity, saying that he cannot accept anything Zawahiri

2 Chapters are numbered as they appeared in the "Al-Masri Al-Yom" newspaper in Cairo, which published the "Exposure" in 13 chapters from November 18-December 2, 2008.
3 See "Al-Masri Al-Yom," November 18, 2008, 14.
4 See "Al-Masri Al-Yom," November 19, 2008, 11.

says about religious science or, especially, religious law. In Sayyed Imam's opinion, Zawahiri erred not only on certain issues of religious law, but also in having founded a corrupt and perverted ideology to legitimize excessive bloodshed. Sayyed Imam claims that this ideology was founded in the early 1990s and then expanded until the end of the decade, when bin Laden and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed cooperated in their desire to kill the largest number of Americans possible by carrying out the Sept. 11 attacks.[5] This operation was made possible by ignoring several legitimate religious principles and bundling together other illegitimate principles. The most crucial of these was changing America from a personal issue into a public issue for the Islamic community, as well as the obtainment of the signatures of many sheikhs and religious scholars from Pakistan and Afghanistan to support the idea of fighting America.

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Sayyed Imam defines al-Qaeda's ideological principles, which he describes as criminal, as follows:

- Fighting the far enemy (America) is more important than fighting the near enemy.
- It is permissible to declare one an infidel (takfir) and kill him on the basis of nationality, as this is a sign of his loyalty to and consent for the laws of the infidel country.
- It is permissible to kill one who pays taxes to the infidel, as he is a combatant with his money.
- It is completely permissible to kill infidel human shields or groups of infidel civilians who are protected by the infidel's military personnel.
- It is permissible to kill the infidel's Muslim human shields or groups of Muslim civilians who are protected by the infidel's military personnel.
- The application of the principle of reciprocity is allowed in order to widen the scope of indiscriminate killing.
- Fighting America is a defensive operation, and therefore it is permissible to

5 Notice that Sayyed Imam here acknowledges the responsibility of al-Qaeda, under the leadership of Osama bin Laden and his assistant Ayman al-Zawahiri, for the Sept. 11 attacks. There is still a group that rejects that al-Qaeda carried out the attacks.

travel there to fight without the permission of one's father or others in authority.

- An entrance visa granted to a Muslim to an infidel country is not a guarantee of safe passage, and therefore it is permissible for him to kill the inhabitants of that country. Even if the visa is a guarantee of safe passage, it is possible for him to invalidate it for reasons mentioned later.
- A tourist entrance visa granted for Muslim countries is not a guarantee of safe passage for the bearer, and therefore it is permissible to kill or kidnap him.

Sayyed Imam does not subscribe to al-Qaeda's view that America is the reason for the misfortunes of Muslims, but rather says that Muslims are responsible for their own suffering. In this context, Sayyed Imam asks the following questions:

- Who lost Palestine? The Arabs. They fought the Ottomans and threw them out of Palestine during World War I, then handed it over to Britain in 1916. The British then gave it to the Jews with the Balfour Declaration in 1917.
- Who kills the Palestinians today, especially their leaders? The Palestinian agents of Israel, whose betrayal enables Israel to kill whomever it wants.
- Who is today building the Jewish settlements in the West Bank to secure the Israeli occupation there? Palestinian workers.
- Who invited America to Afghanistan in 2001? Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri.
- What caused the opening of the American prison for Muslims in Guantanamo, Cuba? The stupidity of bin Laden.
- Who invited the Mongols to ancient Baghdad in 1258? Minister Bin al-Alqami.
- What invited America to Baghdad in 2003? The betrayal of the senior generals of the Iraqi army.
- Who killed the Lebanese for 15 years (1975-1990)? The Lebanese.
- Who occupied Kuwait and killed its people in 1990? The people of Iraq, not America nor Israel.
- Who is killing tens of thousands of Sudanese in Darfur today? The Sudanese themselves are killing each other, just as the Yemenis are.

Sayyed Imam further critiques al-Qaeda's complaint about the presence of U.S. soldiers in Islamic lands. Regardless of the legitimacy of their presence, the American forces in Saudi Arabia during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 did not kill any Muslims in Saudi Arabia, but al-Qaeda has killed Muslims there. The number of

Muslims who have been killed or displaced by al-Qaeda over many years in Kenya, Afghanistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Pakistan and other countries — in the words of Sayyed Imam — greatly surpasses the number who have been killed or displaced by Israel in Palestine and its neighbors over sixty years. The argument that al-Qaeda defends Muslims is a "fairy-tale," Sayyed Imam declares, because they themselves kill and displace Muslims — yet Zawahiri and his sheikh bin Laden attach no importance to what other people think.

4 – In the fourth chapter,[6] Sayyed Imam appears to address all Muslims. He says that there are options for dealing with the enemy other than force, such as peace, truce, isolation, concealing belief and patience. Sayyed Imam says, "O Muslims, these are all legitimate options which can be chosen in accordance with [our] knowledge and capability, and bin Laden and al-Zawahiri are not among the scholars or those who are authorized to issue fatwas, nor are they pious individuals." He accuses bin Laden and al-Zawahiri of disrespecting the Taliban state and its commander Mullah Mohammed Omar, and of allying themselves with the Pakistani intelligence. He also accuses them of insisting on targeting Americans even though Mullah Omar was against it. Sayyed Imam also rejects al-Qaeda's use of an illegitimate innovation (bid'a) to get around Mullah Omar's ruling. Al-Qaeda invented the concept of "localized authority," to say that it was subject to the authority of Mullah Omar in Afghanistan but free to do as it wished outside of it.

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5 – Sayyed Imam continues to criticize what he calls the "illegitimate innovation of fighting the far enemy," or America, in the fourth chapter. He also continues his criticism of al-Qaeda's ideology, whose principles he referred to in the second chapter. He claims that killing on the basis of nationality is an illegitimate innovation, as nationality is not a sign of loyalty or consent to the laws of the infidel. Millions of Muslims live in infidel countries such as India, China, Russia and the nations of Europe, but we cannot say with certainty that these Muslims agree with the laws of their countries. Thus, it is impermissible to declare people infidels on the basis of the mere possibility that they are collaborators with the infidel. Likewise, in a country whose people are

6 See "Al-Masri Al-Yom," November 21, 2008, 4.

infidels, it is not permissible to fight against them collectively, because in Islam there is prohibition against fighting women, young children, hired laborers, employees and farmers - and these are the majority of the people living in any country. Sayyed Imam also considers as an illegitimate innovation the permission to kill those who pay taxes to the infidel, citing a saying of the Imam Amro bin al-Khitab to his Muslim armies: "Deal mercifully [out of fear of God] with the farmers who did not declare war on you," and who were also taxpayers. Sayyed Imam replies to al-Qaeda's principle of "the rule of unrestricted reciprocity" by saying that the correct principle is "reciprocity is proper within the bounds of shari'a legitimacy."

6 – In the fifth chapter,[7] Sayyed Imam refutes the pretexts upon which al-Qaeda's ideology was established, saying that an entrance visa to an infidel country is a "guarantee of safe passage" prohibiting anyone who obtains it from killing or stealing. The visa implies respect for the life and wealth of the traveler in the country he enters, and it is not permissible to invalidate it with the claim that the people of that country are fighting the Muslims. Therefore, it is not permissible, in any situation, for a Muslim to invalidate a guarantee of safe passage in any infidel country he enters.

7 – In the sixth and seventh chapters,[8] Sayyed Imam's argument can be summarized as: whosoever enters an infidel country with a visa is prohibited from betraying that country, even if it attacks other Muslims. His reasoning is that the visa is a personal contract between oneself and the infidels. He continues by refuting al-Qaeda's statement that a tourist who enters a Muslim country with a visa is not protected from killing and kidnapping, saying that crucial point is that the tourist is protected if the visa was understood by him to be a guarantee of safe passage. Sayyed Imam concludes by saying that it is not permissible to target tourists, workers or employees from foreign countries which fight against the Muslims, because that would lead to the killing of millions. Such an approach simply constitutes mass killing, and killing based on the mere possibility that one's victims may be legitimate targets.

8 – In the eighth and ninth chapters,[9] Sayyed Imam discusses al-Zawahiri and al-Qaeda's proclamation that they confronted the American attack on the region. Sayyed Imam declares that it was al-Qaeda who brought America to the region, viewing al-Zawahiri and bin Laden as the reason for the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. He

7 See "Al-Masri Al-Yom," November 23, 2008, 10.
8 See "Al-Masri Al-Yom," November 24 - 25, 2008.
9 See "Al-Masri Al-Yom," November 27 - 28, 2008.

also says that their use of the Palestinian issue is merely to win over public opinion and not out of any true conviction on the issue. The true beneficiaries of al-Qaeda's policies are Iran and Syria. Al-Qaeda has not launched any operations against the Jews in Palestine because the jihad there is not among bin Laden's priorities. Sayyed Imam argues, however, that making the Palestinian issue among the first priorities of the Islamic world leads the Muslim mind astray, because the central issue should be the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate foretold by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

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9 – Sayyed Imam sees peace with Israel as in the interest of the Islamic world, saying that if al-Zawahiri and bin Laden offered to negotiate a truce with America, why would this not be permissible with Israel? Sayyed Imam states that there is nothing in the Shariah that prevents peace with any infidel or apostate as long as this is in the interest of Muslims, and that what is important is the legitimacy of who negotiate on behalf of the Muslim side. Noteworthy here is Sayyed Imam's boldness in declaring the permissibility of peace with and recognition of Israel. This diverges from the opinion of all Islamic movements in the Arab world, most prominent among them the Muslim Brotherhood, which refuses peace with or recognition of what it calls the "Zionist entity."

10 – In the tenth chapter,[10] Sayyed Imam accuses bin Laden of squandering the prospects for an Islamic state, initially represented by the Taliban, with his attack on America on Sept. 11. In Sayyed Imam's view, the Taliban held great promise for fulfilling the goals of Islamists because it hosted bin Laden and Zawahiri, despite them not recognizing the Mullah Omar's authority. Sayyed Imam also views al-Qaeda as a schismatic faction of Sheikh Abdallah Azzam's organization. Going against bin Laden's collective view of the state of political affairs in the Middle East, Sayyed Imam recognizes the Arab rulers as Muslims, opposes declaring them infidels, and deems parliamentary elections to be permissible.

11 – In the last chapter,[11] Sayyed Imam addresses what he calls "civil strife (fitna)

10 See "Al-Masri Al-Yom," November 29, 2008.
11 See "Al-Masri Al-Yom," December 2, 2008.

and the shirts raised in its name." He says that civil strife is a major concern for Muslims and the Islamic world, as it signals a threat to the unity of the community and its political stability, as well as a threat for the manipulation of religious texts and the exploitation religion for nonreligious aims. He says that during the first major civil strife in Islamic history, thousands of Muslims were killed when Muawiya raised the "banner of Othman bin Affan" to justify his opposition to Ali Ibn Talib (may Allah be pleased with him).[12] Other "shirts" followed in succession, as other pretexts were taken to demand property and seize it, or to pervert religion. Among these was the "shirt of zeal for the sanctity of religion," as a pretext for the illegitimate innovation of the Kharijites. This was followed by the "shirt of love for the family of the Prophet," as a pretext for the illegitimate innovation of Shiism and the "shirt of justice" for the Mu'tazilites. If one spoke against a Kharijite they would accuse him of lacking zeal for religion, if one spoke against a Shiite they would accuse him of lacking love for the family of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and if one spoke against a Mu'tazilite they would accuse him of discrediting the sublime justice of Allah.

In the modern age, those who wish to pervert religion have raised the banner of "renewal," "interpretation (ijtihad)" and "the public interest." The last "shirt" used to justify perversion of religion was raised by bin Laden and al-Zawahiri: The banners of "jihad" and "fighting America." By raising these pretexts they violated many religious laws, yet if one disputed them, they raised these shirts in the person's face and said: "He discredits the mujahidin, he serves the interests of America." Sayyed Imam says that this illustration reveals "their falseness."

Conclusion

Despite the significant judgments and opinions in the second self-evaluation, especially concerning Sayyed Imam's position on the events of Sept. 11, 2001, and his refutation of the principles and basic ideas upon which al-Qaeda was launched under the leadership of bin Laden and Zawahiri, this book appears less imperative than the first self-evaluation, particularly in terms of style and methodology. This is specifically attributable to the fact that the author shifted focus from the level of ideas in the first self-evaluation to the level of individuals in the second, using a vulgar language unheard of in debate among scholars and experts on religious law. At the end of the "Exposure," the author warns of civil strife, but he arrives there by employing such harsh denunciation against Zawahiri and bin Laden that his own words could be the

12 Translator's note: Muawiya accused Ali of complicity in the death of the third caliph, Uthman bin Affan, using the assassinated Uthman's bloodstained shirt to propagandize against Ali, who was elected Uthman's successor, as he vied with him for control of the Caliphate.

reason for this civil strife. It would have been both preferable and of stronger effect if the "Exposure" had been devoid of insults.

It appears that the second self-evaluation sets back the revisionist current of Islamic Jihad, contrary to the al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, whose own revisionist process is making steady forward progress. The reason for this is the nature of Islamic Jihad as an organization that inclines toward divisiveness as well as severity in its internal debates and conflicts. Complicating matters even further for Islamic Jihad is the presence of al-Qaeda and its ideological current, which represents a challenge to the construction of a local current with realistic traditions. This suggests Islamic Jihad must take great care while managing its ongoing self-evaluation process to not to be pulled into a war of words and personal issues. Instead it must focus mainly on issues of religious law and ideology, in order to build a new revisionist school of religious law and a new jihadi ideology. Through this, Islamic Jihad's revisionism can persevere in its struggle against the "international jihadi" current.

The second self-evaluation tells us that Islamic Jihad's revisionist school is still in its infancy and requires time to secure its footing and be able to contend with and confront the international jihadi current represented by al-Qaeda. ■

New Salafist Dogmas

Strict Beliefs and Cultural Limits

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Religious ideology, in addition to being a structured system of ideas and conceptions, is characterized by a form of dogmatism stemming from religious doctrine. Religious teachings are a closed set of rituals and directives that constitute the cornerstone of every religion, and delimit the differences between the sacred and the profane. Every religious creed, whether simple or complex, includes this basic distinction, which, in turn, allows for the differentiation between good and evil.[1]

In all cases, religious sectarianism stems from a mentality of total belief and compliance, whereby people unquestionably accept the religious knowledge presented to them. Even if they seek to discuss or critique this knowledge, they do so from the grounding of their subjective, psychologically cognizant experience, rather than through objective logical testing. As a result, we find that clerics become completely preoccupied with communicating their own beliefs and proving their validity vis-à-vis others' creeds. They display a dogmatic approach to their doctrines, as religious creeds are only embraced after the beliefs of others are proven false.

The ideology produced by the new Salafist movements offers a textbook case for understanding religious dogma. These movements constitute a trend of protest against developments that have emerged at two levels: the theological and the ritual. Some

1 Durkheim, Emile. Les Formes elementaires de la vie religieuse, 5th ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 51.

Salafist trends are concerned with religious reform at the theological level, aiming at the metaphysical and moral rationalization of creeds. At the level of ritual, Salafism is based on a movement to reform ritual practices through the standardization of their patterns, wording, gestures and procedures so that the "original ritual activity" is preserved in the face of religious innovations, or bid'ah.

Although the Salafist movement and ideology are relatively remote from the violent jihadist movement, the expanding social base of Salafism in the Arab world in recent years entails significant risk. Despite the distinction between these movements, there remains a significant overlap at the intellectual-ideological and practical levels. The growth of this new Salafism has come to incorporate a critical mass of followers that stand halfway between the politically conservative traditional Salafism and the violent, jihadist Salafism. This suggests that the spread of the Salafist movement could have a negative impact on the evolution of a moderate Islamist movement.

Here lies the importance of identifying the sources of dogmatism in Salafist ideology, as well as its degree, nature and manifestations. Is its nature epistemological or behavioral? What are its sociological effects? This essay attempts to answer these questions.

I. Sources of Dogmatism in Salafism

Two tenets constitute the foundation of Salafist dogma. The first is the rejection of shirk, or polytheism, and the adherence to tawhid, or monotheism, that every human action must follow. The principle of tawhid serves as the criterion by which to judge the legitimacy of behaviors, positions, actions and utterances, even those unrelated to religion. Hence, any form of thinking or action that is not based on tawhid is a form of self-worship.[2] Therefore, Salafism places Muslims before two options of identity: either a Salafist or a non-Muslim.

The second source is a strict commitment to the literal interpretation of the Quran. Salafism follows in line with the Hanbali tradition – named after Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal, which bases everything on the literal reading of the Quran and the Sunnah, the ways and the manners of the Prophet Muhammad. Although Salafism does not identify fiqh, the flexible interpretation of jurisprudence, as un-Islamic, it appears sterner in the face of the contemporary fiqh tradition, which does not follow traditional methods but calls for observing new realities. Salafism views this contemporary fiqh as a "vicious conspiracy" against Shariah, or Islamic law, claiming that the real goal of

2 Abou al-Fadl, Khalid, "The Modern Ugly and the Ugly Modern," Progressive Muslims, ed. Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld Press, 2003), 50.

its advocates is to undermine Shariah and alter the texts of the Quran and Sunnah.[3]

Moreover, Sheikh Rabia' al-Madkhali, a Saudi Salafist authority, considers fiqh of reality, or the contemporary fiqh, deficient in genuine documentation. He argues: "Oddly enough, advocates of the fiqh of reality introduce it to people as the noblest and most important of sciences, while, in fact, it is neither science nor fiqh. Where are its past and present authors, scholars and jurisprudents? Where are its schools? The fiqh of reality is no different from the Sufi principle that differentiates between Shariah and reality… It [fiqh of reality] relies on newspaper stories that spread lies in a professional fashion and are based on ignorance, desire, and exaggeration as well as the alteration of the words of the Book and the Sunnah."[4]

Although Salafism does not identify fiqh, the flexible interpretation of jurisprudence, as un-Islamic, it appears sterner in the face of the contemporary fiqh tradition, which does not follow traditional methods but calls for observing new realities.

Salafism is therefore a vigorous attempt to construct a standard orthodoxy. The movement's adherents are determined to establish pure fiqh schools in line with their Islamic theology of reliance on a text-bound Islam that judges every thought and behavior in accordance with the Quran and Sunnah, while leading a revolution against the classical religious traditions.[5]

The tenets outlined above characterize Salafism as a singular pattern of thought and a set of decisive, self-sufficient commandments that perceive no need for external input. From this perspective, it is deemed sufficient to return to the teachings of the salaf, or early Muslims, and to commit oneself to fixed religious criteria and a set of values that cannot be refuted on theological grounds, but only through approaches that are alien to the ideology, especially historical and sociological arguments. Salafists believe that their ideology can explain and re-interpret all other approaches to suit their theological and intellectual approach through a series of dogmatic debates. This interpretation also leads to the expansion of the boundaries of Islamic theology ('aqida), transforming it into a comprehensive system of jurisprudence that categorizes opponents as enemies and labels them as people of bid'ah.

Considering the circumstances under which Salafism emerged, this pattern of

3 Al-Hussein Ayat, Sa'id, "Ahdath 11 september fi america: asbabuha wa nata'ijuha," [The Events of Sept. 11 in America: Causes and Repercussions] (Marrakesh: Al-Matba'ah wa-l-warraqa al-wataniya, 2002), 22.

4 Al-Sunnah Magazine, quoting "Al-Salafiyah al-maghribiyah wa-l-ta'thirat al-mashriqiyah (file)" [Maghrib Salafism and Mashriq Influences], Al-Tajdid Magazine, no. 492, October 2002.

5 Clifford Geertz, Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia, trans. Abu Bakr Qader (Beirut: Dar al-Muntakhab al-'Arabi, 1993), 25.

thought and practice is associated with a distinct sociogeographical environment, or "infrastructure," that constitutes the concrete social foundation of Salafist awareness. Salafism is most often found in Bedouin and rural areas on the margins of Islamic states, either in remote or interior regions, where foreign influences are minimal or nonexistent and economic and social lifestyles are simple and require no complex solutions or new additions. This singular intellectual pattern flourishes in such environments, in contrast to the reconciliatory thought found in major cities as well as commercial and urban centers characterized by cultural exchange.[6]

II. Aspects of dogmatism in Salafist ideology

In terms of form, Salafist dogmatism is manifested in the movement's view of language. Advocates of Salafism consider language "unchanging," in the sense that there should be full adherence to the literal texts of the Quran, the Sunnah and the terminology used by al-salaf al-salih, the rightly guided early Muslims closest to the Prophet. Innovated terms are rejected, as using any expression that was not used by the salaf would only serve to open the door for enemies and those who have strayed from the right path.[7]

In practical terms, commitment to the invariability of language results in a number of aspects of dogmatism, foremost of which are the following: combating any attempts to introduce new terms into the Arabic language, refraining from speaking any other language but Arabic and rejecting the incorporation of any foreign words, and rejecting the utility of languages other than Arabic for either secular or religious purposes.

In other words, Salafists believe that their rhetoric should use the same language by which the salaf expressed their understanding of the Quran and the Sunnah. According to them, the Shariah not only defined the directives, but also specified their language. Therefore, this language should follow the usage of the Shariah, with no space for idiomatic, non-literal expressions that evolve and vary with changes in the social environment. This entails learning and mastering the language of the Prophet's companions and abandoning modern, emerging terms.

In the final analysis, this Salafist view of language, and the resulting conceptual and terminological dogmatism, leads to strict rhetorical molds that retrieve and employ a "rigid conceptual heritage." This heritage is constantly utilized to deem any

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6 Mohammad Jaber al-Ansari, Al-fikr al-'arabi wa sira' al-addad, [Arab Thought and Its Opposites]. (Beirut: Arab Institution for Studies and Communication, 1996), 35.

7 Excerpted from an article written by a student at the educational institute affiliated with the Moroccan "Society for the Call to the Quran and Sunnah" posted on a bulletin board at the institute.

contemporary terms as a deviation from the path of the salaf and a manifestation of bid'ah. Therefore, Salafism's theological dogmatism results in a changing relationship with religion because it leads to conceptual and terminological dogmatism. This philosophy renders Salafist language intellectually poor but nevertheless effective in preserving the unity of the text and protecting the entire system from social influences caused by the incorporation of new concepts and expressions.[8] This stagnant language not only indicates a cast-iron Salafist view of the world, but also reorganizes intellectual capacity in a fashion that undermines adherents' mental interaction with an ever-changing reality.

This linguistic dogmatism is associated with verbal aggressiveness apparent in numerous contexts and is especially manifested in discourse addressing new phenomena and opposing individuals. This language keeps Salafists psychologically charged and constantly mobilized for conflict.[9] Behind the terminological structure of the Salafist rhetoric lays a revolutionary, rejectionist spirit that allows no form of interaction with a major facet of human existence: language. As much as the Salafist rhetoric is relatively terminological, it sounds stern, even revolutionary, in the way it is expressed. This expression is related to its strict commitment to tawhid, which constitutes the foundation for the entire content of this school.

In terms of content, dogmatism is increasingly acute because ideology is taught through warning against suspicious matters, bid'ah, and perceived theological errors and those who commit them. Adherents are thus taught to attack "ahl al-bid'ah," or people who adopt innovated matters in the religion, and to engage passionately and courageously in such confrontations from the moment they join the movement. Ibn Taymiyah considered he who "responds to ahl al-bid'ah as a mujahid [holy warrior],"[10] rendering the acts of exposing violators and cautioning the nation against innovation a religious duty, citing consensus among Muslims. Ahmad bin Hanbal was asked: "Which do you prefer: a man who fasts, prays and spends the night in prayers or a man who confronts ahl al-bid'ah?" He replied: "If he prays and spends the night performing prayers, he would

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8 Deconchy, Jean Pierre, L' Orthodoxie religieuse et sciences humaines (New York: Mouton, 1980), 62.

9 Mustafa Hijazi, Al-takhalluf al-ijtima'i: Madkhal ila saykolojiyyat al-insan al-maqhur [Social Backwardness: Point of Entry to the Psychology of the Oppressed Person], 8th ed. (Casablanca: Arab Cultural Center, 2001), 176.

10 Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad bin 'Abd al-Halim bin Taymiyah al-Harrani, Al-Fatawa [The Edicts], 4:3.

be acting in his own interest, but if he exposes ahl al-bid'ah, he would be standing up for Muslims, which is preferable."[11]

Similarly, in its introductory pamphlet, the Society for the Call to the Quran and Sunnah in Morocco declares that among its goals are "raising youth to love and hate for Allah, to ally with the righteous people and take as enemies the people of batil [false beliefs], each according to their situation."[12] Naturally, batil in this context means deviation from the Salafist path in word or deed. "The exposure of those who introduce religious innovations by proving their falsehood lies at the core of [the process of] enjoining right and forbidding wrong and advising the general Muslim public."[13] The most important aspects of this process are:

- Rejecting all that derives legitimacy purely from norms and customs.
- Rejecting karamat, or the supernatural powers some are believed to possess enabling them to serve as mediums between people and God.
- Rejecting any act of rapprochement with other religions.
- Rejecting the imitation (taqlid) of scholars [in rituals without documented evidence] and all interpretations not founded on the salaf's understanding; this includes all additional methods of qiyas, or analogical reasoning in Islamic fiqh or jurisprudence, among other additions whether methodological (such as the four schools of fiqh), intellectual (philosophy), theological (Sufism) or institutional (clerical institutions). In other words, this ideology constitutes a complete rupture after 10 centuries of "rigid adherence to madhaheb," or fiqh schools.

The president of the Moroccan Society for the Call to Quran and Sunnah, Sheikh Mohamed Bin Abdulrahman al-Maghrawi, uses the following dogmatic language against opponents in his description of Sayid Qutub and the Muslim Brotherhood:

> "Qutub is one of the misguided people produced by the Brotherhood school. These people ranged between advocates of takfir [labeling Muslims as infidels], rapprochement between Kufr [disbelief] and Islam, and advocates of compromise between rafd [the term used by Salafists to describe Shiism] and the Sunnah. All agreed on warring against the blessed Salafist approach, but Sayid Qutub espoused all evils: He spoke against prophets and messengers… against

11 Ibid. Vol. 28: 231-36.
12 Article 5 of the madhhab pamphlet of the Society for the Call to the Quran and Sunnah in Morocco.
13 Article 6 of the madhhab pamphlet of al-Imam al-Shatibi Institute for Teaching Quran and its Sciences. Tétouan, Morocco.

> the Messenger of Allah's companions and fell into hulul [the belief that Allah dwells in man]. In his beliefs regarding Allah's divine attributes, he committed ta'wil [metaphoric interpretation]"[14] …Consider, may Allah bless you, how he describes with his stinking pen two revered companions of the Prophet as relying on lies, cheating, deceit and hypocrisy (referring to the stand of Mu'awiyah and Abu 'Ubaida al-Jarrah during the settlement of the dispute with 'Ali)… By Allah, readers, how should a da'wa [a call for Allah] ever succeed when it adopts such disgraceful attitudes towards the carriers of Muhammad's message, let alone the fact that this approach is sunk in the dirt of abominable partisanship, bid'ah and this man's other disastrous theological calamities."[15]

This theological dogmatism leads Salafists to a state of intellectual rigidity devoid of both flexibility and the ability to address issues from different perspectives. It further eliminates opportunities to recognize relativity in matters and phenomena, creates disinterest in the facts that contradict the prejudice put forth by the Salafist creed, and tends toward boycotting others. Salafist doctrine dictates:

> "There should be no mention of the merits of those who advocate for destructive and dubious principles and who misguide people, invent matters in the religion, and [believe] in superstitions and partisanship. If we mention such merits, it would trick people into having good faith in them and thus into embracing their principles… Commending them is therefore a sin far worse than their very misguidedness."[16]

This isolationism performs a defensive function in Salafist rhetoric as it plays a significant role in preserving and protecting the ideology against the modernization that emerges in other types of religious rhetoric. Perhaps this explains why protests from within the Salafist movement have never been ideological in nature, but rather organizational and procedural. Nonetheless, this internal criticism often surfaces as controversy over fiqh issues.

In this fashion the dogmatism in the Salafist rhetoric locks itself within its extensive and distinctive fiqh, establishing theoretical and practical relationships with its

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14 Mohamed Bin Abdulrahman Al Maghrawi, Ahl al-ifk wa-l-buhtan al-saddun 'an al-Sunnah wa-l-Qur`an, [People of Falsehood and Lies who Push People Away from the Sunnah and the Quran] (Marrakesh: Maktabat Dar al-Qur`an, 1996), 37. (Rad al-'Udwan [Countering the attack] Series, 1.)

15 Mohamed Bin Abdulrahman Al Maghrawi, Man sabba al-sahaba wa mu'awiyah fa ummuhu hawiyah, [He who Curses Prophet Companions is Destined to a Bottomless Pit] (Kuwait: Dar Al-Furqan, 1996), 75.

16 Saleh bin Fouzan bin Abdullah al-Fouzan, Al-`ajwiba al-mufida 'an as'ilat al-manahij al-jadida, [Useful Answers to Questions of New Approaches] (Riyadh: Dar al-Salaf, 1997), 29.

own enterprise and program as the only positive purpose. This philosophy entails that evil and criminality are characteristics of opposing social and political components in all external fronts, whether moral, religious, political or economic.[17] There should be no mingling with these parties in order to avoid "acquiring some of their moral standards through communication with, observing or imitation of, or exposure to the cultures of others."[18]

The methods by which key Salafist figures attempt to authenticate the hadith, or sayings of the Prophet, influences their approach to interactions with others, opponents and external society in general. In confronting outsiders, they utilize the same process of determining the validity of a hadith and its attribution to the Prophet, by which they define ranks in credibility. They categorize others the way they categorize narrators of hadiths as "dishonest" or "fraudulent. They are always on the alert, warning against opponents who create bid'ah so that no one is tricked into following them, as stipulated candidly in the Sunnah.[19] Therefore, the Salafist rhetoric always displays a certain degree of suspicion of opponents and an underlying hard-line rhetoric in confrontation with them.

Because of this ideological dogmatism, it seems as if a latent structure of violence pervades all Salafist currents, such that it is impossible to differentiate between them in terms of rhetorical structure. Such differentiation occurs only at the level of certain behaviors, especially with regard to Salafists' positions on political authority. This is the virtual divide at which Salafist rhetoric either stops at verbal violence or crosses over to physical violence.[20] However, the religious solution promoted by the so-called moderate Salafist movements falls under revolutionary rhetoric in the symbolic rather than physical sense.[21]

Dogmatism is also a behavioral characteristic of Salafists produced by the stereotyping processes that the ideology employs with regard to foreign individuals and

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17 Al-din fi 'alamina [Religion in our World] (collected works of a symposium held February 23-March 1, 1994 under the supervision of Jacques Derrida and Jiani Fatimo) trans. Mohammad al-Hilali and Hassan al-'Imrani (Casablanca: Dar Toubqal, 2003), 116.

18 Abdullah bin Rushd al-Houshani, Manhaj shaikh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah fi-l-da'wa ila Allah Ta'ala, [Sheikh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah's Approach in Da'wa to Almighty Allah] (Riyadh: Dar Ishbilia, 1996), 1:431.

19 Based on the Prophet's Hadith: "He who deliberately tells false narrations of me should foresee his place in the Hell Fire."

20 An interview with Idris Hani in al-Quds al-'Arabi newspaper, July 16, 2003.

21 Glock, Charles Y. "Origine et evolution des groupes religieux," Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions, January/February 1972, 230. Glock differentiates between the various religious sects in terms of the solution each adopts as an alternative to the status quo. In this context, he distinguishes between the groups that embrace physical violence (immediate solution) and those who advocate gradual change (conciliatory solution).

groups,[22] including different Salafist strands. This practice generates a certain degree of bigotry and prejudice that manifests in verbal aggression. In this fashion, dogmatism plays a social role bringing individuals together and encouraging harmony within individual Salafist groups.

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This dogmatism has significant repercussions, as it pervades the various Salafist activities, either directly or indirectly. One result is that the majority of Salafist preaching is devoted to warnings against bid'ah and the other sects in a manner that leads to vicious attacks on other Islamic forms such as:

1) The "popular Islam" represented in the religious traditions that have become established in many Muslim societies such as marking the Prophet's birthday, visiting graves, attending Sufi rituals and sanctifying al-awliya', or saints, among other practices that are at odds with the Salafist definition of Islam.

2) Organized Islamic groups or Islamic movements, which are criticized for what the Salafists brand theological errors and contraventions to the da'wa approach that is based on religious and educational reform. They are also attacked for focusing on political reform, which Salafists consider marginal compared to their reform mission, which is a form of worship.[23]

3) "Global Islam," which adopts a conciliatory approach in all religious matters, including the theological and the ritual, and squanders, according to Salafists, the essence of the da'wa message.

4) Contradicting an argument that calls for evading discussion of differences, a basic tenet in the work of several political Islamist groups; Salafists argue in favor of highlighting the points of difference. They maintain that silence about

22 Ahmad Zayed, Saykolojiyat al-'alaqa bayna al jama'at: qadaya fi-l-hawiya al-ijtima'iyah wa tasnif al-dhat, [The Psychology of Relationships among Groups: Issues of Social Identity and Self-Categorization] (Kuwait: The National Council for Culture, Art, and Literature, 2006), 75. ('Aalam al-ma'rifah).

23 Mohammad al-Touzi, Al-malakiyyah wa-l-Islam al-siyasi, [Monarchism and Political Islam] trans. Mohammad Hatimi and Khalid Shakrawi, ed. Abd al-Rahim Benhada (Casablanca: Al-Fank, 2001), 207. In contrast with the Salafist approach, refraining from verbal fights or any kind of confrontation with other Islamic groups is one of the basic strategic features of the fieldwork of the al-'adl wa-l-ihsan group. Undoubtedly, the Sufist background of Sheikh Yassin, the head of the movement, explains this approach and relative trend toward calmness and constructive dialogue.

> differences encourages leniency with ahl al-bid'ah, especially regarding theological and educational matters. Salafism argues that Islamist movements' stance on the issue of differences is proof of their lack of concern for theology, da'wa, and religious education.[24]

Dogmatism also manifests itself in Salafists' interactions with opposing Islamic theological schools, such as Ash'ariyah, Mu'tazilah, Murji'ah and Batiniyah. From the Salafist point of view, exposing the truth of these schools is a religious duty and whoever conceals this truth resembles Jews and Christians. Failure to expose misguidance and invalidity present in these groups' literature constitutes betrayal of Allah, His Messenger, His Book (the Holy Quran) and the Muslim nation in general.[25] Moroccan Salafists, however, focus on Sufism since it is the prevalent religious practice in Morocco. Their criticism goes as far as describing Sufism as a current that seeks "to undermine, disband and tear apart the Islamic structure, distort its image and culture and draw its followers into a maze from which they cannot break free."[26]

By virtue of this dogmatism, Salafism embraces a set of views that constitute, along with Salafist theological foundations, a coherent and harmonious structure that cannot be refuted theologically, except by alien approaches from disciplines such as history and sociology.[27] However, the predominant counter arguments emanate from existing religious frameworks. For example, Ahmad bin al-Siddiq al-Ghumari is one leading Moroccan scholar who debated Salafism. As a Sufi eager to defend Sufism, al-Ghumari responded with the same aggressiveness and harsh language present in Salafist rhetoric. He criticized the symbols and leaders of Salafism, describing Ibn Taymiyah as being "obsessed with debate, with a passion to prove his opinions and false arguments and to defeat his opponents by any means, whether right or wrong."[28] Of al-Hatawi, he said that his language is "poor, dull, extravagant and complicated… If it were not for his extensive memorization and narration [of hadith] as well as his tracings of unfamiliar and multiple chains of narration, he would not deserve to be praised at all. His excessive bigotry led him to become resentful and to go astray, May

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24 Salam Salam, Nazharat fi manhaj al-ikhwan al-muslimin: dirasa naqdiyah islahiyya, [A Look into the Muslim Brotherhood's Approach: A Critical Reformist Study] (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Kawthar, 1993), 2:50.

25 Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Maghrawi, Waqfat ma' al-kitab al-musamma dal'il al khairat wa ma sah-ha 'an al-Nabi fi al-salati 'alayhi min dala'il al-khairat, [A Review of the Book Titled Signs of Blessing and Authentic Sayings on Prayers for the Prophet in Signs of Blessing] (Cairo: Maktabat al-turath al-islami, 1990), 3.

26 Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Maghrawi, Man sabba al-sahaba wa mu'awiyah fa ummuhu hawiyah, [He who Curses the Prophet's Companions is Destined to a Bottomless Pit] (Kuwait: Dar al-Furqan, 1996), 73.

27 Abd al-Hakim Abu al-Louz, Ishkaliyat al-din wa-l-siyasa fi al-khitab al-Islami, Khitab harakat al-nahda al-tunisiya namudhajan, [The Dilemma of Religion and Politics in Islamic Rhetoric. The Rhetoric of Al-Nahda Movement as a Case Study.] (M.A. thesis, Qadi 'Iyad University Faculty of Law, 2001).

28 Ahmad bin al-Siddiq al-Ghumari, Al-bahr al-ghamiq [The Deep Sea], 1:51.

Allah save us from that."[29]

Al-Ghumari describes the icons of Salafism as "'ulma` al-zahir [scholars concerned with the outer shell of religion] who believe they are the ones who inherited the true knowledge, out of their ignorance, egotism, falsehood and untruthfulness." Al-Ghumari then concludes, by outlining the qualities of Sufism vis-à-vis Salafism, that the "'ulema' al-zahir are ahl al-rusum [people concerned with appearance]. Regardless of the degree of piety, righteousness and zuhd [asceticism] they might attain, even if they reach the level of Ahmad bin Hanbal… they will still hear from Sufists pieces of knowledge that have never crossed their minds."

III: Limited Revisions within Salafism

At a time when belonging to one madhhab, or school of jurisprudence and theology, implies considerable moral and social coherence, differences in the understanding of a certain element of any madhhab lead to variations between the component parties. In this way, madhhabs receive new less dogmatic and more lenient contributions and may, under the pressure of events, become more pragmatic.

Salafist movements in Morocco are an example of this dynamism. Following the cases of defection witnessed by the Society for the Call to the Quran and the Sunnah, there emerged Al-Hafiz bin 'Abd al-Birr Society for the Preservation of Islamic Heritage, whose members developed extremely critical attitudes towards the dogmatism of the mother organization. For instance, a member of Al-Hafiz bin 'Abd al-Birr Society said:

> In several places where intransigence, coarseness and impatience are practiced, da'wa declines and the words of truth have been compromised. That is because the people that propagate this da'wa were not trained in respectable manners. They recognize no path besides extremism and no slogan besides despair and intransigence. Therefore, these people see triumph in defeat and progress in setbacks. Consequently, the da'wa has become

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29 Ahmad bin al-Siddiq al-Ghumari, 'Ali bin Abi Taleb Imam al-'Arifin au al-burhan al-Jali fi intissab al-sufiyah ila 'Ali [Ali bin Abi Taleb is the Imam of the Faithful or the Clear Proof of Sufists' Adherence to Ali's Teachings] (Cairo: Dar al-Sa'adah, 1969), 230. Bin al-Siddiq al-Ghumari offers more insight on this topic in his book Fath al-Malik al-'Ali bi sihhat hadith bab madinat al-ilm Ali [The Inspiration of All Powerful Lord in Authenticiting the Hadith that Ali is the Key to Knowledge].

> a call for hatred, division and arguments over matters that are contextually misplaced and cannot as a result appear clear or be proven right.[30]

Another member describes the practice of many Salafist du'ah, preachers or da'wa practitioners, by saying:

> They repudiate whoever opposes their views or chooses to adopt a different opinion, and will not hesitate to accuse them of erroneous creeds and lack of credibility. They will not even greet such people, as their disagreement has rendered them mubtadi'ah [those who innovate matters in the religion][31]… This is destructive, and it is a serious crime to raise generations of da'wa on practices unknown to the Salaf. Slogans of al-wala' wa-l-bara' [loyalty towards the believers and disavowal of the disbelievers] love and hate for Allah are raised zealously yet with no clear vision based on the Shariah in this era in which religion is alienated and humiliation and inferiority are imposed on the ummah [the Islamic nation].[32]

Sheikh Mohamed Zouhal, a leading Salafist of the moderate movement in Morocco, stresses the principles of dialogue, intellectual exchange and persuasion as ways to perform da'wa without dogmatism, sarcasm or condescension, basing his contention on the Quranic model of dialogue. He argues:

> "Difference in opinion is natural… as a result of differences between people in their mentalities, knowledge and environments. The best way to eradicate controversy and prevent its causes, consequences and repercussions is to engage in dialogue and debate in order to clarify dubious matters and state the facts with mutual respect, without bigotry, desire or arrogance."[33]

In an effort to avoid making their criticism imply defection from the organization, moderate Salafists seek to establish flexibility without compromising the fundamentals of the madhhab. This is contrary to the practice of those who consider dogmatism an "exercise of the duty of disavowing [opponents] in a spontaneous manner, separate from the scientific framework that should be followed when practicing any form of

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30 Al-Hussein bin Ayat Sa'id, "Al-Muslimun wa marhalat al-ghurba," [Muslims and the Era of Alienation] *al-Ilma'* magazine, vol. 21, no. 221, February 2006.

31 Rasheed Madun, "Min fiqh al-ikhtilaf ila fiqh al-i'tilaf" [From the Fiqh of Differences to the Fiqh of Harmony] (Marrakesh: Al-Matba'ah wa-l-Warraqa al-Wataniyah, 1999), 6.

32 Ibid, 29.

33 Ibid, 7.

worship."[34]

This type of criticism is not so different from that initiated by advocates of different theological orientations, contesting the deficient Salafist understanding of the texts they cite as proof of their approach. One such advocate says:

> Regardless of the degree of authenticity of the "Saved Sect" hadith,[35] it is strange that some cling to it as decisive evidence of the inevitability of this kind of superiority that leads to the belief that the majority of the Islamic nation is destined for Hell… It is similarly strange that some have relied on this text as proof of their sole eligibility to enter heaven, and send the rest to Hell… Reading the hadith is sufficient to understand the underlying message urging adherence to the Book and the Sunnah without identifying other segments as the people of Hell.[36]

After the call for ijtihad, or the process of deducting religious opinions from sources of Shariah, among Salafists failed to transcend its status as ongoing criticism derived from imitations of what they view as authentic models, the critical Salafist movement reframed the call in order to reduce the intensity of such criticism and to avoid employing it outside of the framework of scientific controls and Shariah restrictions. In both cases, none of the madhhab's tenets are compromised by ijtihad. Additionally, *al-Ilma'* magazine noted that it does not claim the absolute truth in what it publishes, although it believes it to be the truth, and does not force anyone to embrace its ideas or adopt its content.[37]

In this fashion, the criticism practiced by the critical Salafist current against its traditional counterpart does not target the core of Salafist creed and thought. Rather, it targets the dogmatism practiced by unqualified parties and its employment against groups that are not legitimate targets, contradicting Shariah and reason.

This applies to takfir; the ultimate expression of dogmatism. The critical Salafist current maintains that takfir should not be used to brand those who deviate from the

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34 Ibid, 5.

35 While the hadith about the "Saved Sect" is one of the hadiths attributed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), there has been significant debate over the exact text and content of the hadith, as well as its interpretation. One of the narrations reads: "My nation will split into 73 sects; all will end in the Hell Fire except one." The Prophet was asked which one would be spared. He replied, "Those who follow me and my companions." The danger lies in the fact that some Islamist groups have relied on this hadith to label other groups as non-Muslims, with each seeing itself as the only true expression of Islam and the saved sect referred to by the Messenger (PBUH).

36 See remarks by Mustafa bin Hamzah in the "Towards a Constructive Sermon" during a symposium on Friday sermons organized by the Moroccan Supreme Scientific Council in cooperation with the Ministry of Islamic Affairs on May 28, 2005

37 *Al-Ilma'* magazine, vol. 1, no. 1, July 2000.

righteous path because of different interpretation or ignorance but rather to label those who know the truth and insist on their position.[38]

According to this critical Salafist movement, dogmatism is also founded on erroneous fundamental beliefs prevalent among certain Salafist groups. Therefore, this movement believes that deeper knowledge of the logic and approaches of the da'wa is critical in order to avoid dogmatism. Consequently, this movement has become engrossed in "building the skills necessary to present the Salafist version of Islam in new forms that fit contemporary visions and mentalities."[39]

The new calls for flexibility in judgment and assessment, however, are in fact an attempt to rectify such dogmatism rather than to dilute its intensity. In doing so, they simply seek to redirect dogmatism away from competing Salafist groups. This is clear from the fact that criticism of dogmatism was mentioned in the context of a review of the Salafist da'wa and its contending movements and in the context of a call for partnership instead of rivalry among all Salafist groups in order to realize their common goals, regardless of their differences at the level of practice. In a sense, this call is one for specialization within the Salafist movement, so that each group addresses a specific field of activity. Apart from that, dogmatism remains a feature of Salafist rhetoric and is therefore inherent at the theoretical level, but differs in practice in accordance with the activities each group chooses to address.

Conclusion

The Salafist heritage is lacking in concepts that support the new tolerant trends ideologically. Therefore, Salafist reinterpretations are restricted to superficially addressing practices and the outer shell of the movement without compromising the school's creed and fundamental tenets. Ultimately, these reinterpretations aim to ensure the sustainability of the Salafist creed, create new paths for these doctrines as they reach dead-ends, and temporarily relieve the organization by releasing stagnation.

Nevertheless, the degree and scope of dogmatism remain the criteria to distinguish between the various currents, especially after the second Gulf war of 1991 and particularly after the events of Sept. 11 that placed many key Salafist figures under pressure to justify their externally and internally alienating thought.

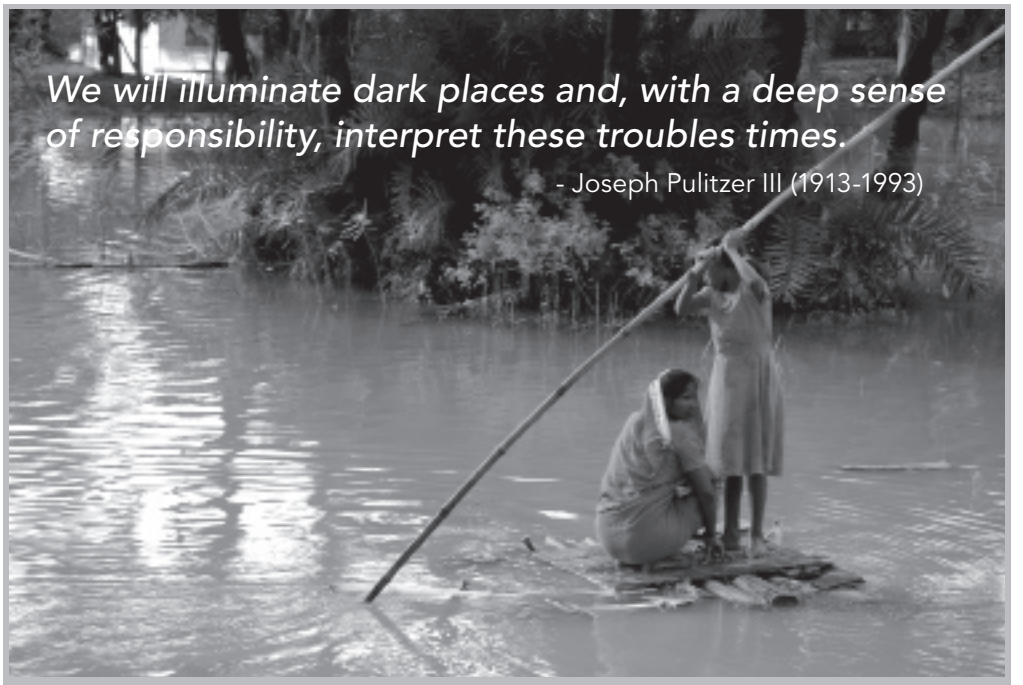
Two trends emerged in response to these pressures. The first trend is led by guards of Salafism, who work to preserve the doctrine in letter and spirit (the protectionist trend). This trend was pushed by this debate to become even more orthodox, and de-

38 Saleh bin Fouzan bin Abdullah al-Fouzan, Al-`ajwiba al-mufida 'an as'ilat al-manahij al-jadida. [Useful Answers to Questions of New Approaches] (Riyadh: Dar al-Salaf, 1997), 138.

39 The madhab pamphlet of the Moroccan Salafist al-Hafiz bin Abd al-Birr Society.

fends the madhhab against attacks launched either by reformist or jihadist Salafists or other political players who pin the blame for the events of Sept. 11 on Salafism.

The second trend represents the new Salafism that attempts to redefine certain parts of the Wahhabi heritage by focusing on its rare and marginalized aspects of tolerance. One notes the very pragmatic tendency of this new rhetoric, which lacks support from solid evidence. For instance, the fact that Wahhabism does not label the Muslim who sins but does not regard that sin permissible or lawful as an infidel only entrenches the concept of takfir. This is especially so as the takfir trend is abundant in the Wahhabi heritage, in topics such as al-wala' wa-l-bara,' jihad, imarat al-mutaghallib [rule of the victorious] and the relationship with the infidels. This attempt is challenged by the deeply entrenched traditional Salafist views and the difficulty of establishing its roots in Salafist sources, given the fact that moderate and tolerant Salafist texts are small in number and most are traced in the biographies of the founding fathers rather than their literature. ■



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Uniting Radical Forces

The Evolution of al-Qaeda in the Maghreb

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From a Local Organization to Ties with Al-Qaeda

In 1996, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) split off from the Armed Islam Group (GIA), which had stood out even in the bloody Algerian civil war for its ruthless atrocities. This history of brutality by the GIA likely served as a direct cause of the split in its ranks.

The newly created GSPC since its onset was characterized by the expansion of activity towards the desert, and by primarily targeting the security forces and foreign interests in Algeria (rather than civilians), while carrying out bombings in Europe. Some interpret the beginning of the GSPC's connections to al-Qaeda in 2002 as being related to this major transformation in the type of its operations.

On Jan. 24, 2007, GSPC announced that it was officially merging with al-Qaeda, which had been aspiring to oversee and coordinate with extremist groups in the Maghreb, including GSPC, the Libyan Islamic Combat Group (GICL), the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) and the Tunisian Combatant Group.[1] The statement, coming four months after GSPC had declared its intent to join al-Qaeda, said that "after GSPC's joining al-Qaeda and announcing its loyalty to the lion of Islam… Osama bin Laden, God preserve him, the organization must change its name to high-

1 Interview with Jean-Louis Bruguiere: "Un Arc Islamiste Radical, au Maghreb Menace la France," Agence France Presse, March 13, 2007.

Salafist Islam represents the rising generation of radical youth opposed to the Arab governments and regarding the Western powers led by the United States to be the primary enemy of the Arab and Islamic world.

light the reality of the relationship between the mujahideen in Algeria and their brothers in al-Qaeda. We had been keen to change the name since the first day we joined, but did not do so before consulting Sheikh Osama bin Laden, God preserve him."

In the stages of the evolution of political Islam in Algeria, the GSPC and similar groups can be labeled as part of the "third political Islam,"[2] that of rebel groups. This Salafist Islam represents the rising generation of radical youth opposed to the Arab governments and regarding the Western powers led by the United States to be the primary enemy of the Arab and Islamic world.

It blends religious fanaticism with political counter violence in reaction to both superpower policies and the repressive Arab authoritarian state. It is also an expression of the profound structural crisis in the relationship between the state and society, since the Arab ruling elite refuses to pay the price of a transition to a genuine democracy with true mechanisms of representation that can make political Islam an integral component of modern civil society. Instead, the governments continue to draw strength from Western support and resort to systematic repression on the pretext of fighting fundamentalist terrorism as a guarantee of legitimacy and survival.

Thus, the GSPC announcement that it was joining al-Qaeda comes as no surprise for many monitoring extremist groups. They argue that the name change to al-Qaeda stemmed from increased cooperation both publicly and in the field between various jihadist organizations in the region and al-Qaeda. Some news reports even go further and claim that the leaders had been in touch since the days of the Islamic Salvation Front (FSI) in 1992,[3] but had been unable to reach a unified stance on a number of issues.

Now that the merger has been completed, the central question is how credible the merger is, and how useful it is for the two sides.

2 The first being the Islam of the Organization of Muslim Scholars under Sheikh Abdul-Hamid Ibn Badis, who has a modern understanding of Islam, combines pan-Arabism with Islam, and joined the Algerian Revolution when the National Liberation Front took up arms against the French colonial power. The second is the Islam of the Islamic Salvation Front, which draws from sources ranging from the Muslim Brotherhood to the Salafist groups, and which is an Islam with wide popular support.

3 Several newspapers cited the claim that an al-Qaeda official named Qari Saeed contacted both Shabouti and Malyani of the FSI, but that they were unable to agree upon a unified stance.

A Marriage of Common Interests or an Organic Relationship?

If the GSPC – al-Qaeda relationship is based on common interests, then we can expect it to end at some point when their interests diverge. However, it could instead be a long-lasting organic relationship based on organizational and ideological unity. In order to answer these questions and understand the announced merger, we must understand what each side is looking for in the relationship.

Al-Qaeda has four main goals from its expansion in the Maghreb:

- Trying to bring together the jihadist movements operating in the region, the most important being GSPC, GICM, GICL and the various Tunisian jihadist-Salafist organizations.
- Expanding the battlefield with the West and the United States to include North Africa and the Sahel, launched from a single command center, so as to give the impression that the organization has a strong presence in the region.
- Benefiting from the region's youth surplus to recruit candidates for work in other theaters, especially Iraq. This point has serious repercussions given the strong desire on the part of the region's youth to fight alongside the Muslim Iraqi people against the United States. Extremist groups according to numerous sources have no trouble recruiting young men and re-establishing their cells. These youths in reality often have their original goal of Iraq changed to operating in their home countries after they have been trained, psychologically conditioned, and had their path of return to normal life cut off.
- Reaching Europe by setting up an organization in a nearby region with close ties to the continent, especially through the North African migrant community traveling back and forth across the Mediterranean.

GSPC's Objectives from the Relationship

- Compensation for its military decline after most of its forms of support dried up.
- Desire for a sort of legitimacy from association with al-Qaeda. The popular conception of Osama bin Laden's organization for a sizeable portion of the public within the Arab world, including within the Maghreb, is that al-Qaeda is the leading organization confronting (or waging jihad against) America in Iraq and Afghanistan. Consequently, any given group joining al-Qaeda or undertaking operations in its name is bestowed a certain legitimacy. This issue was particularly critical for the GSPC, whose name in Algeria was linked with

horrific atrocities against civilians and religious deviancy.

- Benefiting from al-Qaeda's capabilities as a wide-reaching transnational network, compared to its own limited possibilities.

The GSPC had one of the more powerful hard-line Islamist organizations in Algeria until 1998, but after the national reconciliation initiative was announced, its activity was sharply reduced and at times was almost nonexistent.

- Making use of al-Qaeda's accumulated experience in specific types of operations, particularly car bombs, simultaneous bombings, synchronized suicide bombings, the selection of symbolic dates and targets for attacks, and remote-control detonation. The most recent bombings in Algeria have shown that this local organization has absorbed and employed these methods, which previously had been a trademark of al-Qaeda operations.
- Moving up the ladder of armed jihadist movements, since joining al-Qaeda means a promotion from being a run-of-the-mill violent local group to the ranks of international jihadist organizations.

What to Expect from al-Qaeda in North Africa

The GSPC had one of the more powerful hard-line Islamist organizations in Algeria until 1998, but after the national reconciliation initiative was announced, its activity was sharply reduced and at times was almost nonexistent, appearing only occasionally with operations whose main impact was in making the news. This raises doubts about its true strength, and its ability to continue even after joining al-Qaeda. There are two points of view on this matter, the first arguing that the organization's capabilities are limited, while the second counters that several factors will ensure its survival despite its apparent weakness.

Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb in Decline?

This argument is based on a number of points, most importantly:

(A) **National Reconciliation:** This view points to the positive impact of national reconciliation and accompanying legal measures. Supporters claim that al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) is suffering through a crisis because of the growing number of former militants declaring their repentance to benefit from the national reconciliation policy's offer of amnesty, as well as the pressure maintained by the Algerian army in the border regions with Mali and Libya and mountainous areas, all traditional rebel strongholds. This has clamped down on the organization's freedom of movement, iso-

lating it geographically and amongst the population.

Meanwhile, the repentant former militants have turned into informants par excellence, with the detailed field information they are providing to the intelligence agencies threatening the entire organization. Their tips have been behind most of the successful raids launched by the Algerian security forces, especially after ten Tunisian activists were arrested on their way to the Algerian mountains to receive military training, which reinforced the impression that AQIM could be infiltrated.

(B) **Successive Splits within AQIM:** The organization has been reeling from the painful blows dealt by the Algerian security forces, as well as the back-to-back losses of top leaders, most importantly with the arrest of the leader of the cells within the capital Algiers, Fatih Bou Darbala, also known as Abdul-Fattah Abu al-Basir. In addition to this, there has been a growing movement within AQIM calling for mass repentance, feeding internal conflict. The stance towards reconciliation is one of the main points of disagreement for factions debating whether or not to seek a rapprochement with the authorities.[4]

(C) **Stance towards the Parent Organization:** Despite the GSPC joining al-Qaeda and renaming itself AQIM, there are still those who think this merger has hurt the GSPC, and may have taken place over the opposition of some members. This would have crystallized the conflict within the group between the pro-merger side and another faction insisting on maintaining a local Algerian identity in the wake of the unilateral decision taken by Abdul-Malek Droudekadal in January 2007 to join al-Qaeda. A number of observers claim that this move triggered rifts, which widened later that year with the defection of dozens of militants, the most prominent being the member of the Council of Notables and amir of the 9th region Abdul-Qadir bin Masoud. Bin Masoud brought with him chief propagandist Abu Abdul-Rahman Mazoud, the organization's founder and former leader Hassan Hattab (Abu Hamza), and prominent militant Mukhtar Belmukhtar. The common denominator between these figures was their consensus that GSPC's activity had witnessed "many deviations" since uniting with bin Laden, such as the group becoming involved in activities like burglary and kidnapping since 2005, which also resulted in the killing of innocent civilians (which GSPC had tried to avoid since splitting off from GIA).

In this context, the recent operations by AQIM were interpreted as an attempt

4 The "accommodationist" camp is mostly leaders of civilian background, while the rejectionists are dominated by former military officers.

to compensate for this decline by undertaking spectacular, headline-grabbing operations, with three distinct features: suicide attacks, focusing on cities instead of the mountains, and targeting key government and international institutions, such as the headquarters of the Constitutional Council, the Supreme Court and the UN headquarters.

(D) **Intellectual Figures:** Complicating the situation for the GSPC is the fact that Sayyed Imam al-Sharif (Dr. Fadl), the main intellectual source behind al-Qaeda's philosophy, has recanted his original beliefs and declared GSPC's jihad to be illegitimate, as have several other inspirational intellectual figures. This has been a trying experience for the organization, revealing the splits within the newer membership, and also the group's willingness to make do with gullible teenagers easily persuaded to go to Iraq, as well as recruiting foreigners and luring in youth with offers of money.

(E) **The Changed International Stance and Shrinking Sources of Aid:** One of the direct results of Sept. 11 was a united front against groups linked to al-Qaeda and stepped-up coordination in drying up sources of funding and hunting down members of al-Qaeda networks operating around the world. For Algeria, these transformations sparked a sharp change towards the groups working on funding and weapons acquisitions in Europe in particular, which also helped tighten the noose on groups operating domestically.

Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb Bound to Survive?

Despite the aforementioned indicators hinting the AQIM could be struggling, other observers argue that there are still domestic and regional factors bound to keep the organization on its feet, and even increase in strength. The most important factors are as follows:

(A) **The Failure of Political Development in the Maghreb:** This has been embodied in the deep-reaching structural crisis in the state-society relationship, with the ruling elite still seeing it as not in their material interests to accept any serious democratic transformation that would create genuine representation and the peaceful transfer of power, turning political Islam into a normal component of modern civil society. It could even be said that with the falling domestic legitimacy of the ruling regimes, the elites have sought to use Western backing and organized repression under the pretext of a war on fundamentalist terror as their source of legitimacy.

The external factors consolidating an environment of repression in the Arab coun-

tries in general, including those in the Maghreb, are quite important. However, we should not ignore the internal factors such as the legal, economic and political systems, which still prevent Arabs from enjoying the freedoms and rights that were laid out in Arab values, culture and religion before international conventions on human rights enumerated them. The violation of freedoms is increasing and becoming harsher when the question of political freedoms and association with ethnic, religious or other groups in society is raised.

There is ongoing conflict in the Western Sahara and the Tuareg regions in northern Mali and Niger, creating a healthy environment for al-Qaeda to expand its recruiting, smuggling and other activities.

(B) **Civil Society on the Decline**: The aforementioned methods of governance had a profoundly negative impact on the political and social levels, with the countries of the Maghreb and the Sahel witnessing a sharp decline in party and union activity. Even more ominous is the lack of signs of life within civil society, which has made the conflict one of state security versus armed organizations, without any effective role for civil society and intermediary institutions, particularly political parties.

(C) **Instability**: North Africa has seen chronic tension and continued backing for such organizations, which can be clearly noted when comparing the level of activity by al-Qaeda and affiliated organizations in Algeria and Mauritania with that in Morocco, Tunisia and Libya. There is also ongoing conflict in the Western Sahara and the Tuareg regions in northern Mali and Niger, creating a healthy environment for al-Qaeda to expand its recruiting, smuggling and other activities.

(D) **Weak Regional Cooperation**: The American-backed Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership and its predecessor the Pan-Sahel Initiative are the first moves towards broad regional coordination with the technology to keep track of militant activity in the Maghreb and Sahel regions, but the partnership is still of limited effectiveness due to deteriorating relations between the parties, keeping multilateral coordination sporadic.

(E) **Social and Economic Conditions:** These are the broader deciding factors in the fate of al-Qaeda and other radical organizations. A youth who takes to the mountains with AQIM, and who could blow himself up to enter heaven within 30 seconds as promised by the organization, is essentially no different from the young

man desperately risking his life trying to cross the Mediterranean on a flimsy boat in an attempt to reach the promised lands of the northern shore.

The acts of violence committed by the armed Islamist groups in the Maghreb countries, Algeria in particular, reaffirm the tenacity of this new fundamentalist ideology of takfir[5] aimed at Muslim peoples and rulers, and at anyone supporting the government in any way. The militants' defeat at present is far from inevitable, but the establishment of transparent, just political regimes incorporating the culturally and ethnically diverse spectrum of political and social activism would guarantee victory over the medium and long terms, and at long last provide Arabs in the 21st century with a successful example of a peaceful transition of power. ■

5 Excommunication or declaring someone previously considered to be a Muslim to actually be an unbeliever.

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Higher Education in the Arab World:
Hopes and Challenges

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At its various levels, education exists as one of the most outstanding factors contributing to the comprehensive development process of the youth and their ability to solve problems. The pursuit of education exists among the foundations of positive social, economic and political transformations in any society. In the rapidly changing modern world, societies aspire to provide rising generations with the knowledge necessary to deal with present and future challenges, ingraining a national responsibility to achieve such in the minds of the public. With its crucial impact, education can be considered society's most critical investment in human resources.

Higher education and scholarly research hold a key role in promoting comprehensive development and rapid transformation necessary for all nations facing the power of globalization. There is a dire need in the Arab world for a complete re-examination of higher education, research policy and planning in order to work towards improving its quality to meet modern society's needs.

Energies must be focused and resources mobilized in order to deal with the challenges presented by international nongovernmental organizations' and banks interference in Arab affairs. The unavoidable influence of external events and entities require Arab societies to face what is happening in the world and prepare themselves and their institutions properly. It should be noted that international organizations consistently release mostly negative and sometimes deeply pessimistic reports about the state of higher education and research in the Arab world. Clearly for the Arab

There is a dire need in the Arab world for a complete re-examination of higher education, research policy and planning in order to meet modern society's needs.

world, the levels of interest in education and research, and the means by which they are conducted, have a long way to go before catching up with much of the rest of the world.

It is apparent then that the role of higher education institutions needs to be modified in order to suit current international developments, with its various political, economic and social dimensions. This paper aims to discuss the following topics: (a) the state of higher education in the Arab world and its challenges, and (b) recommendations on improving the quality of higher education in the Arab world.

Many countries must launch radical reform processes in order to combat the numerous challenges facing their internal situations as presented by globalization. These need to come in stages, with the first focusing on the fields most related to preparing the state and society for upcoming changes. States must reform the administrative and government apparatuses, which represent the state's nerve center, to abide by a new vision that can make the unwieldy state better able to adjust to new variables. Fixing education and training policies represent other essential steps in the process, as the main means of developing human resources and creating a skilled workforce.[1]

As a cornerstone of development, improving educational standards represent a fundamental step in the reform and change process, and thus must hold a priority position in states' agendas. We must focus on diagnosing the state of higher education in the Arab world in the following ways:

Firstly: Challenges of Higher Education in the Arab World

One cannot deny higher education's role in helping build the modern Arab state and preparing qualified personnel in various fields. Education helped deepen values of national loyalty and belonging, while broadening Arab citizens' horizons and sense of problems facing their nations.

Despite these accomplishments, higher education faces many problems that hamper its ability to catch up with modernity's demands and overcome the Arab world's current weakness. Among these challenges:

1 Hussein Tawfiq Ibrahim, Al-'Awlamah – Al-ab'ad wa al-in'ikasat al-siyasiya, ru'iya awaliya min manzur 'ilm al-siyasa ("Globalization – Political Dimensions and Repercussions, An Initial Vision from a Political Science Perspective") in 'alim al-fikr, no. 2 (October/December 1999): 216.

(A) Soaring Demand

Due to a rapidly growing youth population, the number of higher education students in the Arab world doubled between 1980 and 1990. Helping to further along this rise was the social value ascribed to higher education by many people, regardless of its actual utility.

As a result of this explosion of students, most universities were unable to absorb the growing numbers, either in terms of space or faculty.

Although the increase in student enrollment in Arab countries hardly stands out from the trend in most developing countries, most Arab universities have resorted to putting specific admissions conditions on universities to reduce the number of students wishing to enter. Many do so without providing an academic setting that can properly accommodate these numbers, while excluding certain groups from joining the universities. All of these factors have had a negative impact on the level of education in Arab universities. Additionally, the centralization of most Arab universities in national capitals and primary cities limits access for peripheral regions. As a result, citizens are offered unequal opportunities and development in the countryside and educational progress is severely hampered.[2]

(B) Insufficient Funding

The governments in most Arab countries serve as the primary or sole source of funding for higher education, but the budgets allocated for education remain limited and insufficient to meet the growing needs of higher educational institutions. Some countries have reduced education expenditures, forcing universities to increase tuition and fees in order to balance their budgets. Creating additional problems for the Arab educational system is the exportation of Arab wealth to foreign universities. While the money spent on educating students in the West continues to rise, the amount spent within the students' home countries has dropped.[3] The enormous wealth possessed by some Arabs has gone toward educating a fortunate few abroad, with some attending expensive imported "cookie-cutter" universities, rather than financing the desperately underfunded universities attended by the rest of the population.

The reduction of government expenditure on higher education creates undesirable deficiencies in the level of education and development achieved. The undercutting of

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2 Mohammed Qasim Abdullah, Azmat al-ta'lim al-'ali fi al-watan al-'arabi wal-tahaddiyat al-mu'asira – waqi' wa-bada'il ("Higher Education Crisis in the Arab Nation and Contemporary Challenges – Reality and Alternatives"), Shu'un Arabiya, no. 113 (Spring 2003): 129.

3 Ahmad Boumalham, Azmat al-ta'lim al-'ali – wajhat nazar tatajawiz hadud al-aqtar, ("Higher Education Crises – A Point of View Going Beyond National Borders") Majallat al-fikr al-'arabi, no. 98 (Beirut 1999).

living standards of university faculty and staff[4] creates negative repercussions for their performance and limits their incentive to develop and promote innovative methodologies.

(C) Ivory Towers on Sand

Many universities in the Arab world operate in seclusion from their surroundings, unable to open up and interact with society. Consequently, they are not empowered to research and tackle the problems affecting individuals and society, nor contribute feasible solutions. This keeps academia removed from reality and out of touch with the actual dimensions of society's problems,[5] which leads to a gap between the university's interests and society's concerns. Such a reclusive nature reinforces a total separation between the intellectual and the realistic.[6]

It appears that part of the educational system's predicament lies in its removal from its social and developmental surroundings.

The educational curricula in the universities are mostly theoretical and philosophical, creating a tendency to lack harmony between their content and objectives, as well as between the students' learned skills and the needs and problems of society.[7] The universities could increase their weight and prestige through reinforcing a constant presence and concern with the changes that society witnesses by following up on them with research.

The educational curricula in the universities are mostly theoretical and philosophical, creating a tendency to lack harmony between the students' learned skills and the needs and problems of society.

(D) Little or No Academic Freedom

Academic freedoms, such as thought, opinion and expression, exist as important components of public freedoms and human rights.[8] Open dialogue must be allowed and

4 Ahmad Mukhtar al-Jamal, Al-ta'lim al-jami'I fi al-watan al-'arabi bayna al-wajaha al-ijtima'iya wal-bahth al-'ilmi, ("University Education in the Arab Nation between Social Standing and Scholarly Research") Shu'un Arabiya, no. 127 (Fall 2006): 163.

5 Mansouri Abdul-Haqq, Azmat al-ta'lim al-jami'I fi al-ahdaf wal-ghayat am fi al-wasa'il wal-ahdaf? ("The University Education Crisis: In the Goals and Objectives or in the Means and Ends?) Majallat al-Tarbiya, no. 141 (Qatar: June 2002): 170.

6 Ahmad Ibrahim al-Yusuf, 'ilaaqat al-tarbiya bil-mujtama' wa-tahdid malamihha al-naw'iya, ("Education's Relationship with Society and Determining its Quantitative Features") 'Alim al-Fikr, no. 1 (July-September 2000): 18-23.

7 Hassan Musari' al-Rawi, Dirasat hawl al-tarbiya fi al-bilad al-'arabiya, (Studies on Education in the Arab Countries) (Sidon: Al-maktaba al-misriya, 1987).

8 Mohamed Nabil Nufil, ta'ammulat fi falsafat al-ta'lim al-jami'i al-'arabi (Reflections on Arab University Education Philosophy) Majallat al-Tarbiya al-Jadida 151, (December 1990), 17.

promoted without censorship, restriction or fear of implicit or explicit consequences. The university, as a scholarly institution and a pulpit for free thought, must guarantee the academic freedom for its students and faculty to express and defend their views in the framework of a democratic system, public taste and social norms.[9]

The fact that universities in most Arab countries are government institutions and depend on state financial and administrative support is at the heart of the crisis. Governments impose their rigid regimes without analyzing the reality of these scholarly institutions, inevitably creating unsound practices, even so distorted as to make the universities lose much of their academic status.[10] These governmentally superimposed restrictions on the university directly lower the ceiling of academic freedom and prevent faculty from participating in decision-making, voicing their opinions and publishing freely. Taken together, such limitations restrict scholarly innovation.

Scholarly innovation cannot thrive in an unstable, tense environment lacking freedom and personal security, since such creativity requires environments that stimulate intellectual freedom rather than stifle it.[11] Nader Farjani argues that the type of government control present in Arab countries is one of the primary reasons for the decline of higher education and its lack of involvement in economic development, even if only because of the absence of educational autonomy. The continuation of insufficient funding set aside for higher education furthers an inherently uncreative environment.

These governmentally superimposed restrictions on universities prevent faculty from participating in decision-making, and publishing freely. Taken together, such limitations restrict scholarly innovation.

According to the existing power structure, government provides public goods and services, including education. For the Arab world, this system results in a coercive structure that fails to express the interests of all the people and does not place the pursuit of science and knowledge above all. It is hardly surprising, then, that the quality of higher education has been on the decline, especially in the fields of thought and research, despite education's relatively fast spread.[12]

9 Hassan Sa'id, ed., Hurriyat al-fikr ("Freedom of Thought") Al-Mawsu'a al-Thaqafiya (The Cultural Encyclopedia) (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1972), 397.

10 Abdullah Boubatana, Al-jami'at wa-tahaddiyat al-mustaqbal ma' al-tarkiz 'ala al-mintaqa al-'arabiya (Universities and Future Challenges, Focusing on the Arab Region), 'Alim al-Fikr 12, September 1988, 12-14.

11 Sultan Bilghayth, Daur al-jami'at al-arabiya fi da'm thaqafat al-bahth al-'ilmi al-'ibda'I, no. 127, (Fall 2006), 124.

12 Nader Farjani, Al-ta'lim al-'ali wal-tanmiya fi al-watan al-'arabi (Higher Education and Development in the Arab Nation), *Al-Mustaqbal Al-'Arabi*, no. 237, (November 1998), 98.

(E) Low-quality Research with Unclear Goals

Scholarly research is essentially the bringing of facts to light through hypotheses and reaching results and conclusions.[13] Often, such research serves as a means through which natural treasures, whether economic, social or cultural, can be discovered and utilized. Research plays a prominent role in raising society to a higher level by contributing to forging a problem-solving mentality and opening previously closed doors. Researchers must not limit their work to the purely theoretical, but need to also find practical applications when possible.

Progress in science and technology begins at the university level with its foundations and think tanks, which are scholarly spaces generating the fundamental knowledge utilized to solve the major problems plaguing society. However, the situation in Arab universities is quite different, as research and critical studies are only of minor interest to professors who have little incentive to carry out research. Nor is there sufficient competition between faculty members to earn high positions through research and studies. Contrasting with international education norms, a dedicated scholar might earn only the contempt of his peers.[14]

As a result of the sparse interest in scholarly research, the few remaining innovative researchers in Arab universities usually work in difficult circumstances with a gaping social vacuum and facing continual threats of censorship. Conspicuously absent from institutions' priorities are critical thinking and coordinating research between different specializations to allow the exchange of ideas.[15]

Also aggravating the situation for scholarly research is the lack of sufficient backing. The budgets set by the governments for scientific research is less than one-half percent of public income, whereas in advanced countries governments spend more than two percent of their budgets on research.[16]

Scientific research faces another problem, namely that the research policy in universities and academic institutions has no clear objective serving the goals of the university or society, and the studies that are carried out are done so without purpose. The entire research process, where present, is not based on a clearly defined, integrated policy, due to the lack of objective oversight ensuring coordinated, purposeful

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13 Taysir al-Nashif, Al-sulta wal-hurriya al-fikriya wal-mujtama' (Power, Intellectual Freedom and Society) (Beirut: The Arab Institution for Studies and Publishing, 2001), 100.

14 Ibid, 20.

15 Sultan Bilghayth, ibid, 129.

16 Farouq al-Baz, Al-'arab wa-azmat al-bahth al-'ilmi (Arabs and the Scientific Research Crisis), *Al-Arabi*, (June 2004), 19.

research efforts.[17]

(F) Other Problems Facing Arab Higher Education

The Arab world suffers from a set of problems that comprise a full-blown crisis in higher education:[18]

1. Arab universities lack a social philosophy on which to build a realistic, coherent educational philosophy, which in turn leads to the lack of a clear strategy for higher education.
2. There exists a participation crisis in managing higher education institutions. Since the universities are run by people appointed by government officials who generally seek to serve those officials, a university's work as a scientific, educational pulpit is negatively impacted.
3. Arab universities maintain a low-impact stature on their surroundings, due not only to the nature of the universities but also to the surrounding environment itself.
4. The weak relations between different universities within a single country and near-total lack of cooperation between universities in different Arab countries prevent meaningful inter-Arab discussions on mutual problems. Instead, most Arab universities prefer collaboration with foreign universities over other Arab schools.
5. Most of the Arab universities adopt traditional education based on rote memorization of material without enabling students to be innovative and mix scientific knowledge with practical application. Students are not encouraged to take a critical, analytical approach towards numerous problems in society, creating a spirit of student submissiveness and fear to voice their opinion.
6. Poor integration across the university programs, since the university curricula do not comprise any sort of homogeneous unit.
7. Universities regularly face shortcomings in the general technical, legal and institutional framework, and resort to using "Band-Aid" solutions instead of pursuing comprehensive reform.

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17 Mansuri Abdul-Haqq, ibid, 171.

18 See the following:
Mohammed Qasim Abdullah, ibid, 131-133.
Salman Rashid Salman, Ishkaliyat al-jami'at al-'arabiya (Problem of the Arab Universities), Shu'un Arabiya, no. 80, (December 1994), 163.
Al-Ghali Ahrashaw, Al-siyasa al-ta'limiya wa-khutat al-tanmiya al-'arabiya – hasila wa-afaq (Educational Policy and Arab Development Plans – Results and Prospects), Shu'un Arabiya, no. 107, (Fall 2007), 141.
Mansouri Abdul-Haqq, ibid, 164.

8. The absence of a link between pre-university and university education creates a variety of issues for both universities and students. Since the university curriculum does not take into consideration what the students have already learned over the years, most of the scientific and epistemological components are new to students and are difficult to connect to what they have already learned.
9. Most educational institutions rely on traditional methods in managing affairs. Doing so ignores the concept of comprehensive quality management, which would be far more efficient than any of the traditional management methods.

This review of the problem-ridden state of higher education in the Arab world does not seek to cast blame or to diminish some of the realized accomplishments, but rather is an attempt to diagnose the system's illnesses and demonstrate how important it is to re-evaluate the situation. The UN Arab Human Development Reports and many studies by Arab researchers have found that the dominant education and scientific research structure in the Arab world has become obsolete and is a failure. A rebuilding of the system appears necessary in order to fulfill Arab personal and societal aspirations, while also measuring up to international education standards to provide a viable developmental outcome.

Educational policy is a basic tool of development, with the end goal being the elevation of individuals and society intellectually, culturally and economically from backwardness to modernity. The Arab world faces major obstacles in the way of accomplishing this goal. Containing 4.6 percent of the world's overall population, the Arab countries are in last place in development indicators such as spending on scientific research and number of patents issued. Even if explanations differ, a near-total consensus exists that educational policy's components are far from the international standards, which should link words to action, crown planning with implementation and translate principles and goals into facts and accomplishments. Many promises and grandiose slogans have been uttered in the name of this policy to reform the educational structure to complement economic development, but they have usually remained only words, showing the continued failure and decline of education.

Students are not encouraged to take a critical, analytical approach towards numerous problems in society, creating a spirit of student submissiveness and fear to voice their opinion.

There has not been serious, focused work done to find solutions to this problem in

the Arab world. Education's institutions, policy, management, and decision-making all fail to meet good management standards. Higher education institutions have to deal with vague objectives, preventing them from meeting the needs of the age of globalization. All of this makes us assert that the need for reviewing education policy and planning has become dire. As the world has entered the 21st century and confronted all of the astonishingly rapid developments within it, we must escape from the silence, if not coma, that we have remained in without being shaken by the daily trials and tribulations befalling us so as to face what the age dictates to us.

Educational policy is a basic tool of development, with the end goal being the elevation of individuals and society intellectually, culturally and economically from backwardness to modernity.

Secondly: Recommendations and Proposals for Means to Develop Higher Education

It should be self-evident that the majority of the states in the Arab world still suffer from shortcomings in applying the principles of good governance. This applies for all fields, whether political, social, economic or intellectual, and is reflected in the state of higher education and its institutions. If the Arab world is stumbling and unable to raise itself up enough to develop society and achieve sustainable development, then it becomes incumbent on the states to dramatically overhaul their system of governance. Higher education and the possibilities it presents does not work in a void, but rather is influenced by and influences the situation of society at large. Failures of governance directly impact the state of higher education in nations, often leading it and its institutions to fail as well.

True discussion of higher education reform and setting its policies and planning straight cannot be accomplished in isolation from the prevalent political, social and economic situations in the Arab world. We cannot pretend to acknowledge a separation between sound management for higher education and other governance issues. For the reform process to be comprehensive and far-reaching it must deal with the affairs of society and state at large. In discussing reform in the field of higher education, we must assert that it does not mean abandoning cultural identity. Rather, reform must be based on a careful balance between natural strengths in society that can help guide the educational process and contribute to the information and communication revolutions.

In order for any vision of reform in higher education to be properly and successfully achieved it must be provided with political support and social willpower. Thus, mass action promoting such values would allow for the tools of implementation to

spring forth.

A number of suggestions can be made on how to properly reform higher education in the Arab world:

1 – Democratizing Education

Democratizing education means subjecting the educational process across its different levels and institutions to democratic standards. By guaranteeing the principles of freedom, equal rights, accountability, transparency, freedom of expression, self-criticism, competence for public offices, freedom of informational access and distribution, the rule of law and equality before the law, respect for the values of tolerance, pragmatism and cooperation and, finally, the role of civil society, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and mass participation in decision-making, societies would be more greatly enabled to promote high educational standards.

The application of principles such as these in the field of higher education requires the following:

Strip governments' hegemonic grip over higher education in order to ensure the spread of academic freedoms and the values of scholarly innovation. By placing education into the hands of the people, institutions would be guaranteed balanced, mass participation to put their policies and decision-making processes into place.

Represent the interests of professors and students through electoral mechanisms and the founding of unions and associations. Also, provide the legal environment for freedom of the flow of information, scholarly research and cultural and intellectual activity in the universities.

Create a framework of balanced, democratic oversight in which diverse groups, including the state, the private sector, civil society institutions and academic organizations and personnel, takes part. Such participation in managing and supervising university affairs paves the way for close cooperation between all of these groups. This is also related to the necessity of forming boards of managers to run the universities, made up of independent figures not loyal to certain forces in society.

Lay out a legislative framework to run the universities on an institutionalized – not personalized – basis, while respecting transparency and legal accountability. Institutions should also provide professors and academic researchers a leading role, along with more worth and work to affirm freedom of thought.

Completely equalize admission opportunities for higher education, regardless of gender, on the basis of merit as specified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Develop educational curricula and teaching methods to consolidate the values

of creative, democratic dialogue and openness instead of rote learning, overbearing authority and closed-mindedness.

Build up teachers' abilities and confidence, to ensure they hold the necessary knowledge to impart onto students. Their research should be encouraged and they should not be forced to adhere to strict, predetermined curricula that limit their flexibility.[19]

2 – Greater University Autonomy

Autonomy for universities and research institutes cannot be complete unless funding comes from society and various diverse sources, in order to ensure that it is difficult for any one party to exert pressure or hegemony of any type. This also allows the institutions to continue their work with no restrictions. Several parties could help fund universities:

Governments: University autonomy does not mean in any way that the state must relinquish its responsibility to back education. Quite the contrary, governments need to increase their budget allocations to higher education and also search for additional sources of funding towards these ends.

Foundations, corporations and business enterprises; even individuals and capitalists. It is in the private sector's interest to have skilled graduates in various specializations take part in developing their industries, businesses and all other activities. The state should encourage this through specific incentives and exemptions, or impose fees on private corporations to support education and research.

Additionally, the establishment of private universities, not aiming for profit alone, should be encouraged, as well as expanding open universities and distance learning.

3 – Linking Higher Education with Sustainable Development

Development in comprehensive understanding aims to fulfill the needs of the present without damaging the ability of future generations to fulfill their own needs. Additionally, it raises living standards, while narrowing the gaps between different groups of citizens in order to realize social justice and develop national resources and human capital in an effective, balanced way. Such accomplishments are achieved through increasing individual income, creating jobs, improving the quality of education, health care and social insurance, and broadening individuals' intellectual scopes. The required development does not aspire for human progress for a limited number of

19 Nabil Ali, Iqaamat mujtama' al-ma'rifa lil-nahda (Founding a Knowledge Society for the Renaissance), Al-Mustaqbal Al-'Arabi, no. 342, (August 2007), 100.

years, but rather for all of humanity throughout the future.[20]

Development is related not only to economic resources, but also to human development, for which the foundation is education and gaining knowledge. Linking higher education to development requires the following:

Granting educational opportunities for all and providing the flexibility and capability to confront new needs; fulfill society's demands and the constantly changing needs of labor.

Utilizing the universities, and the future knowledge within them, to contribute to solving society's problems and regulating a modern society. Universities should maintain close ties to fighting poverty, unemployment and environmental degradation, while supporting public health and a civil society culture.

Linking the expansion of education with the labor market's demands, in order to provide training opportunities and supply business with experience, advice, research and services.

Universities should maintain close ties to fighting poverty, unemployment and environmental degradation, while supporting public health and a civil society culture.

Upgrading human possibilities in science and technology to serve comprehensive development. Universities could therefore help solve a range of challenges facing society through the three principal functions of the university, namely education, scientific research and community service.[21]

Opening up the universities to society and to the regional and international environment to develop dialogue skills, collective work, inclusivity and understanding society's problems in order to solve them. Universities would thus be more capable to offer social services in all fields, through backing applied scientific research and focusing it on the industrial, commercial and social sector.

4 – Applying Comprehensive Quality Standards in Higher Education

The concept of comprehensive quality means putting a management strategy in place that concentrates on a set of values, while drawing its vital energy from the information through which workers' talents can be creatively employed at different levels of the organization to promote its continual improvement

20 Mohammed Qasim Abdullah, ibid, 135.

21 Nuzad Abdul-Rahman Al-Haiti, Al-tanmiya al-mustadama fi al-mintaqa al-'arabiya – al-hala al-rahina wal-tahaddiyat al-mustaqbaliya (Sustainable Development in the Arab Region – the Current Situation and Future Challenges), Shu'un 'Arabiya, no. 125, Spring 2006, 103.

In education, comprehensive quality is used to mean adherence to a set of special characteristics that precisely express the essence of the educational process in all of its dimensions. This is especially successful with regards to inputs, processes, outputs and feedback, and includes all of the interactions that lead to realizing the necessary objectives for society.

It is only natural that good educational administration requires comprehensive quality management, which ensures competency, improved results and good output from scholars and graduates. A quality system would be of benefit because it lowers costs and increases productivity, which is just what the higher educational institutions need most as their costs rise and their output remains modest.

A comprehensive quality system in the higher education institutions would require the following:

Professional, scholarly and ethical training for faculty members, so that they are able to deliver their messages competently. This training needs to be comprehensive and fully integrated with teaching methods, means of evaluation and guidelines for student interaction.

Programs that develop academic, technical and administrative employees quantitatively and qualitatively to modernize their skills during on-the-job training sessions or by sending them abroad on training and educational fellowships.

Develop students' creative and critical thinking skills, including innovation in their academic specialization. Stimulating critical thinking also makes the student able to test the veracity of facts and opinions using a set of logical principles.

Provide academic and technical resources and prepare means of observing the institution's needs for all types of resources, so that it can continue in a regular and effective way.

Develop curricula to ensure institutions keep up with scientific and technological developments.

Provide the infrastructure and equipment that can allow the educational institutions to meet academic needs, including buildings, classrooms, labs, libraries, public services and other necessities.

Place standards on all public and private higher education institutions, using strict, comprehensive systems, to ensure quality in these institutions. Applying global rules on the higher education institutions allows them to be compared with their counterparts elsewhere in the world.

Transition from just educating to learning, the latter being a much broader concept that incorporates the many methods of acquiring knowledge, skills and experience over a lifetime. Learning is one of the most important means of change in society,

and it is learning that brings about economic and social progress. If knowledge is the means by which to reach ideals such as freedom, justice and human dignity, then progress is its fuel.

5 – Arab and Global Cooperation

Enhancing cooperation in the field of higher education and scientific research is a pillar of educational development in the age of globalization. Effective Arab cooperation has become a pressing necessity to bring about an educational renaissance in the Arab countries, especially in graduate studies, scientific research and publication.

Higher education institutions in the Arab world can participate in guiding each other with their experiences. If they stand together, their cooperation could create positive results for higher education. Undoubtedly, the issue requires reactivating Arab institutions for joint action.

The world has now become a global village. Complex reciprocal influence in the political, cultural, economic and intellectual spheres imposes a type of exchange that enables higher education institutions to benefit positively from extraordinary progress in science and technology.

We conclude by saying that the topic of higher education in the Arab world has become a vital issue in our current age. Reform has gained urgency and cannot be delayed. Since higher education faces numerous challenges, its current, predominant situation is not promising. The Arab world holds vast capabilities and material and human wealth that present it incredible opportunity. The native humanitarian and cultural values of the Arab world must start this reform and respond to what globalization has imposed upon it. As the Quran says, "And say: Work; so Allah will see your work and (so will) His Messenger and the believers." (9:105) ■

Reform has gained urgency and cannot be delayed. Since higher education faces numerous challenges, its current, predominant situation is not promising.

Facebook and the Arab Youth

Social Activism or Cultural Liberation?

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According to observers studying the activities of young Arabs on the social networking website Facebook, Arab youth use the prominent site to communicate with the opposite sex. Such researchers note that while motivated by sexual desire, this mode of communication is not limited to Arab networks or cyberspace; rather, it transcends national boundaries. However, sex is neither the single reason young Arabs connect on Facebook, nor is it their sole interest. Rather, sex is only one of many manifestations of their cultural presence on the social networking website. Although the interest in sex might be the initial reason one segment of young Arab users joins Facebook, its importance diminishes quickly, giving way to a more complicated and serious interest departing from social relations founded on sexual desire.

In other words, to say young Arabs' use of Facebook is solely dedicated to sex and romance is an extreme abbreviation of the relations they establish on the widely used website. This article builds on the assertion that such interactive websites quickly assume the cultural and social attributes of their users, as each group adds these particular cultural and social contributions. Further, this article explores Arab youth's mode of interaction with Facebook, as well as their cultural and social contributions to the site.

What has Facebook offered for Arab Youth?

Although digital technology should facilitate access to information related to this

subject, available data remains limited. The global technological movement does not effectively gauge the dimensions of human interaction with the Internet. Web statistics often yield conflicting results contravening the concept of digitization, particularly when disparities are too wide to fall within the margin of error. The situation becomes even blurrier in the case of the Arab world, as statistics rarely report accurate information or data. This article attempts to overcome this obstacle by employing established methods used to circumvent inadequate data.

Arab youth's interest in Facebook is primarily motivated by the website's potential for communication, which far exceeds the capabilities of classical Internet applications such as the messenger applications, e-mail groups and online forums. Even when at their best, utilizing Web cams and video conferencing, these services do not adequately satisfy users' appetites for communication and interaction. Facebook is a product of the "New Internet" that revolted against the traditional Internet, which resembled a newspaper stand or kiosk. Investment in the "Old Internet" was only open to capitalists, who would build websites and dispatch communication messages at times to recipients of their choosing, while the common Internet user was deprived of this right. Nonetheless, the Old Internet, known as the World Wide Web or Web, was soon relegated to history, replaced by Web 2.0 and Web 3.0. These two new generations or components of the New Internet eliminated the oligarchy of the Old Internet, making the Internet more democratic. Because the Internet developed in a democratic environment, it reflected the democratic elements in the form of tools to help all people – particularly population segments without significant financial assets – to speak up and have their voices heard. This evolution has led the New Internet to centralize the user, with websites being designed not only for the service of capitalists but also for all, including common users.

Online communities in the Arab world have become one of the most important facets of today's Internet and therefore must be promoted and granted services to facilitate communication and interaction, as networking has become inseparable from content accumulation and circulation.

The new online democracy first materialized in blogging websites such as Blogger and TIG, followed by multimedia websites such as Picasa and Flickr, and later in websites offering storage spaces. Afterward, the Internet experienced a wave of emerging networking websites such as Hi5 and Orkut that were soon outdone by Facebook, thanks to many exceptional features including its significant networking potential. Online communities have become the most important facet of today's Internet and

therefore must be promoted and granted services to facilitate communication and interaction, as networking has become inseparable from content accumulation and circulation.

Building online communities implies that the present-day Internet has moved on from the functions of its predecessor, i.e. designating limited spaces to e-mail groups, a service from the past that can no longer be considered an effective tool.

In the present day, the concept of interaction has elevated the Internet to the cyber rather than the virtual level, becoming simultaneously a communication tool and a forum. This double feature changes users' perception of networking from a website service per se to one that links all other services. It is this networking space that all applications seek to realize; hence, networking must be clearly highlighted as the essential element infusing all the services offered by the website. Networking enables users to view all ultra- interactive applications available on the Web site without having to disconnect in order to move between services. Within this space, users and the rest of their online communities can surf all the materials available to them, while being simultaneously able to discuss them and use various emotions.

The networking trend of the contemporary New Internet renders introducing users to each other as one of its major features. Consequently, the task of introducing people to each other is no longer restricted to matchmaking Web sites, which have also become history despite existing demand for their services. Applications under this category provide various ways for people to meet - relying on key tools, the chief among which is the Network concept, which prompts those belonging to a certain network (country, school, university and workplace) to connect with each other. Other concepts include: Match, through which singles meet; Group, the least commonly used concept application, which allows activists to meet around a particular issue; Fan, with which people can form a fan club of a personality or a phenomenon; User whereby a certain application user can meet the most active user of that application; and Birthday, through which people born on the same day can connect with each other.

The history of this introduction features shows that networking concepts have broadened. Previously, the concept of e-mail groups was the most widespread, followed by the concept of Match. Today, networks are built specifically for every Internet application, every level of affiliation, and every human or inhuman symbol. When a user invites friends, they automatically become members of that user's community of friends. Users of fourth generation websites may create networking communities as they wish.

A crucial concept in networking Web sites is privacy: the protection of personal

information pertinent to Web site users, their friends and activities. However, what concerns Arab Facebook users more is the website's potential for communication by means of renewable and content-rich forms through the Application Platform, whereby small-size interactive networking applications are built. Facebook does not stop here; it enables users to create their own intuitive interactive networking applications, thanks to the Web site's architecture that seamlessly accommodates new applications. More significantly, the Application Platform enables users to create their own interactive networking applications from one or more patterns of customizable applications.

Users are empowered to create and add a large number of applications on Facebook. Nonetheless, the majority of applications users add or create are ones that can accommodate pictures, and be used to create new limited applications under emotions, gifts, animals, birds, flowers, book covers or foods. Such applications reflect the culture of their creators, as illustrated by the large number of Asian Muslims using Facebook that resulted in a significant increase in the number of applications associated with Asian culture. Furthermore, Application Programming Interface (API)-based Facebook applications that collect news and book reviews from Web sites predefined by their developers have become widespread.

Certainly, the extent of networking on Facebook invokes the question of privacy, which unfolds on three levels. The first is the privacy of applications, as they have access to the user's personal data, meaning that other users or third parties could obtain personal information. Therefore, fourth generation Web sites first and foremost ensure the privacy of users against applications and other users. In this case, the applications gain access to the personal information of users but do not share it with others unless authorized directly by the user in question by clicking the agree box. The second level of privacy is ensuring privacy against members; a user belonging to a "Family" group and a "Friends" group may not want the latter group to know about his/her familial activities, not to mention those who do not even belong to either group. The third level of privacy involves ensuring protection against the economic ambitions of the Web site itself (advertisement). The Web site protects user information against misuse should the user decide to block access to their information for commercial use, particularly for advertising. Yet some advertisers have found a way around this privacy by identifying IP addresses and delivering advertisements directly.

Although somewhat lacking, the high respect exhibited for privacy impresses Arab youth, given the fact that youth privacy is constantly violated on the familial, public and governmental levels in the Arab region. All of the above features describe Facebook and the temptations with which the social networking site attracts Arab youth, but what about Arab youth themselves?

According to statistics, there are 31,638,640 Internet users in the Arab region, of whom 20,115,440 reside in the African region of the Arab world and 11,523,200 live in the Asian region. In terms of actual Internet use, statistics show that Saudi Arabia ranks first among Arab countries, followed by Egypt and Morocco in the second place, then Sudan, Algeria and the United Arab Emirates. In terms of expansion and growth in Internet use, Somalia tops the list, followed by Sudan, Morocco, Syria, Algeria and Saudi Arabia. Those between the ages of 18 and 35 constitute 74 percent of Internet users in the Arab world. The youth group is the most important segment for the majority of Web sites and is virtually the sole segment targeted by the New Internet.

Generally, Arab Facebook members use the site either for social aims or to fulfill physiological needs, i.e. for entertainment and fun, whether sexual or derived from the site's exciting applications.

Early in 2008, Facebook had 90 million registered users, surpassing competitors worldwide such as AOL and MySpace, which have in turn recorded a 10 percent decrease in membership. Unlike other highly transparent websites, Facebook does not provide clear-cut statistics. However, experts estimate that out of approximately 32 million Arab Internet users, roughly 6.4 million are registered with Facebook, 750,000 of whom are in Egypt alone. It is the cultural presence of those 6.4 million Arab Facebook users that the present article attempts to analyze.

Structure of Arab presence on Facebook

The current study does not seek to examine an inclusive survey of all Arabs on Facebook, as the exploration of how 6 million members interact cannot be condensed into one article. Instead, this article presents a study of a representative sample of 1500 Arab members of Facebook. However, before addressing the characteristics of the Arab social and cultural presence on Facebook, this article will address the infrastructure framing this presence, as well as providing relevant statistical background. The infrastructure of Facebook is embodied in its distinctive features, particularly the invaluable Facebook Platform. The Platform is not made available to members upon registration; rather users must build the applications they desire.

Facebook has several features and categories include applications for video, photo, music, events, groups, education, chat, dating, sports, fashion, gaming, politics, messaging, file sharing, travel, food and drink, money and business, just for fun, gifts and emotions.

Examination of 1500 Facebook profiles of Arab members aged 18 to 35 revealed

that video, notes and posted items are the most widely used applications, as 100 percent of the sample profiles utilized them. Just-for-fun applications ranked second with 80 percent, gifts with 70 percent, dating with 57 percent, groups with 35 percent and events and emotions with 30 percent. Music, fashion, money and business, chat, sports and file- sharing applications were almost nonexistent among the sample profiles.

What Arabs do on Facebook

This study is based on a six-month observation of Arab members' use of Facebook, focusing on their interactions with these categories of networking and content applications. The overwhelming presence of the above-mentioned applications did not manifest in actual Arab cultural and social presence. A closer look at the content of video applications contained by the sample profiles indicated that foreign content made up 65 percent of applications, while Arab content did not exceed 35 percent. Furthermore, this 35 percent was constituted mainly of documentary clips or flash files containing text and pictures of a religious or educational nature. The content of photo applications included 50 percent personal photos, 20 percent entertainment pictures including pornographic images, 20 percent images displaying mainly Islamic religious content with a modest presence of Christian content and lastly 10 percent images, most of which can be described as political.

Concerning messaging applications, about 30-35 percent were personal messages, while messages with religious content composed 25 percent, political messages 20 percent, advertising messages 10 percent, and other messages 10 percent. The majority of political and religious content messages were written in Arabic, which limits their impact to only those who can read the language.

It is worth noting that the gift applications carry many cultural symbols. Through such applications, members can send their friends e-cards depicting archeological sites from their countries, local dishes, sports or arts. During the study period, Asian applications built by amateurs rather than expert developers became a significant presence on the social networking site. Photo applications constituted the majority of these Asian applications and served different functions. Some photos depicted popular foods, tourist attractions, local sports such as sumo wrestling, and traditions and costumes from eastern and southern Asian countries, including for example the Japanese Geisha costumes. Other photos depicted people from those countries, predominantly Asian women. Some photos showed complete and partial nudity, while others depicted beauty more conservatively. As indicated earlier, 70 percent of sample profiles contained gift applications; however, additions to these applications by Arab

users were minimal, with Egyptian members creating only one or two applications reflecting their national patriotism. Other Arab members did not contribute to gift applications save for Islamic and Christian social and religious greetings. Arab members' contributions to gift applications amounted to less than 2 percent of the overall number of applications in this category, which is significantly less than their overall representation, 7 percent, among Facebook members. Likewise, all dating applications contained in 80 percent of sample profiles were all Western, despite intensive Arab use. Moreover, without diversifying between those who added these applications and those who actually used them, Arab contributions to purely cultural applications such as book review, education and training applications did not exceed 1 percent of the overall number of their users.

Political activism on Facebook in the context of these Arab countries that do not commit what some Arab Facebook members call "heinous actions" are confined to demanding increased freedoms.

The most widespread cultural applications among Arab users were those listed under events and groups. Although such applications were only contained in 30-35 percent of sample profiles, Arab users interacted considerably with them, with activities related to these applications constituting possibly 50 percent of their overall use of all applications.

Summarizing direct observations and interactions the author had with Arab Facebook members, this study attempts to outline the general characteristics of the Arab presence on the social network. This article presents an opinion formulated with as much objectivity as possible.

Generally, Arab Facebook members use the site either for social aims or to fulfill physiological needs, i.e. for entertainment and fun, whether sexual or derived from the site's exciting applications. Around 60 percent of Arab members use Facebook for entertainment and fun. The remaining 40 percent of Arab users utilize the site sociopolitically, engaging with issues related to politics and political reform in the Arab world, religious preaching in cyberspace or promoting charity work and becoming involved with relief and aid efforts.

A segment of Arab entertainment and fun users on Facebook remains conservative in line with Arab values and culture; they neither use pornographic or dating applications nor do they seek to subvert their conservative societies. This segment constitutes 40 percent out of the 60 percent of users who make up the segment of Arabs using Facebook primarily for entertainment and fun. In other words, conservative users make up about 20 percent of the overall number of Arab Facebook users.

The remaining segment of Arab members uses Facebook to communicate with the opposite sex nationally and transnationally beyond the borders of the Arab world. About 25 percent of them consume sexual content as explicitly seen on their profiles.

Through interacting with several Arab youth who use the social networking web site to communicate with the opposite sex, it became clear that a group of them was initially interested in Facebook because of the sexual content provided by its applications. However, this interest faded drastically especially among those whose interactions with the opposite sex were limited to exchanging jokes and everyday social feelings as well as constructing friendships, but whose activities did not reach the level of indulging in virtual sex. On the other hand, around 25 percent of this group continues to use Facebook for virtual sex, with sexual content applications appearing on their profiles.

Facebook exhibits a growing trend of users aiming to employ the social networking site to advance charitable and relief efforts. About 25 percent of Arab users utilize Facebook to realize social aims, working for example to secure winter blankets for needy families, feed the poor and donate blood and raise funds for organizations serving underprivileged segments of the population.

Likewise, a significant segment of Arab users employ Facebook to advance political goals. Those users are concentrated in the central and eastern parts of the Arab region, and are chiefly Egyptians, Saudis, Iraqis, Kuwaitis and Yemenis. This does not imply that users from other Arab countries are not politically engaged or present on Facebook. Arab Facebook members include well-known Arab human rights activists who use the site to mobilize Arab public opinion and encourage Arabs to intellectually criticize the performance and actions of their rulers and politicians. Political activism on Facebook in the context of these Arab countries that do not commit what some Arab Facebook members call "heinous actions" are confined to demanding increased freedoms. On the other hand, Arab Facebook users also include a limited number of government loyalists. The users engaged with political activities on Facebook make up 25 percent of those who employ the site to achieve sociopolitical ends.

Around 20 percent of Arab Facebook users embrace religious slogans to achieve social goals, of whom 95 percent are Muslims and only 5 percent are Christians, which may reflect the population ratio in the Arab world.

The categorization of Arab Facebook users who seek to achieve certain social goals into political, religious and relief groups does not imply that these goals are separate from each other. There is an overlap between political activists and aid activists who embrace Islamic slogans; likewise there are activists who only embrace Islamic slogans. Christian Arab users rarely link religious slogans to their political activism.

However, it is not uncommon for those users to embrace relief slogans.

In light of the aforementioned presentation of the predominant attributes characterizing the presence of Arabs on Facebook, one may conclude that the use of the social networking site as a medium to achieve social goals is likely to increase. This is particularly likely as Arab youth continue to unveil the educational potentials of this website. It is also probable given the fact that technological advancement renders the use of Facebook politically, educationally or simply for fun a pleasurable experience per se. ■

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The Gaza Conflict

Causes and Consequences of Israeli Aggression

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The Israeli military aggression against the Gaza Strip, which "nominally" began on Dec. 27, 2009 and "actually" began much earlier, has entered the annals of Middle East wars as one of the most devastating episodes likely to be indelibly imprinted on the political landscape of the region. The aggression resulted in the killing of 1,300 Palestinians, including 700 civilians, and the destruction of the infrastructure of Gaza Strip. Contrary to the Western media use of the concepts of "War on Gaza," we deliberately use the concept of "aggression" as it accurately describes what the Israelis have done in Gaza. Western media used the concepts of "War on Iraq," "War on Lebanon" and "War on Gaza" to project the image of a war in which two parties fight each other on equal footing, and to avoid identifying the perpetrator of the "war," that is the aggressor. The deliberate avoidance of the use of the concept of aggression in the cases of Iraq, Lebanon and Gaza, should to be compared with the deliberate use by Western politicians and media of the same concept to describe the Russian responses to the Georgian military attacks on South Ossetia in August 2008. In the case of the Israeli and Western military onslaughts in the Middle East, it became fashionable to avoid using the concept of aggression, and to camouflage these onslaughts under the label of "war on…"

1- Who Committed the Aggression?

Israel has projected its aggression against Gaza as a form of self-defense against the

launching of Palestinian rockets against Israeli targets. Granted that rockets have been launched against Israel, but these rockets were not the trigger of the aggression. In fact, the aggression actually began much earlier than the end of the Hamas-Israel truce and the launching of the rockets. During the Hamas-Israel truce reached in June 2008, Israel never stopped attacking and killing civilian and armed Palestinians not only in Gaza Strip but also in the West Bank, which is controlled by the Palestinian Authority of Mahmoud Abbas. It became apparent during the truce that Israel was giving the Palestinians two choices: either selective, targeted and incremental killings, or "blitzkrieg" and indiscriminate killings. To be fair, Israel was offering a third choice that is the total and unconditional Palestinian acceptance of the Israeli version of a peace agreement with them. That version was articulated during the Camp David negotiations of July 2000, which amounts to establishing a series of Palestinian "Bantustans" under total Israeli control, and much worse than their infamous South African predecessors during the Cold War. On a number of occasions, Israeli forces entered the West Bank to kill Palestinian fighters and civilians without regard to the Palestinian Authority. During the six-month truce, Israel killed around 100 Palestinian fighters and civilians. On Nov. 4, that is almost two months before the expiration of the truce, Israel killed six Gaza fighters. Further, Israel never honored its commitment to open the crossing points to the Gaza Strip, which, in addition to the Egyptian closure of the Rafah crossing point, have led to a strategic disaster in Gaza. Israel also blocked access to the Mediterranean Sea via the Gaza port. All of these factors, in addition to the routine selective and targeted killings of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, represent the actual triggers of the aggression. On Dec. 21, the Palestinian government based in Gaza offered Israel the extension of the truce, provided that Israel would stop its aggression against Gaza and open the crossing points. Israel rejected the offer and wanted an extension of the truce on its own terms, including the closure of crossing points and the continuation of selective killings.

Contrary to the Western media use of the concepts of "War on Gaza," Arabs deliberately use the concept of "aggression" to describe what the Israelis have done in Gaza.

Assuming that the Palestinians had initiated the aggression, it was totally unjustified to reply through a strategy of massive retaliation. The rockets were primitive and did not result in any major Israeli losses. The disproportionate Israeli response far exceeded the limits of self defense and verged on committing crimes against humanity. The response was openly supported by most Western governments. This is to be compared with the Western reaction to the Georgian-Russian war in August 2008.

It was clear that Saakashvili had "initiated" the aggression against South Ossetia. Nevertheless, when it became clear that he was losing the war, the French President Sarkozy, arranged a quick and immediate cease-fire and the withdrawal of the Russian troops to the prewar lines. Western observers were dispatched to Georgia to monitor the implementation of this arrangement. In the meantime, a Western donors' conference was held in which the participating states pledged a $2 billion of support to Georgia and the United States offered Georgia a long-term strategic partnership, a country which was by all means the aggressor in the Russian-Georgian war. Initiating the aggression in the case of Georgia was not the determinant of the Western policies; but the claim that Hamas initiated the aggression was used as a major determinant of these policies. When he came to the Middle East amidst the Israeli aggression, Sarkozy claimed that Hamas had committed "an unforgivable error," decried the Russian response as aggression, but he came to the Middle East and left without arranging any cease-fire, and blamed the victim. The Spanish Foreign Minister, and former European Envoy for Peace in the Middle East, Miguel Moratinos also went to Israel to express his "understanding" of the Israeli actions, and earlier promised Israeli Foreign Minister Livni that Spain would change its laws that allow Spanish courts to charge Israeli military commanders of committing war crimes.

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2- Causes of the Israeli Aggression against Gaza Strip

The Israeli aggression was not an outcome of the launching of the Qassam rockets against Israeli targets, but rather the interplay of a set of causes rooted in Israeli, Middle Eastern and Western politics. These were the failure to recognize the results of the Palestinian 2006 parliamentary elections which brought Hamas to power in Palestine, the international blockade imposed on the Hamas government and subsequently on the Gaza Strip after the elections, the failure of the United States to honor its commitment to establish a Palestinian state by 2008, and the Israeli elections of February 2009. A brief review of these causes may be in order. The first cause is the failure of the West, Israel and most Arab actors to recognize the outcome of the Palestinian parliamentary elections held in 2006 in which Hamas won 74 seats out of 132 seats in the legislative council. These elections were monitored by international observers, including former U.S. President Carter, as transparent and fair. The elections were held amidst Western-sponsored projects for democracy promotion in the Arab world. However, most actors refused to recognize these results or deal with the

democratically-elected government on grounds that it did not recognize the right of Israel to exist and did not recognize the previous agreements between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Hamas has been on record affirming that it was prepared to accept a two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, which implied a tacit recognition of Israel. However, it deferred the express recognition to the negotiation process or to Israel's recognition of the territories occupied in June 1967. What Western powers wanted was an unequivocal and unconditional recognition by Hamas without Israel reciprocating such recognition. It appears that Hamas has comprehended the lesson of Yasser Arafat's unilateral recognition of Israel in the Oslo process in 1993, which resulted in the dismal record of that process after thirteen years. During these years, the momentum of Israeli colonization of the occupied territories has increased and Israel received the Palestinian recognition without extending any significant concessions to the Palestinian Authority. All actors ignored the fact that all previous agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority were never implemented. The result was that virtually all the actors mixed their ideological differences with Hamas with their respect of the outcome of the Palestinian ballot boxes and sent a clear signal that Israel was above the democratic will of the Palestinian people. The result was the imposition of a blockade on the democratically-elected government of Hamas. All forms of foreign aid to that government were suspended until it would meet Western conditions. Had the West recognized the results of the elections and dealt with Hamas as the legitimate government of Palestine, as it deals with the most hawkish Israeli governments, such as the Likud-controlled ones, despite their denial of Palestinian statehood, the Israeli aggression would not have occurred. In fact, what happened in Gaza after the election of Hamas nullifies the conventional post-Cold War argument that democracy is a precondition for regional peace. In the case of Palestine, it was the prelude for regional war.

This brings us to the second main root of the Israeli aggression, which is the blockade imposed on the Palestinians after the 2006 elections. As soon as Hamas formed its government as a result of the 2006 elections, a full economic blockade and political boycott was imposed on that government. The Palestinian Authority took part in the boycott by persuading its faction, Fatah, to reject the Hamas appeal to form a coalition government. It also included Israel, all Western powers and most Arab governments. The coalition government was formed in February 2007. However, the Mohammad Dahlan pro-Abbas militia attempted to overthrow the elected government in cooperation with Israel and the Bush administration. The coup attempt was foiled, which led Abbas to remove the elected government and appoint a new government led by Soliman Fayyad that does not enjoy the confidence of the Palestinian legislative

council. This situation led to the present political separation between the governments of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Abbas government fully cooperated with the international blockade on the Hamas government. In fact, it did not protest the arrest and imprisonment of Aziz al-Dowaik, the head of the Palestinian legislative council, who represents Hamas, by Israel. When the truce arrangement was finalized between the Gaza Strip government and Israel in July 2008, Abbas persuaded Israel not to release the arrested Hamas deputies in the Palestinian legislative council or else he would dissolve the Palestinian Authority. Israel was so instrumental in provoking Hamas to use violence. As soon as Hamas formed the Palestinian government in 2006, Israel attacked the Gaza shores with artillery resulting in the killing of eight Palestinians, which led Hamas to launch Qassam rockets on Israeli targets. In the meantime, Israel blocked most supplies to Gaza which put the 1.5 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip on the verge of famine and breakdown of the medical and educational systems. On June 7, 2007, after the showdown between the Gaza government and the Dahlan-led Fatah group, Egypt closed the Rafah crossing point, which is the only window for Gaza to the Arab world. The Israeli-Egyptian blockades led to a humanitarian disaster in Gaza reminiscent of the sanctions on Iraq between 1991 and 2003. Richard Falk, the U.N. envoy in Gaza, described the blockade as "a crime against humanity." Nevertheless, the blockade continued despite appeals from the U.N. Human Rights Council, the most important of which was the appeal of Jan. 24, 2008. One should notice that the blockade was imposed at a time in which not a single rocket was launched against Israel. The objective of the blockade was to overthrow the democratically-elected government and install Abbas to govern Gaza.

Richard Falk, the U.N. envoy in Gaza, described the blockade as "a crime against humanity."

The third main cause of the Israeli aggression was the failure of Western powers to bring about a political settlement by the end of 2008 as was frequently promised by U.S. President George W. Bush. The Middle East Quartet, the Road Map, the Annapolis conference and the Abbas-Olmert negotiations all failed to bring about any progress towards reaching a political solution. The end result of five years of negotiations was the Quartet meeting held in Sharm al-Sheikh in November 2008 in which it was announced that the promise of a Palestinian state was postponed until a later and undefined timeframe. During these five years, Bush promised Sharon his endorsement of the annexation of Israeli colonies in the West Bank and his recognition of the Israeli "realities" in that part of Palestine. The French Foreign Minister Kouchner also contended that the Israeli quid pro quo was to "freeze" the settlements. Whereas the

Israeli-Palestinian negotiations with Mahmoud Abbas were not achieving any progress despite the loyalty of Abbas to the Road Map, Western powers kept handing Israel concessions at the expense of the Arabs. This occurred at a time in which Israel never ceased to build more colonies and kill more Palestinian civilians and activists not only in Gaza, but also in West Bank which was under the control of its ally, Mahmoud Abbas. Let us assume the West had honored its commitment to Abbas and mediated a fair settlement that was put to a free referendum of the Palestinian people. This would have created a new legitimacy, which could have neutralized the influence of Hamas, and new hopes for the Palestinian people to break away from Israeli oppression, and restore dignity.

Finally, the February 2009 Israeli parliamentary elections were quite instrumental in persuading the Israeli ruling coalition to go to a war whose victory was perceived as certain, which would inevitably be translated into votes. It was obvious from public opinion polls that the ruling coalition was about to lose the elections to the more extremist Likud and its allies, the most notorious of which is the Yisrael Beiteinu party led by Avigdor Lieberman. Under these conditions, the ruling coalition has to show that it is no less aggressive than its political rival. The aggression against Gaza (in addition to building more colonies in the West Bank, as has been approved by Defense Minister Barak one week before the elections) was a part of a strategy to win the support of the Israeli public opinion, which has been shifting steadily towards rejecting any compromise with the Palestinians. However, the strategy backfired, despite the destruction and bloodshed in Gaza, the Israeli ruling coalition failed to achieve its objective to uproot Hamas and bring Mahmoud Abbas to power in Gaza. The death of 400 Palestinian children killed by the Israeli military was the price the coalition has to offer the Israeli electorate to bring it back to power.

The February 2009 Israeli parliamentary elections were quite instrumental in persuading the Israeli ruling coalition to go to a war whose victory was perceived as certain.

3- The Consequences of the Israeli Aggression against Gaza

The Israeli aggression has far-reaching consequences on the Palestinians in Gaza, the prospects of Arab-Israeli peace and the future of the Middle East. At the first level, the destruction inflicted upon the Gaza Strip was massive and devastating. Israel did not spare any target in Gaza, military or civilian, whether they were Palestinians or U.N.

personnel, from its military aggression, and did not save any weapon for use including internationally-banned ones, with the exception of the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). It was obvious that Israel wanted to inform all regional actors of its military might and that Gaza was the scene. The result was an unprecedented massacre in Gaza including the destruction of the Gazan infrastructure. According to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR), 4,336 Gazans were wounded and 1,284 killed during the conflict. PCHR also reported that 894 of the fatalities were civilian, including 280 children under the age of 18 and 111 women. Of the 390 non-civilian fatalities, 167 were members of Hamas' civil police and 223 were combatants. An investigation by the Israeli army concluded that between 1,100 and 1,200 Palestinians were killed during the offensive, with only 250 of them civilian. The World Health Organization estimated that the Israeli onslaught resulted in the killing and injuring of 38 health personnel. The headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was also shelled on Jan. 15. Three people were injured and hundreds of tons of food and fuel were destroyed. The United Nations confirmed that white phosphorous shells were used during the attack. UNRWA also reported that five of its staff members, including one Job Creation Programme (JCP) beneficiary and three contractors, were killed, and that an additional eleven staff members, including two JCP beneficiaries and four contractors, were injured. According to the World Food Programme, the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization and Palestinian officials, between 35 percent and 60 percent of the agriculture industry has been wrecked. Extensive damage has occurred to water sources, greenhouses and farmland. It is reported that 60 percent of the agricultural land in the north of the Strip may no longer be usable. Almost 50,800 Gazans were left homeless.

The impact of the Israeli aggression should also be calculated in its long-term consequences. It has led to the psychological destruction of a generation of Palestinian youth who have been traumatized by the savageness of the aggression against all targets including children.

Due to Israel's military heavy-handedness, it managed to inflict major losses on the people of the Gaza Strip and destroy its image as the only democracy in the Middle East. It also incited the international community to bring to justice the architects of the aggression and the crimes committed in Gaza. However, Israel failed to achieve any of its political objectives, especially its declared goal to dislodge Hamas from power, install a pro-Israel government in the Gaza Strip, and restore its deterrent capability, which was shattered during the 2006 aggression against Lebanon.

The Israeli aggression has also reinforced the present trends in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The main trend is the return of the primacy of the Arab-Israeli conflict to

the detriment of other issues such as the Iranian nuclear program, and democracy in the region. The Arab-Israeli conflict itself is likely to enter into a phase of long-term political stalemates and protracted conflicts. It would be superfluous to argue that the Israeli aggression dealt a blow to the prospects of peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis because that peace never really got off the ground since its beginning in 1993 with the Oslo Accords. Since these accords, Palestinians have lost more of their land to Israeli colonies, are more impoverished, continue to be occupied, and see the prospect of independence gradually slipping away. After five years of Mahmoud Abbas at the helm of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinians were never close to a deal. The aggression represented the official death certificate of the "peace process." Regardless of who won the February 2009 Israeli elections, Israeli public opinion is heavily influenced by a mood of hawkishness and the rise of anti-Palestinian political parties, the most infamous of which is the Yisrael Beiteinu party headed by Lieberman, which is likely to influence the upcoming Israeli government. During the aggression, 92 percent of the Israeli public opinion was strongly in favor of the continuation of the aggression. It is not likely that the election of Obama will change these trends as Congress has almost unanimously supported the Israeli aggression. Also, during his first term in office, Obama will not be in position to challenge the present political trends in Israel. In fact, the Rice-Livni Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in the final days of the aggression and the Bush administration, in which the United States pledged to join in tightening the blockade against Hamas, would not have been signed without an approval from Obama.

The aggression led to a noticeable rise in Iranian and Turkish roles in the Middle East and the potential advent of NATO to play a role in the Middle East.

Finally, the Israeli aggression has changed the political landscape in the Middle East by deepening the present political divisions among Arabs, as well as increasing the Turkish and Iranian influence in the region. During its final year in power, the Bush administration managed to persuade Egypt, Jordan and most Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states to target Iran as the main adversary. The result was a new pattern of polarization in which the Arabs were divided into "moderates" and "rejectionists." The moderates are those who consider Iran as the main threat, whereas the rejectionists are those who reject that notion and perceive Israel as the main threat. That pattern of polarization was quite evident during the Israeli aggression as the "moderates" blamed Hamas and Iran as the ones responsible for triggering the Israeli

aggression. The aggression has deepened that pattern as its inconclusive outcome motivated all parties to try other strategies to achieve the same objectives. The aggression also exposed the ineffectiveness of Arab regional institutions, especially the League of Arab States, in dealing with Arab crises and raised the question of the need for a total reform of these institutions.

Ironically, the aggression led to a noticeable rise in Iranian and Turkish roles in the Middle East and the potential advent of NATO to play a role in the Middle East. Iran has been instrumental in enabling Hamas to stand up to the Israeli aggression, and, as Hamas is still in power in Gaza, Iranian influence has persisted. Despite political attacks by "moderate" Arab regimes on Iran for its role in supporting Hamas, Iran has emerged overall as a winner. Further, Turkey's influence in the Arab world has increased. During the crisis, Egypt called on Turkey to persuade Israel to call for a cease-fire, which reinforced the previous pattern of Turkey's increasing political rise in Arab-Israeli politics by virtue of its political mediation between Syria and Israel. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan's squabble with Peres, the Israeli president, in Davos enhanced Turkey's position in the Arab world, as Turkey was perceived as playing a role in criticizing the aggression much more than that of the main Arab countries. The aggression may have also created an opportunity for NATO to play a security role in the Middle East by monitoring the flow of arms to Gaza. NATO has a negative image among Arabs and if it came to the region just to play that role, which would be perceived as providing a security shelter to Israel, such an image would be reinforced. NATO would be better advised to monitor the flow of arms to all sides including Israel, or refrain from providing that service to Israel.

Conclusion:

In our judgment, the main malaise of the Middle East is the unbalanced power relations between Arabs and Israelis, and Western full and unconditional support to Israel. Under these conditions, it is hardly likely to reach a peace settlement acceptable to all parties as Israel has no motive to accept such a settlement. The problem also is inherent in the Arab dependence on authoritarian regimes, which are powerless as far as their ability to deal with the power imbalances in the region and ability to resist foreign pressures, but are quite powerful in perpetuating their grip on political power. This was manifestly clear during the Israeli aggression. It was obvious that the Arabs had no option but to appeal to the Security Council and the West to stop the aggression.

As argued earlier, the present stalemates are likely to continue. Under these condi-

tions, the main credible option available to Arab governments, especially those who classify themselves as "moderates," is to engage in a serious redefinition of the Arab-Israeli and Middle Eastern situations by moving toward establishing more balanced and autonomous relationships. In the short-run, Arab countries should pursue a set of political strategies which could restore some sort of a balanced regional equation. Arab countries should strive to bring about a real inter-Palestinian reconciliation based on the results of previous Palestinian elections, which means they should deal with the elected Palestinian governments regardless of their ideology. It is ironic that Arab regimes are prepared to deal with the most anti-Arab and hawkish Israeli-elected leaders on the rationale of nonintervention into Israeli domestic affairs, but are not ready to apply the same rationale with the elected Palestinian leaders. Recognition of government will serve to persuade Western powers to deal with Palestinian politics and Israeli politics on equal terms. Arab governments should also take measures to directly engage in the reconstruction of Gaza without waiting for the green light from Western powers. They should also withdraw the Arab Peace Initiative presented in 2002. The initiative has hurt the Arab cause more than benefited it. The initiative was a main concession submitted from a position of weakness, which led Israel and many Western countries to ignore it and demand more concessions. Presenting concessions from a weak position is not likely to be a reciprocal arrangement. In our judgment, the initiative was ill-conceived and ill-timed and is un-implementable. Arab countries in the Mediterranean should also suspend membership in the "Union for the Mediterranean," which combines them with Israel. The main objective of the union was to create a framework for Arab-Israeli normalization without Israel presenting a single political concession.

The objective of these measures is to create a new situation characterized by a relative political equilibrium that would be more conducive to an equitable peace settlement, as the strategy of full conformity with Western initiatives in the Middle East has failed to bring the Arabs closer to peace. ■

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