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DOCTRINAIRE SCHISM AND THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS SECTARIANISM IN ISLAM: UNDERSTANDING THE ROOT CAUSE OF SECTARIAN AND RELIGIOUS TERRORISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

ABSTRACT: The current difficulties and insurgency in Islamic states in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) led this study to examine why this region has seen more volatility than any other region today. Furthermore, the unusual nature of the insurgency and turmoil in this region, particularly where Muslims oppose Muslims and Muslim regimes, makes one ask what is the cause. As a result, this study has attempted to analyze today's Muslim divisions through the lens of schisms in doctrines and beliefs, which always lead to sectarian divisions. This paper takes a historical journey into the past to explore the origins of the schisms and their consequences. The emergence of many ulama (or Ayatollahs and Sheikhs) shortly after the Prophet's death and over the centuries of Islamic religion, each with own claim to piety, teachings, and illuminations, has led to the emergence of many sects, each claiming to be more pious than the others and adhering to the precepts, teachings, and examples laid down in the Qur'an and set by Muhammad. The fundamental differences in ideas and interpretations are what have fueled and generated today's sectarian and religious difficulties and instability in MENA. As a result, this instability may continue for many years to come, especially when one group sees the others not only as apostates, but also as an infidels who are divinely intended to be exterminated.

KEYWORDS: doctrine, schism, politics, religious sectarianism, terrorism, Islam, MENA

SCHIZMA DOKTRYNALNA I POLITYKA RELIGIJNEGO SEKTARIANIZMU W ISLAMIE: ZROZUMIENIE PIERWOTNEJ PRZYCZYNY SEKCIARSKIEGO I RELIGIJNEGO TERRORYZMU NA BLISKIM WSCHODZIE I W AFRYCE PÓŁNOCNEJ

ABSTRAKT: Obecne trudności i rebelie w państwach islamskich na Bliskim Wschodzie i w Afryce Północnej (MENA) skłoniły autorów do zbadania, dlaczego ten region odnotowuje większą

zmienność niż jakikolwiek inny region na świecie. Co więcej, niezwykley charakter powstań i zamieszek w tym regionie, szczególnie tam, gdzie muzułmanie sprzeciwiają się innym muzułmanom i muzułmańskim reżimom, każe zadać pytanie, co jest tego przyczyną. W rezultacie w niniejszym opracowaniu podjęto próbę przeanalizowania dzisiejszych muzułmańskich podziałów przez pryzmat schizm w doktrynach i wierzeniach, które zawsze prowadzą do podziałów sekciarskich. Artykuł ten jest podróżą w przeszłość, która ma na celu zbadanie początków schizm i ich konsekwencji. Pojawienie się wielu ulemów (albo ajatollahów i szejków) wkrótce po śmierci Proroka i na przestrzeni wieków, z których każdy miał własne roszczenia, doprowadziło do powstania wielu sekt, z których każda twierdzi, że jest bardziej pobożna niż inne i trzyma się przykazań, nauk i przykładów zawartych w Koranie i ustanowionych przez Mahometa. Fundamentalne różnice w ideach i interpretacjach podsycaly i generowały dzisiejsze sekciarskie i religijne konflikty oraz niestabilność na Bliskim Wschodzie i w Afryce Północnej. W rezultacie ta niestabilność może trwać jeszcze przez wiele lat, szczególnie gdy jedna grupa postrzega drugą nie tylko jako odstępców, ale także jako niewiernych, których spotka boska eksterminacja.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: doktryna, schizma, polityka, sektarianizm religijny, terroryzm, islam, MENA

INTRODUCTION

The origins and beginnings of Islam (submission to God's will) have long been connected to central Arabia, namely the region of Mecca and Medina, commonly known as the Hijaz. Although Islam is said to have originated in this region, experts believe that it underwent significant development and attained unique results outside of Arabia. "Islam is not a desert religion," as Craig et. al. puts it;¹ it developed as a commercial urban center in the Hijaz region of the western Arabian Peninsula, where it flourished in an agricultural oasis and small merchant towns. It has long been assumed that around 610 Hijrah, in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, a merchant named Muhammad began to have religious experiences that culminated in the Qur'an (Recitation of God's Word) and hadith, and that by the time he died in 632 Hijrah, most of Arabia had embraced and converted to his teachings. His disciples had spread to Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and what is now Iraq, Persia (modern-day Iran), northern India, North Africa, Spain, and a portion of France a century later. Islam had expanded from Central Asia to China's frontiers in less than a century. The Muslims had developed a splendid civilization with Baghdad as its center in Iraq by the 9th, 10th, and 11th centuries, a culture that significantly influenced the development of both Eastern and Western civilizations. The Arabian Peninsula is around 1/3 the size of Europe or the United States, and was given the name Arabia by Bedouin nomadic Arabs who grazed their sheep on the semiarid soil. As a result, the term Arab originally meant 'a native of Arabia.' Today, the phrase refers to an ethnic identity in general, whereas Arabic refers to a linguistic and cultural legacy. The tribe was the main social unit for the Arabs, a patriarchal group of blood relatives. The Arab tribes were not static entities, and strong economic ties bound them together. The political system in northern

¹ Vide A.M. Craig, W.A. Graham, D. Kagan, S. Ozment, F. M. Turner, *The Heritage of World Civilisations*, New Jersey 2009.

and central Arabia was characterized by tribal confederations dominated by the warrior class. Religious aristocracies wielded political power in the south. The northern warrior class's authority was based on their fighting prowess, whilst the southern religious aristocracy's authority was based on their cultic and economic dominance. The southern religious aristocracy had a stronger economic footing than the military aristocracy, since they were located in an agricultural area that also served as the Peninsula's commercial nerve center.

Muhammad's political genius was in uniting these disparate tribal groupings and warlords into a strong unified state. Although Islam was the means by which he was able to unite all the Bedouin tribes, Muhammad's social and political perspectives are inextricably linked to his religious beliefs. By the time he died, the crescent and star, Islamic insignia, had taken control of the majority of the Peninsula.

Following the Prophet's death, Islam arose not only as a religious faith, but also as a growing culture with global political implications. The victories and growth of Islam have been attributed by Islamic scholars to God's assistance for the faith. The religious zeal of the devotees was not matched by the cultic convictions of their adversaries. Muhammad has been able to persuade his rising number of followers that a jihad, or holy war, is necessary. Although Islamists have debated the term's exact meaning over time, the general view among supporters is that it represents, on the one hand, an individual's struggle against sin and toward Islamic perfection. Others have claimed that the phrase has both a social and communal connotation, implying militancy as part of a holy war against unbelievers – infidels – residing in areas not under Muslim authority.

It is crucial to review the fundamental doctrines of Islam and grasp how its fundamentalism differs from that of other contemporary sects in order to completely comprehend Islamic fundamental views. Islam is the newest of the three major monotheistic religions in the world. It is also the world's largest religion, with over one billion followers, and the dominant religion in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Islam's core concept is that there is only one God (Allah), who is the same God worshipped by Jews and Christians and is the solitary and supreme ruler of the universe. Although Allah has revealed himself to previous prophets at different times, Prophet Muhammad received his most significant and last revelation in the seventh century. Muslims are followers of the faith, which means "those who surrender to God," since believers must submit to Allah's will. According to Islam, Muslims have just one life to live, and how they live it decides how they will spend the rest of their lives. The Qur'an is Islam's sacred text, which literally means 'reading' or 'recitation,' and denotes Muslims' primary beliefs about the Qur'an, which is that it is a recitation of an eternal scripture written in heaven and revealed chapter by chapter to Muhammad. The Qur'an is regarded as God's final message to humanity, and it is eternal, absolute, and irreversible. Although Islam respects Jewish and Christian writings, the Qur'an is regarded as God's full word. It was physically revealed to Muhammad, who served as Allah's spokesperson, and it has remained large-

ly intact since the prophet's time. An important ritual act is the recitation of the Qur'an, as it is a source of Allah's blessing because it reproduces his divine speech.

The Qur'an and traditions known as Hadith are sources of legal authority. There are thousands of hadiths that elaborate on the basic precepts of the Qur'an. Muslim scholars have used them to answer legal questions and clarify Islamic ceremonial obligations. In Muslim societies, religious education is based on the study of the Qur'an and Hadith. Islam is fundamentally a religion built on submission to God. There are several activities and beliefs that each Muslims should follow in order to devote themselves to Allah and restate their trust in Islam. Islam is more than a belief system; it is a way of life, and what Muslims believe determines how they should live for Allah. The five pillars of Islam are the religious responsibilities that every decent Muslim must fulfill. (1) the shahadah, or statement of faith by repeating the creed, "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is Allah's messenger;" (2) Salah refers to the required prayer. (3) Zakat represents an important Islamic principle that all things belong to God, and Muslims are expected to share their possessions with the poor, widows, or orphans, that is, charity is required by Islamic law; (4) Sawm, or fasting, is required every year during Ramadan. It commemorates the month in which the prophet received his first revelation and is regarded as a principle of self-purification; and (5) Hajj is the pilgrimage to Mecca. Every Muslim who can afford it has a religious obligation to visit Mecca at least once in lifetime. There are six pillars of faith: (1) faith in Allah; (2) faith in His Angels; (3) faith in divine revelations; (4) faith in His messengers; (5) faith in the afterlife; and (6) faith in the Divine intent. The Islamic religion and the religious obligations for all practicing Muslims are defined by the combination of the five pillars of Islam and the six pillars of faith.²

CONCEPTUAL AND HISTORICAL MAPPING: THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

Islam originated from warring tribal cultures that lacked central, stable, and coherent governance institutions, despite having headquarters in towns and cities. Muhammad left a vast Muslim Umma (or community) when he died in 632, but this society was in danger of dissolving into distinct tribal groups once again, with some tribesmen electing new chiefs and leaders. The construction of a distinct and unified Umma, or Muslim community, made up of all those whose primary identification and relationship were a common religious faith and commitment rather than a tribal tie, was Muhammad's greatest achievement as a political strategist and religious teacher. According to Muhammad, the Umma was to be a religious and political society dedicated to carrying out God's purpose on earth. As a result, the Islamic concept of an absolute superior authority that transcended the bounds of specific tribal divisions aided in the political unification of the tribal confederation. All authority was given to

² Vide F.M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, Princeton, N.J. 1981, p. 25.

Muhammad by God. Within the Umma, God's law reigns supreme, and Muhammad is the one who interprets and applies it. As a result, Islam became a centralized weapon, concentrating both governmental and religious authority in Muhammad's hands.³

The Caliphate: Despite the fact that Muhammad's prophetic mission had been completed, his religious work was not only preserved but also maintained under the leadership and control of the caliphs (or successors to Muhammad, representatives or deputies of God). From their control, the Caliphate, as it is known today, sprang. The numerous caliphs were thus tasked with spreading Islam throughout the world, and to do so, they needed to exercise political, religious, and military dominance. Following Muhammad's death, there was a succession issue. A group of Muhammad's most capable supporters, however, chose Abu Bakr (573-634), Muhammad's loyal supporter and father-in-law, as the first caliph or Khalifa. This election signaled the birth of the concept of a universal Muslim community, whose political and religious aspirations were outlined in both the Qur'an and the Hadith. Although the primary purpose of the Qur'an and hadith was to provide rules and regulations for the faithful and to guide the Umma, there needed to be a governing body to enforce and ensure that the precepts, moral codes, and teachings contained in these two documents were followed, especially since Muslim teaching held that the law was supreme. According to the belief system, God is the sole source of law, and therefore the ruler has a religious obligation to obey and implement the law. As a result, the government's role in the Muslim religious system is limited to enforcing rules rather than making them. As a result of Muhammad's leadership style and actions, and as justified by the Qur'an and the hadith, there is no boundary between the secular temporal and spiritual spheres. This concept is one of the primary difficulties at the foundation of today's modern acts of terrorism. Comprehensive religious rules are an extension or a basic strand in the fabric of social laws. According to Grunebaum, religious belief and political power are inextricably linked, as the first sanctifies the second and the latter supports the first.⁴ Abu Bakr, the first caliph, governed for only two years (632–634). His rule was founded on his personal status as the Prophet's father-in-law among the Umma. He carried out all of the duties of a secular-cum-religious state, including sending out military expeditions in the name of the jihad, collecting taxes, dealing with tribal matters on behalf of the entire community, and leading the community in prayer. A caliphate gradually formed as an institution under him and his three successors, Umar (634-644), Uthman (644-656), and Ali (656-661). The first four caliphs were all close to Muhammad, and their relationship provided legitimacy, nostalgia, and an appearance of immaculate purity to their reigns, but later caliphal institutions were founded mostly on brute force legitimized by hereditary succession. The struggle for dominance resulted in the establishment of two major dynastic regimes, known as caliphates.

³ *Vide* F.M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, Princeton, N.J. 1981.

⁴ *Vide* G.E. von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation*, Chicago 1954.

The Umayyad Dynasty/Caliphate: With the first civil war (456-661 Hijrah) and the identification of Mu'awiya, a kinsman of Uthman, as caliph, the nature of Islamic leadership became a topic of discussion. His Meccan clan, the Umayya, established the first dynastic caliphate (661-750 Hijrah). His successors ruled until they were deposed by the Abbasid line, which claimed legitimacy through direct descent from Abbas, the Prophet's uncle. The Umayyads had all of the prestige of the Caliphate, despite the fact that many saw them as worldly in comparison to the first four, who were seen as legitimate Muslim successors to Muhammad. Mu'awiya, the dynasty's founder, relocated the Islamic state's capital from Medina, Arabia, to Damascus, Syria. With the victory of the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik in the second civil war in 692 Hijrah, the caliphal institution was formally established.

When the Umayyad family took over Islam's leadership, there was no Muslim state in the sense of a formal, impersonal institution of governance with jurisdiction over a large geographical area.⁵ Instead, there was "simply a federation of regional armies, each of which was recruited and employed inside its own region, supported by its own income, and governed by such local bureaucrats as it included" at the time.⁶ As a result, the Umayyad relied on personal connections forged through tribal ties with people they knew. Marriage relationships with other tribe chiefs further strengthened this type of relationship. This preference for personal networks over formal institutions was to become a standard feature of Muslim culture. Mu'awiya aimed to strengthen and cement the caliphate's rule by making tribal chiefs reliant on him for special favors and perks. His rule was also made possible by his command of a well-trained and loyal army, which allowed him to develop the caliphate in an authoritarian manner.

He forced the tribe leaders to recognize his son, Yazid, as his successor by coercion, thus establishing the dynastic basis of succession. Mu'awiya established the groundwork for an intricate caliphal court system by retreating from a simple existence within the Umma and withdrawing into the palace he erected in Damascus, surrounded himself with symbols and rites. The Umayyad caliphs devised a court ceremonial that matured into a spectacular spectacle beginning with Mu'awiya. Many of his inventions, on the other hand, were intended to protect him against murder. The Caliph who received visitors sat on a throne and was surrounded by bodyguards, and direct access to him was strictly controlled and restricted by an official, the *hajib*, or chamberlain.

The assassination of Ali and Mu'awiya's ascension of the caliphate had a far-reaching impact and consequence that may still be felt today. It resulted in a fundamental split in the Umma as well as in Muslim theology.⁷ Ali's claim to legitimacy and the Umma's acceptance as the true caliphate and successor to Muhammad was founded partially on family and blood ties – he was Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law – and partly on Muhammad's designation of him as the

⁵ Vide J. P. McKay, B. D. Hill, J. Buckler, P. B. Ebrey, R. B. Beck, *A History of World Societies*, Boston 2007.

⁶ Vide P. Crone, *The Early Islamic World*, in K. Raaflaub and N. Rosetein (eds), *War and Society in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds: Asia, Mediterranean, Europe and Meso-America*, Cambridge 1999.

⁷ J. P. McKay and others, op. cit., pp. 228-229.

imam (or leader in community prayer). His assassination by the Umayyad dynasty sparked disagreement among the Umma, and his adherents were known as Shi'ites (or Shi'at Ali, from the Arabic word Shi'a, which means 'supporters' or 'partisans' of Ali). The Shi'ites became opponents of the Umayyad dynasty and all other Islamic sects that did not accept or pay allegiance to their blood descent from Ali in subsequent generations, and their opposition to all other sects is based on the recognition of the divine knowledge that Muhammad had given them as his heirs. The Shi'ites formed as a unique group or sect from other Muslims who continue to follow the Prophet's precedents in their practices and beliefs. The Sunni (Sunna) is a significant sect whose beliefs are diametrically opposed to those of the Shi'ites. The Umayyad caliphs were Sunnis, and the Shi'ites were a major source of unrest throughout the Umayyad period. The Shi'ite uprisings were political manifestations of religious dissent.

The Abbasid Dynasty/Caliphate: In 750, the Abbasids gained control of the Caliphate by openly revolting against the Umayyad monarchy. Their revolt took advantage of widespread discontent with Umayyad worldliness, non-Arab Muslim resentment of Arab predominance (especially in Iran), and discord among Arab tribal groupings in garrison towns. Despite their emphasis on Muslim piety, the Abbasids were no better than the Umayyads and retained the Umayyads' hereditary rule. Despite this, they were able to keep their dominion and power monopoly until 1258. In truth, the caliphate was essentially a ceremonial authority that represented Islamic unity but did not exist politically. Many religious cults have been developed that claim piety, uniqueness, authentic teaching, and fundamentalism. Their claim to the caliphate can be traced back to their ancestor Abu al-Abbas, Muhammad's and Ali's uncle. The caliphal power and magnificence reached its pinnacle in the first century of Abbasid rule, particularly during the reigns of Harun al-Rashid (786-809), and his son, al-Ma'mun (813-833).

The Abbasid revolt effectively ended the dominance of the Arab and Umayyad. The Islamic imperial capital was moved from Damascus to Baghdad on the Tigris during the Abbasid caliphal rule (762-766) and this symbolized the west Asian shift in cultural and political orientation under the new ruler. More Persians became involved in the government as a result of this transition. The Abbasids disavowed Shi'ites' belief in a divinely inspired imamate in order to attract support from a wide range of Muslims. The Abbasids used Khorasanian Arabs and Iranians, as well as regional mercenaries, as their major armies, whereas the Umayyads depended on Syrian Arab forces. As their kingdom grew, they enlisted slave troops (mamluks), most of whom were Turks from the empire's northern regions. These mamluks and their officers were able to take and dominate positions of authority in the central and provincial governments, as well as the army, due to their sheer numbers and dexterity. The caliphs were eventually ruled by their mamluk commanders, and this dominance resulted in a growing estrangement of the Muslim

people from their rulers. Due to the turbulence, particularly in Iraq, the government seat was moved from Baghdad to Samarra, where it resided from 836 to 892.⁸

The first three Abbasid caliphs annihilated their opponents, turned on, and killed their old Shi'ite allies, and established a new governing class made up of newly converted Persian families that had previously supported the monarchs. The Abbasid revolution established a more cosmopolitan and Islamic foundation for governance and citizenship than the restricted, elite, and Arab supremacy of the Umayyad dynasty. By erecting mosques, patronizing ulama, and promoting Islamic knowledge, the Abbasids linked their rule to Islam. Furthermore, the Muslim state, which had previously been a federation of regional and tribal forces, became semi-independent under the Abbasids, with provincial governors in charge. Although Muslims initially made up a small percentage of the conquered population, the Abbasid leadership created a religious-political environment in which Islam gradually earned the support of the vast majority of the population from Spain to Afghanistan. The Abbasid caliphs altered their title from 'successor of the caliphate' to 'deputy of God' during the height of their power, complete with a magnificent palace, hundreds of attendants, and elaborate court ceremonies that intentionally distanced the caliph from the people. Subjects were required to bend and kiss the ground in front of the Caliph as a symbol of his total sovereignty.⁹ Baghdad flourished as a booming commercial, cultural, and scientific center under the third caliph, Harun al-Rashid; it was Islam's biggest city and one of the world's most cosmopolitan capitals. The Caliph established the Bayt Al-Hikma Library (House of Wisdom).

DOCTRINAIRE SCHISMS AND THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS SECTARIANISM IN ISLAM: THE ORIGIN

Despite having complete authority and power in both political and religious concerns, the Caliph was never both emperor and pope at the same time.¹⁰ The Umma's religious leadership passed to another group. These were the Ulama (those of correct knowledge), who were the Prophet's functional successors and were known for their devotion and learning. They were looked upon as authorities by the people, and their thoughts and opinions were respected by the Umma. These were the Prophet's companions, who were replaced by younger followers after his death, who were particularly concerned with carrying on the legacy of preserving, interpreting, and applying the Qur'an, as well as sustaining the Prophet's original Umma's norms. The Ulama were regarded as authorities in all religious and legal affairs, and their individual legal opinions and collective discussions of problems ranging from ideology to criminal punishment served as a foundation for religious and social order. They had largely

⁸ J.L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, New York 1988, p. 57; A. Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, Cambridge 1991, p. 37.

⁹ J.L. Esposito, *op. cit.*, p. 57; A. Hourani, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹⁰ A.M. Craig, W.A. Graham, D. Kagan, S. Ozment, F. M. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

determined the idea of divine law, or shari'a, that Muslims have adhered to for legal, social, commercial, political, religious, and moral principles by the 19th century.

Initially, Ulama activity was limited to Medina, Mecca, and particularly Iraq (mainly Basra and Kufa, and subsequently Baghdad), then Khorasan, Syria, North Africa, Spain, and Egypt. The Ulama had already adopted the role of religious critics and protectors of the Muslim conscience as early as the Umayyad period, frequently criticizing caliphal rule when it strayed too far from Muslim laws and values. With time, the Ulama took on the role of a new elite, an upper class whose advice and support the Caliph and his governors sought on moral and legal matters (in Muslim eyes, the same thing). Muslim culture created a functional moral-legal system based on a professionally trained, albeit informally organized, scholarly elite and a tradition of concern with religious principles in matters of public affairs and social order without seeking to create a formal class of clergymen. As a result, a lasting pattern emerged in which the Ulama shared, if unequally, leadership in Muslim countries with political authorities. The unintended consequence of this system was the appearance of various Ulama claiming to know and pursue the real path, and therefore succeeding in establishing a split or rupture in the previously united body of the Umma through their teaching. These Ulama gained followers who were eventually convinced that non-adherents and followers of their leader and his teachings were deviants and so labeled as infidels. As a result, sectarian disputes have emerged, polarizing the Muslim faith, with one side claiming devout orthodoxy and fundamentalism while declaring unbelievers or non-adherents to their brand of Islam to be infidels.

THEMATIC DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS SECTARIANISM IN THE MENA

Due to the emergence of different Ulamas, their teachings, and interpretations, the 'unity' of Islam and its precepts has been broken up, resulting in the emergence of two major Islamic fundamentalist groups, the Kharijites and Wahhabis, who have further confounded the belief system, each claiming to be more authentic and pious than the other. Other Islamic religious sects have sprung up as a result of these two. Fundamentalism has been defined as "a movement with radical ideals, extremist means, and literalist commitment to scripture."¹¹ Fundamentalism is also defined by Appleby as "an identifiable pattern of religious militancy in which self-styled believers attempt to stop outsiders from eroding religious identity, fortify the religious community's borders, and create viable alternatives to secular structures and

¹¹ G. Ben-Dor, A. Pedahzur, *The Uniqueness of Islamic Fundamentalism and the Fourth Wave of International Terrorism*, in L. Weinberg, A. Pedahzur (eds), *Religious Fundamentalism and Political Extremism*, London 2005, p. 74.

processes.”¹² It is believed that fundamentalism is a political movement with a political objective, and organized religion has always been about power and hence political.”¹³ Fundamentalist goals, whether political or religious, are revealingly interchangeable. They do not have to be present in every movement in some manner or measure, but should be present in the majority of them.

Ter Haar has attempted to summarize the core content of what comprises fundamentalism in broad strokes as follows: (1) a return to traditional values and an accompanying sense of restoration, which may stimulate and contribute to the building of alternative structures; (2) the search for a new identity, often at the expense of minority groups; (3) a preoccupation with moral concerns that tend to have an adverse effect on the position of women; and (4) a spirit of militancy with which these objectives are pursued.¹⁴

As Armstrong equally noted:

Fundamentalism represents a rebellion against the secularist ethos of modernity. Wherever a Western-style society has established itself, a fundamentalist movement has developed alongside it. Fundamentalism is, therefore, a part of the modern scene. Although fundamentalists often claim that they are returning to a golden age of the past, these movements could have taken root in no time other than our own. Fundamentalists believe that they are under threat. Every fundamentalist movement – in Judaism, Christianity and Islam – is convinced that modern, secular society is trying to wipe out the true faith and religious values. Fundamentalists believe that they are fighting for survival and when people feel their backs are to the wall, they often lash out violently.¹⁵

Other broad and basic traits unique to groups and movements to which the term fundamentalism has been ascribed have been discovered via further distillation of the material. To begin with, they are reactive in nature, inventing new tactics, strategies, and procedures to oppose the many incursions and developments made by modernity and secularity, which are believed to be weakening religious teaching and observance. If violence is a viable option, these methods, strategies, and techniques may include it. Second, they are highly selective, and fundamentalist groups cannot truly be called practitioners of the religion they espouse to defend or uphold in this regard because, in reality, they selectively adopt and adapt certain teachings, texts, and practices of their religion that they deem useful and necessary in their fight against modernity and the modern state system.¹⁶ Third, fundamentalists characterized the world in strict Manichaeian terms, dividing it into good and evil, truth and falsehood, saved and damned, the house of peace (dar al Islam) and the house of war (dar al Harb). As a result, fundamentalists saw themselves as fighting an apocalyptic war, but on the side of the former rather than the latter. This illustrates how demagogues use phrases like ‘infidels,’

¹² R.S. Appleby, *Religions, Human Rights and Social Change*, in G. ter Haar, J.J. Busuttil (eds), *The Freedom to Do God's Will: Religious Fundamentalism and Social Change*, London 2004, p. 199.

¹³ R. Morgan, *The Demon Lover: The Roots of Terrorism*, New York 2001, p. xviii.

¹⁴ G. ter Haar, *Religious Fundamentalism and Social Change: A Comparative Inquiry*, in G. ter Haar, J.J. Busuttil (eds), *The Freedom to Do God's Will: Religious Fundamentalism and Social Change*, London 2004, p. 6.

¹⁵ K. Armstrong, *Ghosts of our Past*, in T.J. Badey (ed.) *Violence and Terrorism*, 10th ed. Dubuque 2007, p. 4.

¹⁶ G. Almond, R. S. Appleby, E. Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World*, Chicago 2003, pp. 94-95.

'dogs,' 'children of Satan,' and others to demean and dehumanize their victims. The intentional use of such language not only excuses the acts of violence because the victims are not recognized or treated as human beings, but it also justifies and erodes any type of restraint on violence, emboldening the perpetrators. Fourth, as Almond et al. pointed out, all religious fundamentalists see their holy scriptures as sacred, inerrant, and irrefutably beyond scrutiny both by man and science because of their divine origins, resulting in absolutism as one of religious fundamentalism's components.¹⁷ Any attempt to subject the scriptures or elements of their doctrine to scientific inquiry or any modern type of hermeneutical criticism is invariably condemned as blasphemous by their supporters. Fifth, religious fundamentalists define time and human history in strictly millennial and messianic terms, each employing specific historical periods in the formation of key religious landmarks as a basis and in direct opposition to the conventional secular date system. Perhaps more importantly, almost all of them "believe that human history will end miraculously with the ultimate triumph of good over evil, usually in the not-too-distant future, and that this end will be brought about by the intervention of a divine force, the Messiah, Saviour, Mahdi, or Hidden Imam."¹⁸ Sixth, almost all fundamentalists are isolationists who wish to keep their distance from the corrupt secular world. Physical segregation, such as living in communes, caves, monasteries, or other forms of enclaves, or symbolic segregation, such as the way they dress or wear special clothing that denotes them as belonging to a particular sect distinct from others, or by adopting peculiar behavioral patterns and religious practices that distinguish them. In either case, fundamentalists set themselves apart from the rest of the population, including those who hold similar ideas but are perceived as already polluted by the world's secularism. Seventh, concerns the outright rejection of democratic tenets and value systems as anti-religious purity leads fundamentalist organizations into adopting authoritarian value systems based on charismatic rather than rational-legal sources of authority, with the leadership considered as having some indisputable mystical or religious powers which are not easily attainable by the followers. Most holy texts are believed to have been acquired through such leaders who had such unique experiences. Eighth, in light of the foregoing, fundamentalists can be referred to as 'monists,' a term coined by Lipset and Raab to describe political fanaticism based on the assumption that there is only one valid answer to all questions.¹⁹ Fundamentalists, like other radicals, are intolerant of ambiguity, and those who hold opposing viewpoints do so because they are bad and fail to recognize and maintain the truth. On the ninth, fundamentalists are outspoken and adamant in their beliefs about sexuality, procreation, and women's roles in the community. This is in addition to official restrictions on women's participation in public life, freedom of movement, and legal rights. Another point to consider is Lipset and Raab's usage of the term 'simplicity'

¹⁷ G. Almond, R.S. Appleby, E. Sivan, op. cit., pp. 95-96.

¹⁸ L. Weinberg, A. Pedahzur, *Introduction*, in L. Weinberg, A. Pedahzur (eds), *Religious Fundamentalism and Political Extremism*, London 2005, p. 6.

¹⁹ S. Lipset, E. Raab, *The Politics of Unreason*, New York 1970, pp. 3-25.

in regard to another feature of political extremism.²⁰ This is because political radicals and religious fundamentalists both believe that not only is there a clear separation between truth and falsity, but that what constitutes the truth is self-evident, available to all, and so uncomplicated. Therefore, the truth does not broach any discussion, and hence extremists tend to shut down the marketplace of ideas, a fundamental tenet usually associated with democracy. What are the two dreaded fundamentalist groups in Islam?

THE KHARIJITES, DOCTRINAIRE SCHISM AND SECTARIAN FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE MENA

This was the most radical idealist organization, with roots dating back to the first civil war (656–661). They were Ali's Kharijites (or clamourers of secession), who believed that Ali had compromised with the enemy. The Kharijites believe that the Muslim state must be founded only on Qur'anic principles, which Muhammad received from God and put into reality during his lifetime. They advocated for complete equality among the believers and required that the Umma's head or leader be the best and most pious among them. They were exclusionary and rigid in their approach to Umma membership, mandating that anyone found guilty of committing a significant sin be ejected from the Umma. A guy like him can no longer call himself a Muslim. As a result, severe Kharijites called on all true Muslims to rebel against the morally compromised reigning caliph, providing a rallying point for those who opposed the Umayyads and Abbasids. Despite the presence of moderates among the Kharijites, who allowed less-than-ideal Muslims and caliphs, they maintained a strong sense of the moral imperatives of Muslim duty. Moderate Kharijites can now be found throughout Oman and North Africa. Despite its reputation as Islam's oldest religious sect, it only accounts for about 1% of all Muslims. They are exceedingly violent due to the extremist character of their ideas, and they were responsible for the assassination of the fourth Caliph, Ali. This group is known for being severe fundamentalists and literalists when it comes to the Qur'an. They are adamant that the Prophet's succession is available to anybody of real faith, not just Sunnis and Shiites.

THE WAHHABIS

This group influenced Al-Shabab (The Youth), which controls southern and central Somalia and has made inroads into neighboring Kenya. The main argument is for a strict Wahhabi interpretation of Islam inspired by Saudi Arabia. All Muslim sects are considered regressive, but the Wahhabi movement is the most reactionary. Wahhabis are opposed to any changes to Qur'anic law. Their purpose is to restore Islam to its ideal core form, as it was during the time of the Prophet's first four caliphs. Many Islamic scholars and groups have criticized Wahhabism as a particularly conservative minority Islamic sect that is intolerant of other kinds of Islam through various publications. All non-Wahhabi Muslims, including Sunni

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 7.

and Shi'ite Muslims, are considered unbelievers under the Wahhabi version of Islam. Wahhabis follow a strict type of puritanism that includes basic, brief prayers, unadorned mosques, and the prohibition of inscribing the Prophet's name on mosques or celebrating his birthday. In reality, idolatry is defined as any kind of extravagant spirituality. The rigorous interpretation of Sharia by the Wahhabis sanctioned severe laws and punishments. Wahhabism is currently practiced by tens of thousands of people. Wahhabism is practiced by the majority of Saudi Arabians, including hundreds of members of the royal family. In the same vein, members of Nigeria's Boko Haram are also considered the Wahhabis.²¹

Interestingly, the Taliban do not practice Wahhabism but rather belong to the Deobandi movement, which was founded in 1860 under British control in a small village in the Indian Himalayas. It is an exceedingly severe form of Sunni Islam, akin to Wahhabism. Both the Deobandi and Wahhabi groups draw a clear line between revealed sacred knowledge and human knowledge, excluding any learning that does not appear to be sacred. Although Afghans have been a part of the Deobandi movement since its inception, the concept of Deobandi helped to spawn many other fundamentalist organizations in the Muslim world, including the Taliban in Afghanistan. Deobandi philosophy has evolved over time to become increasingly conservative and fundamentalist. Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab created the Wahhabi movement in the 18th century. It is primarily a purification of the Sunni religion, which considers image veneration, extravagant worship, and lavish living to be sinful.

Wahhabism preaches that everything added to Islam after the third century of the Muslim era is erroneous and should be destroyed. Members identify as Muwahhidun (Unitarians) who adhere to the belief that God is one and only one, Wahid. Because of his contentious preaching from his book, *Kitab al-Tawid*, the founder of the Wahhabi movement, Abd al-Wahhad, was exiled from his native city of Uyayna in 1744. During his exile, he visited the Saudi tribe of Nejd in the northeast and converted them. In 1763, the Saudi sheik began the invasion of his neighbors after being convinced that it was his religious purpose to wage holy war, jihad, against all other kinds of Islam. From their stronghold in Riyadh, the Wahhabis governed all of Arabia except Yemen by 1811. The Ottoman sultan sent out expeditions in an attempt to defeat them, but they were unsuccessful. When the Sultan summoned Egypt's Muhammad Ali, he was successful, and the Wahhabis were driven into the desert by 1818. They restored dominance in the Nejd and controlled the Persian Gulf coast of Arabia from 1821 until 1833. Despite the fact that Ibn Saud advanced from his takeover of Riyadh in 1902 to the restoration of nearly all of his ancestral kingdom as Saudi Arabia in 1932, where Wahhabism remains dominant to this day, the Wahhabi movement achieved a third victory. Because their forebears assisted the Saudi ruling family in unifying the nation in 1932, members of the Wahab family continue to hold key positions in Saudi Arabia. Other Islamic reform move-

²¹ A.I. Adeyeye, O.O. Akinrinde, O.O. Omodunbi, *The Influence of Globalization on Insurgency: Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab in the Age of Information Technology*, "NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability" 5(1), pp. 15-29.

ments, from India and Sumatra to North Africa and Sudan, were influenced by Wahhabism. Wahhabi theology and jurisprudence are founded on Ibn Taymiyah's teachings and Ahmad ibn Hanbal's legal school, respectively. They emphasize literal belief in the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as the creation of a Muslim state governed solely by Islamic law. Most Muslim countries are thriving under the current Wahhabi movement.²²

Officials believe that the movement has roughly 4,000 members in Lebanon alone. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan have many more adherents to the faith. Ikhwan, Wahhabi, Salifiyya, Mowahabin, and the well-known Taliban are some of its names. Wahhabism is referred to as *fitna a Najdiyyah*, or the problem of Nejd, by anti-Wahhabi Muslims. Wahhabis share a violent interpretation of Sunni Islam and receive financial support from Saudi Arabia's government at the highest levels. Wahhabi religious schools, also known as *madrassas*, are part of a global network of Muslim extremist groups. Wahhabi schools indoctrinate young men between the ages of 7 and 15 in the basics of orthodox Islam, religious responsibilities, and extremist militancy. Young males between the ages of 15 and 25 are groomed for jihad, or holy war, and are taught how to fight for Wahhabi Islam's conquest. Wahhabi schools do not produce all violent young men. Although they engage in paramilitary training, the vast majority of Wahhabi communities do not openly maintain armed militias. The Taliban is an exception, as their adherents do not conceal firearms or other weaponry.²³

Obviously, the term Wahhabi carries a negative connotation, so Saudis prefer to identify themselves as Unitarians, or believers in a single indivisible divinity.²⁴ To say the least, the violence perpetrated as a result of Deobandi and Wahhabi religious ideologies is significant. One comment sums up the religious connection among the multitude of quotes given and articles written about Islamic extremism since September 11th: Not all Muslims are suicide bombers, but all Muslim suicide bombers are Wahhabis. No one can deny that this ideological system has spawned and continues to spawn violence. Unfortunately, we are all familiar with the names of terrorist organizations related to bin Laden, such as al-Qaeda, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Armed Islamic Group, Harakat ul-Mujahidin (Pakistan), and Abu Sayyaf (Philippines). Many suicide bombings, kidnappings, hijackings, and killings have occurred as a result of the violence perpetrated by these groups.²⁵

²² Ibidem.

²³ S. Lackey, *The 'New Wahhabi' Movement*, MSNBC. October 17, 2001, <http://www.msnbc.com/news/643005.asp?cp1=1>, p. 2.

²⁴ R. Hardy, *Analysis: Inside Wahhabi Islam*, BBC News, September 30, 2001.

²⁵ S. Schwartz, *Ground Zero and the Saudi Connection*, London 2001, <http://www.spectator.co.uk/article.php3?table=old§ion=current & issue 2002-0105&id=1104&searchText>, p. 3.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, THE ROOT CAUSE OF SECTARIAN AND RELIGIOUS TERRORISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

The Shi'as: As Perlmutter further opines that sectarian disagreements have resulted in the creation of nearly 70 separate Islamic religions, sects, and traditional schools of Islamic faith today.²⁶ Islamilis, Zaidis, Fatimids, Nizari, Deobandi, Alawis, Druze, Baha'i World Faith, Ahmadis, and the Black Muslim Movement are only a few of the lesser-known sects (Nation of Islam). Sunnis, Shi'as, and Sufis are the most well-known and influential. We will look at these sects and their main teachings since they have sparked not only sectarian strife but also intrareligious strife and terrorism. The 'partisans of Ali' (Shi'at Ali, or simply Shi'a or Shi'ites) can be traced back to the assassination of Ali and especially his son Husayn, by Umayyad troops in Karbala, Iraq, in 680. Ali was held in high regard by all Muslims because of his closeness and blood connection to Muhammad, but the Shi'ites felt he was the Prophet's designated successor. The Shi'ites saw Ali's familial ties to Muhammad as proof that he was the Prophet's chosen successor. During the Umayyad period, a number of rebellions arose around people claiming to be such real heirs, whether as an Alid or just a member of Muhammad's Hashim clan. The Abbasids' claim to the caliphate was also founded on their Hashmite heritage. The major Shi'ite candidates of the 9th and 10th centuries staked their claims on the Prophet's designation as well as on their genealogy from Muhammad's daughter, Fatima. According to the Shi'ites, a true Muslim is a devout follower of the imams who carry Muhammad's blood and spiritual authority.

Ali's assassination and the massacre of his son, Husayn, and his family served as adequate demonstrations of the evil nature of the world's rulers, as well as a rallying point for real Muslims, for the Shi'ites. According to Shi'ites, all sincere Muslims, including their imams, must suffer on earth, but that they will be vindicated by a mahdi (or guided one) who will usher in a messianic age and a judgment day on which the faithful will be rewarded. Shi'a Muslims are the majority faith in Iran today, and they have led the Muslim state since 1500. In both Iraq and Iran, Shi'as are the majority. The sectarian conflict and divisions in Iraq presently indicate that Iraq could be partitioned among the three factions of Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdish people. Between the 10th and 12th centuries, Shi'ite customs began to form. Many states fell under Shi'a dominion, but only Egypt's Fatimids were able to build a significant empire. Those Shi'ite Fatimids who claim ancestry from Muhammad's daughter Fatima were known as the Fatimids. Nonetheless, in Iran, Iraq, and the lower Indus, a sizable Shi'ite community formed (Sind).²⁷

Two prominent factions developed as the most influential from the spread of Shi'ite believers. The 'Seveners' or 'Isma'ilis' were the first to recognize and acknowledge the sixth Alid imam's first son as the seventh imam. The Isma'ili movements are today's most revolu-

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 11.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 12.

tionary Muslim sects. Their history dates back to circa 1100, when they were known assassins after being created by a Fatimid defector in the Elburz Mountains of Iran. Due to the fact that it was thought that they were under the influence of drugs, the word ‘assassins’ was taken to mean an anglicized corruption of the Arabic word ‘hashishyyin’ (smokers or users of hashish). The Mongols exterminated the assassination sect in the 13th century. Most Shi’ites, however, began to accept a line of twelve imams by the 11th century, the last of whom is claimed to have vanished into a cosmic concealment in Samara (Iraq) in 873, from which he would finally emerge as the Mahdi, or ‘Guided One,’ to usher in the messianic period and final judgment. This new generation of ‘Twelvers’ Shi’ites has become the majority, flourishing in Iran, the birthplace of Shi’ite ideology. In the 16th century, the Safavids of Iran made Twelver theology the state religion of Iran. In short, the original disagreement between Sunnis and Shiites was over who should replace the Prophet. Shiites make up less than a quarter of all Muslims. The primary premise of this cult is that Ali, Muhammad’s sole surviving daughter's spouse, should have been the first successor to Muhammad.

The Sunnis: Most Muslims accepted a compromise that loosened the definitions of the Umma’s position, membership, and leadership. In certain ways, this compromise was acceptable to both lukewarm Muslims and pragmatists, as well as those who practiced extreme religiosity. They adopted the name Sunnis, which means ‘followers of the tradition’ – Sunna – as set down by the Prophet in the Qur’an, to emphasize their perspective on issues and their departure from positions already established by other sects. The basic guiding ideas of the Sunni sect are that first, the Umma is a theocratic entity, a state under divine authority and law – the Shari’a. The sources of guidance are, first, the Qur’an; second, Muhammad’s precedent; and third and fourth, the interpretive efforts and consensus of Muslims. Second, the Caliph is the absolute temporal ruler who is responsible for administering and defending Islam, as well as maintaining Muslim norms and practices, but he has no higher authority on issues of faith than other Muslims. Third, everyone who professes to be a Muslim and confesses that “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his Messenger” should be regarded as a Muslim, and no fatal sin should keep them out of the Umma.

The consolidation and institutionalization of Sunni legal and theological standards would subsequently shape the Islamic world. The Sunni Ulama progressively gained popularity and acceptance, making it easier for them to establish their religious, social, and political beliefs among the merchant, landowner, and bureaucratic elites. In contrast to Christianity, Muslims’ predilection to define Islam in terms of what Muslims do, rather than what Muslims believe, has resulted in basic Sunni orthopraxy, or “correctness of religious practice,” which opposes religious and social innovations. Even if Shi’ite aspirations were often expressed politically or theologically, Sunni orthopraxy had become the dominant tradition by the year 1000. The rise and widespread acceptance of a conservative theological perspective associated with one of the four major Sunni legal schools, the Hanbalites (after Hanbal the Ulama), further limited the

possibility for creative theology and tolerance of other Ulama's teachings. Even as they grew absorbed into the social aristocracies, the Hanbalites relied on a literalist reading and interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith, which made them more socially conservative.²⁸

Sunni theology has today encouraged extremist terrorist groups seeking to establish an Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS). Sunni extremist groups, including Saddam-era commanders and troops, have joined them in the offensives. It arose from Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups in Iraq. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, an enigmatic person considered a military leader and tactician, is leading the charge. ISIS's victory in the Middle East will only exacerbate the chaos in the region. It is a Sunni extremist group, and its success will further exacerbate the sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia, which is already the deadliest fault line in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Iran, a country of majority Shi'a Muslims, shares a border with Iraq. Sunni rebels consider Shi'a Muslims to be heretics. According to estimates, ISIS has between 3,000 and 5,000 combatants. The Sunnis are the most common Islamic group today, accounting for roughly 85% of Muslims worldwide. The Sunni faith is divided into four schools, each with its own interpretation of the Prophet's life. The legitimacy of Muhammad's first three successors is shared by all Sunnis. Hanabalites, Malikhites, Hanafites, and Shafites are the four Sunni factions.

The Sufis: The Sufi sect brings the spiritual and mystical components of Islam to the modern world. Sufi is derived from the Arabic word Suf (wool) and refers to the ascetic practice of wearing a coarse woollen robe. Sufi simplicity and humility can be traced back to the Prophet and his Companions, but it became a unique trend around 700 C.E., when male and female pietisms emphasized a godly life over and above the adherence to Muslim rituals and obligations. Some Sufis emphasized asceticism in order to avoid worldliness and temptations, while others emphasized passionate devotion to God. The lofty Muslim notion of God of creation indicates a distance between the human and the Divine, which Sufi piety bridges. Sufi piety took on social dimensions such as saint adoration, shrine pilgrimage, ecstatic worship, which involves the use of music and body movement to generate a state of ecstasy that they think brings them closer to God, and seasonal festivals. Sufi writers have compiled saints' stories, written Sufi treatises, and written some of the world's finest mystical poetry.²⁹

The Sufi Ulama were respected as spiritual gurus and saints, and their followers formed brotherhoods with distinct mystical teachings, Qur'anic interpretations, and devotional practices. Despite the fact that these fraternal orders are not monastic, they have become the primary tools for the promotion of the Muslim faith and the center of popular piety in practically all modern Islamic states and societies. Sufism has always drawn people from all walks of life, including those who are committed to poverty or other extreme causes. Indeed, the pervasive ideological and religious leanings of the Sufi order have made it one of the archetypal

²⁸ S. Lackey, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 3

social organizations of ordinary Muslim life in this period and time, with many Muslims, whether Sunni or Shi'ite, identifying in some way with the Sufi order. Sufism is an Islamic mystical sect. Due to their mystical beliefs, the Sufis are considered a heretical sect. Sufis, according to some, are Islam's most conservative adherents. Sufis differ from other sects in their belief in saints and martyrs, which is considered idolatry by mainstream Islam.

To summarize, the Sunni and Shi'a religions share essential principles but differ in doctrine, ritual, legislation, theology, and organizational structure. The schism stems from a disagreement over who should have succeeded Prophet Muhammad as Umma's leader. While Sunnis are the biggest sect in the Muslim world, the Shi'a, the bulk of whom are ethnic Arabs, make up 60 to 65% of Iraq's population, while Sunnis make up 32 to 37% of the population, split evenly between Arabs and Kurds. Under Saddam Hussein, Sunni Arabs dominated Iraq, and their persecution of Shi'a exacerbated sectarian tensions. The invasion led by the United States in 2003 provided an opportunity for the Shi'a to pursue retribution and revenge. Nouri Maliki, Iraq's president, has been accused of denying Sunni Arabs' genuine participation and implementing security measures that are hostile to them. The situation has progressed beyond Iraq's logic and exclusivity. According to current press reports, ISIS has recruited an estimated 400-500 British-born militants. ISIS currently has a major presence in Syria.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF SECTARIAN POLITICS AND RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM FOR THE STABILITY OF MENA AND THE WORLD

Islam has always been a religion born in the crucible of violence, whether for the sake of survival, spread, evangelism, or conversion of 'infidels.' Islam's violence has been divided into two categories: internal and external. The internal dimension occurs when Islamists turn against one another, while the external dimension occurs when violence is directed towards people seen to be enemies of Islam and infidels (unbelievers and apostates). The Qur'an and hadith explicitly justify each of these types of violence. It is permissible to wage battle against four sorts of foes under Islamic law: apostates, rebels, infidels, and robbers.³⁰ The first two are internal conflicts, whereas the last two are external conflicts. For example, the rules of war against apostates are even stricter than against unbelievers, owing to their status as renegades who have understood the true truth but abandoned it. Because there is no human forgiveness for this crime, the renegade must be executed. The difficulty arises in determining who is a renegade or an apostate. Counter-claims that they had become apostates and rebelled against Muhammad's authentic teachings have justified the deaths of several Muslim political and spiritual leaders. On the other hand, Muslim fundamentalists' rather distinctive 'hate' towards Jews and later Christians is based on a reading of the hadiths and Qur'an that sees them as people who have gone astray and followed erroneous ideologies. Islam, the final and perfect revelation of God, is said to have surpassed and replaced both the Jewish and Christian reli-

³⁰ Vide B. Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*, New York 2003.

gions. The refusals of these two religious sects to accept Islam makes their adherents not only rebels and apostates, but even worse than infidels, because they refuse to recognize Islam as the only genuine religion.³¹

Another important effect of sectarian conflicts is the various interpretations and meanings assigned to injunctions in the Qur'an and hadith. These differences in interpretation and meaning have divided the Umma (Muslim community) more than anything else, setting one group against the other and calling the other apostates and unbelievers.

The interpretation and meaning given to essential Islamic notions such as jihad, as well as the use of terrorism and suicide bombers as insurgent tactics, are only a few examples. The importance of essential Islamic ideas in justifying terrorism may be seen in Islam's basic fundamentals, yet this does not mean that all Muslims understand their beliefs in this way. In effect, how Muslims live their lives is determined by their beliefs. Extremists can theologically justify their terrorist assaults against the Great Satan, who appears in the guise of the United States and western education, if this belief implies perceiving other people and infidel nations as wicked. Terrorism becomes more than a political choice; it becomes a theological duty that determines their eternal fate. Thankfully, most Muslims do not see the United States as the embodiment of evil and follow international law. Nonetheless, Islamic fundamentalists do not discriminate between religious and civil law. This is critical to comprehending the gravity of the threat. Islamic fundamentalists interpret the Qur'an to declare anyone who is not a faithful Muslim to be an infidel who must be killed. Other Muslims who do not practice their severe form of Islam are considered infidels.

Their understanding of Islam is used to legitimize terrorist acts. Al-Qaeda is the most well-known, with a global jihad mandate (the Base). Osama bin Laden declared the foundation of the International Front for Fighting Jews and Crusades in 1998, a group dedicated to assassinating Americans and destroying American interests around the world. Al Qaeda, Egyptian Jihad, Pakistani Society of Ulemas, Ansar Movement, Bangladesh Jihad, and Islamic Army for the Liberation of the Holy Sites are among the organization's members. Al Qaeda is said to have operational bases in Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Turkey, Jordan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Syria, Xinjiang in China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Myanmar, Indonesia, Mindanao in the Philippines, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, Tunisia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Chechnya, Dagestan, Kashmir, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Azerbaijan.³²

Various interpretations of the theological notion of jihad are used by Islamic fundamentalists to justify sacred violence. The term 'jihad,' which does not technically mean 'holy battle,' is divisive, and Islamic scholars have long disagreed on how it should be construed. The understanding of jihad, like other themes in the Quran, is based on the theological and

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Ibidem, p 45.

political perspectives of distinct Islamic sects. Even today's definitions are incongruent. According to the Muslim Students Association at the University of Southern California's Islamic Glossary, Jihad, also spelled jihaad, is an Arabic word whose root is jahada, which means striving for a better way of life. Juhd, mujahid, jihad, and ijihad are nouns. Effort, strain, exertion, effort, diligence, and fighting to maintain one's life, land, and faith are some of the other connotations. Islam prohibits its followers from participating in holy wars. The term 'holy war' refers to the crusaders' holy war. According to the Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion, "the Islamic concept of Jihad, which is derived from the Arabic root meaning to strive or make an effort, connotes a wide range of meanings, ranging from an inward spiritual struggle to attain perfect faith to an outward material struggle to promote justice and the Islamic social system."³³ It can be affirmed that 'jihad is an effort, or a striving. Interpretively, a religious war with those considered unbelievers in the mission of Muhammad. It is an obligatory religious duty, established as a divine institution in the Qur'an and traditions, and prescribed specifically for the aim of furthering Islam and repelling evil from Muslims. For some, jihad entails a fight to keep one's beliefs. Others see it as Muslims' responsibility to protect Islam by removing western influences from the world. For hard-core Islamic extremists like Osama bin Laden, jihad is unmistakably a holy war to purge the Muslim Holy Land of infidels. It is also a justification for fighting all adversaries in the name of establishing an Islamic state. In fact, some Muslims consider jihad to be the sixth pillar of Islam, the unfulfilled or neglected duty. In this light, Islam is a revolutionary ideology that aspires to change the entire world's social order and reconstruct it according to its own precepts and values. In this context, Jihad refers to the revolutionary fight and all-out effort waged by the Islamic Nation/Party in order to achieve this goal. All other acts of terrorism linked to Islamic fundamentalists, including the suicide attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, are, in the eyes of the fundamentalists, a form of jihad. Suicide attacks must be considered a sort of sacred violence, because suicide is religiously prohibited in Islam. Suicide in the name of a holy war is not only legal, but is also one of the most noble acts of self-sacrifice, in the views of the extremists. Extremist fundamentalists regard self-destruction for the sake of Islam as a pinnacle form of jihad and a form of terrorism sanctioned by Shari'a. It is martyrdom (istishhad) rather than suicide (intihar) that will secure a particular position in Paradise. Another area of reinterpretation and application is active martyrdom. Fundamentalists openly support and glorify martyrdom, and the rewards in the afterlife are emphasized to entice people to pursue it. Although most radicals agree that suicide is a serious sin forbidden in Islam, extremist fundamentalists have revived the khariji and assassin traditions of suicide-killings as an acceptable weapon in their present fight. They use Qura'nic verses, Hadith, and cases from Islam's early history to show that self-sacrifice for the sake of Islam (including blowing oneself up as a living bomb) with the goal of defending Muslims and injuring their enemies is not considered

³³ Vide R. Wuthnow. *Encyclopaedia of Politics and Religion*, Washington, D.C. 1998.

suicide, but rather a legitimate fight to the death. Modern terrorists have a firm grasp on the nature of sacred violence and how to exploit the political context so that otherwise peaceful individuals engage in violence as a religious obligation. There is no remorse since religious terrorism is always justified by real believers, trapping them in a circle of righteous retaliation.

CONCLUSION

We concluded by reiterating that the Shi'ite idea of the imamate is the fundamental difference between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims. According to the Sunnis, the Caliph, Muhammad's elected successor, wielded political and military authority but not theological authority. The Shi'ites, on the other hand, hold that the imam (leader) is a direct descendant of the Prophet and is the Umma's blameless, divinely inspired political and religious guide. To put it another way, both Sunnis and Shi'ites agree that authority in Islam comes first from the Qur'an and then from the Sunna. When it comes to interpreting these sources, there is a difference of opinion. Shi'ite Muslims believe that the imam has this ability because he is endowed with heavenly grace and wisdom. Sunnis, on the other hand, believe that the interpretation is based on ulama consensus.

The emergence of numerous ulama (or Ayatollahs and Sheikhs) over the centuries of Islamic religion, each with their own claims to piety, teachings, and illuminations, has resulted in the emergence of numerous sects, each claiming to be more pious than the other and adhering to the precepts, teachings, and examples laid down in the Qur'an and set by Muhammad. In truth, none of the groups mentioned claimed to diverge from Muhammad's teachings and commandments as given out in the Qur'an. Each sect claims to be more religious and pious than the others, while labeling the others as infidels and apostates for departing from traditional teachings and becoming corrupt. The Umma's schism has pitted one sect against the other, with each considering the destruction of the other as its divine aim, rendering compromise impossible. We believe that this is the case in contrasting politically driven terrorism and insurgency with religious insurgency.

The diverse interpretations that the Qur'an and hadith have been subjected to by different Ulamas and imams are at the foundation of this rift or fault line in Islam. This research has attempted to demonstrate that this is not a recent occurrence, but rather one that predates even the arrival of western civilization.

What we are seeing now is the expression of these varied teachings and interpretations, which has led to doctrinaire teachings pitting Muslims against each other. What was once a religious issue has taken on political and secular overtones. Most African countries, particularly those in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), have seen increasing religiously driven violence with political overtones. Since the US and coalition troops deposed Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraq has spiraled into bloodshed and instability as a result of ISIS (now Islamic State; IS), posing a severe threat to the Iraqi population. ISIS is made up of people who have successfully combined religion, politics, and military knowledge to create a powerful

force that has swept the country. Through a social media and mass communication effort centered on its jihadist ideals, ISIS has enticed and inspired radicals of all shades to join its operations in Syria and Iraq.

Many individuals in extremist movements, as in Syria, use them as a vehicle for their own purposes, assuming the costume and demeanor of a devout Islamic radical as a means of achieving wider political aims.

While the instability in Iraq is linked to the Syrian conflict next door, many people who fought for ISIS in Syria have now relocated to Iraq. Iraqi insurgents are more concerned with resolving the country's political problems than with achieving the goals of more extremist Islamic groups. To dismiss the bloodshed in Iraq as the result of a few radical extremists' psychotic whims is to deny the country's very genuine social inequalities. It is not only a nihilistic jihadist group bent on building an Islamic caliphate that has swept through Iraq to within 60 kilometers of the city (as of writing), but rather a broad uprising by large masses of disgruntled people. This is the result of years of social isolation, poor governance, and official corruption in Iraq. ISIS has a well-trained and organized army, with senior former Baathist military officers in charge of coordinating military actions and operations. This portends an unusual alliance – the interests of secular pro-Saddam Baathists and extreme Islamists appear to be diametrically opposed – which could be the movement's undoing.

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