

THE PROBLEM OF THE POLITICAL IN ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS

Roel Meijer

The major paradox of Islamism¹ is that it is a modern phenomenon that emerged as a reaction to Western penetration of the Islamic world. Previously politics and religion were perhaps loosely related in theory but separated in practice.² In many ways classical Islam was apolitical and the *ulama* tended to shy away from rulers, who in most cases were thugs.³ Although the *ulama* won the battle with the Abbasid caliphs (750–1258) over the monopoly to interpret Islamic law, they never succeeded in establishing their authority over the ruler, with the result that a split occurred between the ruler, who dominated politics, and the *ulama*, who acquired religious authority and held sway over the text. Classical political theory recognized this division of labor, laying down the necessity of obeying the ruler (*wali al-amr*). This is a minimalist doctrine. According to Islamic law obedience to the ruler is mandatory, even if he is unjust and incompetent, and revolt is rejected unless he actively works against Islam. Modern totalizing claims to provide a worldview and a complete social, economic and political system embodied in an 'Islamic state' should be regarded as a reaction to Western colonial rule. They are a response to condescension towards conquered peoples whose 'backwardness' was not

ascribed to socio-economic circumstances or a power struggle, but to their deficient civilization, associated with their corresponding inferior religion; in this case Islam. The major problem with this counter-claim was that at the time Islam-inspired movements generally rejected politics (as a form of negotiation and compromise, and a means to reach certain delimited goals) and deeply feared its mechanisms as a source of corruption of authenticity and religious purity. The result has been a deep, but for a long time hidden, crisis; Islamic movements claim to be all things at once while not having the political instruments (which they had never developed) to deliver. Whereas in theory Islamism promises a perfect society and is able to mobilize people on the basis of its slogan, 'Islam is the solution' (*al-islam huwa al-hall*), in practice it suffers from the weakness of populism and its simple solutions to complex problems, which are believed to be located in the personality of the ruler, the morality of the believers and adherence to God's rule. In his famous book *The Failure of Political Islam*, Olivier Roy argued almost twenty years ago that Islamism's problem is the limitation of politics to virtue and piety.⁴ All the rest is 'sin, plot or illusion'.⁵ Concentrating on values instead of politics, Islamism ignores the need for a political program, open debate, and the value of checks and balances in curtailing power and the flexibility to produce a stable political practice.⁶ Its basic flaw is to prefer purity and utopia above concrete results.

Modern Islamic movements have been engaged in three archetypical strategies to reach their goals of acquiring power and establishing an Islamic state. The first strategy concentrated on preaching (*da'wa*) as a means of peacefully spreading the call and convincing Muslims to lead the correct life of the *Sunna*, the example of the Prophet Muhammad. In its more activist version under the guise of 'commanding good and forbidding wrong', or *hisba*, this approach can adopt a violent form of coercion.⁷ The political assumption of *da'wa* is that once Muslims lead a pious life a virtuous Muslim society will appear and political power will automatically follow without leaders having to dirty their hands. One finds the most extreme, apolitical version of this strategy in countries which did not experience colonialism and where political doctrine still goes back to classical tradition. In Saudi Arabia, for instance,

the doctrine of obedience to the ruler has been promoted by Wahhabism/Salafism, leading to a more classical division of labor between the *ulama*, who gained control over society, while the ruler, the family of Sa'ud, acquired a monopoly over politics, the economy and foreign policy.⁸ In this arrangement, the *ulama* actively discourage any political debate as deviant, leading to an internal division (*fitna*) which might undermine the power of the political and religious authorities. On the other extreme, modern Islamic political activism uses force and wages jihad⁹ in order to capture the state and impose an Islamic society from above. In Egypt, the best example was the Jihad Organisation, which was involved in the assassination of President Sadat in 1981. In establishing the Islamic state in this manner, activist consciousness remains pure; their hands unsullied and their belief in their righteousness intact. The problem with these two strategies is that they are political in the sense that they seek power and transform society while at the same time the political dimension of the action is denied. Moreover, the stress on religious purity, the religious sanction of jihad, and the rejection of politics, as well as the tendency to view the political adversary as deviating (*inharif*) from the straight path rather than having a different opinion, an equally valid interpretation of the Islamic law, or representing other interests, stimulates the use of violence. The third and least popular option, which has only recently developed, is to recognize the limitations of *da'wa*, reject the severe liabilities of violence (jihad), and embrace politics (*hizbiyya*)¹⁰ as a means to reform society and power relations while recognizing the existing order. As is the case with *da'wa*, the acceptance of *hizbiyya* means adopting the long term view.¹¹ But it also means that leaders have to become more savvy and interested in the world; willing to become immersed in topics that do not immediately touch upon religion, or even recognize that religion has its limitations and can be seen as an inspiration rather than a model. The process of accepting politics as intrinsically valid and a separate sphere is a tortuous road. The repressive nature of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East has not been helpful, but, paradoxically, it has in a way strengthened this trend. While on the one hand, regimes make it extremely difficult to become democratic in a non-democratic context, on the other hand

movements have adopted democratic claims in order to oppose these states in a universal idiom and formulate their claim in the form of civil rights. At the same time, however, the unstable context also demands that these movements remain flexible, moving between the three archetypal strategies of *da'wa*, *hizbiyya* and *jihad*, or combining them (sometimes by promoting jihad outside its borders, as in Iraq and Palestine, taking part in elections, while building up a civil society by means of *da'wa*). This flexibility, often regarded as ambiguity, has laid them open to the accusation of opportunism or even duplicity. Such ambiguity is increased by the often opaque internal struggles between the different Islamic movements or different currents within movements. Recently, the clash over doctrine and strategy has been represented by the reformist Muslim Brotherhood on the one hand and the apolitical, quietist Salafism—both in its peaceful and in its jihadi apolitical forms—on the other. If in the former *hizbiyya* has become accepted, in the latter it is rejected as a form of unbelief (*kufr*).

This chapter will address the emergence of modern Islamic political thought by first looking back at the origins and nature of Islamism as it emerged as a *da'wa* organization and its subsequent development of the Jihadi trend. It will then analyze the two currents in the 1960s that tried to resolve its ambiguity by either taking the route of jihad or concentrating on *da'wa*. The second section will analyze the outcome of their debate and their attitude towards violence by using the examples of the Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, the Saudi Jihadi ideologue Yusuf al-'Uyairi (also known as 'Ayiri), the Iraqi Association of Muslim Scholars, and finally the Egyptian and Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Moreover, this chapter will illustrate that Salafism, as promoted by Saudi Arabia, is the least likely solution as it tries to smother all forms of politics in an attempt to re-assert the authority of the *ulama* and stifle critique of the monarchy. My argument is that during the past twenty-five years major changes have occurred within the Islamic movement; the writings underpinning both trends have become much more sophisticated. Their development is dictated by their interpretation of 'reality'. Much can be learnt from their definition of reality. Is it evil and must it be changed, or does it contain the seeds of mutual understanding and acceptance? And what is the relationship between sacred texts and reality?

The Advantages and Drawbacks of Ambiguity

One of the major problems of political Islam is that when it arose as a movement and an ideology with the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 in Egypt, it was forced to make exaggerated claims in opposition to Western political, economic and cultural colonial dominance. At the same time, it had to engage with the secular nationalist concept of religion of the Wafd Party, which in its attempt to mobilize Copts, relegated it to the private sphere as expressed in the slogan 'everyone his religion and the nation for everyone'. As part of the process of turning Islam into an ideology, the Brotherhood claimed to represent a comprehensive all-inclusive religious 'system' (*nizam*), laying claim in the words of its leader Hasan al-Banna (1906–49) to be everything from 'a Salafiyya message, a Sunni way, a Sufi truth, a political organization, an athletic group a cultural-educational union, an economic company, and a social idea'.¹² It enshrined political ambiguity by proclaiming the Qur'an, with its limited political directions, to be the constitution, while violence was sanctioned in the form of jihad. Hasan al-Banna rejected politics (*hizbiyya*) because it meant in his words to become involved with 'notables and names' and 'parties and societies'.¹³

Despite the fact that the Brotherhood emerged as an organization that was primarily directed towards *da'wa* and the spreading of the true call under the assumption that the problems of the Muslim world derived from the deviation from the straight path, it in fact quickly became involved in the political intrigues of the monarchy. The monarchy realized its potential as a counterweight to its nationalist opponents after the Brotherhood gained nationwide popularity due to its campaign to support the Palestinian uprising in 1936.¹⁴ In the end, however, the connection with the monarchy and the conservative minority parties did not work out well for the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood's massive growth of adherents turned it into a political force in itself, while the discovery by the police of its paramilitary 'battalions', which were mobilized during the Arab-Israeli war in 1948, made the monarchy realize that the Brotherhood was a dangerous ally. The Brotherhood was disbanded in 1948. The subsequent assassination of Prime Minister Nuqrashi by the Secret Apparatus and the reprisal of killing Hasan

al-Banna by the secret police concluded the first phase of its experiment in the political arena.¹⁵ Its subsequent re-emergence in 1951 ended even more disastrously after the failure of the assassination attempt on Nasser in 1954. The military cracked down on the Muslim Brotherhood, hanged several of its leaders and sent its members to detention camps, from where they only emerged in the 1970s. Because of its armed wing, the Secret Apparatus (*al-jihaz al-sirri*), the new military regime could easily justify the repression of the Brotherhood by condemning it as a terrorist organization.¹⁶

This trajectory was not inevitable and universal and was specifically related to the Egyptian mother organization of the movement. How other branches developed depended on local circumstances. In Syria, where a branch of the Brotherhood had been founded in 1940s, the Brotherhood actively took part in politics and ran for elections between 1945 and 1963, even offering ministers in several cabinets.¹⁷ Despite the participation of the Syrian Brotherhood in parliamentary politics, it did not result in a theoretical underpinning of democracy, which, like in Egypt, was feeble anyway and was interrupted by military putsches. In Jordan, the Brotherhood enhanced its reputation as an ambivalent force when it supported King Hussein against the pan-Arab movement in the 1950s.¹⁸ It benefited hugely from this deal, and until the liberalization in 1989, the Brotherhood was able to gain access through its alliance with King Hussein to crucial sectors of society, as education and welfare organizations. Being registered as a NGO meant it was never allowed to act as a political force and elaborate its political ideas.¹⁹ In Palestine the Brotherhood played a similarly ambivalent role, and was even supported by the Israelis against the PLO on the assumption that it was non-political and based on personal salvation.²⁰

Besides the adverse circumstances in many of these countries, internal obstacles also hampered the development of a political theory and program (*barnamaj*). Opening a debate on political strategies and concepts always contained the threat of internal strife (*fitna*)²¹ which might challenge the authority of the leaders and endanger unity. To prevent this, appointments to such organs as the Maktab al-Irshad—the Brotherhood's politburo—were made by the leader himself, or by co-optation. Reflecting the highly authoritarian nature of politics at the time, the political culture of

the Brotherhood was based on the principle of 'obedience' (*ta'a*) and 'listening' (*sam'*), which would not be challenged until the 1980s.²² The authoritarian terms of obedience and listening are Qur'anic, and are also much in evidence in Salafism where they are used to legitimize the total adherence to the opinion of the *ulama*.

*Repression and the Deepening of Da'wa and Jihad
as Strategy and Ideology*

In the 1960s and 1970s the ambivalence towards politics was resolved in two directions, neither of them conducive to the emergence of political theory and practice. The first was the revolutionary route of Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), the second the 'moderate' official response of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Sayyid Qutb's total war on the military regime in Egypt as a means to end the ambiguity of the Brotherhood under Hasan al-Banna, led to the complete suppression of politics and the opening of the floodgates to violence. Although highly activist, paradoxically his project for the liberation from political secular tyranny of the authoritarian state and its totalitarian nature (*shumuliyya*) was directed by another total subjection, to that of the sovereignty of God (*hakimiyya*). Paradoxically, in this totalitarian form of Islamism, human freedom is gained by total submission to God:²³

This religion is really a universal declaration of the freedom of man from servitude to other men and from servitude to his own desires, which is also a form of servitude; it is a declaration that sovereignty (*hakimiyya*) belongs to God alone and He is the lord of all the worlds.²⁴

Qutb refused to address the specific issue of divergent interpretations, individual differences and the possibility of dissension and internal debate, i.e. the opening up to politics, already feared under the monarchy by the Brotherhood. Instead, he strove for unity and mobilization of the believers by a vanguard (*tali'a*) for the jihad against the ruling regimes which were regarded as pre-Islamic (*jahiliyya*) and therefore based on unbelief (*kufir*). Discipline and obedience in the revolt against the *taghut* (idol) are put by Qutb at the service of self-sacrifice and martyrdom and regarded as the only means of becoming a true Muslim. Ironically, with the introduction of excommunication (*takfir*) as a political instrument Sayyid

Qutb set the scene for individual megalomaniacs, leading to what he wanted to avoid: internal strife (*fitna*) and an endless sectarian circle of condemnation of those who do not approve of one's own doctrine (always regarded as universal), thus further Islamizing and colonizing the field of politics. If the goal was still to establish an Islamic state, the emphasis shifted towards action and jihad as a purifying act of washing away the sin of politics.²⁵

The answer the Brotherhood formulated in response to Qutb at the time was equally unhelpful in developing new political theories. By falling back on the old concept of *da'wa* Qutb's concept of *takfir* was not criticized in political terms but in theological ones. The argument was that it was impermissible for one Muslim to judge another Muslim and condemn him unless this done along very strict lines. Strategically, Hasan al-Hudaybi's *Preachers, Not Judges (Du'a, la quda)* is typical of the Brotherhood's withdrawal to its most inconspicuous minimalist tactical position under threat of annihilation of the authoritarian state.²⁶ Besides condemning the concepts of *jahiliyya* and *takfir*, its tactic, later evolved by the subsequent General Guide 'Umar Tilmisani (1973–1986), was to create a Muslim society rather than a state, in the expectation that in due time the state would automatically fall into the lap of the community if a majority of Muslims lived piously. It was assumed that the *Shari'a*—left undefined—contained all the answers to contemporary problems and following it would eliminate the necessity of politics. This position was equally apolitical, for it was still based on the utopian idea that if all Muslims were virtuous, politics and the necessity of solving conflicts would become redundant. It also did not solve the issue of ambiguity, as the Brotherhood still strove for power, acted politically by creating an Islamized parallel civil society and a state within a state, while at the same time denying they had any political ambitions. This of course was not only the fault of the Brotherhood but of the political system as a whole. President Sadat had released the Brotherhood from prison at the beginning of the 1970s on the condition that it did not mingle in politics.

In the 1960s and 1970s both tendencies evolved further and deepened. Many members of the Brotherhood fled to Saudi Arabia, where the authoritarian and apolitical tendencies were further

underpinned and enhanced. Neither the apolitical Salafism of the religious establishment of the Saudi grand mufti Bin Baz and the main *hadith* specialist Nasir al-Din al-Albani, nor the activism of Juhayman al-'Utaybi was conducive to the development of a truly political Islam.²⁷ In Saudi Arabia itself the mixture of the activism of the Brotherhood and Salafism would lead to a new hybrid propounded by such thinkers as Muhammad Surur Zain al-'Abdin and 'Abd al-Khaliq 'Abd al-Rahman. Both studied at the Islamic University in Medina, the centre of the transnational expansion of Salafism (80 per cent of its students were foreigners), became critical of the Brotherhood for its lack of religious depth and tried to combine the dogmatism of Salafism with the activism of the Brotherhood. They had special influence on the Saudi Sahwa as a political Salafi movement that in the 1990s would criticize the monarchy and demand reforms after the Saudi monarchy had allowed American troops to be stationed on 'Holy soil'. Other forms of Salafism would also evolve. In Jordan, the apolitical Salafi movement would emerge as a new protest movement, as the Muslim Brotherhood had been co-opted by King Hussein in his struggle against Nasserism and pan-Arabism.²⁸ In Afghanistan the jihadi trend would have its field day and blossom into a variety of spectacular forms developed by 'Abdallah 'Azzam, 'Abd al-Qadir bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, bin Laden and others, like Yusuf al-'Uyairi. Repressed in its political expression, outraged by moral corruption and Western interference in the Middle East, their hope for liberation lay in striving for a total destruction of the enemy. Martyrdom, still in its infancy in Qutb's works and imagination, would become central to their arguments.

Three approaches to violence have evolved since the 1980s. The first, influenced by Qutb, is to spread the call by intimidation and non-direct opposition against the ruler, exemplified by the practice of violent *hisba* in breaking up festivals, burning video shops, and intimidating opponents, and ending in jihad against the ruler. The second is to unleash global jihad and jihadism as a permanent revolution. And the third is to use jihad as a means of national resistance against foreign occupation. All three reject politics (*hizbiyya*), but they differ in their methods between low level warfare, global jihad, and violence in the service of national resistance. The

basic difference between these currents and their tactics is reflected in their interpretation of reality.

Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's Tactic of Low Intensity Warfare

Most academic works concentrate on the Jihad Group and jihad against the far enemy.²⁹ In the Egyptian context, the Jama'a al-Islamiyya was much more important and developed a much more specific form of violence.³⁰ The Jama'a al-Islamiyya is a generic term used in the mid-1970s for apolitical pious university societies that spread the call and organized services for its members while promoting pious Islamism. During the 1970s they gradually became politicized, radicalizing as soon as the Left was crushed and the regime was caught between its contradictory policy of playing the Islamic card and becoming dependent on the United States and making peace with Israel.³¹ The Jama'a rejected the Brotherhood's deal with the state of limiting its activities to *da'wa* as too soft and law-abiding.³² Instead, it found in the principle of 'commanding right and forbidding wrong' (*al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*), or *hisba*, a potent repertoire of contention to justify the use of violence as a flexible and multi-faceted political tool to intimidate its opponents, maintain control and discipline over its following, as well as provoke the state by increasingly taking over more public space and whittling down its authority.³³

Of the three means of forbidding wrong by the heart (*bi-l-qalb*), by the tongue (*bi-l-lisan*) and by the hand (*bi-l-yad*), (that is, 'change the wrong-doing with violent force' [*manhaj al-taghyir al-munkar bi-quwa*]), clearly the last became the most important.³⁴ At the end of the 1970s and 1980s, the Jama'a would become notorious for its intimidation of students and Egyptian citizens. The Jama'a's lawyer and a former prominent leader, Muntasar al-Zayyat (born 1956), describes in his memoirs how as a young zealot in the 1970s he smashed liquor stores belonging to Christian Coptic minority in Aswan, the town where he was brought up.³⁵ Universities were terrorized by the Jama'a, who broke up cultural festivals, prevented singing, forbade mingling of sexes and enforced a religious code of chastity.³⁶ As the acceptance of violence expanded at the end of the 1970s, the Jama'a started to train with weapons in the

hills of Asyut in Upper Egypt, eventually merging with the Jihad Organization in 1980 and embracing jihad as a means of ending the *jahiliyya* state.³⁷ They found its justification in 'Abd al-Salam Faraj's tract, *The Hidden Duty*³⁸ and in Qutb's *Milestones*, both famous for metaphorical descriptions of reality.

How politically underdeveloped the Jama'a in fact was, became clear during the assassination of president Sadat in 1981. The only aim of Khalid al-Islambuli, the assassin of Sadat, was to remove the corrupt tyrant (*taghut*), missing the opportunity to wipe out the political elite at the bandstand during the commemoration of the October War in 1981.³⁹ The botched revolt in Asyut two days later was an isolated revolutionary spark that was quickly stamped out by the state. All the other attempts to take over crucial centers of power, such as the television station, were abandoned for lack of preparation. In the end, the attack was typical of late nineteenth-century European 'anarchism of the deed', which was meant to set an example, betting on a spontaneous uprising, without really making a political analysis of the overwhelming odds they faced in the power of the state and drawing up a strategy to overcome them.⁴⁰

Inevitably the spectacular assassination of Sadat was followed by a deep gloom in prison where hundreds of members of the Islamist movement and innocent youth were thrown together. What saved the movement and its apolitical line of commanding right and forbidding wrong was the systematic torture of its members.⁴¹ In order to prevent their previous mistake, the writings of the second half of the 1980s were highly political, providing historical analyses of the plight of Islam which explained in concrete terms their methods of operandi,⁴² giving detailed analyses of the political system in Egypt,⁴³ as well as emphasizing the inevitability of the confrontation with the state,⁴⁴ while appealing to the public against the repression of the state.⁴⁵ The difference with the tracts of the previous period is that all of them dealt with 'reality' and especially with 'means of changing reality'.⁴⁶ None of them presented a political theory, besides how to 'make' a revolution by means of jihad. At the same time cadre training and more ideological indoctrination seems also to have evolved, making the Jama'a into a tighter organization. An interesting insight into this period is given by

Khalid al-Birri (born 1972), who describes how he in his youth in the 1980s applied the intimidation tactics in his secondary school and neighborhood.⁴⁷ At the same time the Jama'a was able to penetrate the marginal neighborhoods of Cairo, like Imbaba, Ayn Shams and Bulaq Dakrur.⁴⁸

Even with their more sophisticated political analysis, the second generation leaders did not realize that the provocative nature of commanding good and forbidding wrong (*hisba*) together with their highly aggressive pamphlets constituted a standing provocation to the authorities and would ultimately lead to another confrontation with the state. From 1987 onwards clashes with the state increased until 1990, when a violent continuous low intensity war broke out after the state assassinated the Jama'a's spokesman and in retaliation the speaker of parliament was assassinated. In the end, violence, which cost 1,500 people their lives, and from 1992 was also aimed at tourists, alienated the Egyptian public from the Jama'a.

It took another seven years before the Jama'a was soundly defeated militarily. The interesting aspect of its defeat was not that it had happened—never in question—but that its leadership subsequently reversed its ideas. Suing for peace, they completely revised their ideas on the use of violence. The first sign of 'revisionism' (*muraja'at*), as it was called, occurred during a trial in Aswan in 1996, when a member of the Jama'a read a letter in which he condemned violence. It was addressed to the Egyptian people and 'the elite of this noble population'. It especially condemned internal strife (*fitna*), the classic rejection of violence and revolt against the ruler. It was also thoroughly nationalist, in the sense that it deplored the weakening of Egypt, once a powerful nation, now being humiliated by its enemies, Israel and the United States, which were taking advantage of the internal turmoil.⁴⁹ The Initiative to End Violence, as the whole campaign was called, was interrupted by the Luxor massacre in November 1997, but was continued in 2001. In January 2002 the Jama'a issued four tracts in which they explained the ideological reasons for the 'revisionism' concerning violence.⁵⁰ Subsequently, they would issue another two tracts, one denouncing violence in Saudi Arabia⁵¹ and another further expounding on their ideas.⁵²

Revisionism makes a strong case against the use of violence and the dangers of extremism (*ghuluw*), and pronounces itself in favor of tolerance and moderation. The dichotomous worldview of the Charter of an eternal struggle between the West and Islam is still there.⁵³ However, the reasons for going astray are that violence and jihad have become goals in themselves.⁵⁴ According to the authors, the Jama'a had lost sight of the principles and general goals of Islam. Jihad can only have meaning when it is used for the general good. The solution the Jama'a seeks is still geared to leading man to be virtuous and man's ultimate goal is 'submission to his God' (*ta'bid al-nas li-rabbihim*).⁵⁵ There are, however, important differences with the earlier tracts from the 1980s in their focus on the relationship with politics. They warn the Islamic movement that knowledge of religious texts is not enough; it must be combined with knowledge of 'reality' (*waqi'*). A crucial remark that highlights their heightened realism is that 'profound knowledge of the *hari'a*, as well as a penetrating sense of reality and a deep understanding of politics are necessary tools for tackling this subject'. Continuing the argument, they state that 'otherwise, people will destroy themselves, spill blood and lose their homeland without justification and without serving the common good and attaining their goal'.⁵⁶ To end the preponderance of text over reality, Islam is no longer portrayed in the Qutbian sense as a complete (*kamil*), total (*shamil*) and conclusive (*khatim*) program (*manhaj*) that solves all problems as soon as the *Shari'a* is implemented. Likewise, the idea that the Jama'a itself has a monopoly of truth is relinquished. Rather, life is now acknowledged to be complex and the sources of Islam must be interpreted and debated in order to adjust them according to differences in place and time in which Muslims live.⁵⁷ For the same reason history is re-evaluated. Historical experience is now regarded as a source of wisdom,⁵⁸ and the West is no longer just rejected but is also regarded as a source of inspiration as long as it does not contradict Islam. Nor should all the ills of the Middle East be blamed on the West.⁵⁹ All those previous methods used to combat the state and impose its will on the population have been constricted by a series of conditions. For instance, the use of *takfir*, the excommunication of a ruler, a state or an individual, is forbidden.⁶⁰ Jihad must be based on consensus of the *umma*, permission to exert

it must be acquired through permission of the *ulama* and can only be executed by the state.⁶¹

Despite these major steps forward to liberating Islam from the total subjection to the text, and the rejection of violence in principle and practice (it cannot be used against the interests of the *umma*), the 'Initiative to End Violence' still suffers from some of the previous flaws. While it opens up the space for the political, it does not include its own autonomous rules. For instance, in a revealing answer to a question about the role of parliament, the authors stated that they regarded it as 'only one of the many means of spreading the call (*da'wa*)'.⁶² From this remark and others, it is clear that politics still only functions as a instrument to establish Islam as a moral code. In this sense a major opportunity to clear the way for transforming *hisba* into a principle of civic responsibility and as a means of checking the power of the state was missed.⁶³

Yusuf al-'Uyairi and the Permanent Salafi Jihadi Tevolution

Yusuf al-'Uyairi, as the first leader of al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula, is probably one of the most well-known of the second generation ideologues and fighters. His extensive writings inform us of the importance and function of violence and how it relates to politics and political theory.⁶⁴ Remarkably, 80 per cent of his work deals with an analysis of the political situation, i.e. 'reality', the rest with the legitimation of violence. His activism is geared towards changing reality (*taghyir al-waqi'*)—which is totally rejected—and much of his work, which typically can only be found on the internet,⁶⁵ deals with reality and ways to revolutionize society in different countries of the Muslim world: Saudi Arabia,⁶⁶ Afghanistan,⁶⁷ Chechnya,⁶⁸ Philippines,⁶⁹ and Iraq.⁷⁰ His minute analysis of the 'on-the-ground' situation in these countries and the economic and political relations with the Middle East and especially Saudi Arabia with the United States, gives his work a highly realistic quality. His analysis suggests that it is not religion as such that is the reason for rejecting the West. Rather, the manipulation of the region by the West and especially the United States for its own interests is the reason for revolt against the prevailing system.⁷¹ Using modern terms such as 'imperialism' (*isti'mar*) 'Uyairi regards these interna-

tional relations as deeply flawed. Any persons or institutions co-operating with the West are therefore rejected, whether they are rulers, *ulama*, or Westernized 'intellectuals'. Despite the political character of 'Uyairi's work, his writings are essentially non-political in the sense that they are harnessed to a strategy, like that of Sayyid Qutb, or even the Muslim Brotherhood in the past, which utterly rejects politics as a pragmatic way to solve problems. Although he is highly flexible in his ideas about how to combat the enemy and is even tolerant in his religious estimation of many of the movements he analyses—not rejecting them because they do not completely adhere to Salafism, such as the Taliban⁷²—his whole work is steeped in a deep moralism and abhorrence of corruption and tarnishment of the self by a pragmatism that could lead to compromise (*tahadun*), co-operation (*ta'awun*) and co-existence (*ta'ayush*); that is the political.⁷³ He draws his ultimate conclusion from this stance: rather than compromise one's principles and religion—one's very reason to exist as man—and engage in negotiations with the adversary, one is admonished to fight him until victory and the establishment of God's rule on earth or find a glorious death as a martyr and win paradise. In this respect 'Uyairi repeats the fallacy of some currents of 'political' Islam that purity instead of the corruption (*fasad*) of politics is the highest goal.⁷⁴

The reason for this uncompromising attitude is 'Uyairi's adherence to a metaphorical overarching master narrative of the clash of civilizations between the West and Islam as a zero-sum game. In this apocalyptic vision of the world, there is no compromise because the West that is bent on destroying the Muslim world, not just by economic and political domination, but also on account of its cultural war on Islam. The result will be the loss of Muslims of their humanity and their 'bestialization'.⁷⁵ As in Qutb's view, the world is divided in dichotomous forces of evil and good in which there are no shades of grey. And as everyone who does not support the forces of good belongs to the opposite side, a continuous war should be waged not against the West alone, but against all Muslims who are connected with the West and are regarded as *kuffar*. Unlike Qutb, however, 'Uyairi crushes the political not on the anvil of *hakimiyya* or on the practice of commanding good and forbidding bad (*hisba*), as in the case of the Jama'a, but on that of Jihad-

ism, which has become a culture in itself, demanding submission to its totalitarian intellectual, physical and moral demands. The victorious sect (*al-ta'ifa al-mansura*), a crucial doctrine in Salafism,⁷⁶ is regarded as the vanguard of the jihadist project and has privileged access to knowledge because its members are at the forefront of the civilizational battle.⁷⁷

'Uyairi's writings are perhaps the best illustration of the creative flight jihadist literature has taken since the 1970s, as well as the political dead end this current has worked itself into. While it struggles to come to grips with reality and is capable of defining and analyzing the sources of political inequality and repression and corruption, and has been clever in mobilizing resistance and appealing to the imagination of the people due to the deplorable state of affairs in the Middle East finds itself in, its Manichean concept of the world as a permanent struggle between good and bad prevents it from coming to terms with reality and coming up with a political program and stating its goals other than to establish a virtuous society. 'Uyairi's revolution failed in Saudi Arabia after the first explosions on 12 May 2003. The state easily isolated its members and hunted them down during the following years and Yusuf al-'Uyairi became one of the first victims when he was killed on 29 May 2003.⁷⁸

*The Iraqi Association of Muslim Scholars
and Islamo-nationalist Resistance*

As 'Uyairi had predicted at the end of his life, it is in Iraq that the full potential of jihad would be fulfilled, but this would not adopt the transnational form he had hoped.⁷⁹ In Iraq the ideologies of resistance and jihad developed by Hamas, bin Laden or 'Uyairi, came together and could be readily used by the opponents of the American invasion. The Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS, or in Arabic *Hay'at 'Ulama al-Muslimin*) would use and pick from them as it felt fit. The difference with the other currents was that the AMS tried to focus, control and direct violence for its own localized goals. The AMS was established as a nation-wide organization of Sunni religious scholars of all directions. The major political breakthrough of the AMS occurred during the first crisis in Fallujah in April 2004 when it openly supported the resistance.⁸⁰

The AMS is a typical Islamo-nationalist movement that legitimates the violent struggle for liberation in nationalist and religious terms, and does not primarily—like Sayyid Qutb or Yusuf al-'Uyairi—cast the struggle between the Middle East and the West as an eternal, global struggle of Islam against the West. Framed in the nationalist terminology, the AMS leader Harith al-Dhari stated, 'we as Iraqis limit ourselves to defending our country and we know what the interests of this country are'.⁸¹ A transnational terrorist organization like al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia is rejected not only for its indiscriminate killing of Iraqi citizens, especially Shi'is, but also for the fact that Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi was a 'non-Iraqi and a foreigner' and has 'other goals than the national resistance'.⁸²

The AMS also gratefully used the advantages of ambiguity so typical of the earlier Islamist movement to hide behind. For instance, it regarded itself as standing above the political parties and claimed unassailability as 'a religious authority on Islamic law' (*marja' iyya diniyya wa shar' iyya*).⁸³ The AMS, according to one of its spokesmen, is 'not a political party, nor a movement', rather it 'contains political parties' and leaves room for 'a diversity of opinions'.⁸⁴ On the other hand, it is clear that the AMS strove for political power and was dictatorial in its single-minded pursuit to be regarded as the sole representative of the Sunni Arabs, as is apparent in the expression that it is the 'national and religious duty of the *ulama* [to] lead the people on the right path'.⁸⁵ That this also meant that the AMS endorsed, if not actively supported, the use of violence against the US was clear when it stated that it regarded itself as 'spiritually' (*ruhan*) close to the resistance.⁸⁶ However, the most important non-political method the AMS became famous for was the boycott, a practice it has adopted from another nationalist-religious movement, Hamas. With tremendous consequences for the Sunni community in Iraq the AMS led the boycott of the 'political process' from 2003 to the summer of 2005. As a result, the Sunnis did not participate in the general elections of December 2004 and belatedly participated in the negotiations for the constitution in summer 2005 and were encouraged to fight in the resistance.⁸⁷

The best insight into the AMS's justification of resistance, and indirectly of violence and the political boycott, is provided by the writings of Muhammad 'Ayyash al-Kubaysi, its chief ideologue.⁸⁸

Four topics stand out which demonstrate the special ideological mix of internal, nationalist and Salafi elements (and even Ba'hist and pan-Arab, not mentioned here) in the ideology of the AMS. First, the ideological legitimation of resistance was initially primarily couched in a non-Islamic discourse of international law. In a debate on a television program on Al-Jazeera, just after the fall of Fallujah in November 2004, when the whole of Anbar province was in uprising and it was clear that the resistance was there to stay, Kubaysi stated that each nation, whether they were Vietnamese or Arab, non-Muslim or Muslim, had the right to armed resistance against the forceful occupation of its country. As it was a natural human right (*haqq al-insan*) it was not necessary to call for jihad or issue a *fatwa* to sanction it.⁸⁹ The AMS preferred the term resistance (*muqawama*) to that of jihad.⁹⁰

However, despite this effort to coach the insurgency in nationalist/religious terms, along the lines of Hamas, it is clear that the AMS adopted large chunks of Salafi Jihadism as developed by, among others, bin Laden and 'Uyairi. This is especially apparent in Kubaysi's vehement condemnation of moderate *ulama*, who oppose armed resistance, as hypocrites (*munafiqun*), one of the prominent themes of the Jihadi Salafi writings. In response to the Iraqi Islamic Party, which had participated in the political process, 'Abd al-Salam al-Kubaysi asserts that this is not the time for mutual leniency (*tasamuh*), and flexibility (*lin*). As the American invasion is a direct attack on the Islamic *umma* by the unbelievers there is only room for armed resistance, and all Muslims should subordinate their life to the waging of jihad.⁹¹ Resistance, he stated, has become an individual duty (*fardh 'ayn*) that can only be ignored at the risk of denying the unity of God, *tawhid*.⁹²

Third, while the AMS adopted an uncompromising stand on the predominance of resistance, it tried to make a distinction between legitimate Sunni resistance against the American occupation and the indiscriminate terrorism of Zarqawi, whose actions were increasingly directed against Shi'i Iraqis who were regarded as 'collaborators'. The official position of the AMS was that both Iraqi civilians and military, even those of the National Guard, who were mostly Shiites, belong to this category.⁹³ In numerous communiqués the AMS condemned terrorist attacks against 'innocent peo-

ple' (*abriya*).⁹⁴ However, Kubaysi did make a case for 'martyrdom operations', as long as they were in the service of national liberation. These martyrs were regarded as courageous and faced death with equanimity and strong faith (*'aqida wadiha*) for a noble goal (*hadaf nabil*).⁹⁵

Fourth, the AMS succeeded in organizing an uncompromising boycott of all political institutions because they were established with the aim of bringing the Shi'a to power. The AMS did not reject democracy outright, but stated that 'true democracy is impossible under an occupation'.⁹⁶ The angle the AMS chose to frame this ideological point was to accuse the Americans of deliberately instigating sectarian strife (*al-fitna al-ta'ifiyya*).⁹⁷ Kubaysi was convinced that the American aim was to convince the Shi'is that they were an oppressed sect (*al-ta'ifa al-mazluma*).⁹⁸ In line with its counter-frame that Iraq was a united nation, the AMS cleverly used the insurgency in Fallujah in 2004 to propagate its Arab and Islamic program of unity between Shi'is and Sunnis. In order to win over Muqtada al-Sadr, who at the time was a potential ally of the AMS, its ideologues repeatedly asserted that the martyrdom of Imam Husayn at Kerbala was now an example for all who defended Islam against the invasion of unbelievers. According to Muhammad 'Ayyash al-Kubaysi, Imam Husayn had established a school of martyrdom (*madrasa al-Husayn al-ishtishadiyya*) that was an example for Sunnis and Shi'is together.⁹⁹

The AMS is typical of resistance movements in the Middle East and the ways they could draw on a huge reservoir of violent rhetoric to justify a totally negative attitude towards politics and what in Iraq was called the 'political process', which was supported by the Iraqi Islamic Party, a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, which accepted *hizbiyya*.¹⁰⁰ Even if this process was fatally mismanaged by the Americans and discriminatory to the Sunnis, it is clear that the fundamentally 'apolitical' stance of the AMS damaged the chances of the Sunni community to salvage some of their power and influence. In the end, the ambiguity of the AMS towards violence against Shi'is, would damage its relations with Shi'i organizations that supported resistance against the United States. Only a spark was needed to unleash the Shi'i forces against the Sunni community in Baghdad to punish them for their ambiguous atti-

tude towards politics and religious condescension towards Shi'is, whose increased power the AMS was unwilling to countenance. When that spark came with the bombing of the Askari shrine in February 2006, this studied ambivalence backfired and Sunni neighborhoods were cleansed of any inhabitants.

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Acceptance of Hizbiyya

The alternative to this ambiguity—openly rejecting violence, unconditionally embracing democracy and the rule of law—occurred in the 1980s. The tone of this development had already been set when the former general guide Hasan al-Hudaybi condemned the concepts of *takfir* and *hakimiyya* in the 1960s. This attitude was initially reflected in the traditional stance of the Brotherhood towards President Mubarak when he came to power in 1981. It accepted a ruler along the lines of *wali al-amr*, even if he is a tyrant, as long as he maintained the minimum of Islamic principles as the 'imam of necessity' (*imam al-darura*).¹⁰¹

The major breakthrough occurred when during the 1980s the room for the establishment of political parties and holding elections expanded, despite the fact that the establishment of parties on the basis of religion was banned by the 1976 Parties' Law. What made this possible was the emergence of the second generation of the members of the Brotherhood as a professional middle class. At a meeting in 1983 in Cairo, Tilmisani argued that becoming a party had several advantages: the Brotherhood would no longer be a secret organization, it could acquire experience in the political process, and it would finally have direct access to ministers and officials.¹⁰² Once it had decided to take part in parliamentary elections, the Brotherhood formed alliances with other parties in 1984 and 1987, and after having boycotted the elections in 1990 and 2000, it won a spectacular eighty-eight seats in 2005.¹⁰³ All analysts agree that since then the Brotherhood has obtained an excellent reputation in parliament, showing political skills and discussing issues that were of broader concern of the people than only the implementation of the *Shari'a*, such as unemployment, inflation, corruption, debts, privatization.¹⁰⁴ Part of this success must be explained by the growing experience the younger generation of the Brother-

hood acquired in the professional syndicates, winning the elections of the Medical Syndicate in 1984, of the Engineer's Syndicate in 1986, and the Pharmacists' Syndicate in 1988. From there they reached out to other social classes in society. The new generation also maintained close contacts with the student movement and the campuses,¹⁰⁵ subsequently winning the majority of seats in the student unions of Cairo, Alexandria and Zaqaзиq, Mansura and at al-Azhar universities in the second half of the 1980s.

Ideologically, the new trend was supported by an increasing number of internal publications that gradually opened the road to a parliamentary system (*hizbiyya*). In 1984 the Brotherhood drafted a manifesto which banned all restrictions on political parties, organizations or political gatherings that intend to express the views of a particular group as regards a particular issue.¹⁰⁶ In 1987 it recognized the Christian Coptic minority as full citizens,¹⁰⁷ and in 1994 it issued statements on women's rights and party pluralism. In their *Shura and Party Pluralism in Muslim Society*, of the same year, it stated that the Qur'an stipulated 'that the *umma* is the source of all powers'.¹⁰⁸ It furthermore called for a legislature with oversight functions and binding decisions. A year later it published the *Statement on Democracy*, re-confirming the equal rights of non-Muslims (Copts), the sovereignty of the people, stating that 'people have the right to invent different systems, formulas, and techniques that suit their conditions, which definitely vary according to time, place and living conditions', and rejecting violence.¹⁰⁹ However, during the repression of the second generation leaders in 1995 and their imprisonment until 2000 the Brotherhood lapsed into the old style rhetoric of its older generation of general guides, Mustafa Mashhur (1996–2002) and Ma'mun al-Hudaybi (2002–2004), but after their release it picked up its earlier liberal trend. When the last of the old guard had died in 2004, the Brotherhood announced under its new Guide Muhammad 'Akif, it would do something about the internal democracy, limiting the number of years of a general guide and deputy guides were elected among the younger group.¹¹⁰ Finally, in a press conference on 3 March 2004 the General Guide declared a 'Muslim Brotherhood reform initiative'.¹¹¹ This initiative called for reforms in politics, judiciary, economics and education, and confirmed its earlier position regarding

universal suffrage, freedom of personal conviction and expression of opinion, freedom of political parties and organizations, the army's dissociation from politics and limited powers of the President.¹¹² A written constitution and the separation of powers, with an independent judiciary, the repeal of the emergency laws, and activating parliament's oversight role, had by that time become part of its standard program.¹¹³

The ambiguity of the Muslim Brotherhood was not totally dispelled in this period. The election slogan of 1987, 'Islam is the solution', which had irritated the government when it was used during the Brotherhood's relief program after the earthquake, was retained in the elections of 2005.¹¹⁴ In its thorough study of the reform of the Brotherhood, the Carnegie Endowment concludes that if it has made important strides in political liberalization, its sacrosanct concept of religious point of reference or source (*marja'iyya*), forms a limit to going the full length of giving politics its own space and becoming a political party instead of a religious movement.¹¹⁵ A further reason for concern was its opposition to artistic and philosophical freedom in the form *hisba*, commanding the good and forbidding the bad, for which the Jama'a became infamous.¹¹⁶ This is no small matter when it comes to violence, as is demonstrated by the condoning by the Brotherhood leader Muhammad al-Ghazzali of the assassination in 1992 of the fiercely anti-Islamist publicist Faraj Fawda. Although the Brotherhood accepts the parliamentary system, its conservative cultural and philosophical and potentially repressive measures, can restrict the freedom of speech and stimulate the use of violence against individuals.¹¹⁷

'Quietist' Salafism: Piety and the Denial of Politics

The development of ideas within the Muslim Brotherhood has been vehemently opposed by the Islamic movement and not just the Egyptian state. The extent of opposition to the tendency to accept politics is exemplified by transnational, quietist Salafism, which is perhaps one of the fastest growing Islamic movements at the moment.¹¹⁸ In its opposition to these new trends Salafism¹¹⁹ can be compared with the counter-reformation of the Roman Catholic Church against Protestantism (although, ironically, Salafism resem-

bles early Protestantism in many respects),¹²⁰ as a struggle that is waged in the name of the Oneness of God (*tawhid*). Its authority is typically based on the claim to have access to the Truth (regarded as transparent) and therefore to have superior knowledge (*'ilm*) of the sources of the Islam (Qur'an and *hadith*), which raises the Salafis to the status of the saved sect (*al-firqa al-najiya*). Individual salvation, purity in doctrine, rather than political mobilization is the crucial issue. As a typical throwback to an earlier period, their opponents are not condemned for their political ideas as such but are attacked as religious deviants (*munharifun*). Against them is launched the whole range of theological weapons Salafism can muster: by incorporating non-Islamic terms and concepts the opponents are accused of committing innovation (*bid'a*); by giving their political leaders authority they are accused of worshipping humans, an infringement of the doctrine of the Oneness of God (*tawhid*) and committing the major sin of giving God associates (*shirk*);¹²¹ and by giving priority to activism instead of piety they are called *harakis* (activists), a curse in Salafi anti-political parlance.¹²² Although quietist Salafism is careful not to excommunicate its opponents (*takfir*), they are vilified, their reputation smeared and their followers ostracized, with the implication that their souls hang in the balance and they are on the brink of becoming unbelievers (*kuffar*).

If in other movements a greater openness and debate is discernable, in Salafism discourse is controlled and directed solely to the text that allows only for one interpretation. Because knowledge can only be reached after a long study of the text, in practice the *ulama* control the access to Truth. The normal believer is discouraged or even forbidden to think outside the restricted parameters laid down by the *ulama*, let alone engage in an open debate with 'others', allow self-reflection (other than in religious terms), or question the authority of the religious establishment. The pronouncement that 'questioning is in principle forbidden and is not allowed except when it is necessary'¹²³ is perhaps one of the most revealing remarks made by Sheikh Rabi' Hadi ('Hadee') al-Madkhali, one of the major sheikhs of the older generation (b. 1931).¹²⁴ And although the appeal of Salafism is ascribed to its non-hierarchical nature—as everyone has access to the sources—in practice an inner circle of

mostly Saudi *ulama*, who are appointed to a hierarchy of different official Saudi religious institutions,¹²⁵ determine doctrine and practice. The struggle, therefore, is for authority and most of the internal struggle is waged by denying other Salafi *ulama*, but especially non-Salafi *ulama*, and above all non-*ulama*—often the case of the Muslim Brotherhood that is led by laymen—their religious authority and by implication the right to have a (political) following.

Needless to say, in the political context of the Middle East, or even Europe with its emphasis on integration, this non-political, quietist attitude of Salafism is highly political.¹²⁶ But Salafism is not simply political by recognizing the state in practice, this recognition is also theoretically grounded in the principle of *wali al-amr*, the doctrine of unconditional obedience to the ruler, who can only be opposed when he actively undermines Islam.¹²⁷ The other principle defending the status quo is that of the rejection of politics as a threat to the unity of the *umma* because it leads to dissension and division (*fitna*). To Salafism the only accepted form of politics is to give discrete advice (*nasihah*), which is always done away from the public eye and is never published.¹²⁸ Unsurprisingly, much of the critique of Salafism by its opponents, including Jihadi Salafism, is aimed at undermining the credibility of the *ulama* as stooges of the state.

Quietist, conservative Salafism has adopted two ways to steer the debate away from politics and the role of its *ulama* in condoning the iniquity of the prevailing political system in the Middle East. One is to emphasize a correct daily demeanor that is focused on piety and accepts the status quo. Whereas Jihadi Salafism concentrates on the struggle (jihad) and activism as self-fulfillment (even if it means martyrdom), and the Brotherhood focuses increasingly on practical politics as a means to achieve its goals, ‘apolitical’ Salafism emphasizes correct behavior and a positive attitude based on civilized norms (*akhlaq*) as its main task, next to propagating the right creed and promoting the right *manhaj*, or practice. In its view, living according to *akhlaq*, in fact following the Sunna of the Prophet, is a sign of belonging to the chosen sect.¹²⁹ Extremism (*ghuluw*), together with dissension (*fitna*),¹³⁰ its dangerous twin brother, are regarded as enticements of the devil. This means that the individual should defend his own honor, respect those of others, maintain social stability, and above all pursue ‘moderation of

emotions'. Uncontrolled feelings, such as passions (*ahwa'*), hatred (*aghrad*), resentment (*ahqad*),¹³¹ are believed to lead to extremism (*ghuluw*) or fanaticism (*ta'assub*). Instead, such qualities as endurance (*sabr*), wisdom (*hikma*), friendliness (*rifq*),¹³² truthfulness/correctness (*sidq*), and brotherhood (*ukhuwa*)¹³³ among Muslims, are promoted. The correct practice (*manhaj*) is based on *wasatiyya*, which means following the straight path (*sirat al-mustaqim*) that keeps the believer in the middle of the road and prevents him from falling in the pitfalls of excess (*ifrat*) and severity (*tashaddud*) on the one hand and negligence (*tafrit*) on the other, while applauding generosity (*samaha*), enhancing facilitation (*taysir*) and condemning destruction (*halak*), obstinacy (*tanatta'*) and transgression (*tajawuz*) in deeds and sayings.¹³⁴ That the positive attitudes mentioned above are equated with the right creed ('*aqida*'), is clear from the accusation that those who oppose Salafism, 'the overwhelming majority of the Muslims', are called 'the people of innovation and passions' (*ahl al-bid'a wa-l-ahwa'*).¹³⁵

From this Salafi terminology and mentality it seems that we are back at Olivier Roy's critique of moralism in his *The Failure of Political Islam*, in which virtue is everything and all the rest is 'sin, plot or illusion'. But it would be a mistake to underestimate the tenacity and pluck of quietist Salafism; it is a highly sophisticated, battle-hardened movement that has been locked into a fierce struggle with its adversaries, especially political Islam since the 1970s,¹³⁶ and has developed a highly polemical discourse, called 'muscular' by some.¹³⁷ In practice this discourse is a reflection of Salafism's capacity to use Islam's historically-grown ambiguous relations with the state to its utmost.¹³⁸ Its power is based on its excellent relations with the authoritarian state from which it obtains privileges in the form of finance and the freedom to build mosques and religious institutes in exchange for attacking their common enemies—especially political Islam—and exerting a pervasive influence on the population. However, it has obtained the largest following when it is led by those who manage to keep their independence from the state (there is always the danger that its opponents accuse the *ulama* of *shirk* for aligning themselves too strongly with the state and infringing upon *tawhid*, the exclusive submission to God), at least publicly, as was the case in Yemen under Muqbil

bin Hadi al-Wadi'i.¹³⁹ This combination of fighting political battles in the name of pure religion reached its most obvious form in its attack on 'extremism' (*ghuluw*) later conveniently presented as the Saudi 'War on Terrorism'. By some regarded as a recent policy that dates from 9/11 and especially 2003, when Saudi Arabia came under attack from al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula,¹⁴⁰ (led by among others Yusuf al-'Uyairi) it dates back to the split with the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s and 1990s, and even earlier.¹⁴¹ Much of the debate also concerns the relationship with reality, which is the red thread through most modern Islamic political thought. Whereas critics of Salafism, such as 'Abd al-Khaliq 'Abd al-Rahman, accuse the Salafi sheikhs in Saudi Arabia of having lost contact with reality, they deny that reality should be the main focus of religion.¹⁴²

It is illuminating to delve deeper into this anti-terrorism campaign not only to show how Salafism works, but also to give an insight into the sharp divisions that are opening up between Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood as a result of the greater involvement of the latter in politics. A variety of adversaries are targeted by quietist Salafism in this campaign, each for different reasons. Favorite targets are the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949) (who is accused of being totally ignorant of Islam, and being a political activist before a religious purifier), Sayyid Qutb¹⁴³ (for being the founder of Jihadism and corrupting Salafism), and above all the two 'hybrids' between the Brotherhood and Salafism, Muhammad Surur Zayn 'Abidin¹⁴⁴ and 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq,¹⁴⁵ or more recently Abu Hasan al-Ma'rib¹⁴⁶ (these last three for being the closest to Salafism and diluting Salafism in Brotherhood activism). Not incidentally all these adversaries are Egyptians (except for Muhammad Surur, who is Syrian), although the Egyptian 'hybrids' have left their homeland long ago under Nasser. They studied at Medina Islamic University in the 1960s and there mixed the doctrinaire Salafism with Brotherhood activism. All are in the end thrown together as sources of terrorism and their genealogy is traced further back to the first century *hijra* and the *khawarij*, a radical sect that is vilified by Salafis because it assassinated the third rightly guided caliph 'Uthman, and therefore are called neo-*khawarij*. They are con-

demned for being political activists and typically are defined as 'people of passions, innovation and partisanship/divisions' (*ahl al-ahwa' wa-l-bid'a wa-l-tahazzub*).¹⁴⁷

If unity (*wahda*) and the Muslim community as a unified whole is represented by Salafism as upholders of the Truth and defenders of the *umma*, its opponents are regarded as the opposite. Even their names, according to Salafis, give them away as deviants promoting division (*fitna*), and endless variations on the terms for group (*jama'a*, *firqa*) are used to disqualify them. The fact that they train followers as cadres (*kawadir*)¹⁴⁸ in itself is regarded as leading to division, their flexibility in accepting divisions on creed and *manhaj* confirms their misjudged tolerance,¹⁴⁹ while a host of further accusations, such as promoting leadership,¹⁵⁰ trying to mobilize the population, disrespect for Saudi Arabia,¹⁵¹ or support of Saddam Hussein against Saudi Arabia in 1990–1,¹⁵² and above all the acceptance of *hizbiyya* (partyism) and *tahazzub* (partisanship), as well as other modern notions such as pluralism¹⁵³ and equal rights for Christian Copts¹⁵⁴ means that they belong to the 'sects of destruction' (*al-firqa al-hilak*) and are held directly responsible for terrorism.¹⁵⁵

The Pluralist Breakthrough? The Case of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood

Despite this strong counter-current, some branches of the Muslim Brotherhood have continued on the road the Egyptian branch pioneered. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, led by 'Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanuni, who lives in exile in London, has adopted a more profound reformist program than its Egyptian sister organization. Like its Egyptian branch, the Syrian Brotherhood had clashed with the state and had lost out. Unlike the Egyptian branch, however, whose members were in prison when Sayyid Qutb launched his ideas, the Syrian branch was illegal but active and was taken over by a radical wing at the end of the 1970s that led to a clash with the state almost ending in the fall of the Syrian Ba'th regime.¹⁵⁶ The Syrians are therefore more comparable to the Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya. This also applies to the revision of their previous ideas on violence. Having started to come to terms with their past in the 1980s,¹⁵⁷ the major public breakthrough occurred in 2000

when The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood issued a critical overview of its own history and its violent past.¹⁵⁸ In an interview in 2002, Bayanuni, who had been involved in the violent clash with the regime as Deputy-General Guide from 1977 to 1982, stressed the necessity of revisionism (*muraja'at*) as a principle: 'it is continuous and permanent; we are constantly revising our life'.¹⁵⁹ It was followed in August 2002 with the presentation of *The Noble National Charter*¹⁶⁰ and the organization of a national conference in London, in which Nasserists, Ba'athists, communists and independent Islamists participated. Finally, in 2004, it published an extensive document of more than a hundred pages, *The Political Project for the Syrian Future*,¹⁶¹ in which it spelled out its revisionist views, not only rejecting violence and accepting democracy but also embracing a fundamentally new concept of Islamic politics and a thoroughly revised worldview based on a humanist foundation in which the Qutbian *hakimiyya* (sovereignty of God), the Salafi *tawhid* (Oneness of God), and even the Ikhwani *marja'iyya* (sources of Islam) are replaced by the centrality of mankind *insan* (humanity) as the point of reference. The basis of the reform program of the Syrian Brotherhood is the acceptance of the idea of pluralism (*ta'addudiyya*).

Not surprisingly, the basic difference with the other currents is reflected in its approach to 'reality' (*waqi'*). Whereas in Salafism, and especially Jihadi Salafism, reality is regarded as a source of evil and corruption and a thinker like 'Uyairi tries to impose his will on reality and manipulate it in the service of a permanent revolution, or in the Egyptian Brotherhood's case reality is approached with ambivalence, in the writings of the Syrian MB reality is regarded as a fact of life and is accepted as a source of inspiration for reform. Although it is true that it regards Syrian 'reality' as stagnant (*rukud*), dominated by repression (*qahr*) and injustice (*zulm*),¹⁶² it is not rejected because it does not conform to the holy texts of the Qur'an and *hadith*. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (MB) accepts reality as a much broader 'social reality' (*al-waqi' al-ijtima'i*), which is anchored in history 'in all its forms, ideational, cultural, behavioral', including its 'customs and tradition'.¹⁶³ The Syrian Brotherhood's concept of reality is therefore inclusive and recognizes the importance of the 'Islamic social heritage' (*turath islami ijtima'i*) as the cultural heritage of the past fourteen hundred years, which forms the 'material

ground' on which 'civilizational projects' are based.¹⁶⁴ The consequences of this historical relativism is not only applied to Syrian past but also to the Brotherhood's own past and the recognition that it does not embody the truth (*haqq*) but is fallible.¹⁶⁵ The same 'realistic' method is applied to the West. The Brotherhood recommends its members not to reject the West as the 'Other (*akhar*); rather they are encouraged to critically evaluate the West, differentiate between institutions and individuals and accept the positive aspects of its culture—not just its technology—as part of 'living reality' (*al-hayat al-waqi'iyya*). Amongst the positive achievements of the West are international norms of justice, human rights and the concept of good governance, which should be embraced as universal values and part of the 'accomplishments of human civilization'.¹⁶⁶

Recognizing the historical past and present 'social' reality, the Syrian MB accepts the existence of diversity (*tanawwu'*) as represented in individual forms of interpretation and viewpoints. Diversity is regarded as a universal phenomenon, not an aberration: 'It is the true reality of every human community'.¹⁶⁷ The Brotherhood regards it as the only way to preserve the unity of the nation.¹⁶⁸ As Islam recognizes the difference of tribes and nations, it calls for mutual understanding (*ta'aruf*) and promotes a 'positive constructive dialogue' (*al-hiwar al-ijabi al-banna'*) that will lead to the respect and recognition of the Other (*i'tiraf bi-l-akhar*).¹⁶⁹ Having rejected the claim to truth (*haqq*), so common in political Islam or Salafism, the emphasis is on mutuality as a 'method of debate' (*manhaj al-hiwar*).¹⁷⁰ Force is rejected because: 'in this age, with its enormous range of freedom, it is no longer possible to impose principles (*aq'id*), methods (*madhahib*), ideas (*afkar*) or systems (*anzima*) from above'. Even the *Shari'a* cannot be imposed by force, and fighting by the sword is only used in self-defense and never as means to spread the faith.¹⁷¹ But there are even more important reasons why the *Shari'a* cannot be imposed. As the Brotherhood recognizes that the *Shari'a* only provides general guidelines/goals (*al-maqasid al-'amma*), 'every generation is allowed to choose the form that is in accordance with *its reality* and to realize *its goals*'.¹⁷² In fact, history went awry when *ijtihad* (individual interpretation) was no longer applied and the 'gap between interpretative of the Islamic law and reality became enormous'.¹⁷³ The Brotherhood creates an autono-

mous space for politics by recognizing that the texts (Qur'an and the Sunna) in themselves are holy, but that interpretation 'is not holy and is subject to revisionism and debate'.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, in contrast to Qutb, the Brotherhood embraces the liberating capacity of human reason: 'Islam has given mankind rationality (*'aql*) and a will (*irada*) that forbids him to let his freedom be confiscated in the name of an interest or rule of some people over others *whatever pretext* [including Islam]'.¹⁷⁵

Politically this view of human life as a historical project, located in a specific time and space, is reflected in the acceptance of pluralism (*ta'addudiyya*). If the *marja'iyya* (religious reference point and source) in the programs of the Egyptian Brotherhood is a barrier for the full autonomy of the political, in the Syrian Brotherhood it has become the basis of and coincides with pluralism and political autonomy.¹⁷⁶ Having accepted the plurality of political parties, each with their own political program and civil society, the concept of the change of power (*tadawiliyya*), it also recognizes the ascension to power of different methods of politics (*manahij*) and different programs (*baramij*), opinions and interpretations, becomes essence of the *marja'iyya*.¹⁷⁷ Even if it states that these should be 'within the confines of the general religious principles of the *umma*' (*fi itar al-marja'iyya al-'amma li-l-umma*), it leaves no room for control over this process.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, the addition of such vague concepts such as *marja'iyya* 'civilization' (*marja'iyya hadariyya*) immediately relativizes it and regards it not in rigid legal terms but as a flexible, historically, contingent identity (*huwiya dhatiyya*).¹⁷⁹ Moreover, the concept is broadened by accepting universal non-Muslim successes in the field of human rights and basic freedoms, and the notion that 'we strive to benefit from the experiences of the international community'.¹⁸⁰ Finally, even if the *Shari'a* is accepted as the juridical framework, it is mostly regarded in general terms as promoting justice (*'adl*), equality (*musawa'*) and mutual responsibility (*takaful*).¹⁸¹ The central concept in the political philosophy of the Syrian Brotherhood is citizenship (*muwatina*), which in modern times has replaced the concept of the protected religious minorities (*dhimmis*) and guarantees complete equality in rights and duties, which must be laid down in the constitution.¹⁸² Another part of the *marja'iyya* and citizenship is the sanctity of contracts.

The modern state is a 'contractual state' (*dawla ta'aqudiyya*), which 'is based on the free choice that is the expression of the will of the people'.¹⁸³ Given the increasing rift between Salafism and the Brotherhood, it was not surprising that revisionism (*muraja'at*) was immediately and vehemently attacked by a Salafi ideologue as Abu Basir al-Tartusi.¹⁸⁴

Conclusion

Islamic political thought has come a long way during the past quarter of a century. By both trying to justify and reject violence and embracing democracy it has become much more sophisticated than the original Muslim Brotherhood of Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, or the simple tracts of the Egyptian groups which caught international attention in the 1970s.¹⁸⁵ Even compared to the Gudrun Krämer's analysis of the movement in the mid-1990s, political thinking has deepened and broadened and has become more complex. In particular the struggle between Salafism and the Brotherhood has given it an extra dimension. It seems safe to say that on the whole political consciousness of the Islamist movement has grown, as is apparent from its concern with 'reality', which includes the interests of its following, the preservation of the organization, the complexity of the struggle with the state and the keen awareness that violence is a dead-end that will end in destruction not only of the own organization but also of the prospects of Islam as a whole. The emphasis with at least its more perceptive leaders and thinkers has moved on to civil rights and the development of Islamic concepts of citizenship and an interest in constitutional reform and the restriction of political power instead of expanding it in the name of God. The rise of this new attitude is not an accident; it is linked to the emergence of a professional class that emphasizes an Islamic identity, has acquired vested interests and has become part of a new middle class that entertains new ambitions and new ways of attaining these ambitions. As these ambitions have become more clearly defined, the ideas and methods of the struggle have become more focused and realistic. At the same time, it is clear that this trend has not succeeded and is heavily contested. A strong imaginative jihadist (youth) culture has

emerged that has given violence a new impulse. As is apparent, not all Brotherhood-inspired movements have laid down their weapons. National-religious resistance in Palestine still uses the religious rhetoric of jihad, but this serves a specific goal of liberation and national and international mobilization has become less of a goal in itself and has less of a utopian dimension, as is the case of Jihadi Salafism.

The overall picture now seems to be a triangular struggle between Jihadi Salafism of Osama bin Laden, Yusuf al-'Uyairi and others on one angle, the different Muslim Brotherhood branches on the other, and purist, quietist Salafism on the third. The differences are reflected in the way the currents analyze reality and the discourse and terminology they have developed in analyzing it or rejecting it. Although there are mixtures and 'hybrids', as we have seen with the Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq, which mixed Jihadi Salafism with nationalism and pragmatism, or the Salafi purist and Brotherhood activist combination in Muhammad Surur and 'Abd al-Khaliq, on the whole the relations are clear. During the past three decades the professionals of the Brotherhood have developed a whole new inclusionary discourse on 'reality' that includes terms like humanity (*insan*), culture (*hadara*), heritage (*turath*) and modernism (*hadatha*). Within this discourse terms have evolved connoting mutuality (typically a sixth or eighth form in Arabic), like tolerance (*tasamuh*), co-operation (*ta'awun*), co-existence (*ta'ayush*), mutual understanding (*tafahum*), respect (*ihthiram*), mutual recognition (*i'tiraf*); or political terms that reflect flexibility, like multi-party system (*hizbiyya*) democracy (*dimuqratiyya*) and freedom (*hurriyya*). In the end 'positive' political/cultural connotations, like pluralism (*ta'addudiyya*), progress (*taqaddum*), and even previous traditional theological terms as reform (*islah*) and renewal (*tajdid*) are accepted and given a new content. This trend has infiltrated the writings of previous jihadi or more radical activist groups, such as the Jama'a al-Islamiyya and other violent groups that recently have renounced violence, which show how strong this trend has become and the extent to which violence has been discredited.

In contrast, Jihadi Salafism revolves around unbridgeable dichotomy. Reality is primarily regarded as negative and the world is seen as a clash of civilizations, a zero-sum game. Progress is

regarded not as the political manipulation of reality but as its destruction in order to install a new order. This is expressed in the adoption of rigid exclusionary theological terms which draw clear borders between the saved and the damned. Its discourse revolves around a strict definition of creed (*'aqida*) and principles (*mabadi'*) which lead to a certain method and tools (*manhaj*) to distance oneself from the evil and show loyalty (*wala' wa-l-bara'*), and to implement (*tatbiq*) the method (*manhaj*) by means of jihad. It is a top-down deductive method and its success depends on discipline and bravery of the *mujahid* rather than the flexibility and wit of the lawyer or the creativity of the social movement. It is the violence of the person who has made himself believe that he has nothing to lose, rather than the member of the middle class who has property and children to protect. This has not been a continuous process, but is a combination of the revival of the Qutbian trend, the closed worldview of Salafism, and the disastrous policy of the West in the Middle East and the Muslim world. Whereas it seemed that during the past two and a half decades, with the defeat of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria in the 1980s, the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA) in Algeria and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya in Egypt in the 1990s, violence was discredited as a theoretical and practical dead end, after 9/11 and especially after the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, jihadism has been given a new life-lease, on the ground in Iraq, and especially in the imagination of young people by means of the internet. Although with the defeat of al-Qaeda in Iraq the trend now seems to be moving again in the direction of the countervailing trends, this battle is by no means over. The most important question is, what next? As the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East hardly seem inclined to budge and are unwilling to liberalize their political system sufficiently to further stimulate the democratic tendencies in the Brotherhood movements, having thoroughly defeated the violent trend in Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco. Instead, they seem to invest heavily in quietist Salafism, or other forms of quietist and pious Islam, as a means to combat the canalization of political demands by the middle classes. This will have far-reaching consequences. In ideological and practical politics the continuation of authoritarian regimes means that ideological ambiguity and practicing politics 'by other

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE ISLAMISTS?

means', i.e. religion, will continue. Although violence has become impossible and counter-productive and thinkers along democratic lines have become important, one wonders how strong this trend can become if the avenues of expression of these trends are limited. A big question is the role Salafism will play in this battle of the minds and canalization of grievances. Will the pious, quietist, conservative trend, directly or indirectly supported by authoritarian states, prevail, or will the hybrid forms with a greater activist orientation become more prominent? Will Jihadi Salafism die out or revive again? One point, however, is certain: insight into the development of these trends and the transformations in their mutual relations is important for European policy towards states in the Middle East, Muslim populations in the region and Muslims in Europe, as so many of these trends are also present on European soil. Simply denying that Islam is dynamic and therefore should not be condemned as a whole—as some politicians and academics in the Netherlands insist it should—is not only not an option but is also counter-productive, for it drives many Muslims into the arms of the most intolerant trends.