International Panel on Exiting Violence

CHAPTER 3

BETWEEN SALAFISM, SECTARIANISM AND VIOLENCE: THE NEW FACES OF RADICALIZATION

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Salafism as an Incubator of Violence? Untangling the Strands

Considering the relationship between Salafism, sectarianism, and violence in the context of transnational and globalized jihadist violence brings us back to the issue faced by many interested parties (including politicians, academics, journalists, and religious actors): the powerful interaction between religious fundamentalism, the creation of a sectarian and radical fantasy, and the legitimization of a violent ethic which feeds a particular conception of jihad requiring battle against any person or group perceived as an enemy of Islam.

According to this reasoning, Salafism causes sectarian positioning in that it divides a group seen as authentic from other communities which are discredited for their religious beliefs[1] and sometimes presented as political enemies and military targets. Can these causalities be verified by an analysis of several countries located in Europe, the Middle East, the Maghreb and the Indian sub-continent? What links can be observed among Salafism, religious radicalism, and political violence? Should we validate the theory of causality, or at the very least a high degree of ideological, sociological, and political porosity between Salafist socialization and jihadist involvement?

The Logic of Salafism: Make Islam Great Again!

What is Salafism?

"Salafism" is a religious framework whose *raison d'être* can be located in its etymology and epistemology. It is based on a "restorative" conception of Islam, centred on the idea that the "authentic" way of being Muslim was lost shortly after the death of the Prophet Muhammad and the first generations of faithful believers. The history of Muslim societies, in spite of undeniable developments over epochs, is first and foremost a series of religious cycles. This means that individuals within each age must return to the first and original version of the faith, religious practice, and way of behaving in society. These modes are found among the *Salaf Salih*, an Arabic expression referring to the Ancient or Virtuous Ancestors, i.e. the members of the very first generations of the Muslim community (*al-Umma*). Since its birth, Islam has given rise to different ways of identifying the legacy of Muhammad, Seal of Prophets and, as such, the final Messenger able to claim he bears the Truth revealed. After Muhammad passed away, most Islamic traditions have not been

1. Sectarianism is indeed a concept which originated in the world of religion, initially to describe the behaviour and vision of Christian groups which detach themselves from the majority in order to claim a monopoly on truth and the sense of faith. From this perspective, belonging to a particular group and affiliation with the faith are presented as identical and exclusive questions (Weiss, 2015).

able to boast of compliance with his teachings, nor those of the people (men and women) who followed and are considered as *Salaf Salih*[2], the source of knowledge or truth, as Tradition has designated them over the centuries.

Islam as many believers think of it today has never been as pure as it was in the beginning. In Salafism this means any revivalist undertaking is founded in the rediscovery of this foundational and paradigmatic era, which represents the return to an objective form of orthodoxy in belief, religious practices, and social relations. The question then becomes how to accomplish this quest for a renaissance of religion and identity which defines Salafism. This raises the issue of how to reform Islam (i.e. a faith, a practice, and a civilization) as it is practised by the believers. The road of Islam is clearly mapped out: it is a question of taking a route which was originally intended without "straying" down "deviant" paths that could lead to the end of Islam.

Although centuries of exegesis have in actuality given rise to various forms of Salafism, ranging from the most radical intransigence to the most rational modernism, in the contemporary era the Salafist framework is most often characterized by exclusivist and reformist movements of a consciously fundamentalist nature. On an individual level these most often result in an antagonistic relationship with the rest of the world, and on a collective level they result in a cognitive and politically violent questioning of ideas and practices which these readings of the religious corpus aim to discredit.

Contemporary Reconfigurations and Possible Porosity

The shift from what is essentially a critique to a more sociological analysis makes it possible, in the contemporary era, to shed light on the plural and often competing ways in which this revival is being put into practice. This results in the need for different ways of classifying Salafism. These groups do indeed share a puritanical vision, more specifically an epistemology based on imitation of the *Salaf Salih*, with well-defined conceptual and practical outcomes (see the discussion below). Nevertheless, there are undeniable differences in terms of both the societal model advocated and the strategies proposed to achieve it.

Thus a number of typologies have been established in recent years to highlight the similarities and differences in contemporary understandings of Salafism. The most famous of these is certainly that of Quintan Wiktorowicz (2006), whose main contribution is to distinguish the present forms of Salafism by their political modalities, with a particular focus on the issue of violence, political activism and power. It is again clear that, although all these conceptualizations of the necessary return to the Wise Ancient Ones are founded on defending a radical definition of God's uniqueness (*al-Tawhid*), fighting "innovation" (*al-Bid'a*) in terms of religion, and the principle of Loyalty and Disavowal (*al-Wala wal-Bara*)[3], profound disagreements have arisen regarding the substance of these ideas. This has fragmented the contemporary Salafist framework, yet also given rise to ideological and sociological porosity between the different groups demanding this revival.

Wiktorowicz's typology identifies three forms of Salafism. The first is consciously violent and is quasi-systematic in its passionate and insurrectionist reading of the concept of jihad. It echoes the dynamics of compliance with the spirit and letter of the Muslim religion (along with discussion of

2. The term Salaf comes from the root s-l-f, referring to ancestry and thus to the original believers. The word Salih is derived from the root s-l-h, which recalls moral virtue, piety and excellence. In the wake of the Salaf Salih (the Prophet's Companions and the two generations which succeeded them), the salafi(st)s are the faithful who choose to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors. The Salaf Salih inspire followers through the moral and societal traces (al-Athar) they left behind. As part of the most orthodox Sunnism, their example is the third source of inspiration after the Koran (al-Quran) (word of God uncreated) and Muhammad (al-Sunna).

3. Examples of this include the Egyptian Party of Light and the Tunisian Mercy Party.

what that may be). Manifested in movements such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, this vision rejects politics in the institutional sense of the word (political parties, elections, etc.) in favour of a violent strategy for constructing a new order (the Caliphate, which is in fact old in the eyes of the jihadists). This order is intended to combine territorially and politically the geographical spaces over which the *Umma* is spread. The second form, on the other hand shares the same objective of re-establishing exclusive sovereignty for all Muslims, but through a national rather than a transnational political ethic. This legitimizes electoral competition where possible and the establishment of political parties[4].

The third version defends a relationship of both distrust of and subordination to politics (*de facto* or legal). Muslims must concentrate on moving society toward increased compliance with religious requirements on purely religious grounds, without any political activism. The fundamentalist approach called for by these "quietist" Salafists (thus differentiating them from the "jihadist" first group and the "political" or "participationist" second) nevertheless takes into account a major constraint: the preservation of the social order, without which there would be no safety or religious practice for the *Umma*. Because of this, any regime which does not explicitly reject Islam (where the religion is a majority) must be obeyed. In a minority context, the most commonly used "orthodox" practice is "healthy migration" (*al-Hijra*), the purpose of which is to morally and physically separate the believing party from a negative environment for Islam, where there is a serious risk of perversion or even moral ruin.

The high visibility and undeniable influence of Salafist thinking and norms in many societies during recent years have prompted us to highlight another typological form. This form takes into account the contemporary phenomena of possible political radicalization and even violence. On the one hand, due to the diversification of ways of following Salafism, today it is necessary to focus on general Salafist sensibilities rather than clearly identifiable movements. On the other hand, due to the intense debates over materials referring to the appropriate way of restoring Islam "to its origins", we can identify a phenomenon of ideological dilution of the revivalist meta-goal in the narrative of certain groups. The structuring discourse of these groups remains a return to the origins, but in their daily actions they identify themselves above all through a dynamic of opposition to the surrounding system, removed from all exegetic or interpretative work regarding the nature of the ideal Islamic society and the proper means of achieving it. Finally, as a result of the rise of a virtual universe in which deterritorialized identities and mobilizations are carried out in the context of broad activism without a specific political agenda (unlike the Islamic State, which has not only advocated but put into practice the Caliphate model), other communities claiming the Salafist way of life and reference points (clerics, concepts, etc.) have gained notoriety. If, in the long term, the search for exclusive political sovereignty for all Muslims is sought, it is not through conquest but rather through infiltrating the public sphere (in this case, virtual) which characterizes this mode of Salafism. All these dynamics have thus strengthened Salafism as a symbol of rupture with and opposition to the social and political environment. This has resulted in a dilution of the Salafist framework, in that it is now difficult to identify movements with a clear agenda and strategy. At the global level, Salafism has become a language of opposition rather than representing a homogeneous ideological offering.

Our attempt at a typology therefore consists in differentiating three Salafist modalities in relation to the political order. An objective analysis of these puritanical communities in the predominantly Muslim world, but also elsewhere (Western societies, etc.), must acknowledge their determination to radically alter the social order towards ever greater moral, identity-based, and judicial adherence to the Islamic standard, understood from a fundamentalist perspective. However, beyond

4. Interview with Z., Algeria, July 2001.

interpretative and exegetic divergences, the relationship with the political order is what determines the main differences between the Salafist communities which have expanded for several decades through the Arab world and beyond. Thus, three ways of understanding this return to the origins of Islam must be highlighted, due to the dilution of the ideological content implied by the use of Salafist rhetoric and symbols, and the diversification of current movements laying claim to this revivalist puritanism.

First of all, it is important to emphasize the existence of a preservationist Salafism, of which the stated objective is to maintain a political order without open protest. This mode of understanding actively seeks the conservation of a regime, state, government, or system, including by a conscious alliance with power, as observed in the highest echelons of the Saudi state for several decades. In effect, clerics and princes govern the country as part of a politically targeted Salafism. The goal is to maintain the religious identity of society, without this leading to legitimate militancy for believers who are neither clerics nor princes. Politics are an affair of the duopoly, beyond which neither challenge nor protest is theoretically justified. In this case the defence of Islam is top-down, but preservationist Salafism can also be done bottom-up in the case of the faithful who preach a distancing from militancy. This preaching is done outside the official political sphere, but in collaboration with it if the Muslim state whose authority they accept is threatened. In this case, the political establishment promotes imams, university lecturers, and preachers calling for the proscription of challenges to the ruling power.

Another Salafism seen today is that of transformation, whether through violence or political participation. The main difference here is that the place of power is thought to be potentially available through an insurrectional or democratic process in which the power holder could be forced out. Here, we identify an ethic of change from the top. Jihadist and participationist Salafists preach with the intention of socializing the faithful in an ideology of challenging the powers-that-be, although the strategy advocated for doing so diverges radically between the two.

Finally there is a Salafism of subversion, wherein political power is not a matter of priority. Rather this is a social, cultural, and religious movement whose objective is visibility in the public sphere through infiltration. Tunisia, with certain student movements after the 2011 revolution or certain European countries (Belgium with Sharia4Belgium, the United Kingdom with Sharia4UK, France with Forsane al-Izza…) offer interesting cases of this disruptive and factious Salafism wherein it is not necessarily the institutions which are targeted but rather a moral and symbolic order. Here, preaching in the purely religious sense is abandoned in order to achieve public visibility which is militant but not necessarily aimed at seeking power. The objective, despite the slogans, seems to be more to polarize opposing camps than to mobilize around a common political project.

Ideological similarities exist between the different communities sharing all or part of the contemporary Salafist imaginary and belonging to one of these three categories. However, certain dynamics of both opposition and porosity have emerged as these groups become more important and come into conflict in order to assert their particular visions of Salafism. The main question today concerns the links between moral, cognitive, and identity-based radicalization on the one hand, and political, military, and violent radicalization on the other. If the overwhelming majority of Salafist communities in many countries do not fall within the scope of an ideological or religious doctrine of transformation through violence, can we say confidently that the difference between them is of degree and not of nature?

The state of research in this area is first and foremost distinguished by a lack of work carried out on a large scale (whether in a majority or minority Muslim context) regarding the impact of Salafist socialization on the transition to jihadism. Nevertheless, researchers have published detailed studies of specific geographical and sociological areas, which bring to the current state of understanding important context for the potential existence of a mechanical causality between

identification with Salafism and jihadist engagement. It appears that, despite some exceptions, there is now a phenomenon of separation between the former and the latter. Jihadism results above all from the politicization of a social identity which perceives itself to be under attack, one of the outcomes of which will be an attraction to fundamentalist Islam. Interest in the Salafist imaginary does not allow for the identification of clear sociological porosity between socialization within a Salafism community and entry into a violent group or individual commitment to terrorist action carried out alone.

The Logic of Jihadism: Muslim Lives Matter!

Explaining Marc Sageman's Theory of Turning to Political Violence

The title of our chapter implies a new face of radicalization: from Salafism to sectarianism to violence. Is this suggestion empirically supported? We leave the explanation and definition of the word "radicalization" to another research group. In the following section, we focus on turning to political violence (*passage à l'acte*), which is the major theme of the International Panel on Exiting Violence. The process of turning to political violence described below is based on an empirical analysis of 34 campaigns of political violence, spanning four continents and more than two centuries (Sageman 2017).

The first step in the process is a politicization of one's social identity in contrast to the state and/or society. This emerges from a grievance that divides the world into two mutually exclusive groups on either side of the grievance. State intervention in the negotiations about the grievance politicizes the aggrieved group. The collection of people with this politicized social identity forms an imagined political protest community. Over time, this community becomes a counter-culture, with its own lifestyle, discourse, symbols, and politics. Islam, and in this case Salafism, can be a constitutive part of each community member's social identity. This community is still non-violent, but may become violent under three conditions.

The first is an escalation of conflict between this community and the state. This leads to increasing hostilities between the two parties, with a shift to extremity on both sides. Concurrent with this escalation is a cumulative radicalization of discourse, with war metaphors used to describe the nature of the conflict. It is this violent speech rather than extremist ideology that is the important factor in further radicalization of the conflict. This violent discourse decreases the threshold of violence.

The second condition is a disillusionment with legal means of redress of the grievance. At this stage, most people in the political protest community exit from political activity. However, a few, the most dedicated and loyal to the community, redouble their efforts on behalf of the community.

The third condition is moral outrage at egregious state aggression against one's imagined community. This can take the form of the murder or the unfair punishment of a comrade, threats of eradication of the community, or insults to a core symbol of the group's social identity (such as the defamation of the Prophet).

At this point, a few members of this imagined community volunteer as soldiers to protect their group. In other words, they acquire a martial social identity, and soldiers kill on behalf of their community. This new "bunch of violent guys" grow to believe that they are the avant-garde of a large challenge to state sovereignty and society in general. At this stage, political violence explodes onto the political scene.

In this general process of radicalization, which holds for any political group and ideology, Salafism is just a component of the social identity of the members of this imagined political protest community that is still non-violent but that, under the three conditions outlined above, may turn to

political violence.

Muslim Lives Matter (in life)

Algeria

In Algeria, the Islamic Army's shift toward political violence is the product of a religious sectarianism that does not come exclusively from the doctrinal framework of Salafism. It is above all the result of the exclusion by the Algerian regime of the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF) from politics, following the cessation of the electoral process, and equally of the forceful and political repression of its members. Many interviews with militants from the Islamic Salvation Army (ISA), the armed wing of the ISF, confirm that the repressive policies of Algerian authorities (house arrest, incarceration, etc.) were the source of their violent radicalization. A former emir of the ISA explains, "I went to an internment camp in the desert. I was released but still threatened by the police. So I knew I was going to die and be killed. I'd been insulted. I was living with injustice so, if I had to die, better to die with weapons in hand and I decided to join the underground"[5].

Faced with this situation, the ISA felt that it was now impossible to express its political positions except through violence. According to ISA officials, they targeted the institutions and representatives of the Algerian state whom they considered to be accomplices of a tyrannical power (*at-Taghut*). Soldiers, gendarmes and police officers were killed or murdered during ISA military operations. Despite these violent actions, this revolutionary organization enjoyed popular support. This support ended the moment the Armed Islamic Group (AIG) explicitly claimed Salafism, opting for total violence and ceasing to differentiate between representatives of the state and civilians. As such, the AIG criticized the ISA for its political moderation and its desire to spare the Algerian population, and even considered the group an accomplice of the Algerian state. According to more and more sources, because the AIG was infiltrated by state representatives, it responded to the state strategy of attacking the entire jihadist opposition, even the most "moderate". According to many witnesses, it was the ISA which rushed to defend villages threatened by the extreme violence of the AIG. However, the various massacres of civilians of course marginalized the AIG, but also had a ripple effect of marginalizing the ISA.

Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia

Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia (AST) is a radical Salafist organization which was founded in April 2011 and outlawed in August 2013. During its brief existence, it was able to give voice to a larger *Salafi Jama'a* (Salafist constituency), which was itself the product of the post-revolutionary politics of contention (Merone 2017).

After the 14 January 2011 Tunisian revolution (*al-Thawra*), there was a widespread expectation of political and social change. A new faction of young radicals emerged, but the post-revolutionary political process frustrated their expectations. In particular, the disenfranchised youth in most of the urban marginal areas of the country did not participate in formal and institutional politics, whether this meant participation in election or engagement in parties or formal associations. Salafist radical ideology shaped this faction. Groups of young people began to transform their social identity with reference to special Salafist groups. For each local area where this phenomenon developed, the *Awlad al-Huma* (the guys of the city/neighbourhood) became a *Firqat an-Najiya* or *Ta'ifa al-Mansura*

5. According to the United Nations working group on the use of mercenaries, the number would be around 5.500-6000 (United Nations, 2015).

(the saved or victorious group), emphasizing their identity as a special group. If religion as such was empowering the inner group identity, the relationship with outsiders was potentially a conflictual one. Most of the outsiders were those living in other areas of the city, and in particular the better off. The "others" were identified as the "haves" as opposed to the "have-nots". The process of identity formation was also represented in group activities such as football games, picnics in the mountains, or religious meetings.

AST as an organization was formed by a small group of former jihadists who came out of prison after the general amnesty in February 2011. They were the vanguard of a *Salafi Jama'a*, a larger social group that developed in an environment where political and social contention was "translated" into Salafization. This group created an organization that was officially set up in April 2011 (Gartenstein-Ross, 2013). Throughout 2011 and 2012, the leadership of the group tried to create a new Salafist organization out of this new social and religious participation. Because of the post-revolutionary environment of freedom, the organization attempted to build a new idea of what it meant to be a Salafist-jihadist in a liberal environment, whereby jihadists were not meant to use violence to change society, focusing on other means instead. With this in mind, a process of organization building began. Local groups of empowered youth changed into quasi-formal local committees linked to charismatic sheikhs, who became cadres of the organization. This process, however, was interrupted by an escalation in the confrontation with the state. In 2013 two political assassinations created a general climate of insecurity in Tunisia, and the country clearly went through a rapid process of political and social polarization between pro-Islamists and anti-Islamists, with the latter placing Nahda, the moderate party that had won the October 2011 elections, with the rest of the Salafist radical landscape. In May 2013, AST wanted to organize its third congress in Kairouan, but the police decided that the time for toleration was over and prevented the event by force. The tension between the Salafist groups and the state escalated further and tensions remained high until the Egypt military coup against the elected Islamist president Morsi, which came as a warning for Nahda. That party decided to follow the Interior Minister's decision to outlaw the group in July 2013 and cut its links with AST, firmly committing instead to democratization.

After the summer of 2013, Nahda and the nationalist party Nidaa Tunis came to an agreement on how to take Tunisia fully toward liberal democracy within a larger process of national unity that included also unions, professional associations, and several human rights groups. In 2014 and 2015, the Minister of Interior launched a widespread campaign against all Islamist public activities under the label of "war against terrorism". As a response to this campaign, the large Salafist radical *jama'a* became a mass of potential recruits for armed jihad. The leader of AST himself declared that the time for peaceful preaching had ended in the face of the state's decision. Thus, some Tunisians became one of the most numerous groups of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, while others decided to take on the Tunisian state, whether through a Salafist guerrilla force or through targeted attacks against foreign civilians (the Bardo Museum attack in March 2015 and the attack in Soussa in June of the same year).

Salafism and the Struggle for Power in Libya

The configuration of Ansar al-Sharia's Salafist jihadist movement in Libya (ASL) was symptomatic of the chaotic militant landscape of the country after several months of struggles to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi's regime. ASL immediately presented itself as an armed revolutionary militia, carrying out the activities of preaching, social actions, and armed protection of the population. The experience in towns like Benghazi and Derna perfectly illustrates these roles. ASL appeared in Cyrenaica (in Benghazi and Derna) in 2012 using the same methods as those seen in Tunisia (social action, charitable association) but also relying on an armed structure, which is characteristic

of the Libyan political landscape and a determinant element of ASL.

ASL is made up of former liberated opponents who took part in clashes in 2011, and of a generation of veteran former jihadists from the Afghan (1990) and Iraqi (2003) fronts. As in Yemen (see below), Libyan fragmentations have had a profound impact on the evolution of the organization, preventing its dissociation from violent action. IS's proclamation of the Caliphate in the Levant in June 2014 both forged allegiances and created dissidence in ASL in the cities of Derna, Ajdabiya, and Sirte in September 2014. In November 2014, a military offensive was triggered by militants in Marshal Haftar's camp in Cyrenaica, whose objective was to eliminate the main Islamist forces from the Libyan political field. This led to ASL incorporating Islamic jihadist coalitions that had formed in reaction (a form of counter-violence) the same year in Benghazi, Derna, and Ajdabiya. On the other hand, Salafism also served the interests of Marshal Haftar, who relied on other Salafist armed militants.

From summer 2014, this component intervened in different armed offensives which took place in Libya, both to remove ASL partisans in Cyrenaica and to support struggles in 2016 to liberate the coastline in Sirte, which had been under the control of IS militants since spring 2015. These factions, which were co-opted by the state, were followers of the legal Wahhabist current, strongly inspired by the influential Saudi preacher Al-Madkhali. Following in the footsteps of Yemen, Salafism in Libya has been subjected to a struggle for influence, and it has been co-opted by certain state actors to legitimize their power as well as being used by the jihadist current as an ideological norm.

Yemen, Jihadists Adapted to Local Realities

Yemen's repeated political crises over the past twenty years have provided opportunities for the local jihadist movement known as Al-Qaeda on the Arab Peninsula (AQAP) or Ansar al-Sharia Yemen (ASY). The jihadist organization is particularly well suited to the reality of Yemeni society's fragmentation. AQAP first established a unifying discourse by erasing the national, regional, and tribal differences present in this southern part of the peninsula. Founded in 2003 in Saudi territory and then relocated to Yemen beginning in 2009, AQAP has never built social barriers between its militants, whether they be Saudi or Yemeni. While in general the social and economic status of Yemenis has remained far lower than that of the Saudis, this dynamic has always been absent from the governing structure of AQAP. Influential roles have also been assigned to people from tribes or regions of lesser influence, incorporating local features and explaining the ties established with local tribal chiefs. Finally, the jihadist movement has relied on a militant narrative which is specifically Yemeni. This is linked to a sense of exaltation and to the messianism of prophetic speech centered on Yemen, particularly in the Aden Abyan region. This has always been an important symbolic dimension in expanding the social base of AQAP in the south of the country.

The consideration of Yemeni political crises as part of the jihadist agenda remains the other central element which explains the local presence of AQAP. Opposition to regimes, whether linked to former president Ali Saleh's supporters, to the Houthi rebels of the Zaydi minority, or to the southern and tribal factions, remains a factor in emancipation for Yemeni jihadists. For example, support given to the populations in the south, in the provinces of Abyan, Shabwa and Hadramawt, coincides with the loss of influence of the socialist ideas of the former South Yemen. Jihadists have been able to benefit from a context of greater social malaise in this region, which is a source of protest against the authorities in Sanaa. In the north, the strategy has been similar since 2010. The jihadist organization legitimized its attacks on the Zaydi Shiite minority (Houthis) by characterizing them as defending the Sunni population. AQAP thus affirmed its desire to replace both the Yemeni and Saudi authorities, who were unable to stem the inexorable Houthi push that would bring that militia into the country's capital in 2015.

The Syrian Conflict: From a Popular Uprising to an Islamist Confrontation

Contrary to the propaganda circulated by the highest Syrian authorities beginning in March 2011, in which they raised the spectre of "terrorist groups", "Islamists", and "Salafists", the Syrian protest movement initially had nothing to do with religion, although it was imbued with relatively reserved Islamic sensibilities. Beginning in 2012, despite the fact that Islam still does not seem to be the objective or driving force behind the protests, signs of an Islamist narrative (whether of a Muslim Brotherhood or Salafist allegiance) have been felt in the ranks of the armed opposition. This is symptomatic of a protest made up of a predominantly Sunni population (70 percent of the Syrian population), which is largely pious and marked by a certain social conservatism. Above all, it is the result of the regime's brutal crackdown: references to God seem natural for activists and protesters—even those who were deeply secular or atheist at departure, or who belong to other religious communities—who confront death daily, ready to sacrifice their lives for freedom.

Moreover, neither Islamist parties nor the official representatives of Sunni Islam (the *'ulama*) were involved with the genesis of the protest movement. Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood did, of course, take up the cause of the revolution and mobilize very early on, primarily from abroad due to the absence or weakness of their structures on the ground. The Sunni representatives, divided between loyalists and protesters, did not emerge as a structuring force for revolutionaries.

Similarly, in the beginning, the feeling of belonging to a community appeared much more prominent among the minorities (Alawites and Christians) than among the Sunni population. The trend towards Islamization has, however, been strengthened in the medium and long term by three factors contributing to its emergence. First, there were the insidious practices of the regime's security services (rape of Sunni women, bombing mosques, insults to the Sunni religion filmed during torture sessions, mobilization of primarily Alawite militias, arms distribution in Alawite villages). These were reinforced by the large-scale punishment of Sunni revolutionary strongholds, which only radicalized the movement on a sectarian basis. Second, the secular component of the movement eroded. This was the result of the regime deliberately prioritizing the destruction of these "secular" militants, and the (forced or voluntary) exile of a large number of its members. It is also explained by the high level of corruption which has affected its political circles in exile. This helped pave the way for the Islamist movements to achieve a stronger grip on the uprising, reinforced by the regime's cynical strategy of releasing a large number of Islamist rebels from prisons. These people then went on to make up most of the leadership of the Syrian insurgency's Islamist and jihadist movements. Finally, the most vocal external supporters, who are likely to invest further in providing effective assistance to the Syrian people fighting, have built their approach on solidarity between Sunni Muslim peoples, who are in general susceptible to the anti-Shi'ite sectarian logic. This is the case with support from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Muslim Brotherhood of the various countries in the region, and representatives of the international Salafist-jihadist movement.

Egypt: From Revolutionary Dynamics to Violent Action

From the beginning of the fall of the Mubarak regime, Egypt was one of the most successful incubators of political Islam, including that of jihadist movements. The release of many figures from the Afghan jihad of the 80s and 90s led to the creation of a militant jihadist collective which acted entirely outside the institutional world. This group soon established an opposition to the political programs of the other Salafist parties (an-Nour and al-Asala). These were considered too modernist in terms of their dogma and their recognition of the democratic electoral system. Through media activity, Egyptian jihadists declared solidarity with their Tunisian and Libyan "brothers" Ansar al-Sharia, but also with the Syrian insurgency groups. They also participated in joint projects with

the Salafist centres of Gaza and criticized the actions of the Egyptian army in Sinai. Not wishing to take the side of particular presidential candidates in 2012, these jihadists had, as a societal project, advanced the principle of rejecting these institutions by calling for "ideal and supreme" Islamic governance.

After the fall of President Morsi during the summer of 2013, this group was hit hard by the repression which brought down jihadist preachers. The group experienced a development similar to that of its Tunisian counterparts Ansar al-Sharia. Some activists decided to join other jihadist fronts (in Libya and the Levant). Faced with the repression of the new regime, the transition to armed struggle became an option which would materialize a few months later with the advent of more active armed jihadist groups in Sinai and the outskirts of Cairo.

The Afghanistan/Pakistan Area

There is no pure Salafism in the Afghanistan/Pakistan area. The local fundamentalists come from a different school of Islamic jurisprudence—that is, from the Hanafi tradition rather than the Hanbali tradition that gave rise to Salafism. They are part of the deobandi revivalist that started in India but acquired a more militant outlook in Pakistan after partition. They gave rise to many proselytizing movements, the most prominent of which is the Tablighi Jamaat, which intentionally avoids political activities and aims to change society from the bottom up. These fundamentalists also gave rise to politically violent movements, such as the Afghan Taliban, Tehrik e-Taliban e-Pakistan, and Lashkar e-Jhangvi. Deobandi Islam is an integral component of the comprehensive political social identity of these local militants. However, the political violence in this South Asian region is so intertwined with local political issues, such as local resistance to central government encroachment both in Pakistan and Afghanistan, that it is impossible to separate the religious from the political components of this conflict. In any case, these militants are not Salafists in the pure sense of the word, but fundamentalist deobandis.

France and Belgium

Since the advent of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, France and Belgium been targeted by jihadists. This is due not only to the values these European nations espouse but also especially because of their participation in the international coalition and their involvement in the bombing of the Daesh army. It is thus possible to confirm that the political dimension of Salafism was certainly the catalyst for the attacks which have taken place in these two countries (Bataclan, Nice, Zaventem, Malbeek, etc.). The jihadists saw the international intervention as a declaration of war, and it has been a key trigger in the radicalization of young Europeans who are close to the jihadist organization. Sceptics need only read the statement by Adam Djaziri, who died after attempting to kill gendarmes in June 2017. In a recovered letter, he lays out "the demand for 'the total cessation of arms sales to the tyrannical regimes of Muslim countries, the liberation of imprisoned jihadists, the possibility of Muslims leaving France to settle in Syria, etc.'". These demands are political in nature; they derive from a secular and worldly logic rather than one which is religious and Islamic.

Impact of the Virtual Neo-Community

The use of social media among young radical Salafists has been a subject of much discussion in academic and policymaking circles. On the one hand, some observers have stressed how the internet has been a major factor in the development of a global Salafist community (Sageman 2004). On the other, the direct link between accessibility of jihadist websites and radicalization is

still unclear.

There is no doubt that tools of the World Wide Web such as chat forums, Facebook, and Twitter have played an important role in creating a space of communication among members of a community scattered geographically and constantly under the control of security agencies. Its role has been ideological, in the sense that most theoretical material has been provided in "sheikhs" personal forums or blogs. It has also been purely communicative, insofar as sympathizers throughout the world have been able to communicate with each other and exchange opinions on current affairs. Its value has also been propagandistic. In particular, the propaganda videos diffused throughout the Web has served as a model of imitation for many young followers and sometimes as an inspiration for style and personal conduct. The impact on recruitment is, however, unclear. Hegghammer (2014) provides examples of how the "trust factor" is a serious obstacle for recruiters relying on such virtual public spaces, and Lia (2006: 14) downplays the "incitation to action" that such instruments may provide, labelling most Web users "armchair jihadists".

The use of the internet developed significantly after the rise of the Islamic State organization and its campaigns in Iraq and Syria, with the use of their own official media channels considered to be of the highest importance for jihadist groups. The spreading of a "shared" brand is also an important factor as well as the role of certain videos communicating direct or indirect calls to action. The role the Web has played should, however, not be overestimated. Behind these virtual tools there are still people who operate on the ground, linked to specific contexts and in the midst of real, concrete dynamics.

Jihadism: The Logic of Counter-Violence

The Implacable Jihadisation of the Syrian Conflict

Faced with unprecedented repression by the Syrian regime, the trend toward the Islamization of the protest movement in Syria was palpable from the end of 2011, along with its militarization. The international Salafist-jihadist movement could not help but see an opportunity in the Syrian conflict to expand its influence in an area where its footprint had thus far been limited. In fact, this movement describes and conceives its action purely in the context of an armed confrontation which it calls jihad. The question of the militarization of the Syrian protest was taken for granted. The debates were instead going to take place on another level, causing structural fragmentation. These would lead to deep divisions about the fact of fighting under a banner other than that of a jihadist movement. The question was raised in particular of whether the Free Syrian Army (FSA) could present an acceptable ideological platform in order to accommodate jihadi fighters in its ranks. This issue had already been observed in the case of Iraq when it came to identifying, for foreign jihadists, the ideologically appropriate Sunni groups resisting the 2003 American military intervention.

Very quickly, the rejection of the FSA as a legitimate movement would definitively lay the foundations for an ideological jihadist narrative: the Alawites are perceived as a deviant form of Islam. The regime's alliance with Hezbollah's Iranian and Lebanese Shiites (considered to be the region's most menacing enemies) along with the presence of Kurdish nationalist movements fuelled the sectarian sentiment of the conflict. Western interventionism against IS in the summer of 2014, followed by Russia's arrival in October 2015 as the main external support for the Syrian regime, finalized the idea of a conflict framed as a war between Islam and foreign powers. Turkish involvement beginning in 2016 also constitutes a divisive topic. Finally, a messianic dimension, the Sham prophecy (Syria as the land on which the ultimate confrontation between Islam and its enemies will precede the End of Days), which is strongly believed by IS supporters, brought an important millenarian

element to the Salafist-jihadists.

The evolution of the Syrian conflict and the rise of IS in the Levant have led to a succession of tragic events, responsible for the polarization of the current jihadist field between jihadist actors affiliated with Al Qaeda's movement and resilient Iraqi jihadist leaders who returned to the scene after 2010. Finally, this centrality of Syrian discourse has strongly contributed to creating a generational phenomenon of jihadist volunteers in numbers never before seen.

The Case of Salafist-Jihadist's Appropriation of the Palestine Issue

Initially, although Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and even Kashmir were the territories of jihad for Al-Qaeda (AQ), the struggle for Palestine has remained what it was always in the minds of its militants: the avant-garde of jihad, with the prime objective of liberating the third sacred place of Islam, *Al-Quds* (Jerusalem) from "the Jewish occupation". In the thinking of AQ, nationalist Palestinian groups lost their monopoly on the liberation of Palestine. They are accused of having taken it for their personal interest. For AQ, the defence of Palestine is not linked to patriotism, a national political struggle, a state, or a nationalist party. Moreover, the notion of the Palestinian people is not recognized as such. Salafist-jihadists prefer to use the terms "Holy House" (*Bayt al-Maqdis*), "fortress territory" (*Ard al-Ribat*), or recently "disputed territories" (*al-Aradhi al-Mughtasaba*) to refer to Palestine. Above all, Palestine is a legitimate religious cause whose liberation is decreed to be an obligation for all Muslims. However, in this vein, the context never truly allowed for the opening of a direct jihadist front in Palestine. Since this fight cannot be carried out directly in the territory, AQ has targeted the United States as Israel's main ally. Later, with the arrival of IS on the jihadist stage, the same effects were observed. While calls to target Israel have been made by IS, the organization has never really been able to make its mark on the Palestinian territories. It has instead favoured other more accessible regional enemies.

However, since around 2005 there has existed a question of a breach of Salafist-jihadist ideals among Palestinian Islamist militants. Several signs of this have appeared on the Palestinian scene. Since 2006, new Palestinian groups have appeared in the Gaza Strip, bringing with them a different narrative and a specific agenda. All of these state that they are fighting a struggle whose goal is not just to liberate a piece of territory or to establish borders. They perceive the struggle of the Palestinian people as a jihad whose objective is to establish an Islamic Emirate over Palestine, without ever addressing the issue of a Palestinian state.

This radicalization of discourse would strengthen and become more decisive with the evolution of political contexts, both in Palestine and at a regional level. To begin with, the various Salafist groups in Gaza have continued to increase their warnings and messages to the Palestinian people after Hamas' rise to power. Although, of course, they condemn those who argue for a renunciation of the armed struggle (Fatah and the Palestinian National Authority), they also criticize Hamas for having accepted a system of governance handed down from elections deemed illegitimate by the jihadists. Gradually, this radicalization managed to find allies in the radical Palestinian jihadist groups which developed in some of Lebanon's refugee camps and then in the presence of the Sinai insurgency, in which Palestinian fighters of this movement are present alongside IS supporters. Finally, at the international level, the latest US reversals on the Jerusalem issue can only have a stimulating impact on the most radical, of which Salafist-jihadists are the primary breeding ground.

Conclusions

While many observers portray Salafism as a direct source of violence in ideological and even sociological terms, a rigorous analysis of various countries and instances of transition to violence

leads us to conclude that there is no causal relationship between the Salafist imaginary and violent engagement.

The types of and explanations for the political violence seen in the many ongoing conflicts in the Middle East are, above all, the result of dynamics of social disintegration (particularly affecting the younger generations) and of antagonism between society and the state in countries where access to democratic and peaceful ways of expressing political demands is almost impossible.

The issue of the insecure position of Muslims in the world and the conflicts in which they find themselves is a key factor in jihadist involvement. Followers of this world view see themselves as soldiers of Islam who come to the aid of their fellow believers, and feel justified in doing so.

To understand these manifestations of political violence, we must replace the ideology (whether Salafist or jihadist) with the fact of a *self-categorization* (construction of the self) which has come into contact with specific social and political conditions.

For a number of years, the measures intended to diminish jihadist involvement have often led to more jihadism. Why is this the case, and can we identify a fundamental misunderstanding?

The majority of jihadists today do not go through a true Salafist socialization.

A dynamic of ending violence must be built on social and political de-escalation that takes into account not only the religious dimension, but all the themes and factors which may explain violent action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

LISTEN TO MUSLIM VOICES

1. Consider political and symbolic demands from Muslim societies rather than criminalizing them and treating them with suspicion.

The central challenge is to take into account social demands from groups which feel attacked or discriminated against because they are Muslim. This is effectively a question of establishing systems of both political and symbolic deliberation in which demands for political action to end states of injustice are channelled, legitimized, and taken into account. Salafism is a language which translates complaints and reproaches about the state of an Umma which are often imagined, but whose attacks on the dignity and security of a community nevertheless lead a vanguard to take up arms in order to restore a state of security for their fellow believers, whose fate becomes a religious cause. The idea of an Umma in danger as a structuring theme of jihadist mobilizations appears to be the main focus of violent action, whether individual or collective. In this respect, the central issue highlighted by this study is that of the representation and politicization of a non-violent and effective demand for the security and dignity of Muslim communities.

Four approaches, listed below, should be prioritized in order to prevent and counter the sometimes growing appeal of jihadist narratives. The common feature of these is considering the context which has enabled the legitimization of a politico-religious identity of militarized rejection capable of violence against those who are portrayed as enemies of Islam.

2. Re-politicize the voices of Muslims carrying the demands of their society, whether we like those voices or not.

This is a question of allowing an area of moral, media, and political legitimacy for actors in direct contact with their societies in order to establish and consolidate alternative channels for debate and deliberation on the crises in which Muslim communities are involved. The purpose here is not to establish a normative judgement of the obligatory discourse presented by its non-violent representatives. Rather, the intention is to favour any position outside the violent sphere in opposition to

analyses identifying a continuum of the different modalities of political and militant Islam in which radicalization begins with any anti-establishment discourse. Clearly, an analysis of the different ways in which certain individuals or Muslim groups have become violent highlights the need to diversify the scope of grievances and even disputes. The shift to violence can be explained in the case of jihadism by the impossibility of translating legitimate demands from a given Muslim social body (whether one's own or one that is identified with) into non-violent political actions. A complaint raised by any given actor must be subject to political treatment. Just because it comes from a person or a movement whose values we do not like does not mean political debate should not take place. At the same time, democratic governments, media, and international organizations need to encourage any democratic movement which competes with movements having a strong social base among the religious. These must not, however, have a monopoly on the representation of popular aspirations. In short, any actor who refuses and denounces violence must be encouraged.

3. Reflect on the root causes of the legitimization of violent engagement: the issue of justice.
The preceding point works only if a broader reflection is undertaken regarding the causes of the lack of justice in Muslim societies, whose situation can hardly be summed up as a struggle between followers of violence and those who reject it, between radicals and moderates. The notion of justice is inclusive and requires, in addition to giving a political space to actors capable of expressing politically grievances of various kinds, imagining an overall political order wherein people potentially attracted by jihadist discourse (most often the younger generations) would no longer feel victimized. This means acknowledging past mistakes committed on both sides and ending at an international level support for camps which continue to use violence against innocent Muslim populations. Otherwise, the jihadist violence will appear to be more legitimate counter-violence endowed with the seal of approval of religion by seeming to fight a sacred battle, although it operates first and foremost under a political logic. Thus the jihadization of conflicts could be avoided. The principle of justice is also related to the use of force and insulting tactics. Generally, the clerics who present themselves as "moderate" will become marginalized if their society (or at least a large part of it) feels attacked and humiliated. It is therefore up to actors (state or otherwise) to exercise goodwill and impartiality in order to separate the oppressed community from the vanguard proposing to defend or avenge it. When human beings come to favour divine justice or even a millenarian ethic which seeks to speed the end of the world, it is because no human justice is seriously conceivable in situations where violence is justified by the suffering of certain Muslim populations. Domestically, it is necessary to avoid making heroes of jihadists through exceptional punishment. Rather, it is urgent to separate them from the community of which they are supposed to be the defenders by revealing the reality of their practices and actions. In short, it is a question of identifying the intellectual, moral, and political reasoning that can lead others to a positive view of jihadism and to join a movement advocating a violent and radical ideology. These are two different things and require two different types of action.

4. Recognize the need for de-escalation.
Given that discursive constructions play a central role in increasing the tension of political protest dynamics, it is urgent to prevent semantic, symbolic, and rhetorical constructions based on a primary and ideological division of the world (them vs us) as well as calls for hatred and violence. Here, religious discourse (Salafist or otherwise) as well as political, media and intellectual discourse must be examined very closely. Any words and positioning leading to polarization and the justification of violence must be contained. Here, religious mobilizations within Islam, regardless of whether they are Salafist or not, must be the subject of a prevention policy in order to stop all calls for hatred and violence. Any targeting of a specific population must be rejected and severely punished by

law. This is not peculiar to Salafism, since any social group (religious or otherwise) can enter into a process of rising tensions, but neither does this mean that religious communities are not capable of justifying violence that is once again a matter of the politicization and militarization of social identity. To effectively prevent violent discourse, it is necessary, as stated above, to legitimize non-violent words and mobilizations which bear the grievances of the people who are oppressed or attacked and therefore potentially more inclined to assimilate violent messages. This offers them an alternative to violence.

5. Implement individual reintegration.

The last approach concerns the need for the individual reintegration of people involved in jihadism, or political violence more generally. Exceptional legal or political mechanisms must be avoided in order to reinforce the fairness of jihadists being treated like everyone else. Beyond the imperative of supporting democracy in all societies of the world, the prevention of political violence must also mean public actions (the state being theoretically the sole guarantor of the common good) aimed at the social, economic, and political integration of individuals. It is therefore a matter of favouring any dynamic which allows identification with a non-violent group and a system of morality where, on the one hand, problems cannot be resolved by violence, and, on the other hand, humiliation and socio-economic suffering are perceived as everyone's business. Everyone has the right to a fair and just distribution of the material and symbolic resources of society; otherwise they can be more easily pulled into a movement of dispute or even radical protest against the established order.

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Today, a Childrens' Playground. A view behind the towering accommodation blocks either side of the avenue known as Maala Straight. Here these youngsters, playing football, jockey for position during a ' Throw-In'.
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