Jihadi
After Action Report

SYRIA

Stephen Ulph

Series Editor: William McCants

THE JIHADIST movement in Syria is the first modern jihadist movement, whether in an Arab land or in the Islamic world, and its work was distinguished and exemplary. But through our own fault events took the opposite direction to the one we intended.

There entered new concepts on the nature of the struggle against the tyrants of the regime, which the Muslim youth had not heard before: concepts of democracy, ethnicity, national unity, Arabism, recognition of the legitimacy of infidel parties and their right to rule if they won a majority.

After this the bonds (with God) were severed, He withdrew His blessing and left us to our own souls that command us to evil.

Sheikh Abu Baseer al-Tartusi

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Executive Summary

Despite its crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in the early '80s, the Asad regime has had to contend with a rising tide of Islamist activity due, in part, to its pandering to the Sunni religious establishment in order to shore up its legitimacy. However, the growing appeal of Islamism (the notion that Islam should be the primary source of law and identity in Muslim-dominated countries)[1] has not made it easier for Jihadis to attract a large following. This is due to several factors, including:

1. The Jihadis' uncompromising puritanism, which makes their ideology religiously repugnant and prevents them from engaging in pragmatic political actions and alliances

2. The Jihadis' lack of scholarly firepower, which makes it hard for them to stand up to government-sponsored clerics and justify their cause and their violent tactics to the masses

3. Improved security measures in the past year

4. The infiltration of Jihadi groups by clerics

5. The influence of Sufism (Islamic mysticism)

6. Popular televangelists that preach tolerance and pacifism

7. The willingness of popular Islamist groups like Hamas and Hizbullah to participate in democratic elections

8. Competing identities, either ethnic (e.g. Kurds), sectarian (e.g. Alawite, Shia, Christian, Druze), or nationalist

9. The pull of Western culture, particularly among the youth

The Scope of the Present Work

This country study forms part of a series examining the internal vulnerabilities of the Jihadi Movement in Middle Eastern states.

Based on the assumption that at least half the struggle waged by the Jihadi Movement is an internal Islamic struggle—an assumption drawn from its professed aim to restore a pristine Islamic identity by a return to authenticity—the first aim of this research is to uncover the methodology and contours of this struggle. The task is to draw up a map of the terrain over which the contest is being fought, the intellectual and ideological arena, the mutual points of tension, and the Islamist currents and the leading personalities in the field. Once this is in hand, the second aim of this research is to draw up an accurate, prioritized program on which to build a coherent counter-ideology strategy by examining the points of tension and mutual antagonism between militant Islamic organizations, non-Jihadi Islamic currents, and the broader public.

The study of Syria is the first of the series, and the choice is deliberate. The Syrian arena is very dynamic since it presents one of the richest sources of historical Jihadi experience (the largest, failed rebellion to date) and the most challenging arena for the Jihadi program of doctrinal re-education (it is one of the Middle East's most diverse religious, ethnic, and sectarian territories). The experience of Jihadism in Syria provides much in the way of a template for the life-cycle and features of revolutionary Islamism.

The following study is a preliminary survey of the range of documentary sources available on which an eventual counter-ideology program will need to draw. It is based primarily on analyses of the failures and successes of the Jihadi Movement in Syria written by its participants. These "after action reports" provide one of the best sources of information on the internal dynamics of the movement and its vulnerabilities.

Scheme of the Syrian study

Rivals and competitors to Jihadism in Syria

Internal Rivalry
- Islamic competition, the doctrinal vulnerability of Jihadism
- Religious scholars as active collaborators or government agents
- Religious scholars as passive collaborators
- Competition with alternative currents of Islam

The main points of tension in Jihadi theology
- Military tactical operations and their doctrinal implications
- The theological argument for or against Jihad
- Points of core belief
- The problem of *takfīr*
- The struggle for legitimacy

Rivalry from outside the Islamic spectrum
- The challenge of nationalism
- Cultural competition

The effectiveness of Syrian suppression

Syria in the balance

The Middle East crises

Appendix: Chronology of Islamic militancy in Syria

SYRIA HAS had a long history of conflict with Islamism. The ideology of the present regime, Baath socialism, has waged a more than 40-year struggle with political Islam, one made more acute by Sunni indignation at the domination of the party by a heterodox Alawite sect of Islam. In the late 1970s the conflict at one time assumed the form of an all-out armed conflict before bloody suppression doused the flames for several decades.

In the absence of native research on Muslim activism in Syria—a topic forbidden by the state—gauging the political strength of Islamist movements in the country is difficult. In addition, the delicacy of relations between the regime and groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood militate against overt demonstrations of Islamist strength. However, there is a consensus among Syria-watchers that the environment in the country is changing in the direction of a religious revival—whether measured by the gutsier tone of mosque sermons demanding reforms that would give Islam a larger role on the model of Turkey, or simply by the increasing numbers of head-scarves visible in the more well-to-do neighborhoods of the capital.

Rivals and competitors to Jihadism in Syria

While there is clear evidence of growing pro-Islamic sympathies in Syria, Jihadism in the country has to negotiate a terrain that presents considerable sources of competition which still benefit from the history of past excesses and failures in Islamist militancy.

These reasons for failure have been well documented by Abu Mus'ab al-Suri (Mustafa Setmariam Nasar)[2] and Abu Baseer al-Tartousi[3], both of whom outline the organizational failings and the tensions within Syrian Jihadi groups. The reasons for these failings, according to both authors, were doctrinal contradictions and various competitors. Since these contradictions and competitors have not gone away, they provide good starting points for counter-ideology efforts.

Internal rivalry

One point of vulnerability for Jihadi groups may be termed 'internal rivalry' between the competing shades of militant radicalism. Transition to pragmatic politics has proved to be a poisoned chalice for Syrian groups, as have been the attempts at alliance with those who have made that transition. As this study reveals, the troubled issue of resolving differences has caused open antagonism and remains a source of division.[4]

Looming large in the problems of the Jihadi current in Syria has been the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose history provides a good example of the life-cycle of a radical Jihadi movement and the destructive effect of in-built weaknesses when faced with political realities. The list of the ideological 'crimes' of the Brotherhood, seen from the point of view of its enemies, provides us with a checklist of pressure points at which to direct counter-ideology initiatives. Of these, its alliance with 'parties of Infidelity, *Zandaqa* ('freethinking'), and apostasy' feature prominently, along with acceptance of the democratic system, "the last dagger in the back of the Islamic movement in Syria, particularly of the Jihadis." [5]

The process of inter-Jihadi polemic whereby the *al-Talī'a al-Muqātila* group ("The Fighting Vanguard") vilified the Muslim Brotherhood even as it declared that members of the Baath party were Muslims was, according to Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, a major factor in confusing the Jihadi message and weakening the appeal of Islamic radicalism.[6] The lesson provided by this experience, and therefore one of the opportunities for counter-ideology, is that it is difficult for an ideologically purist movement of the rigor of Jihadism to contract relationships with less purist groups. In addition to this confusion, several endemic excesses outlined by al-Tartousi in *'These I fear for the Jihad'* and *'The type of Jihad we don't want'* [7] further confused the Jihadi message and weakened the appeal of the mujahideen in

the broader community. These excesses include unruliness, incitement, loquacity, bad manners, low culture, noisiness, excessive zeal, inappropriate and unqualified pronouncements on matters of religious law, and disrespect for scholars with divergent views, along with the historical inattention given to public relations.[8]

Islamic competition, the doctrinal vulnerability of Jihadism

The ideological vulnerabilities of Jihadism are apparent on a more existential level. Jihadism requires establishing a culture in conflict with tradition and the prevailing intellectual environment. This is a demanding task and requires considerable intellectual investment. However, as Abu Mus'ab al-Suri has argued, members of militant groups were not sufficiently instructed in Islamic doctrine. And as the government forces fought back, whatever level of knowledge was available was progressively thinned out.[9] The implication of this lack of trained scholarly resources made itself felt on two fronts: firstly, the propaganda and public relations front, and secondly (and uniquely to this form of revolutionary conflict) the strategic front where doctrinal propriety not only influenced, but was impacted by, militant operations. With the failure of the Syrian Jihadi rebellion in the 1980s, Jihadi thinkers have focused on the need for more thorough doctrinal training. This fact allows counter-ideology practitioners to map and measure their intellectual 're-armament' as it develops.[10]

Religious scholars as active collaborators or government agents

Related to their lack of scholarly firepower, Jihadis also have to contend with hostile religious scholars they derisively call the *'ulamā' al-sulta,* the 'regime scholars,' who divert active support from the youth. Literature in the Syrian Jihadi arena is rich in denunciations of the influence of these 'collaborator' imams.[11] One preacher in particular, Muhammad al-Bouti, is marked out for suspicion. Although his profile is hardly pro-western (he has called for attacks on American interests globally), for the pro-Jihadi scholars his performance of official duties and his refusal to pronounce *takfīr* ('excommunication') on the regime renders him "an apostate infidel, on whom should apply all the verdicts of apostasy and its consequences in this world and the next."[12] The threat to the Jihadis of 'official Islam' has led to the development of an entire legal category, termed *Masājid al-Dirār*, ('Mosques of Detriment'). Some of the chief ideologues, such as Abu Qatāda and Al-Tartousi have written on the subject,[13] enumerating the legal conditions that impel Muslims to shun a particular venue as unclean.

One reason for the rancorous attitude of Syrian Jihadis toward their religious critics is that they have been duped by clerics in the past due to their own doctrinal naïveté. Jihadi analysts of the Syrian experience point to the case of Abu Abdallah al-Jasari, whose single infiltration of the Jihadi group *al-Talī'a al-Muqātila* shortly after the siege of Hama effectively destroyed the movement. The aura of piety and doctrinal authority that al-Jasari managed to affect blinded the group's members in Jordan to his weak Jihadi pedigree, to the point that the rank and file, and even the group's leader 'Adnan al-'Uqla, willingly assented to his plans to link up with a fictitious remnant of mujahideen across the border in Syria, where they were rounded up *en masse.* This is a continuing vulnerability, as one author recently observed:

> This is what we fear to happen in Iraq if the security and doctrinal training is not solid, and if there is no prudence concerning spies from the enemies of God.[14]

The most overt contemporary case of active collaboration with the Damascus regime is the case of Mahmud Qul Aghasi, known as Abu al-Qa'qā'. This case is particularly interesting in that it gives some insight as to how the Syrian government has streamlined the filtering of Muslim clerics, starting from the earliest days of their training. Abu al-Qa'qā' combined study in Islamic law with membership in the Baath party. Under government supervision he subsequently developed a radical public profile, which he maintains to this day, and which

has drawn "thousands of mujahideen militants", many of them en route to Iraq, to his aggressive sermons in Aleppo. The aura of militancy—fostered by the long beards, military fatigues, and weapons and martial arts training of his followers—had the same effect as al-Jasari's piety. Even major radical Salafi preachers such as Safar al-Hawali in the Gulf had made significant financial contributions to his work before his role as informant to the security services was suspected. Infiltration, as the Jihadi analysts conclude, "occurs largely in the preaching ranks first, and from there into the Jihadi ranks."[15] However, as a tactic, it is high risk. The contradiction of regime-friendly radicalism collapsed on April 12 2006 with armed confrontations in central Damascus between wayward members of Abu al-Qa'qā's group and Syrian security forces.

Religious scholars as passive collaborators

But it is not just active clerical support of the regime that is damaging. A more intractable problem for Jihadi radicalism is when the 'collaboration' is not with a regime but with a mentality, in this case Islamic moderation and the modernist draw of pluralism, liberalism, and democracy. Jihadi commentary is at its most shrill as it attempts to grapple with these more abstract targets.

Since the acceleration of the Salafi *Islamic Awakening* (Sahwa) movement in the 1970s, Jihadi ideologues have had to tussle with the influence of non-Salafi clerics.[16] The problem in Syria is particularly acute since the doctrinal background in the country is heavily imbued with Sufi (Islamic mysticism) influence which, by its nature, combines the appeal of tradition with less textualism. Embodying this influence is the legacy of the late Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro, the Grand Mufti of Syria. His doctrinal position presses all the negative buttons of the mujahideen: Sufi training, advocacy of interfaith dialogue (and ecumenism to some extent), political quietism, and *de facto* separation between mosque and state. For the Jihadis, this is made all the worse by the highly conspicuous legacy of the Abu Nour Mosque and Foundation outside Damascus, which he founded, and his unofficial international profile as the 'representative' of the faith of Islam.

The Syrian regime has so far efficiently sorted and promoted scholars of this stamp to positions of Islamic authority and political influence. Figures such as the Grand Mufti of Damascus Sheikh Ahmad Badr al-Din Hassoun have been coordinating the doctrinal and social competition to Jihadism, while the official recognition of female preachers on May 2006, the so-called *Qubaysiyyāt* (named after the founder of the movement, Sheika Munira al-Qubaysi) signals an advance of an overt 'modernist' Islam. Against this the Jihadi ideologues have to posit their 'authenticity' against the contamination from Western secularizing tendencies. This contamination takes a number of forms. One of these is the 'cultural' challenge from popular televangelists such as the Egyptian Amr Khalid, who focuses on inclusiveness and studiously avoids the political dimension of Islam. Al-Tartousi, for example, takes aim at the preacher both for matters of inauthenticity in style (e.g. clean shaven, in Western clothes, addressing an audience of unveiled women) and content: "[he] omits to talk about the duty of believers to enmity and hatred towards the polytheist infidel."[17]

Jihadi ire is particularly directed at scholars who, in their eyes, have been affected by the culture of pluralism. Chief among the *bête noires* is Muhammad Habash, the director of the Center of Islamic Studies in Damascus, who is leading a campaign of 'Islamic renewal,' encouraging Muslims to recognize ideas from the West. Most controversial is his rejection of what Habash terms the 'monopoly of salvation.' Such a message disarms the Jihadis' claim to cultural and moral distinctiveness and authority:

> Their call is for the 'co-existence' of Truth alongside Evil within one garment, so that principles, concepts, and values become mingled with each other, without Truth being distinguished out and its existence made independent. [18]

Even for many of the moderate tendency, Habash appears to be going a step too far. The late Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro was himself moved to issue a statement of condemnation of

such views. Yet the seriousness of Habash's challenge to Islamic conservatism was seen in the impressive tally of votes given to his candidacy in the 2003 parliamentary elections. As in other arenas of the struggle, much Jihadi ink is spilt on vilifying such developments, against a growing cultural habit.[19] The fact that Hamas, the 'polytheist Islamists', have intellectually made their peace with the democratic system provides a disturbing example (in Jihadi eyes) of the latter trend.

Competition with alternative currents of Islam

Other sects of Islam present Jihadi scholars with the smallest challenge and, therefore, a counter-ideology program taking this as a starting point would constitute a waste of effort. However, while a sect like Shi'ism is too heterodox to present any significant ideological threat to Sunni Jihadism, the recent acceleration in Shi'ite prestige through the perceived success of Lebanon's Hizbullah does hold the potential for distracting the target youth constituency down a nationalist, pan-Arab track. It is for this reason that radical Sunni scholars have had to refute pragmatic arguments voiced by their supporters for the need to overcome sectarian differences and unify against the common enemy.[20] Leading strategists, such as Abu Bakr al-Naji, may argue that the overriding Jihad on behalf of the *Umma* outweighs 'differences in the correct method in intellectual matters',[21] but Sunni visceral distaste places Shi'ism beyond such considerations.

More troublesome to Jihadis, as mentioned earlier, is the still strong appeal in Syria of alternative Sufi currents of Islam, and the web pages of Salafist sites are accordingly well stocked with open vilifications of their 'deviancy.' On the level of broad slogans, Sufis are vilified for 'opening the doors to hidden, esoteric interpretation of these texts', or 'damaging the Islamic creed', or 'calling to moral depravity, debauchery, and licentiousness'. In addition, the radicals react with hostility to what they see as Sufism's 'unorthodox' views on the nature of God, the Prophet, and the Saints (*awliyā'*). But more specifically for the Islamist radical program, Jihadis resent Sufi efforts to 'direct people away from the *Qur'ān* and *Hadīth'*; in other words, they object to its anti-textualism. In *shari'a* terms, this manifests itself in a weakening of the importance attached to outward obligations of the faith and to what is considered permissible and forbidden. This has important implications for Jihadism, since it undermines the authority of the radicals' argument for revolution. For example, Jihadis criticize the unwillingness of Sufis to oppose the ruler of a state on the basis of that ruler's failure to observe the tenets of Islam—a crucial element in the Jihadis' political case.[22]

The main points of tension in Jihadi theology

To an extent little appreciated by counterterrorism experts, a considerable part of militant Islam's struggle for power takes the form of a pamphlet war. This is because, as indicated earlier, the mujahideen have to take on a major re-education task to counter the weight of tradition and the resources and religious patronage of the Muslim states. In the thirty plus years since the ideology of Islamic radicalism was invigorated with the initiation of the Islamic Awakening program, this pamphlet war has amassed a veritable library of doctrinal polemics covering—though not resolving—every conceivable point of theological tension. In the years since the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, this war of words has intensified still further with its adoption of electronic distribution methods across the Internet. This is a major opportunity for counter-ideology, since, by its nature, a public educational program cannot shield its weak points from scrutiny. The vehemence of the Jihadis' defense of these points provides evidence of the level of danger they pose.

Broadly speaking, the doctrinal points of tension that attract the most attention may be classified into three degrees of 'intensity'. A fundamental principle to understand is that in terms of their long-term importance to the Jihadi Movement they may be ranked in inverse order to their tactical application. The ranking is as follows:

1) Military tactical operations and their doctrinal implications:

The mujahideen are making claims to a war for Truth. More than in other revolutionary struggles, the behavior of the fighters comes under scrutiny for its doctrinal propriety. Typical issues spawning polemical exchanges are:

- Child, female, and elderly casualties
- *Tatarrus,* the use of the civilian population centers as cover for the mujahideen
- The killing of non-combatant infidel (both in a Muslim state and in non-Muslim states considered *Dār al-Harb*)
- The treatment of prisoners
- The taking of hostages (mostly in response to the capture of Arab ambassadors in Iraq)
- The mutilation of bodies
- Suicide or *istishhād*: the propriety of self-sacrifice and the choice of target

A highly productive source of argumentation and prioritization on these issues has been provided by the mujahideen themselves in an encyclopedic *e-book* entitled: 'Questions and Uncertainties Concerning the Mujahideen and their Operations'[*]. This work is in constant state of expansion as the Jihadi ideologues respond to developing controversy. It is consequently a useful litmus test for the shifting levels of tension in the doctrinal war.

2) The theological argument for or against jihad:

Underpinning the above issues is the legitimacy of the jihad itself. Far from an open and shut question, the traditional Islamic position on jihad is hedged with nuance and conditionality. Jihadi ideologues therefore have to reinforce the legitimacy of their position by continually negotiating the objections of both their opponents and their supporters. The principal points of tension are:

- The status of jihad (is it recommended or obligatory; on whether it constitutes 'the sixth pillar of Islam', and the issue of the 'greater' or 'lesser' jihad)
- The obligation of jihad with one's wealth
- Other obligations that conflict with jihad: (whether the need for religious knowledge—as a precursor to fighting the Infidel—allows someone to put off jihad until they are fully educated, or whether *da'wā* supersedes jihad, etc.)
- Whether waging jihad is therefore dependent on its appropriateness in terms of a phase having been reached, or whether it is rather a matter of categories of 'types' of jihad that may be waged

[*] **تساؤلات وشبهات حول المجاهدين وعملياتهم** published by 'A Group of Those Strongly Attached to the Mujahideen (*al-Qā'idūn*)'. An earlier work of this nature, **أباطيل وأسمار** ('Prattle and Idle Talk') by Abu Abdallah al-Sa'di appears to have been superseded by this encyclopaedia. The work **شبهات وتساؤلات حول الجهاد في جزيرة العرب** ('Uncertainties and Questions on the Jihad in the Arabian Peninsula'), published by *Sawt al-Jihād*, is actually an excerpt from this main source published separately during a time of pressure on the mujahideen for their militant activities in Saudi Arabia in 2004, which resulted in the deaths of many Muslims.

- Conditions permitting jihad (defining whether the country of the resident is infidel, the promotion of jihad as *fard 'ayn* (an 'individual's duty') over *fard kifāya*, (the 'duty of the community' alone) along with the punishments for neglect of this duty, and seeking permission from parents to go on jihad, etc.)

- The vexed issue of the *qā'idīn 'an al-jihād,* those 'holding back from the jihad,' as an indication of the failure, statistically, to ignite a mass movement

- Qualifications for a jihad, such as jihad with, or without, an official head of state, or one waged alongside ignorant Muslims (an argument brought up by conditions in Afghanistan) and on the need for the existence of the Caliphate before the declaration of a jihad, etc.

3) Points of core belief

Underpinning these in turn are the core ideological starting points. An appreciation of these is essential for the establishment of a list of priorities governing a counter-ideological strategy that targets the long-term radicalization process. The main points of contention are:

- The case for the *kufr*[†] of governments and the defense of the doctrine of *tawhīd al-hākimiyya*[‡]

- Non-*sharī'a* legislation

- The defense of certain categories of *takfīr*[§]

- The defense against the charge of *Kharijism*[**]

- The defense of the theory on *al-walā' wal-barā'*[††] and the conditionality of concluding alliances or peace agreements with non-Muslims

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[†] 'Disbelief'; the issue of the Islamic credentials of a Muslim ruler is commonly characterized by the *kufr dūna kufr* ('Disbelief short of full Disbelief') debate, whereby supporters of more liberal interpretations argue that policies of Muslim regimes that do not strictly conform to the maximalist conception of the radicals do not necessarily incur the charge of blasphemous disbelief.

[‡] 'Oneness of sovereignty', the doctrine whereby God is singled out as the starting point for all government and legislation. The doctrine is placed in direct opposition to non-Islamic legislative systems, with all the necessary ramifications for religious pluralism and international law. Islamist radicals lay particular stress on their belief that *tawhīd al-hākimiyya* does not constitute a category separate from 'monotheism' as such, fearing that this would open the door to subjective, modernizing tendencies leading to the legitimization of the nation state.

[§] The accusation of blasphemous disbelief, effectively a formula of excommunication. The seriousness of the charge is summed up by the *Hadīth*: "If a man calls his Muslim brother *kafir,* it applies to one of the two" (Bukhari), and has brought about an elaborate body of conditions to verify or mitigate it.

[**] The starting point is the Qur'ānic verse: وَمَن لَّمْ يَحْكُم بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللّهُ فَأُوْلَـئِكَ هُمُ الكَافِرُونَ : *'Whoso judgeth not by that which Allah hath revealed: such are the disbelievers'* [V,44], and refers to an incident in early Islamic history whereby the adjudication on an issue of succession following the death of the Prophet Muhammad was deemed to lack divine authority. Those who were intransigent on the issue of *kufr dūna kufr* (see the footnote above) 'exited' (*kharajū*) the arena, and from this is taken the term *khawārij* ('Kharijites'), denoting those whose excess takes them out of the fold of Islam.

[††] 'Alliance and Enmity', the regulation of foreign affairs in a state where prioritization is given to the Islamic or pro-Muslim credentials of the external state, over against other considerations (moral or financial obligation, economic interest, international treaties etc.).

- The attack on those whom the radicals charge with *Murji'ism* [‡‡]

A great deal of effort is put into contextualizing doctrinal debate in the above categories, on the premise that if an error can be established in one or more these core concepts the moral authority of the antagonist can be summarily dismissed.

The problem of takfīr

Of the above points of tension, the most troublesome for the mujahideen are those of *takfīr* and *Kharijism*, since the legal intricacies surrounding these issues clash with the visceral charges leveled by Jihadis against Muslim governments and members of the security services. *Takfīr* is a serious undertaking fraught with peril since at stake is the threat of legal proscription, which can have lethal consequences. Even scholars who are generally sympathetic to the mujahideen regularly break ranks over this issue and attempt to protect themselves from criticism from either side by hedging their argumentation. The result of this is a great deal of inter-scholar acrimony.

An example of this acrimony is the controversy over al-Tartousi's *takfīr* of the Syrian preacher al-Bouti mentioned above. In June this year al-Tartousi had to defend his excommunication of al-Bouti from criticism leveled at him from other Salafi preachers, even from someone of such impeccably radical credentials as Sheikh Salman al-'Awda, one of the founders of radical Jihadi Salafism. It is worth sampling this exchange for an illustration of the strident tones the issue engenders.

Answering a question from a student of Islamic law as to whether al-Tartousi was justified in his accusing al-Bouti of disbelief, Al-'Awda had replied that the "*takfīr* of a person's followers is a dangerous pitfall, whatsoever be their sin, even if there is disbelief contained in their articles." Al-'Awda went on to argue that imams in early Muslim history had not done this, that the first schism in Islam was caused by an incident of *takfīr*, and that the Sunna warns against this practice. Al-Tartousi pulls no punches in his response, labeling Al-'Awda as 'fraud' with views "unworthy of the Sheikh, his learned status, and the trust placed on his shoulders as a caller unto God." [§§] Al-Tartousi's argumentation follows typical Jihadi lines:

- The *takfīr* of an infidel whom God has judged to be an infidel is a legal obligation which neither needs 'assent' nor brooks hesitation.
- Not pronouncing *takfīr* in such cases constitutes a pitfall, since it means that *takfīr* can effectively never be pronounced.
- The first schism in Islam was a result of Kharijis pronouncing *takfīr* on the Companions, not of people pronouncing *takfīr* on the supporters of a criminal ruler.
- The Sunna does *not* warn against *takfīr* as such, but against pronouncing *takfīr* for more minor misdemeanors.

Al-Tartousi then goes on to cite many instances of *takfīr* in Muslim history to prove his point. The bitterness of such exchanges points to *takfīr* being a core issue in the struggle for the soul of the Muslim community, since it performs the function of an Islamic

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[‡‡] An opprobrious term used by Jihadis to denote 'those who defer' and state that a Muslim is a Muslim due to his faith, not to his acts. Hence, under *murji'ism*, a Muslim co-operating with the infidel is still a Muslim, even though his actions are objectionable. The application of this doctrine to the reality of modern politics is self-evident.

[§§] Al-Tartousi: **الرد على سلمان العودة في مسألة تكفير أخطاء فادحة لا تليق بالشيخ، ولا بمكانته العلمية، ولا بالأمانة الملقاة على عاتقة كداعية إلى الله الأعيان** ('Refutation of Salman al-'Awda on the Question of the *Takfīr* of Collaborators'), June 7, 2006.

shibboleth, distinguishing the level of purism and commitment to the radical cause. But if the term is a powerful weapon against the Muslim establishment in the hands of the Jihadis, it also has a highly fragmenting influence on the constituency they are attempting to win over. From the beginnings of the Islamic Awakening, or even earlier in the era of Abu al-'Alā al-Mawdudi in the 1930s, the issue of the abuse of *takfīr* was considered the single most destructive element to the cause of radical Islamic renewal.[23]

The struggle for legitimacy

The Jihadi intellectual framework is rooted in the quest for authenticity. This preoccupation defines the parameters of the polemical debates, powers the quest for legitimacy, and conditions the criteria for establishing what constitutes legal authority. Given that the verdict in a contest between scholarly protagonists hangs on the satisfactory demonstration of this authority, it is not surprising that the methodological framework behind this demonstration is the subject of vigorous dispute.

For instance, the mujahideen are engaged in a re-education program for Islamic society. Does this mean that they are introducing concepts new to Islam's 1,400-year tradition? Are they *innovators*? This is the thrust of the traditionalists' counter-attack on Jihadi scholars. For any *ibdā'* ('innovation') that is imported into what is held to be a perfect and divinely ordained legal order must of necessity be heretical. Anti-Jihadi scholars such as Rabi' bin Hadi al-Madkhali regularly attempt to cut the Jihadis off at the knees with the accusation that they are *mubdi'īn* ('innovators').[24] In addition, parodying the phrase made famous by Sayyid al-Qutb [***] ("he who does not declare an infidel to be an infidel, is therefore himself an infidel"), they argue that "whoever does not declare the innovator to be an innovator, then he is an innovator." Faced with this argument, Jihadi scholars do not dispute the heretical status of *ibdā'* (since they cannot), only whether they themselves are guilty of it.

In response, Jihadis write off this tendency as *murji'ism* (see note above). Those who hold to this doctrine downgrade major infidelity to 'minor Disbelief', resist exclusively implementing legislation by the *shari'a*, condone alliances with infidels, and turn a blind eye to infringements of Islamic law on the assumption of the sinner's ignorance of its stipulations. All of this, in their view, is motivated by a craven desire to appease Muslim governments and win their (often financial) patronage. On a more technical level, Jihadi protagonists attempt to undermine the credibility of their opponents' legal authorities while criticizing them for doing the same thing.

The struggle for legitimacy is an area that warrants the closest examination since of all the arenas of contention between the shades of traditionalist, Salafi, and Salafi-Jihadi doctrine, the demonstration of legal *bona fides* impacts most on the protagonists' claims for authenticity and the moral high ground.

Rivalry from outside the Islamic spectrum

Jihadism in Syria has to deal with cultural legacies that not only compete with, but also undermine, the Islamic message. Since the contours of this debate are more readily available to the researcher and cover more familiar ground, this synopsis will summarize the challenges.

The challenge of nationalism

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri[25] noted ruefully that when secular, pan-Arab nationalist thinkers became involved in the Jihadi Movement, the message of jihad was distorted by a Baathist message. The experience of the Muslim Brotherhood mentioned earlier is also a conspicuous example of this. Mindful of the dangers to the movement, Jihadi ideologues are strenuous in their

[***] Author of a number of signal works on jihad, and a symbol—positively or negatively—of the new jihadist culture.

denunciation of identities that are prioritized above identity as a Muslim. Targeting and repudiating *wataniyya* ('nationalism') presents little in the way of conceptual challenge, since for their purposes the Jihadis define *wataniyya* in the narrow sense of 'glorification of the ruling regime', and hence personalize the issue to the behavior of individuals and a party.[26] However, while they can make condemnations against political reform, corruption, and the absolute domination of the Baath party by issuing of denunciatory *fatwās*,[27] the legacy of a decades-long investment by the Damascus regime in the cultures of pan-Arabism and Syrian identity presents a more resilient target. Radical ideologues have had to strenuously argue that they are not engaged in an act of dissolving ethnic, tribal, or regional identities, or of devaluing love of one's homeland. Rather, they contend that they are fighting manifestations of ignorant clannishness which conflict with the Islamic call to *al-walā' wal-barā'* (see note above), and which upset the distinction of alliances and enmities calibrated on the basis of a group's Islamic credentials.[28] The reality of 'what comes after' occupies the Jihadis little. The argument that undermining the regime will cause *fitna* ("upheaval"), destroy livelihoods, and expose Syria to its enemies can be waved aside by the same prioritization of the interests of Islam over individuals:

> If you compare the aims and demands of *tawhīd* with the aims and demand of safety and security, or any other aims or demands, the aims, demands and welfare of *tawhīd* must take precedence. This is what the text of the Qur'ān, the Sunna, and the consensus of the [Islamic] Nation's scholars stipulate.[29]

Sub-nationalisms have equally obstructed the path of Jihadism. Adding to the terrain of religious diversity resistant to the prospects of Islamic radicalism—Alawites, Christians, and Druze who make up almost a quarter of the population—fully one in ten Syrians is a Kurd and the dominant Sunni denomination includes a sizeable portion of rural Bedouin. The lack of attention given to securing the participation of ethnic minorities and tribes formed another part of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's diagnosis of Jihadi failure in Syria, in that the government successfully co-opted these groups and closed them off to radicalism.[30]

Cultural competition

A number of further irritants stand in the way of radicalism's progress. The pull of Western cultural patterns is proving highly seductive to the youthful constituency the radicals are attempting to appeal to, producing the same effects conservatives in Iran refer to as *Gharbzadegī* ('Westoxication'). Its influence penetrates even to the core of Islamic *da'wā,* as al-Tartousi lamented in his treatise denouncing the preaching methods of Amr Khalid (see above), with his use of colloquial language, mixed audiences, and the message of tolerance and respect for religious pluralism. However, its most threatening manifestation is the apparently inexorable progress of the secularist mindset. Whereas in the past Islamist radicals could target secularism as part of its opposition to the governing Baathist ideology, economic globalization and media proliferation is dispersing the target. The resulting frustration spawns regular diatribes from Islamic conservatives of all shades, but the Jihadis are particularly alive to the threat. For the radical scholars the problem is the growing cultural defeatism of the nation in the face of the advance of the West. "Defeats take various forms and guises," argues al-Tartousi:

> The most grievous in terms of destructiveness and influence on the peoples and nations are the intellectual and cultural defeats, defeats which afflict them in their creed and their identity. Whenever a nation is defeated intellectually and culturally …it loses the element of resistance, which defends itself from all the ailments and forms of external attack, be they material or spiritual! [31]

The defeated may be the liberal freethinkers, the *zanādiqa,* who "speak of 'socialism,' 'democracy', 'ethnicity' and 'nationality,' and other heathen slogans which make man subservient to other men." Or they may even be the religious scholars themselves, who are proving no more immune to the disease:

> They prioritize corrupt Reason over sound Tradition … They are led astray by the scholasticism, philosophy, and logic they were brought up with, and they set these above the science of the Qur'ān and the Sunna, and delve into things that are not permitted to delve into.[32]

This is a threat to Jihadism of an entirely different order from the contest over the sources of scholarly authority and the demonstration of religious authenticity. For this struggle the Jihadi radicals possess fewer and far less honed intellectual armaments. Bereft of the familiar dueling ground of the Islamic textual tradition, where the discourse of the 'defeated scholars' is now one of interpretation and rationalism, they are reduced to trading insults and employing scare tactics:

> Beware of them and warn others about them and their diseases. [Warn them against] mixing with them or attending their gatherings, or listening to them or reading them. They are a leprosy, a cancer, a deadly AIDS. Scarcely anyone who comes near them is safe from a symptom, or contagion or disease that can overwhelm them and cause them to perish, so that he loses both his faith and his life! [33]

This stridency is interesting. Sadiq al-Azm, a Syrian professor of philosophy, noted the anxiety powering the denunciations: "Fundamentalists believe this is the final confrontation," he states, "if the modernization of states continues like this, what is there to prevent Islam from eventually becoming like Christianity in Europe? They feel that if they don't stand up now and draw a line, that's it."[34] The vulnerability of Jihadism to rationalist interpretations and the lack of effective tools to thwart it is a point of great interest for counter-ideology.

The effectiveness of Syrian suppression

The events of the past two years indicate that in terms of physical interdiction, the Syrian security forces have been highly effective against Islamist militancy in the country. Certain elements in the Syrian success were due to circumstances unique to the contest, in particular the localization of an uprising in the city of Hama in 1982 after the declaration by the Muslim Brotherhood of 'total war' against the Damascus regime. Both al-Suri and al-Tartousi have lamented the organizational failure and indiscipline which led to the movement being left vulnerable to infiltration.

Since the allied intervention in Iraq, the recrudescence of militant Jihadi activity in Syria (much of which is connected with mujahideen attempting to transit through Syria to Iraq) has not succeeded in establishing momentum. Indeed the complaints of Jihadi forum participants about collaborators among Muslim groups in Syria previously trusted with expediting the transit is indicative of the continued difficulty of the terrain. Already by summer 2005 the mujahideen were cautioning sympathizers, via the Jihadi forums, against assuming that Syria's anti-USA position would render the terrain safe. One posting titled 'How to get to Iraq' was careful to warn that many volunteers had "fallen into the hands of the Tyrants [i.e. Syrian security forces] before entering Iraq, or have been killed in entire groups trying to make entry, without (having the chance of] presenting any danger to the American forces." Warnings continued on the *Minbar Suriya al-Islami* site against the ingenious intelligence techniques of the Damascus regime, including the existence of "some groups in (refugee] camps which are directed by Syrian intelligence while their members thought that they were serving the jihad."[†††] They went on to explain that even if Syria presented a supportive environment for the mujahideen "this does not go beyond the popular level, through its Sunni majority acting in support of fellow Sunni mujahideen in Iraq." [‡‡‡]

[†††] *Minbar Suriya al-Islami,* July 4, 2005: Tالحذر كل الحذر ('Maximum Warning').

[‡‡‡] *Minbar Suriya al-Islami,* June 14, 2005: نصيحة للإخوة الذين يتمنون الجهاد في العراق ('Advice to brothers wishing to perform jihad in Iraq').

The complaints of Jihadi indiscipline made in earlier years have resurfaced. As reports hit the world press of armed clashes between security forces and pockets of mujahideen in Hama and Hasaka, further postings appeared asking for local Islamists to maintain a low profile lest their actions cause the Syrian government to crack down, and thus close an important gateway into Iraq for the mujahideen. One note requested that the mujahideen "act for the sake of the faith and refrain from ignoble individualistic acts, since nothing harms the Jihadi recovery more than this type of individual behavior which is not based on judgment or knowledge."[§§§]

The lack of Jihadi momentum in Syria is proving dispiriting. Just how effective the Syrian tactics have been was summed up by a participant in a Jihadi forum in July 2006 who ruefully noted how over the last two years "more than 20 (armed] confrontations have taken place…most of them (with the mujahideen) on the defensive, and the result, unfortunately, has been catastrophic for the mujahideen." He could therefore see no alternative but to hope "for the birth of al-Qaeda (in the region) to take the reins of initiative and embark on long term, bold and calculated operations that will deliver a strong propaganda message." The participant then went on to outline in detail the Syrian intelligence techniques had done most to damage the mujahideen since the beginning of the year:

- The inauguration of a number of counterterrorism security branches, such as the Information Security Department
- The modernization of security devices, the importation of new skills and training, and new (model 2000 and above) vehicles, albeit on a small scale
- The placing of an earthwork barrier to the height of 3-6 meters throughout the length of the Syrian Iraqi border
- The pressure exerted on estate agents to hand over full information and passport photographs of any foreigner residing in the area; this is a blow against guest houses and refuges of mujahid brothers who are awaiting their turn to enter Iraq
- Flying patrols on all roads leading to frontier villages and the interception, without warning, of coaches and inspection of all passengers
- Large-scale tightening up on mobile phone lines and the non-sale of any Sim card without the production of a passport or identity card photo in the presence of the subject of the photo
- Tightening up on the airports, hotels, physical education classes, and general recreation areas
- Rejection by telecom companies of any call using connections from the street where the number of the caller is not recognized, (a method) which the brothers used to employ all the time
- Pressure on internet cafes to allow surveillance and other security measures. [****]

Since figures on the number of Islamist militants in custody are not published, the tally given by the forum participant—"some 400 both Syrian and foreign, at the lowest estimate"—may serve as a pointer to the scale of the defeat.

[§§§] *Minbar Suriya al-Islami,* July 3, 2005: Tنصيحة إلي جند الشام ('Advice to the *Jund al-Shām'*).

[****] *Al-Tajdeed* forum: امل في ولادة تنظيم القاعدة في بلاد الشام واجراءات المخابرات السورية في اضعاف الجهاد في المنطقة July 25 2006.

Despite such indications, the sense that the Jihadi flame in Syria is far from extinguished may be judged from measures taken both in the interests of immediate national security and long-term regime survival. In response to these two imperatives, the Syrian regime has not just the suppressed, but also expelled a number of Islamic militants, effectively exporting to its neighbors their destabilizing potential. While this has been recognized as a point of contention in the Iraqi arena, the warning by President Bashar al-Asad that some members of al-Qaeda have been fleeing Syria toward Lebanon provoked cynicism.[††††]

Aside from issues of political will or expediency, a factor of far greater significance for the prospects of the contest with Islamic militancy is the inability of the regime to make significant headway in countering the replenishing source of the militancy, the Jihadi ideology. This is partly due to the intangible nature of the target, but also to developments in the present political environment that are weakening the government's prospects for countering the culture of militancy.

Syria in the balance

Even though Islamic militancy has been contained in Syria, the government's efforts to contain it have progressively widened the spectrum of Islam's political influence in the country, to the point of becoming a determinant in the debate.

Since 1982 massive investment by the government in more politically quietist forms of Islam dampened the overt political voices of Islamism but also reinforced an Islamic identity that is intrinsically hostile to the official secularism of the state. At the same time, weakening public support has pushed the regime to curtail the only other competition to Islamism: secular reformist currents. Co-opting elements of the Islamic current, as the regime appears to be attempting, threatens to prove both internally divisive and counter-productive in a climate of mounting frustration with corruption and economic stagnation.

With the rise of Islamic-tinged politics that has swept over the Middle East during the last two decades and the weakening gravitational pull of Arab nationalism, the Damascus regime has found itself with little alternative but to accommodate this swell. While it may be premature to claim, as some clerics have done,[35] that the regime at Damascus is on its way to abandoning secularism as its rallying slogan, it is undoubtedly true that its room to maneuver is severely limited. From its inception, the regime at Damascus has found itself in the contradictory position of having to assuage mass opinion in Syria through talking up its commitment to Sunnism—a doctrine that has little room for its Alawite minority confession.[36] One manifestation of this has been to award near total autonomy to the religious establishment in matters of religious education. As a result, the curriculum remains traditional, rigid, and unresponsive to the promotion of tolerance for religious traditions other than Sunnism. Nor is their anything in the system that challenges the most conservative interpretations of the faith. There is, at present, an uneasy confessional peace created by a studied silence on the subject of the religious orientation of the President and his regime. From the perspective of the Syrian school student trained by the curriculum, there are effectively no Druze, Ismailis, Shi'ites, or Alawis in the country, the religious spectrum being defined by only two denominations: Islam and Christianity. The implications of this exclusivity is that the school system is not priming its students to support an official public policy of religious inclusion and tolerance when the Alawite regime (which has had an interest in promoting these elements) is eventually removed from the scene.[37]

The Middle East crises

Syria, axiomatically, stands positioned at the center of the political fallout from the US and allied policies in the War on Terror, the intervention in Iraq, and the festering Israeli-

[††††] Prominent Lebanese politician Walid Jumblatt remarked: "When Assad spoke of Syria pursuing Al-Qaeda members, leading them to flee toward Lebanon, this reminded me of what is going on in Iraq, and the Al-Qaeda members fleeing Syria toward Iraq and killing Iraqis and causing chaos." *Daily Star* of Lebanon, July 3 2006.

Palestinian conflict. The recent perceived successes of Hizbullah in the contest with the Israeli Defense Force may not please the Sunni Jihadis on doctrinal grounds[38], but as mass demonstrations of support in Syrian cities illustrate, the public mood has no problem with identifying military success with religious motivation. The change can be seen at the highest levels. Sheikh Salah Kuftaro, the son of the politically quietist Grand Mufti mentioned earlier, had once banished political Islam from the mosque. He now presents Hamas and Hizbullah as "a path young Muslims should aim to follow" and has explicitly declared that jihad is the calling of all Muslims.[39]

If this comment can be taken as symptomatic of the rise in the religious temperature in Syria, and assuming the continued weakening of secular reform currents, the question is what form Islamism's quest for expression in the country will take. At the moment, the form being promoted by Damascus is one of an 'Arabist-Islamism' on the Hamas and Hizbullah model, a visible compound of Syrian nationalism, anti-Americanism, and Arab renewal through the filter of Islam, the compound perhaps best symbolized by the Arab Socialist Baath Party's hosting of a conference of Islamic parties.[40] However, such currents remain closely conditioned by political events. Parallel to this development, and drawing sustenance from it, is the emergence of a type of ideology which is impervious to political vicissitudes. The Arabist-Islamist formula is as yet an unproven tactic. It is not at all clear, should the regime fall, that the 'Arabist-Islamist' model of political Islam would be in a position to control the energies of radical Jihadi Islam. Hamas receives no less opprobrium from the Jihadi scholars than Hizbullah for its dabbling with the Western political game.[41] If and when this association of Islamism with Arabism weakens, the pressures on the regime will increase, to the benefit of the Islamist factor, which will take advantage of the progressive Islamization of the educational curricula. Should the task fall to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood—a weaker organization than its Egyptian counterpart and resourced by a far less wealthy constituency drawn from the lower middle class—it may simply find it beyond its capacity to control the more extreme Islamist currents.

Conclusion

Syria's experience with Jihadis is of particular interest in that, for either camp, the contest has been played out in the least favorable of conditions. The lessons to be drawn therefore have the virtue of robustness. For the Damascus regime, the response to the Jihadi challenge had to take place in the context of increasing international isolation where intelligence co-operation was minimized. For the mujahideen this was the Arab world's first experience of Islamist militants taking on a modern established military power through armed rebellion. The lessons of this failed attempt, as both al-Suri and al-Tartousi demonstrate, have become the foundation for more considered tactical analysis by Jihadis preparing for the next stage. However, a major success scored by the mujahideen has been the forcing of a regime—in particular one as overtly secular as that at Damascus—to ride the coattails of political Islam. This—the Islamist command of the debating arena and Syria's adoption of a new political vocabulary—constitutes a clear victory. Out of the jaws of defeat, the mujahideen have found a tactic that Syria's organs of security and law enforcement will not be able to suppress. We are now in uncharted territory.

Notes

[1] For definitions of terms, see the "Executive Report," *Militant Ideology Atlas* (www.ctc.usma.edu/atlas).

[2] See his **ملاحظات حول التجربة الجهادية في سوريا** ('Observations on the Jihadi Experience in Syria') which is part of a larger work entitled: **الثورة الإسلامية الجهادية في سوريا** ('The Islamic Jihadi Revolution in Syria').

[3] Among his numerous works on the subject, see **أسباب فشل بعض الحركات الجهادية في عملية التغيير** and **عندما ينزل البلاء بالمجاهدين**. See also: **هؤلاء أخافهم على الجهاد والمجاهدين**.

[4] On this, see al-Tartousi's **الجماعات الجهادية بين الاعتراف بالخطأ والتراجع عن الثوابت** ('Jihad Groups, Errors and Compromises') in full text.

[5] Al-Tartousi, responding during an open conversation on a jihadi forum (**المأسدة الجهادية**, Jan 31 2005).

[6] *Harmony & Disharmony, Exploiting al-Qa'ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities,* CTC, West Point, p.31.

[7] The **نوع من الجهاد لا نريده** statement (from *Minbar al-Tawhīd wal-Jihād*) and the document, dated October 27, 2004: **هؤلاء أخافهم على الجهاد والمجاهدين**.

[8] Al-Suri, *Observations.* With the failure to develop a public relations campaign to communicate Mujahid Revolutionary Theory, there was no organized public relations campaign, so that lower level members were the primary mouthpiece of the movement.

[9] Al-Suri, *Observations.*

[10] Works on this subject abound, cf. **التربية أولاً .. أم الجهاد** ('Education first, or Jihad?') by al-Tartousi.

[11] Of al-Tartousi's works see **دعاة أم طغاة** ('Preachers, or Tyrants?') and **حكم الصلاة وراء الأئمة الذين يدعون للحاكم المرتد** ('On Those who Pray behind Imams Supporting the Apostate Ruler'), as well as **ملاحظات وتعليقات على 'بيان حول اتصالات النظام السوري مع بعض الإسلاميين' للشيخ سرور** ('On Sheikh Surour's Declaration Concerning the Regime's Links with Some Islamists').

[12] Cf Al-Tartousi: **هذا هو البوطي فاحذروه** ('This is al-Bouti: Beware of Him').

[13] Examples are: Abu Qatāda, **هجران مساجد الضرار** ('The Avoidance of Mosques of Detriment') and al-Tartousi, **صفة مساجد الضرار التي يجب اعتزالها** ('Description of Mosques of Detriment that Must be Shunned').

[14] From a detailed discussion on the forum *Minbar al-Shām al-Islāmī,* July 7 2006.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Al-Naji (*Management of Savagery*) highlighted in particular the baleful influence of non-Salafi clerics in challenging the legitimacy of Salafism and confusing the youth.

[17] **إنه يستثني الحديث – ولو بالإشارة – ما يجب على المؤمنين من العداوة والبغضاء نحو الكافرين المشركين المحادين لله ولرسوله** in al-Tartousi:**سؤال وجواب حول أسلوب عمرو خالد الدعوي** ('Question and Answer on Amr Khalid's Preaching Methods'), October 8 2003.

[18] **لا لكي يظهرالحق من الباطل فيُتبع.. لا؛ وإنما لتعايش الحق مع الباطل في ثوبٍ واحد، ولكي تختلط المبادئ والمفاهيم والقيم.. ومن دون أن يكون للحق تمايزه ووجوده المستقل** in Al-Tartousi, **احذر ثقافة المهزومين** ('Beware of the Culture of the Defeated'), November 22, 2000.

[19] The quandary of election processes among students of Islamic law has produced at least one treatise. Cf. Al-Tartousi, **حكم المشاركة في المجالس الطلابية في الجامعات** ('On Participating in Student Groups in Universities'), *Minbar al-Tawhīd wal-Jihād* forum.

[20] Cf. Abd al-Satir Al Husayn: **تحذير البرية من نشاط الشيعة في سورية** ('Warning Mankind of Shi'a Activity in Syria'), *Minbar al-Shām al-Islāmī* forum, May 8, 2006; Al-Tartousi: **التعاون مع الرافضة في الجهاد ضد أعداء الإسلام** ('Co-

operating with the Shi'a Against Islam's Enemies'), *Minbar al-Tawhīd wal-Jihād* forum, and **حزب الله اللبناني.. وتصدير المذهب الشيعي الرافضي** ('The Lebanese Hizbullah and the Export of the Rejectionist Shi'ite Doctrine'), February 2, 2004.

[21] **حتى لو خالفت المنهج الصواب في أمور علمية** *Management of Savagery,* p.34. The full translation of Naji's book is available online: www.ctc.usma.edu/naji.asp

[22] A popular radical treatise is Abd al-Qadir Abd al-Khaliq's **فضائح الصوفية** ('Scandals of Sufism') from which the points of tension in the text have been taken. Syrian examples include: Abu Dujana: **حقيقة الصوفية** ('The Truth about Sufism'), *Minbar al-Shām al-Islāmī* forum, and al-Tartousi: **حقيقة الكرامات المزعومة للمتصوفة** ('The Truth about the Claimed Miracles of the Sufis'), *Minbar al-Tawhīd wal-Jihād* forum.

[23] "Whether the cause of this mischief is narrow-mindedness with good intentions, or selfishness, envy and self-seeking with malevolent intentions, the fact remains that probably nothing else has done the Muslims as much harm as this has done" (Mawdudi, *Fitna-I Takfir* article in the magazine *Tarjuman al-Quran,* May 1935).

[24] See Brachman and McCants, "Stealing al-Qaeda's Playbook," *SCT*, 29: 313-14.

[25] Al-Suri, *Observations*.

[26] See this treatment in al-Tartousi's **النظام السوري .. والوطنية** ('The Syrian regime…and Nationalism'), January 5, 2006.

[27] Cf. Al-Tartousi's *fatwā* on the Ba'th as a '*kāfir party'* (*Minbar al-Tawhīd wal-Jihād* forum).

[28] This is the argument of al-Tartousi's **العروبة والإسلام** ('Arabism and Islam'), May 6, 2003.

[29] Al-Tartousi: **التوحيد .. قبل الأمن والأمان** ('Tawhīd … Before Safety and Security') December 15, 2004 , p2.

[30] Al-Suri, *Observations*, 9,10.

[31] Al-Tartousi, **احذر ثقافة المهزومين** ('Beware of the Culture of the Defeated'), November 22, 2000.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.: **فإنهم الجذام .. والسرطان .. والإيدز القاتل .. لا يكاد يسلم من اقترب إليهم من شبهة أو عدوى أو مرض قد يكون سبباً في القضاء عليه وهلاكه ..فيخسر دينه ودنياه..!**

[34] *'Syrian reformer rankles Islamists',* Nicholas Blandford, CS Monitor, January 13, 2005.

[35] Sheikh Wahbi Zubaydi, Ibid.

[36] If the aim has been to divert criticism, this has singularly failed, as a glance at the volume of anti-Alawite commentary, both on jihadi forums and in publicly released statements from Muslim radicals demonstrates. Examples are: Abu Mus'ab al-Suri: **أهل السنة في الشام في مواجهة النصيرية والصليبية واليهود** ('The Sunnis in Syria confronting the Nusayris [Alawis], Crusaders and Jews'); Abu Dujana's 53-page **(** حقيقة الطائفة النُصيرية الباطنية (العلوية ('The Truth about the esoteric Nusayri (Alawi) Sect'); the *fatwā* condemnation by Hamūd bin 'Uqla al-Shu'aybī and the frequent reference by Jihadi commentators to the work by Ibn Taymiyya on the Alawis and the Druze.

[37] J.M Landis, *Islamic Education in Syria: Undoing Secularism,* from a series on *"Constructs of Inclusion and Exclusion: Religion and Identity Formation in Middle Eastern School Curricula",* Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, November 2003.

[38] The popular success of Hizbullah is complicating matters for the Sunni extremists, as the large number of forum postings excoriating Hizbullah (often recast in the perjorative forms *'Hizb Allāt'* or *'Hizb Shaytān'*) indicates. As early as February 2004 al-Tartousi was issuing statements warning against the influence of Hizbullah: حزب الله اللبناني.. وتصدير المذهب الشيعي الرافضي ('The Lebanese Hizbullah … and the Exportation of the Rejectionist Shi'ite Creed'), and Sheikh Hamid al-'Alī has pitched in with more than one *fatwā* of condemnation.

[39] R. Sinderbrand, *Syria Stays Above the Fray*, www.slate.com, July 27, 2006.

[40] Z. Haydar, **البعث يستضيف مؤتمر للأحزاب الإسلامية** *Al-Safir* newspaper, April 6, 2004.

[41] See al-Tartousi, **حماس .. والنفق المُظلم** ('Hamas … and the Dark Tunnel'), March 5 2006.