

UNDERSTANDING ISLAMISM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	i
I. ISLAM, ISLAMISM AND ISLAMIC ACTIVISM.....	1
II. THE MAIN CURRENTS OF SUNNI ISLAMIC ACTIVISM.....	3
III. SUNNI POLITICAL ISLAMISM: <i>HARAKAT AND HIZB</i>	6
IV. SUNNI MISSIONARY ACTIVISM: <i>AL-DA'WA</i>	8
V. SUNNIS ON THE WAR PATH: <i>JIHAD</i>	14
VI. SHIITE ISLAMIC ACTIVISM.....	18
A. BACKGROUND.....	18
B. THE LEADERSHIP OF THE SCHOLARS	19
C. THE BASES OF VARIETY IN SHIITE ISLAMISM	20
VII. CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS OF THE DIVERSITY OF ISLAMIC ACTIVISM FOR THE "WAR ON TERRORISM"	24

UNDERSTANDING ISLAMISM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reacting to the spectacular and violent events of 11 September 2001, many Western observers and policy-makers have tended to lump all forms of Islamism together, brand them as radical and treat them as hostile. That approach is fundamentally misconceived. Islamism -- or Islamic activism (we treat these terms as synonymous) -- has a number of very different streams, only a few of them violent and only a small minority justifying a confrontational response. The West needs a discriminating strategy that takes account of the diversity of outlooks within political Islamism; that accepts that even the most modernist of Islamists are deeply opposed to current U.S. policies and committed to renegotiating their relations with the West; and that understands that the festering Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the war occupation of Iraq, and the way in which the "war against terrorism" is being waged all significantly strengthen the appeal of the most virulent and dangerous jihadi tendencies.

In understanding the different streams of Islamic activism, the starting point is to distinguish between Shiite and Sunni Islamism. The concept of "political Islam" first appeared in the wake of the 1979 Iranian revolution, with Shiite activism then viewed as the most worrying threat. In fact, however, because Shiism is the minority variant of Islam (Sunnis constitute over 80 per cent of Muslims) and because Shiites typically are minorities in the states in which they find themselves, the most widespread and natural form of Shiite activism has been communal -- defending the interests of the Shiite community in relation to other populations and to the state itself. For this reason, and also because of the leading political role played by scholars and religious authorities, (*ulama*) Shiite Islamism has remained unified to a remarkable degree and has not fragmented into conflicting forms of activism as has Sunni Islamism.

Sunni Islamism -- on which most Western emphasis is today placed, and about which most fears are held -- is widely viewed as uniformly fundamentalist, radical, and threatening to Western interests. Yet it is not at all monolithic. On the contrary, it has crystallised into three main distinctive types, each with its own worldview, modus operandi and characteristic actors:

- *Political*: the Islamic political movements (*al-harakât al-islamiyya al-siyassiyya*), exemplified by the Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt and its offshoots elsewhere (including Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait, Palestine, Sudan and Syria) and by locally rooted movements such as the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*, AKP) in Turkey, and the Party for Justice and Development (*Parti pour la Justice et le Développement*, PJD) in Morocco, whose purpose is to attain political power at the national level. These now generally accept the nation-state, operate within its constitutional framework, eschew violence (except under conditions of foreign occupation), articulate a reformist rather than revolutionary vision and invoke universal democratic norms. The characteristic actor is the party-political militant.
- *Missionary*: the Islamic missions of conversion (*al-da'wa*), which exists in two main variants exemplified by the highly structured Tablighi movement on the one hand and the highly diffuse Salafiyya on the other. In both cases political power is not an objective; the overriding purpose is the preservation of the Muslim identity and the Islamic faith and moral order against the forces of unbelief, and the characteristic actors are missionaries (*du'ah*), and the *'ulama*.
- *Jihadi*: the Islamic armed struggle (*al-jihad*), which exists in three main variants: internal (combating nominally Muslim regimes considered impious); irredentist (fighting to redeem land ruled by non-Muslims or under occupation); and global (combating the West). The characteristic actor is, of course, the fighter (*al-mujahid*).

All these varieties of Sunni activism are attempts to reconcile tradition and modernity, to preserve those aspects of tradition considered to be essential by adapting in various ways to modern conditions; all select from tradition, borrow selectively from the West and adopt aspects of modernity. Where they differ is in how they conceive the principal problem facing the Muslim

world, and what they believe is necessary, possible and advisable to do about it.

Political Islamists make an issue of Muslim misgovernment and social injustice and give priority to political reform to be achieved by political action (advocating new policies, contesting elections, etc.). Missionary Islamists make an issue of the corruption of Islamic values (*al-qiyam al-islamiyya*) and the weakening of faith (*al-iman*) and give priority to a form of moral and spiritual rearmament that champions individual virtue as the condition of good government as well as of collective salvation. Jihadi Islamists make an issue of the oppressive weight of non-Muslim political and military power in the Islamic world and give priority to armed resistance.

Which of these three main outlooks will prevail in the medium and longer term is of great importance to the Muslim world and to the West. While the West in general and the U.S. in particular ought to be modest about their ability to shape the debate among Islamists, they also should be aware of how their policies affect it. By adopting a sledge-hammer approach which refuses to differentiate between modernist and fundamentalist varieties of Islamism, American and European policy-makers risk provoking one of two equally undesirable outcomes: either inducing the different strands of Islamic activism to band together in reaction, attenuating differences that might otherwise be fruitfully developed, or causing the non-violent and modernist tendencies to be eclipsed by the jihadis.

Cairo/Brussels, 2 March 2005

UNDERSTANDING ISLAMISM

I. ISLAM, ISLAMISM AND ISLAMIC ACTIVISM

Islamism is defined here, and will be in future Crisis Group reports, as synonymous with "Islamic activism", the active assertion and promotion of beliefs, prescriptions, laws, or policies that are held to be Islamic in character.¹ There are numerous currents of Islamism in this sense: what they hold in common is that they found their activism on traditions and teachings of Islam as contained in scripture and authoritative commentaries.

Western discourse has tended to represent Islamic activism as a more or less unitary phenomenon, whether labelled "Islamism" -- or "political Islam" or "Islamic fundamentalism", and to counterpose this phenomenon to the practice of Islam as religious belief by "ordinary Muslims". This tendency has intensified markedly in the context of the so-called "war against terrorism" declared by the U.S. in reaction to the 11 September 2001 attacks. To a large extent, this is understandable: in the wake of those attacks and of numerous others that struck Africa

¹ Earlier Crisis Group reporting generally defined Islamism more narrowly, as "Islam in political mode". But it has become apparent, as the discussion in the main text makes clear, that there were two problems with that definition. First, it presupposed that Islam per se is not political, whereas insofar as Islam is inherently interested in matters of governance, in fact it is. Secondly, it presupposed that all forms of Islamism are equally political, whereas in fact, there are significant distinctions in this regard between those forms that privilege political activism, missionary activity or violence. While past Crisis Group reporting on Islamism, particularly in a North African context, had begun to draw out the implications of the existence of different varieties of Islamism and of the evolutions within them, the present report takes the analysis a major step further. For that past reporting, see in particular Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefings, *Islamism in North Africa I: The Legacies of History*, 20 April 2004; *Islamism in North Africa II: Egypt's Opportunity*, 20 April 2004; Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°29, *Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria: Turning the Page*, 30 July 2004; also, Crisis Group Asia Report N°83, *Indonesia Background: Why Salafism and Terrorism Mostly Don't Mix*, 13 September 2004, and Crisis Group Middle East Report N°31, *Saudi Arabia Background: Who Are the Islamists?*, 21 September 2004.

and Asia over the last three years, the general phenomenon of Islamic activism was perceived to have mutated in an alarming way, taking the form of spectacularly violent terrorist movements attacking Western as well as non-Western targets. But this monolithic concept is erroneous in its assumptions and misleading in its policy prescriptions.

The most extreme instance of the tendency to lump all forms of Islamic activism together is the "clash of civilisations" thesis, which views the entire Muslim world, qua civilisation ("Islam"), as a single whole, as one problem and, by implication, target. But the same tendency is apparent in other, notionally less simplistic, theses regularly articulated by leading Western voices. A notable case in point is the dichotomy, often taken for granted by Western leaders, between on the one hand, Islam *qua* religion and its adherents -- "ordinary decent Muslims" for whom "Islam" is a matter of personal piety, not political commitment -- and, on the other hand, "Islamism" or "political Islam" -- by implication an affair of a minority of agitators exploiting the faith of their fellow-Muslims for political ends, stirring up resentment, constituting a problem for Western interests and "friendly" Muslim states alike. This dichotomy is misleading for several reasons.

First, it is premised on a view of Islam that is profoundly mistaken. Islam is not so much a religion of peace² as a religion of law.³ In this respect it is

² When President Bush described it in these terms in his address to a joint session of Congress on 21 September 2001 (invoking "the peaceful teachings of Islam" and reiterating that Islam's "teachings are good and peaceful"), he was criticised by Christian fundamentalists, who argued precisely the opposite, that Islam was inherently and essentially a warlike and aggressive faith. Both characterisations are equally tendentious and mistaken. Islam *qua* religion cannot accurately be stated to be either more or less "peaceful" than Christianity; both faiths have a militant conception of the struggle of Good versus Evil, and both have justified numerous wars in the name of God. The key difference between them, apart from the theological conflict between Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus and in the Trinity and Islam's rigorous monotheism, is that Islam is a religion that contains and transmits a framework of law held to be of divine origin and binding on all believers, in a way that -- the Ten Commandments and the like notwithstanding -- has no counterpart in Christianity.

much closer to Judaism and very unlike Christianity. To represent it as an essentially apolitical creed of peace (different messenger, same message) is to project onto it a feature which may, perhaps, be held to be (at least in theory) intrinsic to Christianity, but does not necessarily belong to other faiths and does not actually belong to Islam.⁴ Being a religion of law, Islam is inherently concerned with governance and so political in tendency.

Secondly, it attributes to "ordinary Muslims" a form of religious belief that is essentially a private matter.⁵ This view is unrealistic: it would be more accurate to say that, for the majority of Muslims, Islam is *an intrinsically public matter*, in that it not only postulates a *community* of believers (the *umma*) but also contains and transmits a corpus of legal prescriptions as well as moral injunctions and is, therefore, "the blueprint of a social order".⁶ This being so, there is a powerful tendency, however latent at times, for a large proportion of "ordinary Muslims" to be responsive to the proposition of activist minorities that the prescriptions of their religion should be reflected in the social mores, laws and form of government of the states in which they live. Thus the postulated antithesis between "ordinary Muslims" and Islamic activists is

flimsy and liable to break down under pressure. And it can safely be said that most, if not all, Muslim populations today are living under great pressure.

Thirdly, the conception of "political Islam" inherent in this dichotomy is unhistorical as well as self-serving. The term "political Islam" is an American coinage which came into circulation in the wake of the Iranian revolution. It implied or presupposed that an "apolitical Islam" had been the norm until Khomeini turned things upside down. In fact, Islam had been a highly politicised religion for generations before 1979. It only appeared to have become apolitical in the historically specific and short-lived era of the heyday of secular Arab nationalism between 1945 and 1970. But even during that period it is difficult to speak of apolitical Islam. Not only did Arab nationalist governments control the religious field and promote modernist and nationalist trends within Islam, but a key element of Western (and especially U.S.) policy in response to Arab nationalism from the early 1950s onwards was to support and encourage an alliance of conservative Muslim states, headed by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, in the promotion of a pro-Western pan-Islamism to counteract the Arab nationalism of Nasser's Egypt and those states broadly aligned with it (Algeria, Iraq, Libya, Syria, South Yemen).

³ This is intended as a statement of fact, not as a *definition* of Islam; there is no universally agreed definition. For practical purposes, what matters is what Muslims believe their religion to be, and this varies with circumstances and has changed over time. Several contemporary Muslim viewpoints would dispute an attempt to *define* Islam as a religion of law. Some Muslim intellectuals have played down or even tried to deny the significance of the legal prescriptions contained in scripture -- see Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London and New York, 1991), pp. 201-213 -- but this is very much a minority view. The popular Sufi tradition in Islam has given priority to the spiritual aspect of the faith and the (often mystical, gnostic) quest for individual knowledge of God over the worldly concern with mores and law. Unlike some modernist Muslim thinkers, however, the Sufi orders have not disputed the legal content of scripture, and it has accordingly been possible for prominent *'ulama* to be simultaneously doctors of Islamic law and members of Sufi orders.

⁴ Christianity began as a more or less persecuted Church within a political framework (the Roman Empire) which it did not control; Islam began as a community of belief determined to constitute itself into an independent polity, did so quickly, and then expanded at enormous speed, absorbing surrounding territories and populations into its framework of law and governance as well as belief. The dichotomy between God and Caesar fundamental to Christianity's attitude to politics throughout the formative first three centuries of its existence was wholly absent from the Muslim experience from the very outset.

⁵ This mistaken view of "ordinary Muslims" is, of course, the corollary of the mistaken conception of Islam itself mentioned above.

⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 1.

The concept of "political Islam" and its definition as a problem only occurred when Islamic politics began to articulate anti-Western or, more specifically, anti-American attitudes. There has, therefore, been confusion between the implied notion that "political Islam" represents a deviation from an apolitical norm (a notion which is historically inaccurate) and the tacitly understood (but concealed) notion that it is a deviation from a pro-Western political norm. In effect, "Islam" was only seen to be political when it was seen to be a threat.

Finally, the dichotomy assumes that "political Islam", "Islamism" or "Islamic fundamentalism" is internally undifferentiated for most practical purposes. It thus ignores the diversity of outlook, purpose and method which is actually to be found in Islamic activism. Instead, it postulates a simple dichotomy within an otherwise monolithic category between "radicals" and "moderates". This does not differentiate between alternative visions and policies so much as between the strength with which views are held. In practice, this usually boils down to distinguishing between those with whom Western governments feel they can "do business" (the moderates) and those with whom they cannot or will not. This tends to get translated into the distinction between those who are susceptible to co-optation and those who take their beliefs in earnest, cannot be bought off and who -- on the generally unexamined assumption

that they cannot be tolerated -- must accordingly be confronted.⁷

The principal weakness of this analytical distinction is that it fails to notice that the most important factor differentiating varieties of Islamic activism is not so much the relative militancy or moderation with which they express their convictions, but rather the nature of the convictions they hold. These include different diagnoses of the problems faced by Muslim societies, different views of Islamic law, and different conceptions both of the appropriate spheres (political, religious, military) in which to act and of the kinds of action that are legitimate and appropriate, and accordingly entail divergent and often competing purposes. This differentiation is distinct in kind from that traditionally observed between Sunni and Shiite varieties of Islam.⁸ It is between forms of contemporary Islamic activism rather than between historic religious traditions; and its existence, in particular within Sunni activism, is a relatively recent development that is not complete but rather a continuing process.

II. THE MAIN CURRENTS OF SUNNI ISLAMIC ACTIVISM

The various tendencies or currents of Sunni activism which can and should be distinguished today were often combined and confused as recently as a decade ago. Differences which were overlaid by common doctrines and purposes in the past have acquired a new salience, and divisions have crystallized as strategic choices have had to be made under the pressure of events and in the light of experience. Our categories need to catch up with what has been happening if we are to be able to conceive it accurately and analyse its policy implications effectively.

Abstracting from the complications of local circumstances and the nuances these entail, three main currents of activism within contemporary Sunni Islam can be distinguished.⁹

The first of these, addressed in Section III below, might reasonably be called *political Islamism*, in that it comprises movements which give priority to political action over religious proselytism, seek power by political rather than violent means and characteristically organise themselves as political parties. The leading examples are the Muslim Brothers in Egypt and their numerous affiliates or derivatives elsewhere, notably in Jordan and Algeria, but also as far afield as Indonesia, where the Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*) falls into this category. Other varieties of political Islamism include the *Jamaat i Islami* in Pakistan, the AKP in Turkey, and the PJD in Morocco, all of which are the products of developments external to and independent of the Muslim Brothers' tradition. The main exception to the general rule of non-violence is where a political Islamist movement finds itself operating under conditions of foreign occupation and thus engages in resistance (including armed resistance); the archetype is the Palestinian movement *Hamas*.¹⁰

The second current, addressed in Section IV below, is that of *missionary activism*, which is both revivalist and fundamentalist. Movements in this category typically eschew explicit political activism, neither seek political power nor describe themselves as parties,

⁷ As Fawaz Gerges has recorded, the principal division in debates over "Political Islam" in the U.S. prior to 11 September 2001 was between "the confrontationalists" and "the accommodationists"; see Gerges, *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (Cambridge, 1999), chapter 2. Ironically, the radical-moderate dichotomy postulated by Western governments thus tends to resolve itself into essentially the same dichotomy -- between "believers" (*al-mu'minun*) and "hypocrites" (*al-munafiqun*) -- that is the fundamental sorting-sheep-from-goats distinction in Islam itself.

⁸ For a discussion of Shiite activism, see Section VI below.

⁹ Sunni Islam is the faith of by far the majority (between 80 and 90 per cent) of Muslims worldwide; most of the remainder belong to the rival Shiite variety of Islam, which is dominant in Iran, numerically preponderant in Azerbaijan, Bahrain and Iraq and present as the faith of significant minorities in Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

¹⁰ See footnote 61 below.

but concentrate on the missionary activity of preaching -- *al-da'wa* -- in order to reinforce or revive faith -- *al-iman* -- and preserve the cohesion of the community of believers -- *al-umma* -- by upholding the moral order which underpins it. The dominant example today is the Salafiyya movement, which originated in the Arab world and has now gone global, being present in sub-Saharan Africa, in South and South East Asia and increasingly in Europe. Another example, the Tablighi movement, which originated in India in 1926 and also spread across the world, remains important but has tended in recent years to be eclipsed by the Salafiyya.

The third current, addressed in Section V below, is that of the *jihadis*, activists committed to violence because they are engaged in what they conceive to be the military defence (or, in some cases, expansion) of *Dar al-Islam* (the "House of Islam" -- that area of the world historically subject to Muslim rule) and the *umma* against infidel enemies.¹¹ Within this category two main currents can be distinguished:

- the so-called "jihadi" Salafiyya (al-Salafiyya al-jihadiyya), composed of people of a Salafi outlook who have been radicalised and have abandoned the non-violent activism of the *da'wa* to enlist in the armed jihad, and
- the so-called Qutbists (al-Qutbiyyin), activists influenced by the radical thought of the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966),¹² and initially disposed to wage jihad against "the nearer enemy", that is, local regimes, denounced as "impious" (*kufir*), notably in Egypt, before redeploying to the global jihad against "the further enemy", namely Israel and the West, especially the United States.

¹¹ A movement which does not fit neatly into the three categories outlined here is the *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami*. It is neither a conventional political party (although very influenced by the conspiratorial Leninist model), nor engaged in religious missionary work, nor a jihadi group. Founded in Jerusalem in 1952, it has long since lost a practical connection with or mooring in Palestinian irredentism and has developed into a movement based largely on "de-territorialised Muslims" (whom it socialises in a way which resembles the Tablighi movement) and possessing global pretensions, since it advocates the restoration of the Islamic caliphate. It differs from jihadi groups which share this objective in abstaining from violent activity. Prominent on the campuses of British and other European universities with Muslim students, the movement has recently acquired a presence in Central Asia. See Crisis Group Asia Report N°58, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir*, 30 June 2003.

¹² For discussion of Qutb's thought and influence, see Crisis Group Briefing, *Islamism in North Africa I*, op. cit.

An important trend over the last fifteen years has been for these two jihadi currents to combine with and penetrate one another. Thus Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network represents a synthesis of jihadi-Salafi and Qutbist elements, the latter personified by his chief lieutenant, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, former leader of the Egyptian Qutbist group, *Tanzim Al-Jihad* (the *Jihad Organisation*), which conducted a protracted campaign of intermittent terrorism against the Egyptian state between 1976 and 1997.¹³

Of these various tendencies, only the Tablighi Jama'a can really be described as quietist. None of the others take a low profile, and all have political implications.

While adherents to these three currents of Sunni activism may all at times attack or at least vigorously criticise both Muslim governments and their tame official *'ulama* and the policies of the U.S. or other Western governments, they do so from quite distinct points of view and the agreement between them in this respect is shallow. Most of the very important debate taking place -- notably over whether violence is licit or illicit in specific circumstances -- is occurring within the Islamist movement itself rather than between it and secular or secularist currents in the Muslim world, much less between it and the West. The three main types of Sunni Islamism have as their point of departure significantly different diagnoses of the contemporary Muslim predicament. The different diagnoses entail different prescriptions, and the resulting strategies are in competition with one another in the following ways:

- Political Islamists criticize or at least dissociate themselves from Salafis primarily on the grounds that Salafis are excessively preoccupied with individual behaviour (and moreover with the minutiae of this: correct Islamic dress, rituals of eating, sitting, sleeping etc.) and thus distract the attention of Muslims from more urgent issues.
- Political Islamists attack doctrinaire jihadis as a rival tendency; the Muslim Brothers, for example, sponsor their own, Islamo-nationalist, ventures in conventional *jihad* (*Hamas* in Palestine) and do not want Salafi-Jihadis or Qutbists muscling in. But, above all, the Muslim Brothers and other political Islamists dissociate themselves from the jihadis because of the latter's conservative Salafi attitude to law (the opposite of the contemporary Brothers' attitude) and/or their Qutbist attitude to the state.
- Salafi religious Islamists attack jihadis when the latter fight "the nearer enemy", i.e. when they act

¹³ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Islamism in North Africa II*, op. cit.

as Qutbists; thus, Salafis defend imperfect Muslim rulers from the intemperate Qutbist-jihadist onslaught. But the Salafis do not have principled objections when jihadis fight "the further enemy", i.e. the classic *jihad* to defend the *umma* from infidel aggression. If they object, it is for pragmatic not doctrinal reasons, usually to do with the policies of the Muslim government to which they are linked. Such objections have no moral force with the jihadis being criticized, although they may in the short term legitimize the policy of the government in question in public eyes.

- Salafis also attack political Islamists and especially the Muslim Brothers for contesting Muslim governments and exploiting religion for party-political purposes; the word *Ikhwani* (meaning a member of the Muslim Brothers -- *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*) has become a term of abuse in the contemporary Salafi lexicon. Thus the Salafi critique of political Islamists combines traditionalist Sunni deference to the Muslim ruler (however bad), hostility to "Western" political ideas (such as elections and political parties) and a version of the contemporary Western critique of "political Islam" as a perversion of religion.
- Jihadis generally recycle the Salafi critique of political Islamists as exploiting Islam for party-political purposes while aping Western (in other words un-Islamic) political models, but their general thrust is to outflank rather than combat them.
- Some jihadis engage quite vigorously in debates within the broader Salafiyya movement, intervening to reinforce the dissident Salafi *'ulama* against the court or official Salafi *'ulama* (e.g. in Saudi Arabia); this support is not necessarily welcome, however, to some dissident Salafi *'ulama*, who may be embarrassed rather than strengthened by it.

What is notable about this landscape, and particularly important for Western audiences to appreciate, is that contrary to the implications of crude talk equating "political Islam" with "Islamic fundamentalism" and "radicalism" or "extremism", it is the *most political* tendency, that embodied in the Muslim Brothers, the Moroccan Justice and Development Party (PJD) and the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP), that is *the least fundamentalist*, that has gone furthest in accepting democratic norms and principles previously shunned as "un-Islamic" while simultaneously adopting a modernist attitude to Islamic law.

It is precisely the political element of its outlook that accounts for this, its concern to construct alliances

and win over public opinion obliging it to adapt to contemporary realities and innovate within the medium of the Islamic tradition. Uninterested in political action properly so-called and dependent for their own authority on the literalist reading of scripture of which they claim a virtual monopoly, the Salafi *'ulama* have generally evinced no such tendency (although this has, very recently, begun to change with respect to certain elements of the younger, *Sahwa*, generation of Saudi *'ulama*). It is therefore more accurate to suggest that religious or missionary, rather than political, activists have been the real fundamentalists, while adepts of the Salafi outlook radicalised by turmoil in the region (the Afghan *jihad*, Palestine, and now Iraq), lacking any experience of or inclination towards political activism of the modern kind, have gravitated directly towards the jihadi formula.

Which of these three main outlooks will prevail in the medium and longer term is extremely difficult to assess. While Islamic political movements have recently scored notable successes in Turkey and Morocco, the Muslim Brothers remain banned in Egypt and have been losing political ground in Algeria and Jordan (although holding it in Palestine and possibly gaining it within the Muslim diaspora in Europe). The Salafiyya, in its latter-day, Wahhabi-dominated, phase was at the peak of its influence and coherence in the 1980s; the precipitation of serious divisions within Saudi Wahhabism from 1990-1991 onwards, combined with the more recent vacuum in its intellectual and spiritual leadership, suggest that the movement may now be entering a phase of decline in the Arab world, while still expanding impressively in sub-Saharan Africa, South and South-East Asia and Europe.

This expansion of the Salafiyya around the periphery of the Islamic world and in the Muslim diaspora is increasingly difficult to dissociate from the electrifying and galvanizing impact of the Salafiyya Jihadiyya on the imaginations and reflexes of the younger and increasingly mobile, if not wholly deterritorialized, elements of the Muslim population.

It should be clear that the eventual outcome of the competition between these tendencies will have important implications for the prospects for political reform in Muslim countries, for the relationship between the Muslim world and the West in general and the national security of Western countries in particular, and for the prospects for the successful integration of Muslim diaspora populations in European states. These implications, and the means by which the West can exert some influence on these developments, are discussed in the final section (VII) of this report.

III. SUNNI POLITICAL ISLAMISM: *HARAKAT AND HIZB*

The leading examples of political Islamism today have emerged out of movements¹⁴ which themselves originated in the revivalist Islamic *da'wa* in an earlier period (roughly the 1920s to the 1970s) and initially expressed a broadly fundamentalist outlook. What has happened is that elements of these earlier movements have become politicised in a way which has led them to distinguish between political and religious activism, to concentrate on the former, to adopt contemporary (chiefly European) models of organisation -- the political party (in Arabic, *al-hizb*) -- to focus their energies on winning political power within the states in which they find themselves, and to modify their agendas and discourses accordingly.

This evolution has had important consequences. In seeking political power, these movements have adapted to their local political context and accordingly tended to:

- distinguish between the political and other spheres (including the religious) and invest their energies in establishing their presence in the former, thus helping to underwrite the broadly modern distinction between the spheres in question;
- accept the nation-state (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Turkey, etc.) as not only the framework of their main activity but also as legitimate in itself, thus abandoning fundamentalist views which deny legitimacy to the nation by counter-posing to it the supra-national community of believers (*umma*);¹⁵ and
- abandon the revolutionary goal of overthrowing the existing regime and replacing it with a radically

¹⁴ The Arabic word for "movement" -- *haraka(t)* (plural *harakât*) -- is the term favoured by Islamic political movements and parties, especially those derived from the tradition of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt; examples include *Harakat al-Mujtama' al-Silm* (Movement of Society for Peace, MSP), *Harakat al-Nahda* (Movement of the Renaissance, MN), and *Harakat al-Islah al-Watani* (Movement for National Reform, MRN) in Algeria and *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Resistance Movement), more widely known by its Arabic acronym as *Hamas*, in Palestine. Other Islamist political parties use the word *Hizb* ("Party") and occasionally *Jabha* ("Front"), as do nationalist and secularist parties.

¹⁵ In this respect, these movements have not merely effected a historic compromise between Islamism and nationalism, but have actually positioned themselves as the heirs of the nationalist tradition and have begun to demonstrate nationalist attitudes and reflexes. See Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York, 2004), pp. 62-65: "From Islamism to nationalism".

different "Islamic state" (*dawla islamiyya*) in favour of strategies that, while often proposing constitutional reform, nonetheless accept the constitutional status quo as providing the legal framework and ground rules of political activity.

The last of these has been especially significant. Islamist political movements have emerged as major actors in a wide variety of Muslim states, and have tended in some degree to legitimate the states in question either as a more or less explicit condition of their own legalisation or simply as an implication or by-product of their reformist perspectives. In Jordan, the Islamic Action Front (the party established by the Jordanian Muslim Brothers) has accepted and even defended the Hashemite monarchy as legitimate in Islamic terms;¹⁶ in Morocco, the PJD has similarly made its "royalist" credentials very clear in proclaiming its recognition of the king's status as "the commander of the faithful" (*amir al-mu'minin*);¹⁷ in "republican" Egypt, meanwhile, the Muslim Brothers have endorsed the Islamic credentials not only of the state but also of the government,¹⁸ and in Turkey the AKP, currently in government, has similarly made clear its acceptance (and thus in effect its endorsement) of the secularist as well as republican aspects of the Kemalist constitution.¹⁹

The corollary is that Islamic political movements no longer operate with a definite and demanding conception of "the Islamic state" to be counterposed to existing states in the Muslim world and promoted at their expense. Indeed, Islamist political movements have come round to acknowledging that scripture (the *Qur'an*, the *sunna* and the *hadith*) contains no clear definition of the "Islamic state" and that this can, accordingly, take different forms. At the same time, recognition of the limitations of scripture in this respect has led these movements to drop the simplistic slogans, such as "*Islam huwa al-hall*" ("Islam is the solution") and "*al-Qur'ân dusturna*" ("the *Qur'an* is our Constitution") which they previously

¹⁶ See Jennifer Noyon, *Islam, Politics and Pluralism: Theory and Practice in Turkey, Jordan, Tunisia and Algeria* (London, 2004), chapter 7: "Islam and the Jordanian monarchy", and Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: Expansion et Déclin de l'Islamisme* (Paris, 2000), pp. 326 ff.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interview with Saadeddine El-Otmani, Deputy Secretary General of the PJD, Rabat, 23 July 2003.

¹⁸ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Islamism in North Africa II*, op. cit.

¹⁹ See Kepel, op. cit., part 3, chapter 11: "Du salut à la prospérité: la laïcisation contrainte des islamistes turcs", and Noyon, op. cit., chapter 6: "Islam and secularism in Turkey". See also "The AKP, Turkey and Islamic Politics", *The Estimate: Political and Security Intelligence Analysis of the Islamic World and its Neighbours*, Vol. XIV, No. 20, 4 November 2002.

favoured, and to dissociate themselves from the backward-looking conceptions of fundamentalist Islamic movements inclined to invoke the original Islamic community of first century A.H./seventh century C.E. Arabia as the political model to emulate.

As a result, these movements have increasingly explicitly broken with fundamentalist perspectives. Abandoning the revolutionary utopian project of *dawla islamiyya* has led them to emphasise other themes, most notably the demand for justice (*al-adala*) and freedom (*al-hurriyya*). In articulating these demands, these movements have insisted that the key to their realisation is the consecration by the state of Islamic law, the *Shari'a*. But this insistence on *Shari'a*, while remaining a central feature of Islamist political agendas and rhetoric, is itself now qualified by two key elements.

First, recognition of the need for Muslims to "live in harmony with their time"²⁰ rather than try to recreate the original Islamic community of seventh century Medina has led these movements to insist on the need for *ijtihad*, the intellectual effort of interpretation, in order to establish precisely how the principles embodied in the *Shari'a* may best be translated into actual legislation in contemporary Muslim countries.²¹ Secondly, recognition of the need for *ijtihad* has led quite naturally to recognition of the need for deliberation, and thus acceptance of the role of deliberative instances representative of the community, namely representative assemblies and parliaments, in the process of law-making. This evolution in political thinking has led Islamist political movements away from theocratic conceptions of the Muslim polity, in which sovereignty (*al-hakimiyya*) is conceived as belonging to God alone (*al-hakimiyya li-Llah*), to more or less democratic conceptions which recognise that sovereignty belongs to the people.²²

In the case of Egypt's Muslim Brothers and those movements and parties elsewhere which are either affiliated to or at least derivatives of them, this evolution has involved an historic -- if still not fully acknowledged -- u-turn of immense proportions. The outlook of Hassan

Al-Banna (1906-1949), who founded the movement in 1928, was predominantly anti-Western, conservative and illiberal, and explicitly counter-posed Islamic political ideas to democracy, defined as intrinsically Western and so un-Islamic. The perspectives of the Muslim Brothers were further radicalised in the 1950s and 1960s by the thinking of Sayyid Qutb, who led the movement into a frontal antagonism with the nationalist regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser. Qutb argued that the Muslim world was lapsing into a new barbarism, *jahiliyya* (literally: ignorance) comparable to the historic *jahiliyya* of the pre-Islamic era, that nationalism was the principal ideological force promoting this barbarism in Muslim countries -- in that it substituted the principle of popular sovereignty for that of God's sovereignty -- and that the nationalist regime was therefore un-Islamic²³ and a licit if not obligatory target of *jihād*.

Following Qutb's death, the leaders of the Brothers dissociated the movement from his more radical theses, reverted to Al-Banna's less revolutionary outlook and adopted a gradualist and non-violent perspective²⁴ which rationalised their persistent search for a *modus vivendi* with the Egyptian state, a search they have sustained for the last three decades. In recent years, while continuing to invoke Al-Banna as their principal doctrinal authority, the Muslim Brothers have gone even further, tacitly abandoning crucial elements of his thought while adopting a more positive orientation to Western democratic principles.²⁵ It remains for them to acknowledge this explicitly and settle accounts with the illiberal elements of Al-Banna's thought, a difficult step given his unique status as the movement's founder.

Thus, contrary to widespread Western perceptions that equate "political Islam" with fundamentalist and anti-democratic outlooks, *the most thoroughly political* currents in Islamic activism have proved able and inclined to adopt or at least accommodate modernist and democratic ideas. This has not been the result of any necessary affinity between Islam and democratic principles at the level of abstract ideas so much as the fruit of an evolution determined by three main variables: the objective of maintaining and where possible extending social and political influence; the need to adapt to the political context of the various states in which

²⁰ Crisis Group Report, *Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria*, op. cit..

²¹ In this way, the Islamist political movements have come to reject literalist readings of scripture and have reverted to the perspectives of the "Islamic-modernist" movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whose leading theorist, the Egyptian Mohammed Abduh (1849-1905), was preoccupied precisely by the problem of adapting Islamic law to take account of modern conditions. For discussion of the Islamic modernist movement and Abduh, see Crisis Group Briefing, *Islamism in North Africa I*, op. cit.

²² See Crisis Group Report, *Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria*, op. cit.

²³ *Al-Takfir*, the act of denouncing something or someone as infidel or impious (*kufir*) accordingly became central to the doctrine of those radical tendencies and groupings which developed on the basis of Qutb's thinking in Egypt and elsewhere.

²⁴ This does not apply to its Palestinian offshoot, *Hamas*, as explained below.

²⁵ This orientation had characterized the "Islamic-modernist" movement during the period prior to the First World War.

these movements operate; and the policy lessons drawn from past experience (including the negative experience of Western reactions to their previous, anti-democratic discourse and the positive experience of democratic human rights organisations' defence of Islamists' political rights).

That said, it should not be forgotten that some Islamic political movements have, in the past, adopted notably undemocratic positions and strategies: the way in which, in Pakistan, the *Jamaat i Islami* rallied to and legitimated the harsh military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq after the coup which overthrew Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977 is a memorable case in point,²⁶ as is the approach followed by Hassan Al-Turabi's National Islamic Front in Sudan in infiltrating the army officer corps and coming to power in alliance with General Omar Al-Bashir and his fellow officers in 1989.²⁷ While the eventual failure of these strategies may well have prompted Islamic political movements elsewhere to drop anti-democratic alliances with the military in favour of democratic perspectives, it ought not to be assumed that the impulse behind such undemocratic alliances will not manifest itself again where circumstances encourage it to do so.

IV. SUNNI MISSIONARY ACTIVISM: *AL-DA'WA*

The two main currents of religious activism within Sunni Islam are the Tablighi movement, launched in India in 1926 by the *Jama'at al-Da'wa wa 'l-Tabligh* (Group for Preaching and Propagation) and the more diffuse Salafiyya, which dates back to the 1880s but assumed its current profile and outlook as recently as the 1980s. Both movements are fundamentalist and predominantly (but not exclusively) backward-looking. Both are formally -- and in the main substantively -- apolitical. This does not mean that they are wholly without political objectives or significance, but rather that they do not seek political power for themselves (as distinct from influencing the power-holders) and reject public political action as commonly conceived (party competition, elections etc.) in favour of the religious mission of preaching and proselytizing (*al-da'wa*). They are activists in the sense that they seek to convert, not so much non-Muslims to Islam as nominal Muslims to what they regard and proclaim as the correct conceptions of Islamic belief and practice. This activist aspect is an essential trait, and distinguishes them sharply from the Sufi orders.

The Tablighi movement arose to address the quite specific predicament of the Muslim population of India, where Muslims were massively outnumbered by non-Muslims and governed by a non-Muslim power. Its central thrust was to preserve the faith, cohesion and identity of the Muslim population by offering elaborate definitions of what it is to be a Muslim, especially in terms of a code of individual behaviour. Based on and legitimated by scripture, this code tended overwhelmingly to be backward looking and focused on the practice of the Prophet Mohammed himself.

Adepts of the movement are typically enjoined to mark their initiation and rupture with their previous lives by adopting "Islamic" dress and habits of daily conduct (strict Islamic diet, growing a beard for men, sleeping not in a bed but directly on the ground as the Prophet is supposed to have done and so forth). Given the movement's orientation to a Muslim population defined very largely by its minority status in a non-Muslim state, the Tablighi movement has been characterized by remarkable organisational cohesion and consistent political quietism. The general thrust of its activity has been relevant to the concerns of minority Muslim populations elsewhere, and it has had considerable success in expanding across Europe in particular, but has also been important in the Arab world, notably in Algeria and Morocco, and in Southeast Asia, where it has a steadily growing presence in Indonesia (known as *Jamaah Tabligh*), Malaysia, southern Thailand and the

²⁶ Mumtaz Ahmad, "Islamic Fundamentalism in South Asia: the Jamaat-i-Islami and the Tablighi Jamaat of South Asia", in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago and London, 1991), pp. 457-530: 479-485.

²⁷ Gilles Kepel, op. cit., part 2, chapter 6: "Le putsch militaire des islamistes soudanais".

southern Philippines.²⁸ Assessments of its worldwide membership vary but its numbers are in the millions.²⁹ In recent decades and outside India, however, it has increasingly been eclipsed by the rival Salafiyya.

The Salafiyya began as a movement of modernist reform in the Middle East in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Its founders, the Persian Shiite Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) and the Egyptian Sunni Mohammed Abduh (1849-1905), were concerned above all to enable the Muslim world to rise to the challenge of Western power. To this end, they sought to overcome the internal forces of cultural, spiritual and intellectual decadence in Muslim society by promoting a kind of reform which could not be stigmatized as heretical or unorthodox but which would permit a modernist renewal of Islamic civilisation.

The Salafiyya accordingly invoked the founding fathers of Islam, the so-called "venerable ancestors" (*al-Salaf al-Salih*, whence the movement's name), notably the Prophet Mohammed and the first four "rightly-guided" Caliphs -- *al-Rashidun* -- of the original Muslim community in seventh century Arabia in order to identify the fundamental principles of Islam in their original pristine purity. These principles were not treated as wholly sufficient in themselves. Rather, they were seen as furnishing unimpeachably Islamic criteria for selective borrowing from the West and the basis on which to dispense with most of the historically contingent -- and so eventually outmoded -- body of doctrine and ritual developed thereafter, notably by the official *'ulama* (religious authorities) of the Ottoman state and the Sufi orders.

This reformist combination of selective "back to basics" fundamentalism and selective modernism (accepting Western science and political ideas, notably liberal democracy and constitutional government) went into eclipse following the First World War. In the political turmoil in the Middle East following the destruction of

the Ottoman empire, the abolition of the Caliphate, the expansion of Jewish settlement in Palestine and the establishment of British and French protectorates (Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Transjordan), the Salafiyya movement evolved in a markedly anti-Western and conservative direction under the guidance of Abduh's disciple and successor, Rashid Rida (1865-1935). This involved an explicit rapprochement from the late 1920s onwards between the Salafiyya movement and the Wahhabi doctrines championed by the triumphant Al-Saud dynasty in Arabia. With the reassertion of Western political and military power in the heart of the Arab world since the first Iraq war (1990-1991), the logic of this disconcerting evolution is freshly relevant today.

The idea of borrowing from the West in order to reform and renew Islamic civilisation in its confrontation with Western power made sense as long as most of the Muslim world -- *Dar al-Islam* -- was still under Muslim rule and Muslim societies possessed the political power of decision and choice. With the destruction of the Ottoman empire and the establishment of Western (British and French) political and military power in the heart of *Dar al-Islam*, the priority shifted from renewal to resistance, from reforming the Islamic polity to re-establishing it as the precondition of everything else. This shift was clearly reflected in the work of Rashid Rida: whereas his mentor Abduh had been preoccupied with modernising Islamic law, Rida became preoccupied with the need to restore the Islamic Caliphate.

It is in this context that the convergence of the previously modernist Salafiyya with the fundamentalist Wahhabi tradition of central Arabia can be understood: the triumph of the Al-Saud in unifying most of Arabia under their rule and establishing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 was the one example then available of the successful exercise of Muslim political and military power. It is also understandable, in this context, that the most important Islamist movement established at the time, the Muslim Brothers (founded 1928), should have proclaimed a conception of Islam as an all-inclusive system -- *din wa dunya wa dawla* (religion, world and state) -- and of Islamic political thought as self-sufficient, in need of no foreign borrowings: "*al-Qur'an dusturna*" ("the *Qur'an* is our constitution"). It has taken the Muslim Brothers over 60 years to re-evaluate the original modernist elements of the Salafiyya, incorporate them in their political outlook, and distance themselves from what the Salafiyya has since become.

Since the late 1970s the Salafiyya movement has been closely identified with the severely puritan and backward-looking fundamentalism, based on literalist

²⁸ For Algeria, see Aïssa Khelladi, *Les Islamistes Algériens Face au Pouvoir* (Algiers, 1992), p. 120, and Ahmed Merani, *La Fitna: Témoignage d'un membre fondateur du Front Islamique du Salut* (Algiers, c. 1999), pp. 19-21; for Morocco, see Mohamed Tozy, *Monarchie et Islam Politique au Maroc* (Paris, 1999), pp. 259-276. The movement has also spread since the early 1990s to Central Asia, where its missionaries are known as *davatchi* (from *da'wa*); see Crisis Group Asia Report N°72, *Is Radical Islam Inevitable in Central Asia? Priorities For Engagement*, 22 December 2003.

²⁹ John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York, Oxford, 1992), p. 202. The annual gathering of Tablighis is the largest of its kind for Muslims in the world after the pilgrimage to Mecca; over one million were recorded as attending at Raiwind near Lahore, Pakistan, in 1988, Mumtaz Ahmed, op. cit., p. 510.

readings of scripture,³⁰ of the Wahhabi tradition in Saudi Arabia. Throughout the preceding period, from the 1920s to the mid-1970s, some local offshoots of the Salafiyya movement, notably in Algeria and Morocco, retained elements of the original modernist outlook, in part because they came under the influence of modernist nationalist movements in those countries. But those local variants petered out in the 1960s and 1970s and, with the massive expansion of Saudi political influence following the oil-price shocks of 1973-1974 and 1980-1981, reinforced by Saudi determination to counter the influence of revolutionary Shiism emanating from the new Islamic Republic of Iran from 1979 onwards, the Salafiyya movement came under Wahhabi hegemony.³¹ Its adepts in the generation of Islamic activists which came of age in the 1980s have no memory of the movement's original modernist perspectives.

The main traits of the Salafiyya are the following:

- its central activity is the Islamic *da'wa*, the mission of preaching and conversion;

³⁰ In this the contemporary Salafiyya exhibits the influence of the Hanbali school or rite (*madhhab*) in Sunni Islam; Hanbalism adheres to the most literalist reading of scripture, allowing very little scope for rational deliberation or interpretation (*ijtihad*), in contrast to the other three *madhahib* -- Hanafism, Malikism and Shafe'ism (especially the first and third of these); the Hanbali *madhhab* was the doctrinal basis of Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's preaching in central Arabia in the mid-eighteenth century C.E., and Wahhabism can be described as a form of revivalist Hanbalism in the Arabian context.

³¹ A movement in Indian Islam exhibiting important similarities to the Salafiyya, the Deobandi movement, also came under a degree of Wahhabi hegemony at around this time. It takes its name from the town of Deoband in Uttar Pradesh in northern India, where a reformist *madrasa* (religious college), the *Dar ul-Islam*, was established in 1867, promoting an austere scripturalist Islam tending to literalist readings of scripture and a sectarian hostility to Shiism. The *madrasa* was also a vehicle for anti-British sentiment and a more general hostility to Western cultural influence. The movement thus resembled the neo-Hanbali and Wahhabi tendencies in the Salafiyya, despite the fact that it developed out of the historically more relaxed and liberal Hanafi *madhhab*. The Taliban in Afghanistan are a product of the Deobandi movement, as is the *Jamiat Ulema Islami* (JUI: Association of Islamic 'ulama) in Pakistan, a most unusual phenomenon in that it is a political party founded by 'ulama which has participated in the government coalition. General Zia-ul-Haq actively favoured the Deobandis over rival Islamic currents, and under his rule their madrasas expanded rapidly to become the majority in the Pakistan of the late 1970s and early 1980s. They also benefited from Saudi patronage in some degree, although this was primarily accorded to a more strictly Salafi movement called *Ahl-e-Hadith*, which also expanded rapidly at this time. For a detailed account, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°36, *Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military*, 29 July 2002.

- this activity is emphatically based on scripture (the *Qur'ân*, the *Sunna* and the *Hadith*) subject to a literalist and accordingly dogmatic and fundamentalist reading;
- the promotion of scripturalist Islam is often accompanied by the promotion of literacy (at least in Arabic), notably through the foundation of religious schools (*madrasas*);
- in both faith and morals, the movement is very conservative and hostile to "blameworthy innovation" (*bid'a*);
- in theology the movement vigorously asserts the strictly monotheistic aspect of Islam -- the unicity or "oneness" (*tawhid*) of God -- and denounces the cult of saints or holy men engaged in by the Sufi orders as heresy;³²
- a corollary of Wahhabi hegemony over the movement is that it has adopted Wahhabism's sectarian hostility to Shiite Islam;³³ it has also tended to adopt the Wahhabi view of Christians and Jews as "unbelievers" (*kuffar*; sing. *kafir*), in contrast to the traditional Islamic attitude, especially prevalent within the Ottoman empire, of qualified respect for Christians and Jews as "People of the Book" (*Ahl al-Kitab*);
- the primary content of Salafi preaching concerns what it means to be a good Muslim, the answer given being that this is above all a matter of correct behaviour, defined by observance of the prescriptions of the faith, notably the categorical distinction between what is licit (*halal*) and what is forbidden (*haram*);
- the principal focus of this preaching is thus the individual;
- the "pious ancestors" -- *al-Salaf al-Salih* -- are invoked mainly as exemplars of the good Muslim, but also as validators of conservative readings of scripture; and

³² This heresy is called *shirk* (literally "associationism") -- "the view that saints or the dead and other beings or objects can, through association with God, partake of his sacredness", Ernest Gellner, op. cit., p. 156. It is considered a form of polytheism and thus un-Islamic; the term *mushrikin* is often used to mean "polytheists".

³³ This is in sharp contrast to the outlook of the original Salafiyya, whose founder (Al-Afghani) was a Shiite and which tended to transcend the Sunni-Shiite division by invoking the Islam of the time of the "venerable ancestors", before the schism.

- beyond the individual Muslim, the Salafiyya's preoccupation with behaviour leads it to function as a kind of Muslim "moral rearmament" movement, acting as guardian of the mores and defender of what it considers to be the fundamental unit of society, the family; this underlies its conservative position on the status of women and its hostility to those elements of contemporary Western mores (sexual freedom, women's liberation, homosexuality, etc.) which it considers subversive of the family.

Like the Tablighi movement, the Salafiyya has a trans-national conception of the Islamic *umma*, the worldwide community of believers. The strictest Salafis have tended to be explicitly hostile to nationalism and do not recognise the existence of nations in the modern sense, considering such concepts to be Western and un-Islamic, although other Salafis have displayed ambivalent and ambiguous attitudes on this issue. Both movements focus on the individual and on correct behaviour, and tend to be apolitical. But there are important differences between them, which have to do with their different relationships to political power.

Addressing in the first instance (in twentieth century India) a politically dispossessed and minority population, the Tablighi movement offered it what amounted to a Muslim "alternative society", an emphatically Muslim way of life detached from that of the surrounding non-Muslim society. In order to maintain this, it assumed the form of a tightly organised community, the *jama'a*,³⁴ which is in fact a complex pyramid of hierarchically related *jama'ât*.³⁵ While non-sectarian in conventional Islamic terms (i.e. not identified with any particular tradition within Sunni Islam and inclined to welcome all and sundry), the Tablighi Jama'a has come to resemble an (admittedly vast) sect in its behaviour, in that it remakes its individual adepts into "new" Muslim men and women and, by socialising them into their new "community" (defined by the boundaries of the *Jama'a* itself), radically detaches them from the wider society.

³⁴ *Jama'a* (plural: *jama'ât*) is usually translated as "Group" but this fails to capture the connotations and resonance of the Arabic word, which signifies the community of believers in a state of mobilisation and communion, the community assembled (for prayer, for deliberation or for self-defence); the English word "congregation" comes closer to this meaning.

³⁵ In its international organisation, the Tablighi movement consists of chains of hierarchically related *jama'ât*: for example, in Morocco the movement consists of a *jama'a* at the national level (itself a section of the international *Jama'a*), a number of *jama'ât* at lower levels (e.g. the city of Casablanca) and further *jama'ât* at yet lower levels: thus in Casablanca there are four *jama'ât* at neighbourhood level; see Mohamed Tozy, op. cit., pp. 266-267.

Unlike the Tablighi Jama'a, the Salafiyya has historically addressed Muslims in countries in which they have been dominant, if not the overwhelming majority, and in which they have also been under Muslim rule for most of their history (without interruption in the case of Saudi Arabia). There has accordingly been little incentive to organise the movement as a kind of Muslim alternative society or stimulus to endow it with a strong organisation of any kind³⁶ (none at all in recent years when it has been identified with Saudi Wahhabism). Consequently diffuse in organisational terms, the Salafiyya has also had a strong and positive orientation to political power, since it has tended for the most part to take it for granted that this power is Muslim, at least in principle. It has accordingly conceived its own role as complementary if not indispensable to that of the governing authorities, in so far as the properly Muslim credentials of the government require watchful validation by the religious authorities.

Whereas the leaders of Islamist political movements are typically laymen with modern educations and a history of political activity, the leaders of the Salafiyya are typically *'ulama*,³⁷ the scholars or doctors of law, possessors of *'ilm* (science, learning, erudition). This is because the *'ulama* possess the specialist knowledge of scripture which equips them to determine what is licit and what is illicit and to issue judicial opinions (*fatwas*) which carry authority. It is for this reason that, with the rise of violent offshoots of the Salafiyya movement, the mainstream Salafiyya is often referred to as *al-Salafiyya al-'ilmiyya* -- "the scientific or scholarly Salafiyya" -- to distinguish it from "the warrior Salafiyya" (*al-Salafiyya al-jihadiyya*).

Within the Salafi *'ulama*, two main tendencies can be discerned for much of the time.³⁸ On the one hand, there

³⁶ The Association of the Muslim Brothers (*Jam'iyyat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*) in Egypt and the Association of Algerian Muslim *'ulama* (*Jam'iyyat al-'ulama al-muslimīn al-jaza'iriyyīn*, *Association des Oulemas Musulmans Algériens*, AOMA), both offshoots of the Salafiyya in its intermediate phase following the First World War, are partial exceptions to this generalisation. The first, founded in 1928, when the form of Muslim government of Egypt belied the substance of British control, articulated among other things a militant reaction to the secular-modernist perspectives of the Westernised elite; the AOMA was founded in 1931, in the only North African country that was both wholly under non-Muslim rule and (as constitutionally an integral part of France) apparently destined to remain so.

³⁷ While, at grass-roots level, individual Salafi activists may well not have the status of *'ulama*, but rather simply that of missionaries, *du'ah*, they will take their bearings from and relay the teachings of prominent *'ulama*, whose perspectives accordingly orient the *da'wa* as a whole.

³⁸ For this division within the Salafiyya in the Algerian case, see Crisis Group Report, *Islamism, Violence and Reform in*

are the *'ulama* of the religious establishment, who owe their positions to government appointment and whose role is to manage the state-maintained institutions of the religious field (the main mosques, the Islamic universities), to organize the celebration of Islamic festivals and the annual *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) and to provide religious legitimation for the regime.

On the other hand, there are the more independent *'ulama*, whose learning commands respect but who occupy no official position and may, especially in times of social or political crisis, articulate a dissident and critical attitude, either in trenchant sermons in mosques or in the form of "advice" (*nasīha*)³⁹ given publicly to the governing authorities. Such dissident Salafi *'ulama* have been key figures in the development of the Islamist movement as a movement of ideas across much of the Sunni Muslim world over the last 30 years. Standard themes of their discourse have been the decline of mores in general and corruption in government in particular; a staple if the secondary theme has been the servility of the official *'ulama*.

Dissident *'ulama* have rarely fallen entirely foul of Muslim governments, because they have at no point constituted or even sought to constitute a political alternative, and their critiques of corruption have typically been well-founded (and so enjoying popular approval) while usually careful not to target the ruler (king or president) by name. Their pronouncements have accordingly had the status of warnings to the authorities to look to their laurels and take appropriate measures to repair their Muslim credentials and restore public confidence. The response of governments has generally been to treat them as useful safety valves and early warning mechanisms and not to repress them but either tolerate or even co-opt them if possible.

These considerations have also encouraged some governments to turn a blind eye to the occasional resort to violence by the mainstream Salafiyya. This violence arises from the commitment to promote "correct" behaviour by engaging in the practice, warranted by scripture, of "commanding what is proper and forbidding what is reprehensible" (*'amr bi 'l-maruf wa nahi ani 'l-munkar*). On occasion, this has assumed a muscular aspect (attacks on brothels, shops selling alcohol, courting couples, women deemed to be immodestly dressed). It is not jihadi in spirit or objective, and in those

areas where the government's writ scarcely runs -- classically, the large shanty towns on the edge of the teeming cities -- the rough and ready "Islamic order" imposed by more or less self-appointed Salafi custodians of morals is often the only order available, and acquiesced in for this reason by local population and distant government alike.

The limits to the dissidence or criticism expressed by the *Salafiyya 'ilmiyya* are a function of the movement's own fundamentalist outlook. There is no warrant in scripture, on a literalist reading, for political activity of a modern kind. Sunni political thought classically enjoins obedience even to an unjust Muslim ruler and condemns rebellion against Muslim government as illicit. Salafis are, therefore, generally hostile to Islamist political activism and explicitly criticise the Muslim Brothers and their derivatives for forming political parties.⁴⁰ This critique employs two arguments: the first denounces parties in general as dividing the *umma* and so tending to *fitna* (dissension, civil strife);⁴¹ the second accuses Islamist parties of using Islam as a party-political stock-in-trade, arguing that Islam should be above party politics. Thus even the dissident Salafi *'ulama* tend to validate the political status quo. It is, therefore, natural for Muslim governments to tolerate the mainstream Salafiyya as a counterweight to Islamist political parties.⁴²

However, what is true of some Muslim governments is not necessarily true of all, let alone of governments of non-Muslim countries. This has become a live issue in Europe and elsewhere in recent years. For the Salafiyya movement has expanded well beyond its original terrain

⁴⁰ See Crisis Group Report, *Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria*, op. cit. For a detailed discussion of this in the Indonesian case, see Crisis Group Report, *Indonesia Backgrounder*, op. cit.

⁴¹ *Fitna* can also mean sedition or rebellion; in all cases it implies the division or dissolution of the community of believers into warring camps, which is regarded as the supreme danger to be avoided. That *'ulama* (among others) are inclined to view political parties in this way is an index of the extent to which the notion, familiar to Western democracies, of a loyal opposition is yet to be established in many Muslim countries.

⁴² This was notably the tactic until recently of the Moroccan government, whose minister of religious affairs from 1984 to 2001, Abdelkebir Alaoui M'Daghri, was well-known for his Salafi views and connections. The Algerian government tolerated and selectively co-opted Salafi activism throughout the 1980s, especially under Minister of Religious Affairs Abderrahmane Chibane (1980-1986); it was only following the decision to ban the Islamic Salvation Front in 1992 that the government stopped cultivating the Salafi tendency and sought instead to use other currents in Algerian Islam, notably the derivatives of the Muslim Brothers on the one hand and the Sufi orders on the other, as counterweights to it.

Algeria, op. cit. For the Saudi case, see Crisis Group Report, *Saudi Arabia Backgrounder*, op. cit.

³⁹ *Nasīha* is the term used by *'ulama* for that element of their discourse explicitly addressed to the ruler or government; it literally means "friendly advice or admonition", and so in principle excludes political hostility and rivalry.

in the Middle East and North Africa over the last two decades, spreading east (into South Asia and South East Asia),⁴³ west (into Sahelian and sub-Saharan Africa)⁴⁴ and north (into Europe, and France in particular).⁴⁵ This development should not be attributed simply to Saudi sponsorship -- it has owed a great deal to the general processes of globalisation promoted by Western policies.⁴⁶

In Muslim Africa and Asia, as in, for example, the Maghreb, the Salafiyya has advanced at the expense of the previously dominant local or national tradition of Islamic belief and practice; thus Salafi Islam has tended to displace the traditional Islam of the great Sufi orders in West Africa⁴⁷ but also the urban-based, modernist, Islam of the Muhammadiyah movement in Indonesia,⁴⁸ while simultaneously helping to spread Arabic and "Arab" (in effect, contemporary Arabian) cultural fashions. As such, despite the backward-looking aspect of its fundamentalist message, it is often locally perceived as a form of modernity, associated not only with international links (often mediated by impressively sophisticated technology), but also, and above all -- like the original Puritan movement within Protestant Christianity --

with the vigorous promotion of literacy as the indispensable condition of the cult of scripture.

In Europe, the Salafi tendency is in competition with other Islamic tendencies (the more quietist Tablighi Jama'a, the more political trend associated with the Muslim Brothers,⁴⁹ the "moderation" of Muslim community leaders favoured and co-opted by European governments, etc.) and both its potential and its actual adepts are usually already literate. Accordingly, the Salafiyya in Europe functions chiefly to promote a particular and exhilarating conception of the Muslim identity. This combines both a demanding and uplifting personal aspect -- the ideal of the "good Muslim" guided by the litany of prescriptions and prohibitions -- and an exciting collective aspect embodied in the reference to the global *umma*, the primary if not sole locus of Muslim political obligation.

The conception of identity promoted by the Salafiyya thus fosters an Islamic individualism that is partly congruent with -- but also distinct from and partly at odds with -- contemporary Western individualism. It also fosters a Muslim collective sentiment distinct from and potentially at odds with contemporary Western notions of community at both the national and European levels. It thus tends to inhibit or even disrupt the cultural and political integration of Muslim populations into the European societies in which they have settled.

Finally, it should be noted that the hegemony of Wahhabism, which has determined the profile of the contemporary Salafiyya since the 1970s, is now itself in question as a consequence of divisions within Saudi religious circles which, gestating since the late 1970s, have come into the open since 1991. The disarray of the Saudi *'ulama* has several causes. Triggered by the stationing of non-Muslim troops in the Kingdom in 1990-1991 and the subsequent maintenance of U.S. military bases and personnel, it was aggravated by the vacuum in religious leadership following the deaths of leading *'ulama*.⁵⁰ At the same time, a new generation of Saudi Islamic activists has emerged, giving rise to the so-called Islamic awakening (*al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya*).

⁴³ Crisis Group Report, *Indonesia Backgrounder*, op. cit.

⁴⁴ For the development of Salafi reformism in Nigeria, see Ousmane Kane, "Izala: The Rise of Muslim Reformism in Northern Nigeria", in Marty and Appleby, *Accounting for Fundamentalisms*, op. cit., pp. 490-512. For a graphic description of how Islam in Africa is being taken over or displaced by a new radicalism, see Fuad Nahdi, "A cocktail of grievances in paradise: Tourism, U.S. swagger and a new Islam have transformed Mombasa", *The Guardian*, 29 November 2002.

⁴⁵ See Kepel, op. cit., part 2, chapter 7: "Europe, terre d'Islam: le voile et la fatwa"; Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York, 2004); and Kepel, *Fitna: Guerre Au Coeur de l'Islam* (Paris, 2004), chapter 6: "La Bataille d'Europe". For the progress of Salafism in France, see also *Le Monde*, 25 January 2002, and *Le Figaro*, 7 October 2003.

⁴⁶ For discussions of this point, see Crisis Group Briefing, *Islamism in North Africa I*, op. cit.; Roy, op. cit.; Paul Lubeck, "Antinomies of Islamic Movements Under Globalisation", Centre for Global, International & Regional Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz, CGIRS Working Paper No. 99-1, and Paul Lubeck and Bryana Britts, "Muslim Civil Society in Urban Public Spaces: Globalisation, Discursive Shifts and Social Movements", in J. Eade and C. Mele (eds.), *Urban Studies: Contemporary and Future Perspectives* (Oxford, 2001).

⁴⁷ See Kane in Marty and Appleby, *Accounting for Fundamentalisms*, op. cit.

⁴⁸ The *Muhammadiyah* was founded by Indonesian admirers of Rashid Rida and other reformers of the earlier phase of the Salafiyya; thus the Wahhabi-dominated Salafiyya has tended to supersede and eclipse offshoots of the earlier, more complex and less conservative, Salafiyya.

⁴⁹ The Muslim Brothers have a notably influential presence within the *Union des Organisations Islamiques en France* (UOIF); see Roy, op. cit., pp. 67, 106.

⁵⁰ Namely Sheikh 'Abd Al-Aziz Ibn Baz, the doyen of the Wahhabi *'ulama* since his appointment to head the religious establishment in 1967, who died in May 1999, and Sheikh Muhammad Ibn Otheimin, who died in January 2001; to these should be added the disappearance of the influential Syrian *'alim*, Nasr Al-Din Al-Albani (1909-1999). For a discussion of the significance of their disappearance, see Gilles Kepel, *Fitna*, op. cit., pp. 225, 228-229.

Influenced by both Wahhabi and non-Wahhabi (especially Muslim Brotherhood) ideas, they are aware of the need for some kind of reform in the Kingdom, are turning out to be more political than their elders, less conservative in their outlook and less wedded to Wahhabi dogma, in that some of them notably accept the national idea now being promoted by the Saudi government, including its inclusive implications for the Shiite minority. The coherence that Wahhabism gave to the Salafiyya is becoming a thing of the past.⁵¹ Whether this will eventually advantage the more political and modernist currents of Sunni Islamism -- e.g. a renewal of a qualified "Islamic-modernism" *within* the Salafiyya -- or the jihadis remains to be seen and is one of the more significant issues at stake.

V. SUNNIS ON THE WAR PATH: *JIHAD*

The jihadi tendency in contemporary Sunni Islamic activism has come to prominence in three distinct contexts and has been guided by three distinct strategic visions:

- *internal*: the *jihad* against nominally Muslim regimes which the jihadis hold to be "impious" and thus licit targets for subversion (Egypt, Algeria, etc.); this variant of *jihad* has a problematical relationship to Sunni political doctrine and has clearly proved a failure in Egypt and Algeria to date;
- *irredentist*: the struggle to redeem land considered to be part of *Dar al-Islam* from non-Muslim rule or occupation (Afghanistan, Chechnya, Kashmir, Mindanao and above all Palestine). This type of struggle is sometimes the object of rivalry between nationalist forces, who may not conceive of it as a *jihad* at all (notably in the Palestinian case) and Islamist forces and, within the latter, between 'local' and 'international' elements, e.g. the distinction between the Afghan *mujahidin* and the "Arab" forces which flocked to their struggle in the 1980s; similar complexities have been discernible in other irredentist conflicts, notably Bosnia 1992-1996,⁵² Mindanao⁵³ and now Iraq.
- *global*: the new *jihad* against the West, or more specifically against the United States and its allies (first among the latter, Israel) pioneered since 1998 by al-Qaeda but now also conducted by autonomous networks benefiting from al-Qaeda's endorsement.

This plurality of outlook and agenda has been somewhat obscured in jihadi discourse by certain common themes (notably the reference to Palestine) but the underlying diversity of objective, strategy and tactics -- including notably the refusal of some groups to sanction or emulate the indiscriminately terrorist methods of others⁵⁴ --

⁵² See Crisis Group Europe Report N°119, *Bin Laden and the Balkans: The Politics of Anti-Terrorism*, 9 November 2001.

⁵³ See Crisis Group Asia Report N°80, *Southern Philippines Backgrounder: Terrorism and the Peace Process*, 13 July 2004.

⁵⁴ Disagreements over tactics and especially over the question of what are licit methods and targets of *jihad* have been central to the internal politics of the jihadi movement in Algeria since 1992 and have accounted for some of its most important divisions and splits; see Crisis Group Report, *Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria*, op. cit. They have also arisen in jihadi movements elsewhere (Bosnia, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, etc.) and are now arising in Iraq. Western analysis which reduces all forms of armed struggle to "terrorism" and accordingly treats "terrorism" as internally

⁵¹ For a detailed discussion of the contemporary ferment in Saudi Islam, see Crisis Group Report, *Saudi Arabia Backgrounder*, op. cit.

matters deeply when assessing their behaviour and prospects. An important distinction here is between the resort to armed struggle that is primarily determined by the situation (such as foreign rule or military occupation) and that which arises primarily out of a radical doctrine expressing a definite preference for violent over non-violent strategies despite the possibility of engaging in the latter. Irredentist struggles are not as a rule the work of doctrinaire jihadis, whereas both internal and global jihads typically are.

The resort to *jihad* in the sense of the armed defence of the *umma* was a salient feature of the relationship between the Muslim world and the West at both the onset and close of the colonial era, as well as during the centuries that preceded it. Resistance to colonial conquest often assumed the explicit form of *jihad*, notably in Algeria, Libya and the Sudan. The ending of colonial rule was not always a violent affair. In so far as modernist and secular ideologies entered into and complicated Muslim nationalists' conception of their struggle, this was not necessarily conceived as a *jihad* in the traditional sense even where it assumed a primarily military form.⁵⁵ Since the provisional resolution of the political conflict between Western powers and the Muslim world at the end of the colonial era in the 1950s and early 1960s, the revival of the jihadi current with Sunni Islamic activism has occurred slowly and in a complex process which has exhibited four main -- if overlapping -- stages:

- the emergence of a doctrinaire jihadi tendency in Egypt in the 1970s and 1980s based on the radical thought of Sayyid Qutb and especially the concept of *takfir*;⁵⁶
- the mobilisation of jihadi energies across the Muslim world for the war in Afghanistan against the Soviet presence and the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul (1979-1989);
- the protracted but unsuccessful insurgencies against allegedly un-Islamic regimes, notably in Algeria (since 1991) and Egypt (to 1997); and

undifferentiated fails to notice or comprehend such aspects of jihadi behaviour and therefore cannot take account of them properly in formulating policy.

⁵⁵ An illustration of this ambiguity is provided by the Algerian case; the political platform adopted by the National Liberation Front (FLN) in 1956 declared that "the Algerian revolution is not a war of religion", yet the FLN's wartime paper was called *El Moudjahid* (i.e. he who fights the *jihad*); while secularists in the FLN leadership did not view the war as a *jihad*, it was widely conceived in these terms at the popular level.

⁵⁶ See fn. 23 above.

- the *jihad* launched by al-Qaeda against the West since the late 1990s.

The initial target of reascent jihadi activism was a Muslim regime, that of President Anwar al-Sadat in Egypt. The doctrinal basis, as we have seen, was Sayyid Qutb's innovation, which cancelled the traditional Sunni injunction on Muslims to obey Muslim governments. It argued that nationalism, in supplanting the sovereignty of God with that of the people, is inherently anti-Islamic (*jahili*) and that the nationalist regime established by the Free Officers in 1952 was not a form of Muslim rule, but infidel (*kufir*), such that rebellion against it was not *fitna* (illicit sedition) but *jihad*, that is licit, if not obligatory.⁵⁷

Qutb was executed in 1966 before he could specify precisely how this *jihad* was to be conducted, much less organise and lead it himself, but a violent jihadi tendency began to manifest itself on the radical fringe of Egyptian Islamic activism in the mid-1970s. One striking feature of its outlook was the centrality of the Palestinian question. The failure of successive Egyptian governments to secure a resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict in the latter's favour -- notably the military débacle under Nasser in June 1967 but also Sadat's choice of a separate peace in 1978 -- was attributed to their un-Islamic character. The jihadis argued that in order to defeat "the further enemy" (Israel) it was first necessary to deal with "the nearer enemy", the infidel Egyptian state.

A second key feature was the doctrinal innovation that posited *jihad* as an individual obligation (*fard 'ayn*) incumbent on each Muslim, in opposition to the traditional conception of it as a collective duty (*fard kifaya*).⁵⁸ It is likely these two features were historically linked, that the doctrinal innovation authorising individual Muslims to take *jihad* into their own hands arose, in part, precisely because the Egyptian state had signalled that it

⁵⁷ Qutb's contribution was not truly original, since it was predicated on two key borrowed ideas -- the sovereignty of God (*hakimiyyat Allah*) and the contemporary or modern *jahiliyya* -- first developed by the Indian Muslim thinker Al-Mawdudi (1903-1979); it also recycled the doctrinal innovation of the much earlier Hanbali thinker Ibn Taymiyya (1262-1328 C.E.) that rulers who are nominally but not truly Muslim should be combated. For a discussion, see Crisis Group Briefings *Islamism in North Africa I and II*, op. cit.

⁵⁸ *Jihad* is not one of the "five pillars" of Islam, that is the five duties of the individual believer (profession of faith in one God, prayer, alms-giving, observance of the fast during Ramadan and performance of the pilgrimage to Mecca). The traditional doctrine that it is only a "collective duty" meant in practice that the individual Muslim should engage in jihad only when the authorities of the community -- the ruler(s) -- decide this is necessary.

was no longer in the business of conducting *jihad* as a collective duty. This was the outlook of *Tanzim al-Jihad* ("the Jihad Organisation"), the group which assassinated Sadat in October 1981 and waged a campaign of killings and bombings in Egypt between 1981 and 1997. The same outlook was broadly shared by a separate organization, *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* ("the Islamic Group"), which conducted a parallel campaign between 1992 and 1997.

Between the crystallisation of Egyptian jihadi ideology around 1980 and the dramatic intensification of the insurgency in the 1990s, however, the second stage of the development of jihadi activism had occurred with the war in Afghanistan. In doctrinal terms, this was a simpler and arguably quite traditional affair, in that the Soviet invasion in December 1979 was naturally perceived as the conquest of a Muslim country by a non-Muslim (indeed atheistic) power. As such it was possible for the least radical, most conservative, tendencies in Sunni Islam to be mobilised by the call to *jihad*. It was in fact Sunni Muslims from the Arabian peninsular, most if not all of a Salafi outlook, who furnished the main element of the Arab fighters who flocked to Peshawar throughout the 1980s, although North Africans (especially Egyptians and Algerians) were also well represented. While the Afghan *jihad* did not involve any radicalisation in doctrine, it had a radicalising effect, in three respects:

- ❑ its intoxicating success in precipitating the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 laid the basis for belief in the efficacy of *jihad*, even against a superpower;
- ❑ it was a life-changing experience for participants, presenting surviving veterans with major problems of social reinsertion in their countries of origin; and
- ❑ it facilitated the formation of an international network of jihadis from Morocco to the Philippines, and thus established the nucleus of what has since become known as *al-Salafiyya al-jihadiyya*, the jihadi wing of the Salafiyya movement.

All three of these factors, and especially the second and third, fed into the local insurgencies in Egypt and Algeria in the 1990s, as returning Afghan veterans swelled the ranks of the native Islamist movements and oriented them in the most intransigent directions.⁵⁹ With the failure of these local jihads to achieve their object (the overthrow of "impious" regimes), a reorientation

occurred which culminated in the emergence of bin Laden's al-Qaeda network as the pace-setter of the latest, fourth, stage -- *jihad* at the global level.

The ideology of al-Qaeda is not a simple affair, and it is a serious mistake to reduce it to Wahhabism. To do so is to ignore the extent to which al-Qaeda broke with the traditional geo-political outlook of Wahhabism, which had never entered into politico-military opposition to the West and was indeed in alliance with the U.S. from 1945 onwards. Far from being a straightforward product of the Wahhabi tradition, al-Qaeda's *jihad* is in part rather the product of the crisis and fracturing of Wahhabism and of its relationships both to the Saudi royal family and to the U.S. since the early 1990s. To focus exclusively on the Wahhabi roots of al-Qaeda is also to ignore the crucial role of Egyptian radicalism, mediated by bin Laden's lieutenant, Ayman al-Zawahiri, the eventual leader of *Tanzim al-Jihad*, in determining the movement's vision and strategy. These exhibit the following key features:

- ❑ the reorientation of the traditionalist, Salafi, conception of *jihad* from an alliance with the West (notably against Soviet Communism but also against secular Arab nationalism) to a frontal antagonism with its former Western sponsors;
- ❑ the reorientation of *takfiri* jihadi energies from "the nearer enemy" (local, insufficiently Muslim, regimes) to "the further enemy" (Israel and especially the U.S. as Israel's principal sponsor, but also other Western states allied to the U.S.);
- ❑ the recycling of the traditional Wahhabi (and latter-day Salafi) vision of Christians and Jews as infidels to be combated, as opposed to earlier (notably Ottoman) conceptions of them as "People of the Book" -- *Ahl al-Kitab* -- to be tolerated and protected;
- ❑ the strategic reorientation of *jihad* from a single, geographically limited, terrain to the global level; and
- ❑ the tactical reorientation from popular-based guerrilla warfare (as practiced notably by the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan) to highly elitist urban terrorism (the hallmark of *Tanzim al-Jihad's* insurgency in Egypt between 1981 and 1997).⁶⁰

⁵⁹ In Indonesia in the early 1990s, veterans returning from Afghanistan helped turn an on-again, off-again movement to establish an Islamic state, whose ranks had grown in response to Soeharto-era repression, in a much more militant direction. See Crisis Group Asia Report N°63, *Jemaah Islamiyah in South East Asia: Damaged But Still Dangerous*, 26 August 2003.

⁶⁰ It should be noted that these tactics and techniques did not originate in *Tanzim al-Jihad*; as John Gray and Fred Halliday, among others, have pointed out, they are similar to those of various terrorist tendencies in European radicalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; see John Gray, *Al-Qaeda and what it means to be modern* (London, 2003), pp. 20-21; Fred Halliday, *Two Hours that Shook the*

Contemporary Western analysis, as reflected in official discourse at least, does not appear to have taken the measure of this development. Two tendencies of that discourse are especially wide of the mark.

The first lumps all forms of violent Islamic activism together as a single phenomenon, problem, threat and target: "terrorism". Quite apart from the problem of establishing a definition of terrorism on which all potential supporters of the "war against terrorism" might agree, and the difficulty (for example) of situating the Palestinian movement *Hamas* in this category,⁶¹ the main drawback is the failure to take account of the single most important feature differentiating the global jihad from both the internal and irredentist jihads -- the fact that it has no clear-cut, intelligible and in principle attainable objective.

The internal jihad has posited objectives -- the revolutionary overthrow of impious regimes and the constitution of properly Islamic states -- which the Iranian experience demonstrated to be, at least under certain conditions, theoretically attainable. Equally, irredentist jihads by their very nature posit what are in principle specific, measurable and attainable ends: the liberation from non-Muslim rule of the territories in question. The global jihad instigated by al-Qaeda is another matter. While its discourse intermittently invokes the desirability of re-establishing the political unity of the Muslim world under a restored Caliphate, little or no thought has been given to how this might actually be done or to defining other, more easily realisable, political objectives at the global level. As a result, it tends to feed on local, primarily irredentist but also occasionally internal,⁶² struggles in the Muslim world and on the

emergence of identity politics among disaffected elements of the Muslim populations in the West, in Europe above all. Likewise, it tends to retreat from or at least qualify its global political objectives and ambitions.

The second declares respect for Islam as a religion of peace and suggests by implication that Islamic activism in general is un-Islamic, a perverse exploitation of religion for political ends, and that jihadi activism in particular -- conceived as merely the extremist end of the Islamist spectrum -- is simply evil. But while it is rooted in the understandable concern of Western governments to make clear that "the war against terrorism" is not a war of religion, this approach renders jihadi activism inexplicable in terms of cause and effect. However reassuring to certain (mainly Western) audiences, this discourse is wholly inappropriate to prosecuting, let alone winning, the battle of ideas in the Muslim world, for two reasons.

First, since Islam is above all a religion of law, all forms of Islamic activism -- including the government-sponsored activism of "official Islam" -- are naturally political to a degree. Secondly, to suggest that Islam is a religion of peace that has been "hijacked" by jihadis is in effect to imply that *jihad* has no place in the Islamic tradition, whereas it has a very clear and time-honoured -- *but also rule-bound* -- place. For the U.S. president or the British prime minister to deny this is for them to claim to be the arbiters of what true Islam is, a remarkable claim by any standard, and one which ensures that official Western discourse can have little or no purchase on the reflexes of the populations of the Muslim world.

What is at issue in key debates in the Muslim world since the rise of al-Qaeda is whether particular conceptions of *jihad* are licit in terms of Islamic law. By suggesting that all jihadis are inexplicably evil, by equating all forms of armed struggle with "terrorism" and by denying that any *jihad* can be licit, Western policy-makers send the clear message that such discussions are futile and can have no effect whatsoever on their policies, thereby undermining a crucial debate. The danger is that, in doing so, the West may convert "the war against terrorism" into precisely what it claims it is not, a war against Islam -- that is, to make a gift of

World, September 11, causes and consequences (London, 2002), p. 32. See also Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam*, op. cit., pp. 41-54 ("Is jihad closer to Marx than to the Koran?").

⁶¹ As the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brothers, *Hamas* belongs to the "political Islamism" rather than the jihadi category and shares the Brothers' broadly "Islamic-modernist" worldview; its outlook is thus very far from that of the Qutbist and Salafi jihadi movements. It engages in armed resistance, which can certainly be called *jihad*, essentially because it considers (rightly or wrongly) that circumstances (Israeli occupation) dictate this, not because it shares the Qutbist and jihadi-Salafi doctrinaire preference for armed *jihad* over non-violent political activism. Unlike the doctrinaire jihadis, *Hamas* is willing to engage in alliances with non-Islamist forces and does not have an overtly sectarian attitude to Palestinian non-Muslims (although it has, of course, resorted to crude anti-Jewish as well as anti-Israeli rhetoric).

⁶² Significantly, the notionally global *jihad* thus reverts at times to attacking -- or at least endorsing and identifying with attacks on -- the "nearer" as opposed to the "further" enemy. A key instance of this is the violent campaign within Saudi Arabia led by a new movement calling itself "al-Qaeda

on the Arabian Peninsula", which, however, should not be regarded as a simple extension of the bin Laden organisation; see Crisis Group Report, *Saudi Arabia Backgrounder*, op. cit. In Indonesia, the outbreak of local communal conflicts in the Moluccas and in Central Sulawesi proved to be an unparalleled recruiting mechanism for the Salafi jihadis. See Crisis Group Asia Report N°74, *Indonesia Backgrounder: Jihad in Central Sulawesi*, 3 February 2004.

the defence of Islam to the extreme, global variety of jihadism exemplified by al-Qaeda, at the expense of all non-jihadi varieties of Islamic activism, including those of friendly Muslim governments and modernist and democratically inclined Islamic political movements.

To brand all armed struggle by Muslims -- even that arising out of opposition to foreign occupation -- as terrorism is to strengthen the arguments of al-Qaeda that the problem is "the further enemy", i.e., the U.S. and its allies, with whom it is useless to argue or try to negotiate and who only understand the language of brute force.

VI. SHIITE ISLAMIC ACTIVISM

While this report deals principally with the question of Sunni Islamism, one cannot ignore the role and place of its Shiite counterpart. The two stand in stark contrast. Where Sunni Islamism has fragmented into rival tendencies with distinctive worldviews as well as different strategies and forms of organisation, Shiite Islamism has remained impressively integrated. Specifically, it is not differentiated into separate political, missionary and jihadi forms of activism. This fact is ultimately rooted in Shiism's historic status as the minority form of Islam;⁶³ more immediately, it is closely connected with a remarkable feature of Shiite Islamism, namely the leading political role of the *'ulama*.

Historically, the *'ulama*'s influence has been based on their autonomy vis-à-vis the state. But their authority within the Shiite community also owes a great deal to the fact that, unlike their Sunni counterparts, the mainstream Shiite *'ulama* have never stopped practicing *ijtihad*, the intellectual effort involved in the interpretation of scripture. Notwithstanding the images of bearded and turbaned clerics, the activist Shiite *'ulama* have been far more modernist in this sense than most of their Sunni counterparts. The result is that the divisions within Shiite Islamism are quite different from those in Sunni Islamism in their bases, nature and implications.

A. BACKGROUND

Although reliable and precise statistics are rare, Shiites generally are believed to account for between 10 and 15 per cent of all Muslims. They constitute an overwhelming majority in Iran (about 89 per cent) and large majorities

⁶³ Shiism originated in the dispute over Prophet Mohammed's succession. Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law (as husband of the Prophet's daughter Fatima) claimed to be the rightful successor but was repeatedly passed over before eventually becoming the fourth Caliph. His position was soon challenged by Mu'awiyya, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, and Ali was killed in 661 C.E. His supporters, *Shi'at 'Ali* ("the partisans of Ali"), were those who accepted the argument that the leadership (*al-imama*) of the Muslim community combined spiritual and temporal responsibilities, required divine inspiration, and should, therefore, be drawn from the Prophet's line alone. They subsequently supported the claims of Ali's sons, Hassan and Hussein, as his rightful successors, in opposition to the line of Sunni rulers; both sons led unsuccessful revolts against the Umayyads and were killed (Hassan in 671 and Hussein in 680 C.E.). Thereafter, the Shiites regarded all Sunni rulers as illegitimate usurpers and recognised only their own imams in the line of descent from the Prophet through Ali's children.

in Azerbaijan (roughly 67 per cent), Bahrain (60 to 70 per cent), and Iraq (probably 60 per cent or more). In Lebanon they are the largest single confessional group (approximately 38 per cent). Elsewhere they form clear but sizeable minorities, estimated at 30 per cent in Yemen, 25 per cent in Kuwait, 15 to 20 per cent in Pakistan, 15 per cent in Afghanistan and the United Arab Emirates and 11 per cent in Saudi Arabia. Smaller Shiite populations are found in Syria, Turkey, India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and East and South Africa. There are now hardly any Shiites in North Africa, and they are a marginal element in the Muslim diaspora in Europe and North America.

There are three main variants of Shiism: Zaydis, Ismailis and Twelvers,⁶⁴ which arose out of disagreements over the succession to the imamate. Today, the Twelvers (*Ithna Ashari*) are by far the largest, accounting for some 80 per cent of all Shiites, a preponderance that owes much to their political quietism. The Zaydis⁶⁵ actively sought to establish Islamic states in accordance with their doctrines, as did the Ismailis.⁶⁶ The Twelvers believe that the twelfth imam, Mohammed al-Mahdi, did not die but went into hiding or "occultation" in 874 C.E. and that he will return in "the last days" as the Mahdi to establish the reign of justice and equity on earth. The imamate has accordingly been in suspension ever since. Having no imam to champion against Sunni rulers, Twelver Shiites established a *modus vivendi* with

them, accepting them as the *de facto* authorities. As a result, they have tended to be tolerated which, in turn, has enabled them to attract adepts and become the majority form of Shiism.⁶⁷

The historic condition of mainstream Twelver Shiism as an Islamic community subject to what it regarded as illegitimate Sunni rule had two long-term implications which have fed directly into contemporary Shiite activism. First, it reinforced and perpetuated the Shiites' self-image as "the community of the suffering and the oppressed" and their cult of martyrdom, notably the cult of Sayyidna 'Ali ("our Lord Ali") and his son, Sayyidna Hussein. Secondly, it established the basis for the remarkable autonomy of the Shiite *'ulama*, and thus the precondition of their eventual emergence as the principal source of Shiite political leadership.

B. THE LEADERSHIP OF THE SCHOLARS

Because the state was under Sunni rule, state Islam had no use for Shiite *'ulama* who, insofar as they considered it to be illegitimate, were in any case disinclined to participate in it.⁶⁸ As a result, the Shiite *'ulama* could not depend on state patronage. Because Twelver Shiism was quietist, Sunni rulers tolerated it and left it to its own devices, allowing the *'ulama* to exercise religious leadership over the Shiite community because this did not connote political opposition. Accordingly, the Shiite *'ulama* came to depend very largely, if not exclusively, on the support of the Shiite community itself, receiving regular income from the faithful and in many instances becoming major landowners. They therefore acquired the status of leading social authorities within the Shiite community while simultaneously becoming substantively autonomous of the state.⁶⁹ In this way the moral and material premises of their future political leadership were established in conditions of emphatic quietism.

⁶⁴ A number of other sects, notably the Alevi of Turkey, the Alawis of Syria and the Druze of southern Syria and Lebanon, are offshoots of Shiism which incorporated elements of other beliefs in their doctrines. Many if not most Muslims, including Shiites, do not regard these sects as Muslim.

⁶⁵ The Zaydis take their name from Zayd Ben Ali, the grandson of Hussein the son of Ali; Zaydi doctrine holds that, following the first three imams (Ali, Hassan and Hussein), the imamate was open to whomever of their descendants made good his claim to it. It is thus the closest to Sunni doctrine in practice. The Zaydis established two successive states in what is now Iran in the ninth and tenth centuries C.E. The imamate they established in northern Yemen in 893 C.E. lasted until 1962; Zaydis remain active and influential in Yemeni politics to this day.

⁶⁶ The Ismailis or "Seveners" recognise Ismail (the eldest son of the sixth imam Jaafar) as the seventh imam, and the line of imams descended from him has continued to the present; the imam of the main body of Ismailis is the Agha Khan, the 49th in line of descent from the Prophet Mohammed. Ismaili Shiites were the instigators of the revolt against Sunni rule in North Africa which established the Fatimid dynasty (909-1171 C.E.) that founded Cairo (and its famous mosque, Al-Azhar); the members of the sect in north-western Persia and Syria in the eleventh and twelfth centuries C.E. known as "the Assassins" were also Ismailis. Today Ismailis are primarily found in South Asia (India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar), modernist and even cosmopolitan in outlook and politically quietist.

⁶⁷ This process was reinforced by the decision of the Safavid dynasty in Persia (1500-1736 C.E.) to declare Shiism the state religion, a decision to which the successor Qajar dynasty (1794-1925 C.E.) formally adhered.

⁶⁸ The advent of the Safavid dynasty in Persia modified this situation, since some Shiite *'ulama* were drawn into the management of state Islam under their rule; their successors, the Qajars, however, operated a far more decentralized form of rule which both accentuated the autonomy of the Shiite *'ulama* and eventually fuelled dissident attitudes among them. See Sami Zubaida, *Islam, The People and The State* (London, 1993), p. 31.

⁶⁹ In Persia (subsequently Iran), this tendency was accentuated under the Qajar dynasty, which operated a more decentralised form of rule than its Safavid predecessors; see Sami Zubaida, *ibid.*

At the same time, and unlike Sunni *'ulama*, Shiite *'ulama* never stopped practicing *ijtihad*, the independent exertion of the intellect in the interpretation of scripture. Once the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence (*madhahib*) had crystallized by the middle of the ninth century C.E., the consensus of the Sunni *'ulama* was that "the gates of *ijtihad* were closed"; no further effort of interpretation was either necessary or wholly legitimate, and subsequent attempts were liable to be condemned as *bid'a* (blameworthy innovation). The long-term result was the sclerosis of Sunni thought and the eventual outflanking of the Sunni religious establishment in the course of the 20th century by a variety of dissident and critical currents engaging in more or less anarchic *ijtihad* of their own.

None of this applies to Shiism, where *ijtihad* is central.⁷⁰ The result is that Shiite thought has never become sclerotic. The tendency to self-sustaining intellectual vitality was consolidated by the outcome of the controversy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries C.E., in which the Usuli school, which championed *ijtihad*, defeated the Akhbari school, which tended to literalist and fundamentalist positions.⁷¹

The Usuli school of Twelver Shiism is the intellectual tradition which eventually produced Ayatollah Khomeini. In view of this, it is a massive mistake to assimilate Khomeini's revolutionary Shiite activism to the Salafi or Qutbist currents in Sunni Islamic activism and to label them all as "Islamic fundamentalism". The doctrinal underpinnings of Khomeini's politics are the polar opposite both of Wahhabi-dominated Salafism and Sayyid Qutb's thought. Where latter-day Salafism insists on literalist readings of scripture, Khomeini's Shiism does the opposite. And in insisting on *ijtihad* and the

intellectual freedom and authority of the *'ulama*, revolutionary Shiite activism, far from agreeing with Qutb's insistence on the sovereignty of God and the illegitimacy of all merely human rule, preserves a major role for human authority in the making of law and the conduct of government. The ideological point of contact between Shiite and Sunni activism is more accurately with the "Islamic-modernist" wing of the latter.

This combination of material autonomy from the state, immense social authority and intellectual flexibility, innovation and worldliness has been the foundation of the Shiite *'ulama*'s leading political role, as illustrated not only by Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, but also by Imam Musa Sadr in Lebanon,⁷² Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah in Lebanon (but also in Syria, Iraq and various Gulf countries such as Bahrain)⁷³ and Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani in today's Iraq.⁷⁴ Their leadership has prevented Shiite activism from fragmenting in the way Sunni Islamism has done between politics, missionary activity and *jihad*. This coherence does not mean that Shiite Islamism is monolithic or uniform, but rather that the differentiation that has occurred has been of another nature and has had other causes.

C. THE BASES OF VARIETY IN SHIITE ISLAMISM

Because of Shiism's status as the minority variant of Islam and its adherents' status as politically marginal or even oppressed communities (whether or not they have been absolute numerical minorities) in most of the states in which they have found themselves, communalism -- the defence of community interests in relation to other populations and the state -- has become the most natural form of Shiite political activism. This has been the case for Shiite activism in the Gulf states (Kuwait, Saudi

⁷⁰ This centrality is underlined by the fact that Shiite *'ulama* aspire to the status of *mujtahid* (a scholar having the authority to formulate independent decisions), and competence in *ijtihad* is the main condition of promotion in this informal hierarchy.

⁷¹ The Akhbaris took a modest view of the Shiite *'ulama*'s social and political role and tended to a literalist reading of scripture, resembling in this respect the Hanbali *madhhab* in Sunni Islam. The Akhbari school was fundamentalist and anti-rationalist in tendency, hostile to *ijtihad* and inclined, by restricting the *'ulama*'s intellectual freedom, to minimise the distance between *'ulama* and lay believers and thus the former's social authority. The Usulis argued, on the contrary, that Islamic jurisprudence rested on a certain number of principles (*usul*) given in scripture, but that the practical application of these principles were a matter for *ijtihad*, that is, the exercise of reason. The victory of the Usuli school thus confirmed the special position of the Shiite *'ulama* as the community's intellectual as well as moral and social authorities while placing a premium, in the demanding training of Shiite *'ulama*, on the independent and innovative exercise of reason.

⁷² Born in Qum (Iran) in 1928, Musa Al-Sadr came to Lebanon in 1960 to assume the religious leadership of the Shiite community in Tyre and was elected president of the Higher Shiite Islamic Council for six years after its foundation in 1969; he founded the Movement of the Deprived (*Harakat al-Mahrumin*) in 1974, and then its armed wing, *Amal* ("Hope"). Noted for his non-sectarian outlook and willingness to engage in dialogue with Christians, he disappeared mysteriously on a visit to Libya in 1978.

⁷³ Of Lebanese parents but born in Najaf in Iraq in 1935, Fadlallah co-founded the Iraqi Shiite Da'wa Party in the late 1950s/early 1960s. In Lebanon he helped inspire Hizbollah and has been described as its spiritual leader, at least until 1992-1993. Over time, his relations with Hizbollah became strained. See Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°7, *Hizbollah: Rebel Without A Cause?*, 30 July 2003, pp. 12-13.

⁷⁴ See Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°8, *Iraq's Shiites Under Occupation*, 9 September 2003.

Arabia, United Arab Emirates), Lebanon and Pakistan. It has also been the tendency in states where Shiites have become the numerical majority, namely Iraq and Bahrain.

Even where communal in basis, the specific character of Shiite Islamist politics has varied as a function of local political context. A clear example is Lebanon, where the Shiite population began to mobilise in the 1970s to denounce its relative social deprivation through the Movement of the Dispossessed (*Harakat al-Mahrumin*), under Musa Sadr's leadership and, later, through the Amal party. Israel's invasion in 1982 triggered new political alignments, with the formation of organisations enjoying Iran's support and dedicated to active resistance against the occupier. This culminated in the establishment of Hizbollah, soon to become one of Lebanon's most disciplined and organised movements and whose self-proclaimed goals were to emulate Iran's Islamic rule (see below), free Lebanon of Israel's presence and, ultimately, destroy Israel.⁷⁵

Another case is Iraq, where Shiites enjoyed substantial political representation in the 1960s through their participation in the Baathist and Communist parties. The loss of this representation through purges and the regime's increasingly dictatorial nature, combined with the dramatic impact of the Iranian revolution, radicalised the outlook and tactics of an activist Shiite Islamist opposition. The clandestine Da'wa Party (*Hizb al-Da'wa*)⁷⁶ increasingly resorted to violence in the form of attempted assassinations of Baathist officials. A second, perhaps more decisive, transformation occurred in 2003, with the U.S.-British military intervention and overthrow of the Baathist regime. This has precipitated major developments -- and not a few tensions -- within Iraqi Shiite activism, which has been forced to move beyond communalist defence of Shiite interests to a more ambitious and demanding national agenda addressing

issues of Shiite participation in governance, the role of religion and the coalition presence.⁷⁷

In Pakistan, Shiite activism historically has for the most part been defensive, focused on communal demands -- e.g., for a separate religious syllabus for Shiite students in government schools; against the introduction of Sunni Islamic laws introduced by General Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s⁷⁸ -- and on the development of Shiite madrasas. When it has tended toward more aggressive, rebellious and even violent behaviour, it typically has been in response to a perceived threat to its religious faith, and particularly to the rise of the Wahhabi-influenced Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadith movements. This has manifested itself in forms of urban terrorism targeting mosques and hard-line Sunni activist leaders; that said, more than 70 per cent of those killed in sectarian violence since 1985 have been Shiites.

As elsewhere, the Iranian revolution had a profound effect, leading to the establishment of the first Shiite political party in 1979, *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh Jafaria* (TNFJ, The Movement for Implementing the Jafari Fiqh, or Shiite laws). Considering that Pakistan is a Sunni majority country, the party's name was in itself noteworthy, reflecting the early revolutionary ambition inspired and supported by Tehran. The name later was modified to *Tehrik-e-Jafaria Pakistan* (TJP, Jafaria Movement of Pakistan) and, in 2002 following General Musharraf's decision to ban all Shiite and Sunni sectarian parties, to *Tehrik-e-Islami Pakistan*, (TIP, Islamic Movement of Pakistan). The zeal for an Iran-like Shiite revolution has since died down, with activism reverting to its more defensive mode.

In light of the minority status and scattered distribution of the Shiite populations, activist orientation to the notional global *umma* such as comes naturally to Sunni Islamism has for the most part not been a feature of Shiite activism, though the following of a religious authority (*marja'iyya*) often transcends national borders, and the success of the Iranian revolution had a clear ripple effect. Shiite communalism typically has tended to orient itself to particular states and the national idea, accepting the latter -- the idea of Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, etc. -- while seeking better inclusion within that nation. Shiite communalist politics accordingly have tended to embrace

⁷⁵ See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°7, *Old Games, New Rules: Conflict on the Israel-Lebanon Border*, 18 November 2002.

⁷⁶ The very name of this movement underscores the peculiarity of Shiite Islamism, combining as it does two concepts (political party, religious mission) which are almost always separated in Sunni Islamism. The party was founded, primarily by Sayyid Mohammed Baqir Al-Sadr, as early as the 1960s (some sources claim 1957-1958); it adopted a more insurgent and violent approach from the late 1970s onwards, and was largely crushed by regime repression; its leaders Baqir Al-Sadr and his sister Bint Al-Hoda were executed in April 1980, and its surviving militants mostly fled to Iran; see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°6, *Iraqi Backgrounder: What Lies Beneath*, 1 October 2002.

⁷⁷ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Iraq's Shiites Under Occupation*, op. cit.

⁷⁸ Shiites refused to pay *zakat* (the Islamic tax) and launched massive protests against the *zakat* ordinance of 1980, forcing Zia-ul-Haq to exempt them. More recently, when the government introduced new Islamic textbooks promoting Sunni rituals and history in Shiite-dominated areas in the North, Shiite teachers went on strike and asked students to block roads and organise protest rallies.

and emphasise modernist notions of pluralism, equality of rights and citizenship, and in particular to conceive citizenship as dissociated from religious identity, while exhibiting non-sectarian attitudes towards non-Shiites.⁷⁹

As a rule, Shiite minorities have displayed a tendency to violent sectarianism only where they have found themselves under violent sectarian attack. A partial exception occurred during the intense violence in Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s, in which the distinction between defensive and offensive violence was lost sight of in the protracted cycle of reprisals: the Shiite movement Amal not only defended Shiite neighbourhoods and sought enhanced political representation for Shiites in the political system, but also occasionally went on the offensive, attacking Palestinian camps and forcibly expelling Christian residents from mixed neighbourhoods in West Beirut. However, the Shiite Islamist movement, Hizbollah, which has since largely eclipsed Amal, has avoided aggressive sectarian attitudes and made clear its support for the Lebanese national idea as well as its solidarity with the Palestinian national movement on a non-sectarian basis. The same attitude has been in evidence in Iraq, where the competing forces in current Shiite politics have sought to restrain rather than lead violent reactions to provocations by violent Sunni Islamist groups.

The great exception to the predominantly communal form of politics has been Iran, where Shiites have constituted an overwhelming majority, Shiism has been the state religion since the sixteenth century, and Ayatollah Khomeini led an Islamic Revolution in 1979. The transition from political quietism to political activism was not instigated by Khomeini but began much earlier. The Shiite *'ulama* were key actors in the nationalist agitation known as the "Tobacco revolt" in 1891, and in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911.⁸⁰ They were also actors (although expressing several viewpoints) in the period of the nationalist Mossadeq government in the early 1950s. Shiite Islamic activism over this period cannot be called communalism, since Shiites were virtually the national population as a whole; it was a form of vigorous but limited opposition, which agitated on nationalist and constitutionalist themes while abstaining from decisively challenging the regime. Khomeini,

however, furnished the doctrinal basis of what, for Twelver Shiites, was the entirely novel ambition to overthrow, instead of merely oppose, the state and constitute an Islamic state.

Velayet-e-faqih, as the doctrine is called, means "government of the Islamic jurist".⁸¹ Khomeini argued, first, that an Islamic state under Islamic government was a necessity, secondly that Islamic government (*hukuma islamiyya*) required that supreme oversight of the conduct of government be entrusted to the man qualified to uphold the *Shari'a*, namely the jurist (*faqih*) recognized as possessing, in higher degree than any other, the two indispensable qualities: complete knowledge of the law, and total justice in its execution.⁸² Such an outstanding *faqih* could plausibly come only from the top echelon of the Shiite *'ulama*, the Grand Ayatollahs. *Velayet-e-faqih* thus resolved the problem of who should rule while waiting for the twelfth imam to return.

The state established by the Iranian revolution has often been described as theocratic and/or as subject to clerical rule. It is not at all clear that this is what Khomeini intended or what actually existed during his period in power. While the finality of the Islamic state was to ensure the upholding of Islamic law, agreed by all to originate in divine revelation, Khomeini's doctrine placed enormous emphasis on human agency and supreme authority in the hands of one man endowed with exceptional powers of judgment. While he relied on the Shiite *'ulama* networks both as major agents of the revolutionary mobilisation in the struggle to overthrow the Shah and as the source of cadres for the new Islamic state, he did not promote the formation of a clerical party.⁸³ Moreover, Khomeini repeatedly insisted that the defence of the Islamic state was the supreme law, and that it could even justify the temporary suspension or abrogation of the *Shari'a* in certain circumstances.⁸⁴ Thus revolutionary politics could trump religious dogma,⁸⁵ a fact which qualified the political authority of the *'ulama* in that it authorised the governing *faqih* to base decisions

⁷⁹ This has been notably true of Shiite activism in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. In Bahrain Shiite activists protest against the discrimination Shiites suffer and have strongly denounced the 2002 constitution, but their activism is non-violent and reformist, not subversive, in nature. On the "two-track approach" of Shiite activists in Saudi Arabia (contesting discrimination while affirming loyalty to the Saudi nation), see Crisis Group Report, *Saudi Arabia Backgrounder*, op. cit.

⁸⁰ See Abdulaziz A. Sachedina, "Activist Shi'ism in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon", in Marty and Appleby, *Fundamentalisms Observed*, op. cit., pp. 403-456.

⁸¹ *Velayet* (in Arabic: *wilaya*) means government in the sense of a moral charge or trust, as distinct from government as an institution (*hukuma*); it can therefore equally be translated as "custodianship", "trusteeship", "mandate" or "guardianship". In all cases it connotes a supervisory authority.

⁸² Zubaida, op. cit., p. 17.

⁸³ When a group of *'ulama* led by Ayatollah Beheshti did just that, in creating the Islamic Republican Party under their own leadership, Khomeini was noticeably unenthusiastic, and when Beheshti and his colleagues perished in a bomb attack in 1982, their project died with them.

⁸⁴ See Zubaida, op. cit.; Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (London, 1994).

⁸⁵ On this point, see Olivier Roy, op. cit., chapter 10.

on his reading of the political situation rather than his reading of scripture.

Khomeini's personal authority was such that no convincing successor could emerge in his lifetime. The choice of Ali Khamene'i has been controversial, since, unlike Khomeini, he was not a Grand Ayatollah at the time of his succession, and his intellectual and moral authority over the Shi'ite *'ulama* as a whole has been widely disputed. As a result, Khamene'i has been unable to act as decisive arbiter of debates and conflicts within the regime and has tended to depend on and act as the spokesman of conservative clerical factions ensconced in non-elective positions in the state apparatus and opposed to the reformist ambitions of those who owe their positions to popular election (notably President Khatami) and are accordingly sensitive to popular pressures for change.⁸⁶

In other words, Khamene'i has tended to find himself in precisely the position that Khomeini sought, through *velayat-e-faqih*, to avoid, and to act in the way that Khomeini was unwilling to act, as the representative of clerical dogmatism. As a consequence, not only Khamene'i's personal performance as Supreme Leader but also both the doctrine of *velayat-e-faqih* itself and the political role of the *'ulama* have come under attack, a fact which points to the underlying diversity of political outlook within Iranian Shi'ite activism, which has included liberal, leftwing, democratic and anti-clerical currents as well as Khomeini's authoritarian current. These were eclipsed for the duration of Khomeini's personal ascendancy but have been making a come-back over the last fifteen years.

The impact of Khomeini's revolution on Shi'ite Islamism outside Iran was such that issues of doctrine became entwined with the question of allegiance to Teheran. Iran's search for supporters led it to instigate factional splits in some movements, notably in Lebanon, where it actively promoted the rise of Hizbollah at the expense of Amal.⁸⁷ Hizbollah has accordingly accepted *velayat-e-faqih* as an element of its own doctrine, while simultaneously acknowledging that the conditions for an Islamic state do not exist in Lebanon.⁸⁸ In Pakistan, the Shi'ite political party (TIP) is divided into two main

factions, one staunchly pro-Iranian and the other, less influential splinter group, less so; the concept of *velayat-e-faqih* has gained almost universal acceptance among the country's Shi'ite clergy.

The influence of Iran is of particular importance within Iraqi Shi'ite Islamism, divided principally between followers of the quietest Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, the populist fire-brand Moqtada Al-Sadr, the various branches of the splintered Da'wa party, and the late Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir Al-Hakim (assassinated in Najaf on 29 August 2003), who founded the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution (SCIRI) in Teheran in 1982. Al-Sistani, a disciple of and successor to the late Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasem al-Khu'i, commands unquestioned authority among a significant majority of religious Iraq Shi'ites, does not accept Khomeini's doctrine, and in fact has expressly rejected the "government of the Islamic jurist".⁸⁹ Moqtada al-Sadr has accepted it, at least formally, but he has no genuine religious standing. Riding on the coat-tails of his late father, Ayatollah Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr (assassinated in 1999), a religious rival of Sistani's, he has carved out a political role for himself as the representative of the Shi'ite urban underclass.⁹⁰ SCIRI embraced Khomeini's doctrine while under Iranian tutelage but, since its return to Iraq in April 2003, has prevaricated on this issue, much like the rival *Da'wa Tanzim al-'Iraq*; both have expressed support for democratic politics.⁹¹

Given Iraq's religious diversity, it is far from clear whether the principle of *velayat-e-faqih* can be put into practice there even if Shi'ite Islamists of the SCIRI or *Da'wa Tanzim al-'Iraq* brand -- currently a minority even among Shi'ites -- somehow gain control of the government. More likely, they will be obliged to exercise *ijtihad* and develop either a heavily qualified version of *velayat-e-faqih* or a new and different doctrine to rationalise their novel accession to national political power. How such developments would affect the internal situation in Iraq remains to be seen. Either way, Shi'ite Islamist politics have interesting days ahead.

⁸⁶ On the internal debates and conflicts within the power structure of contemporary Iran, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°5, *Iran: The Struggle For The Revolution's Soul*, 5 August 2002.

⁸⁷ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: Expansion et Déclin de l'Islamisme* (Paris, 2000), pp. 129-130.

⁸⁸ Although it formally continued to advocate an Iranian-style state, Hizbollah over time adjusted its approach; today, while the Shi'ite community remains its basis of support, it has gained broader appeal across different communities.

⁸⁹ In rejecting foreign rule in Iraq, Sistani called for the early transfer of sovereignty to a popularly elected government as the appropriate answer to occupation, and has advocated pluralism and democracy as the principles that should underpin the Iraqi nation-state. See Crisis Group Briefing, *Iraq's Shi'ites Under Occupation*, op. cit., pp. 7-11.

⁹⁰ Ibid, pp. 15-20.

⁹¹ Ibid, pp. 11-15.

VII. CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS OF THE DIVERSITY OF ISLAMIC ACTIVISM FOR THE "WAR ON TERRORISM"

Since 11 September 2001, the primary lens through which the West has viewed Islamic activism has been the U.S.-led "war against terrorism". Given the trauma experienced on that day, priority has been assigned to a policy of countering terrorism and, because of al-Qaeda's involvement in the attacks, the focus has been on so-called Islamic activism. But as the preceding discussion suggests, the world of Islamism -- and in particular the world of Sunni Islamism -- is highly variegated. Its diversity has important implications for Western analysis and policy choices.

The first is that analyses which see the Muslim world as deeply polarised between pro-Western and pro-jihadi sympathies, and the conflict between these viewpoints as amounting to a civil war within Islam,⁹² are greatly exaggerated if not entirely mistaken. The various tendencies within Islamic activism generally, and Sunni Islamism in particular, let alone the wider ideological and political spectrum in Sunni Muslim countries, have not been reduced to a pro-Western (let alone pro-American) camp and a pro-bin Laden camp. U.S. rhetoric to the effect that "you are either with us or against us" has made little if any impression. Suspicion of, if not opposition to, the behaviour of al-Qaeda and its imitators is widespread within Islamist circles and all but unanimous among political Islamists, but this does not translate at all into a pro-American outlook; at the same time, hostility to Western and especially U.S. policy is very widespread but does not translate into support for, let alone participation in, al-Qaeda's global *jihad* except for a tiny minority, many if not most of whom are drawn from the Muslim diaspora.

The second is that the sheer diversity of Islamic activism mandates caution and modesty in Western policy. The political complexity to which this diversity gives rise in individual Muslim countries is actually much greater than may be suggested even by the distinctions between the main tendencies that have been documented in this report. In any one country, a Muslim government may face several competing brands not only of political Islamism, but also of fundamentalist missionary Islamism and of jihadi activism, not to mention other forms of Islamic activism (e.g. Sufi orders, Shiite minorities), non-Islamic religious activism (Christian

minorities and even missionaries) and political activism (secular parties of left, right and centre).⁹³ The adroit political management of these complexities is clearly beyond the capacities of Western governments and other external actors, which should not presume to micro-manage matters but instead recognise their interest in facilitating rather than complicating or disrupting the efforts of Muslim governments in this respect.

This does not mean that the West should be indifferent to which general trend in Islamic activism comes to the fore in the medium and longer term or that it has no influence in this regard. One trend in particular, Sunni political Islamism, is definitely modernist in most essential respects, favouring non-violent over violent strategies, open to dialogue and debate and interested in democratic ideas.⁹⁴ It is not a tamely "pro-Western" trend by any measure. In fact, it is precisely because these movements now represent a reconciliation between Islamism and nationalism -- a nationalism that inclines them to defend national sovereignty and resist Western interventionism -- that they have come round to democratic strategies and modernist views of Islamic law. By the same token, the preoccupation with securing social justice and combating corruption in their policy agendas inclines political Islamists to a measure of (non-violent) militancy and radicalism in their behaviour as well as their rhetoric.

But their attitude to the West is critical rather than virulently hostile, and their militancy in both domestic and international outlooks is generally measured and politically calculated as well as non-violent. For this, the most forward-looking tendency in contemporary Sunni Islamism,⁹⁵ to win out over the fundamentalist and jihadi

⁹³ In Algeria, for example, the government has faced at least five varieties of political Islamism in the shape of the three derivatives of the Muslim Brothers (all legal), the banned Islamic Salvation Front and the Wafa Party (which it has refused to recognise) as well as numerous secular parties, both the Salafi and the Tablighi varieties of Islamic *da'wa*, a multiplicity of Sufi orders, and even evangelical Christian missionaries, not to mention a plethora of armed jihadi movements representing Islamic-nationalist, Qutbist and jihadi-Salafi outlooks.

⁹⁴ While this trend is primarily represented by Sunni political Islamists, they do not have a monopoly on it. Islamic modernist ideas have also been reviving outside political Islamism, in the thinking of movements which do not describe themselves as political parties and explicitly disclaim ambitions in the party-political sphere; an example is the Movement for Renewal (*Mouvement Pour le Renouveau*, MPR) founded in 2003 by the French-Algerian Mufti of Marseille, Soheib Bencheikh; see Crisis Group Report, *Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria*, op. cit.

⁹⁵ These movements do, of course, exhibit an important degree of conservatism in their attitude to women's status, the family

⁹² See, for example, Michael Doran, "Somebody Else's Civil War", *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2002, pp. 22-42.

tendencies would be in the long-term interest of the West in that it would facilitate the modernisation of Sunni Muslim societies.

The West can encourage this evolution. But should it choose to do so, it will need to drop or at least moderate its more activist and interventionist impulses where Muslim countries are concerned, display greater respect for their sovereignty, understand their ambition to renegotiate their relations with it over a range of issues and come to terms with and take account of their viewpoints on the most controversial questions in the current relationship, notably the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iraq and the modalities of the "war against terrorism" in general.

The alternative -- continuing to look for tamer brands of "moderation" without altering present policies in most respects -- most likely will fail. If "moderate" is defined to mean "co-optable", it can only really refer to groups and tendencies which fail to articulate the frustrations and expectations of the mass of "ordinary decent Muslims", have little or no purchase on their political reflexes and will prove unable to promote either significant reform in Muslim countries or a substantive modernisation of their cultural and ideological outlook. Rather than reducing the appeal of extremist currents, the patronising of "moderates" in this sense by Western governments risks reinforcing it, while undermining the modernist tendency in Sunni Islamism to the benefit of fundamentalists and jihadis.

An assessment of the state of the "war on terrorism" three years out is, in this respect, highly instructive. Measures taken in the context of the war appear to have been effective, in that al-Qaeda has been driven from its sanctuary in Afghanistan and can no longer run jihadi training camps, many jihadi networks have been dismantled or disrupted, numerous individual jihadis have been apprehended, the financing of jihadi activities has been disrupted, and so on. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that the jihadi movement is still extremely vigorous, perfectly capable of replacing arrested terrorists with fresh recruits, and able to operate relatively freely across much of the world outside North America.

Indeed, during this period the security threat posed by jihadi activism has risen appreciably in Europe (above all Spain, but also France, the Netherlands and the

United Kingdom), in Russia (Chechen terrorism in Chechnya and elsewhere) and most of all in the Muslim world itself. One has only to look at Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, the bombings in Tunisia (Djerba), Morocco (Casablanca) and Egypt (Taba), and of course the continuing if reduced insurgency in Algeria, as well as events in sub-Saharan Africa (the Mombasa bombing in Kenya) and South East Asia (the Bali bombing in Indonesia and attacks in the Philippines). In short, the "war on terrorism" has -- at most -- merely scotched the snake, not killed it; on one reading it has actually been attacking a hydra and causing its heads to proliferate.

An important reason is that the issues and grievances which have been grist to the mill of Sunni jihadism across the Muslim world have not been resolved or even appreciably attenuated since 2001, but, on the contrary, aggravated and intensified. The failure to address the Palestinian question and, above all, the decision to make war on Iraq and the even more extraordinary mishandling of the post-war situation there have unquestionably motivated and encouraged jihadi activism across the Muslim world. Unsophisticated Western understanding and rhetoric that tends to discredit all forms of political Islamism, coupled with the lumping together of the internal, irredentist and global jihadis, also has made it appreciably more difficult for Muslims themselves to denounce and combat the more noxious forms of jihadism.

There is another alarming cost in the way the "war on terrorism" is being waged. Among the problems presented by Islamic activism is the threat to the social and political integration of Muslim diaspora populations. This is not an issue of major concern in the U.S., but in the medium to long term may well become the principal concern in Europe, especially in France, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom.

The "war on terrorism" is by no means the cause of this threat, but the way in which it has been conducted -- the attack on and occupation of Iraq, the resort to torture, the blanket stigmatisation of all forms of jihad as terrorism, the suspension of Western legal norms in respect of people accused of involvement in terrorism (Guantanamo, Belmarsh) and the absence of serious measures to address the Palestinian question -- has clearly exacerbated it. To head off what could well become a major source of internal instability, European policy-makers will need to alter current anti-terrorism policies.

Specifically, this means defining the security problem as one of terrorism in general and not "Muslim terrorism" alone; clearly and carefully identifying "terrorism" and distinguishing it from other forms of violent struggle; primarily emphasising police and intelligence work (and perhaps ceasing to describe the counter-terrorism effort as a "war" at all); and, crucially, understanding that the

and sexual morality. This conservatism may appear to overlap with that of the fundamentalist movements, but to describe it as "medieval" is to caricature it; it is essentially of a kind with the attitudes which were generally prevalent in Western democracies as recently as the 1950s, and has already begun to evolve.

principal grievances invoked by armed movements -- whether or not they actually motivate them -- should be taken seriously and addressed. Minimising (or at least diminishing) the mobilisation and radicalisation of European Muslims caused by the dramas experienced in the rest of the Muslim *umma* -- Palestine and Iraq in particular -- by seriously reconsidering and addressing these dramas would be a good place to start.

Cairo/Brussels, 2 March 2005