

In the name of Allah al-Rahmān al-Raheem

*“There will appear at the End of Time a people young in age and foolish in mind. They will speak the best words of Creation. They will recite the Quran but it will not pass their throats. They leave Islam as swiftly as an arrow flies through its target...”*

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- Prophet Muhammad<sup>1</sup> ﷺ

*“There is the story of a Sunni Scholar who refused to endorse a pre-written fatwa targeted to his locality that all young men must join the Free Syrian Army. The FSA representatives, foreign fighters, killed his aging wife and two grandsons right in front of him...”*

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- Report from Syrian refugee camp, Turkey<sup>2</sup>

I praise Allah who created the Jinn and Mankind and released the Two Seas which do not mix. I praise Allah who created Heaven and Hell and decreed for each a portion. I praise Allah the Transcendent and Exalted who created the universe in Truth. I praise Allah the Almighty who sent His Final Messenger with the Glorious Book in which is a clarification of all things. And may peace and mercy be upon The Messenger, Abul-Qasim Muhammad ibn Abdillah, and his Family and Companions and all those who follow them upon the Right Path until the Last Day.

Allah the Transcendent and Exalted says,

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاءَ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لِعَيْنٍ

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<sup>1</sup> Bukhari. *Kitāb istitābat il-murtaddeen wal-mu‘ānideen wa qitālihim* (Book of demanding repentance from apostates and recalcitrants and fighting them): *bāb qatl al-khawārij wal-mulḥideen ba‘da iqāmat il-hujjah ilaihim* (Chapter on killing of Khawarij and deviants after presenting the evidence against them). [NB: When referencing hadiths from Bukhari, I have sufficed with one of often several places the hadith appears within Bukhari.]

<sup>2</sup> See bibliography: (Ali 2013)

لَوْ أَرَدْنَا أَنْ نَتَّخِذَ لَهُمْ لَأَتَّخِذْتَهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا إِنْ كُنَّا فَاعِلِينَ

بَلْ نَقْذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلَى الْبَاطِلِ فَيَدْمَغُهُ ، فَإِذَا هُوَ زَاهِقٌ وَلَكُمُ الْوَيْلُ مِمَّا تَصِفُونَ

*“Not for (idle) sport did We create the heavens and the earth and all that is between!*

*If it had been Our wish to take (just) a pastime, We should surely have taken it from the things nearest to Us, if We would do (such a thing)!*

*Nay, We hurl the Truth against falsehood, and it knocks out its brain, and behold, falsehood does perish! Ah! woe be to you for the (false) things you ascribe (to Us).”<sup>3</sup>*

The Quran is unique as being the only book on this earth that reflects truth in its every word. Without this divine light of guidance, we cannot arrive at clarity in any area of inquiry. This sacred knowledge is a living knowledge, a transmission and a light that must be acquired from the hearts of the people of knowledge.

The issue of the ‘Islamic State’ (IS) in Iraq and *Shām*<sup>4</sup> and the proclamation of a caliphate in the region has led to mixed reactions and considerable confusion. While a majority of Muslims broadly believe in the idea of genuine, pious Islamic governance, the harsh and intolerant actions of the IS group are difficult for many to reconcile. Many Muslims are distrustful of the global news media and suspicious of its portrayal of events on the ground.

This article will examine some areas that the author believes are useful to arrive at an orthodox Sunni interpretation of current events:

1. The strong Quranic prohibition of shedding Muslim blood and injunction to maintain Muslim unity
2. A recognition that the extreme Salafi-Jihadist groups who make *takfeer* (declaring someone a disbeliever) of Muslims and take up the sword against them are Khawarij, and what that recognition entails
3. How the Western powers continue to use the age-old strategy of ‘divide and rule’ and how the Salafi-Khawarij are a (perhaps unwitting) agent of that policy

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<sup>3</sup> Quran Al-Anbiya:16-18

<sup>4</sup> Arabic for the Levant region

4. How the current Khawarij-Shia conflict is being intentionally misrepresented in the media as a ‘Sunni-Shia’ conflict in a deliberate attempt to instigate the latter
5. That a fear of America and Israel is the emergence of an authentic Sunni caliphate in the region which could potentially spread rapidly across and unite the Sunni Muslim lands
6. That the role of Salafi-Khawarij groups in the region is to *prevent* such an authentic Sunni caliphate from coming about by causing division and in-fighting amongst Muslims, as well as associating the whole idea of ‘caliphate’ (a noble ideal) with violent barbarity in the eyes of the non-Muslim world.

### Severe Quranic prohibition of shedding Muslim blood and the Sunni concept of Muslim unity

The unlawful killing of any human being is such a terrible sin that the Quran describes it as equivalent to the killing of all people<sup>5</sup>, but the most severe warning in the Book of Allah is possibly one which relates to the intentional killing of a Muslim:

وَمَنْ يَقْتُلْ مُؤْمِنًا مُتَعَمِّدًا فَجَزَاؤُهُ فِي جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدًا فِيهَا وَعَذَابُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ وَلَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُ عَذَابًا عَظِيمًا

*“If a man kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell, to abide therein (forever); And the wrath and the curse of Allah are upon him, and a dreadful penalty is prepared for him.”<sup>6</sup>*

This āyah of Quran is extremely fear-provoking as it lists four categories of punishment that await anyone who intentionally kills a Muslim:

1. Eternality in the Hell-Fire
2. The Wrath (*ghadab*) of Allah upon them
3. The Curse (*la’nah*) of Allah upon them
4. A ‘dreadful penalty’

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, “A Muslim is the brother of another Muslim”<sup>7</sup> and “Every part of a Muslim is sacred to another Muslim – his blood, property and honour”<sup>8</sup>, and “A Muslim is he from whose hand and tongue other Muslims are safe”<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Quran, Mā’ida: 32

<sup>6</sup> Quran, Nisā:93

The Prophet forbade the unlawful bloodshed of any Muslim, even those who were hypocrites i.e.

outwardly Muslim but inwardly enemies of Islam. The Prophet ﷺ was informed through revelation who the hypocrites in Madina were but he refused to fight them saying, “Let people not say that Muhammad kills his companions” .<sup>10</sup>

Once, one of the most beloved of people to the Prophet ﷺ, Usamah ibn Zaid (may Allah be pleased with him), was in a battle. At one point he and an Ansarite man were chasing a disbeliever. Usamah caught up with the man and was about to strike him when the man suddenly proclaimed, “There is no god but Allah”. However, Usamah proceeded to kill him. When they returned to Madina, the Prophet ﷺ was appraised of the event and he rebuked Usamah seriously saying, “You killed him despite him saying ‘there is no god but Allah’ ”

“He only said it to save his life”, replied Usamah.

But the Prophet ﷺ kept on repeating, “You killed him despite him saying ‘there is no god but Allah’”, so many times that Usamah ibn Zaid said, “I wished I had not become Muslim before that day.”<sup>11</sup> In another narration, it adds that the Prophet ﷺ asked him, “Did you split open his chest?”<sup>12</sup>

In relation to this (or a similar event)<sup>13</sup>, the following *āyah* of Quran was revealed:

يَأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِذَا ضَرَبْتُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَتَبَيَّنُوا وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَنْ ءَلْفَىٰ إِلَيْكُمْ ءالسَّلَامَ لَسْتَ مُؤْمِنًا تَبْتَغُونَ عَرَصَ الْحَيٰوةِ الدُّنْيَا فَعِندَ اللَّهِ مَغَازِمٌ كَثِيرَةٌ كَذَٰلِكَ كُنْتُمْ مِّن قَبْلُ فَمَنْ ءَلْفَىٰ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ فَتَبَيَّنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا

<sup>7</sup> Muslim. *Kitāb al-birr was-ṣilah wal-ādāb* (Book of goodness, keeping ties and etiquette): *Bāb taḥreem zulm il-muslim wa khadhlihi wa-ḥtiqārihi...* (Chapter on prohibition of oppressing or abandoning or despising a Muslim...)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Bukhari. *Kitāb al-eemān* (Book of faith): *Bāb al-muslim man salim al-muslimoon min yadihi wa lisānihi* (Chapter on ‘the Muslim is one from whose hand and tongue the Muslims are safe’)

<sup>10</sup> Bukhari. *Kitāb tafseer al-qurān* (Book of exegesis of Quran): *bāb qawluhu la’in raja’na ilal-madīna layukhrijanna al-a’azzu minha al-adhall...* (Chapter on His words, ‘If we return to Madina the mighty amongst us will drive out the weak...’)

<sup>11</sup> Bukhari. *Kitāb al-diyāt* (Book of blood monies): *bāb qawl-ullahi ta’āla wa man aḥyāha* (Chapter on the saying of Allah the Exalted, ‘and whoever gives life to it...’)

<sup>12</sup> Muslim. *Kitāb al-eemān* (Book of faith): *Bāb taḥreem qatl al-kāfir ba’da an qāla lā ilāha illallāh* (Chapter on the prohibition of killing a disbeliever after he says ‘there is no god but Allah’)

<sup>13</sup> Tafseer al-Baghawi

*“O you who believe! When you go forth (to fight) in the way of Allah, be careful to discriminate, and say not unto one who offers you peace: “You are not a believer,” seeking the chance profits of this life (so that you may despoil him). With Allah are plenteous spoils. Even thus (as he now is) were you before; but Allah has since then been gracious unto you. Therefore take care to discriminate. Allah is ever Informed of what you do.”<sup>14</sup>*

The Quran, in many *āyahs*, strictly prohibits Muslims from dividing, separating or fighting amongst themselves, for example:

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

*“And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves...”<sup>15</sup>*

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ وَأُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

*“And be not like those who separated and disputed after the clear proofs had come unto them. For such there is an awful doom”.<sup>16</sup>*

These sources set the foundation of the Sunni understanding of the sanctity of Muslim life and the imperative of unity above almost all else. The term for ‘Sunni’ in Arabic, *ahl al-sunnah wal-jamā’ah* (lit. ‘the people of the prophetic example and the united majority’), invokes the fundamental premise of Sunnism which is to stick to the main body of Muslims and not to break away into sects.

This premise was taken directly from the teaching of the Messenger ﷺ himself and the practise of the Companions after him.

At the first historical instance of Muslim infighting, when rebels surrounded the house of Sayyiduna Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him), Uthman refused to authorise his kinsmen to remove the rebels by force. His famous words were,

*“I will not be the first to shed the blood of Muslims.” (Suyuṭi 2004:127)*

<sup>14</sup> Quran, Nisā:94

<sup>15</sup> Quran, Āl ‘Imrān: 103

<sup>16</sup> Quran, Āl ‘Imrān: 105

He was subsequently martyred by the same rebels he had refused to fight, hence ushering in the beginning of the *fitan*, or Muslim civil wars. In fact, it is likely that the murderers of Uthman were the proto-Khawarij, as many authors have suggested. The killers of Uthman joined the forces of Sayyiduna Ali in Madina, and it may be these same were those who broke away from him later to form the Khawarij. If this is the case, it means that the Khawarij were responsible for the murder, not only of Ali (may Allah ennoble his countenance), but Uthman also (Timani 2008:26).

There are many *āyahs* of Quran and many hadiths that stress the importance of unity amongst the believers above almost all else. One powerful passage in the Quran is the narrative of Moses and Aaron and the incident in which their people started worshipping the Golden Calf. When Moses returned to his people from the mountain and found them worshipping the Calf, he turned to his brother, the Prophet Aaron, whom he had left behind as his deputy. Grabbing him by the head, Moses demanded,

*“O Aaron, what kept you back, when you saw them going wrong, from following me? Did you disobey my order?”*

Aaron replied, *“O son of my mother! Seize (me) not by my beard nor by (the hair of) my head! Truly I feared lest you should say, ‘You have caused a division among the children of Israel, and you did not respect my word!’”*<sup>17</sup>

Hence, the reason Aaron did not intervene was that he did not want to divide his people. Despite them committing the worst of sins, associating partners with God, Aaron chose to wait for Moses’s return in the hope that division between his *ummah* could be avoided.

### **The Khawarij – Past and Present**

On the morning of Friday 26<sup>th</sup> of January, 661, the ‘Lion of God’, Ali ibn Abi Talib, was struck on the head with a poisoned sword by a Khariji man, Abdul-Rahman ibn Amr ibn Muljam, in the masjid where he had come for the dawn prayer. Thus ended the life of the best man on the face of the Earth at the time. Arguably, no group of Muslims have done more damage to Islam and the Islamic community than the Khawarij.

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<sup>17</sup> Quran, Ta-Ha: 92-94

The murder of Sayyiduna Ali demonstrates two of the defining characteristics of the Khawarij: they tend to make takfeer of Muslims (anyone who does not agree with their doctrines and interpretations of scripture) and shed the blood of Muslims (Timani 2008:30). The early Khawarij (known as *Harūriyyah*, because they first gathered in a place called *Harūrā'*) declared both Ali and Mu'awiyah to be disbelievers, as well as all those who participated in the Battle of the Camel, i.e. most of the Sahabah (Timani 2008:30). One thing that Ibn Abbas noted when he was sent by Ali to try and reason with them was that there was not a single Companion amongst them. The early Khawarij rejected the authority of the Companions as the best interpreters and conveyers of Islam. Thus, the third characteristic of the Khawarij is their rigid adherence to certain interpretations of scripture, intolerance of difference of opinion, and a 'holier-than-thou'/superior attitude to others, even if those others are the highest authorities in Islam.

Indeed, the earliest members of this group, according to Sunni scholars<sup>18</sup>, even criticised the Prophet ﷺ himself and accused him of committing a major sin, i.e. being unjust in the distribution of booty/zakah<sup>19 20</sup>.

It is narrated that once the Prophet ﷺ received some gold from Yemen. He was distributing it to some of the newly-converted Muslims in order to attract them further (ta'alluf) when "...along came a man with a big beard, high cheekbones, deep-set eyes, protruding forehead and a shaved head, and said, 'Fear Allah, O Muhammad!' [accusing the Prophet of unjustly distributing the gold]. 'And who would obey Allah if I disobey Him?' asked the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, 'He has entrusted me with the responsibility for all the people on the Earth and yet you do not entrust me?' The man withdrew, and one of the people present – it is thought that it was Khalid ibn Waleed - asked permission to kill him. 'Surely from the stock of this man,' said the Prophet ﷺ, 'come a people who recite the Quran but it does not go beyond their throats; they kill the Muslims and spare the idolaters; they pass through Islam like an arrow passing through its target; if I were to come across them, I would surely destroy them as the 'Ād were destroyed'."<sup>21</sup>

Thus, the Khawarij couple a superior with a 'we-know-Islam-better' attitude.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Bukhāri includes the hadiths about the incident/s in which the Prophet (upon him be peace) was falsely accused under his chapters on the Khawarij

<sup>19</sup> It is interesting that Uthman was also accused of unjustly distributing public funds and favouring his own family.

<sup>20</sup> It is interesting that the modern-day Khawarij continue to insist that the prophets can and did commit major sins, contrary to orthodox Sunni doctrine.

<sup>21</sup> Bukhari and Muslim. *Kitāb al zakāh* (Book of Zakat): *bāb dhikr al-khawārij wa sifātihim* (Chapter on mention of the Khawarij and their description) (wording that of Muslim).

Many interesting accounts of their interactions with Companions and scholars are recorded in the biographical sources which throw light on their narrow-mindedness and slightly odd reasoning, which may explain why the Prophet ﷺ described them as *sufahā al-aḥlām* ('foolish/dim'). To cite one example, when Ibn Abbas went to discuss with the group that had gathered at Harūrā' and asked them what their objections to Ali were, one of the points they made was that because Ali had removed the title of 'Commander of the Believers' from himself, it meant that he must be 'Commander of the Disbelievers' (!). Ibn Umar used to regard them as the worst of God's creation; he said, "They take *āyahs* of Quran that refer to disbelievers and apply them to believers".<sup>22</sup>

It is clear from the hadith literature that the Prophet ﷺ warned many of the Companions about the tribulation of the Khawarij in the strongest possible terms and, in view of the large number of narrations, probably on many occasions. In fact, the Companions had so much information about the Khawarij from the Prophet ﷺ that when Ali first went to fight them at Nahrawan, he was able to describe one of them before the encounter took place. After the battle, the man was found amongst the enemy dead exactly according to the description given by Ali.

From the numerous hadiths which the Companions narrated containing descriptions of this group, a prominent theme is that they exhibit an extreme *outward* piety:

*"You will think that your prayer is nothing compared to their prayers; and your fasting is nothing compared to their fasting; they read the Quran, yet the recitation does not go beyond their throats; surely they fly from the faith as rapidly as an arrow flies through its target".*<sup>23</sup>

When Ibn Abbas went to speak to them on behalf of Ali, he made particular note of their outward religious practice: "I saw a people the like of whose worship I have not witnessed before..."<sup>24</sup>

In some narrations, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "If I were to come across them, I would destroy them as the 'Ād [people] were destroyed."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Bukhari. *Kitāb istitābat il-murtaddeen wal-mu'ānideen wa qitālihim* (Book of demanding repentance from apostates and recalcitrants and fighting them): *bāb qatl al-khawārij wal-mulḥideen ba'da iqāmat il-hujjah ilaihim* (Chapter on killing of Khawarij and deviants after presenting the evidence against them)

<sup>23</sup> Bukhari. *Kitāb istitābat il-murtaddeen wal-mu'ānideen wa qitālihim* (Book of demanding repentance from apostates and recalcitrants and fighting them): *bāb man taraka qitāl al-khawārij li-tta'alluf wa anla yanfiru al-nās 'anhu* (Chapter on one who does not fight the Khawarij in order to attract them [back to the fold] and to prevent the people from abandoning him)

<sup>24</sup> This is particularly striking in light of the fact that Ibn Abbas was a Companion.



As some Salafi groups cause confusion by referring to themselves as ‘*ahl al-sunnah*’, it is useful to define further what is meant by ‘Sunni’ orthodoxy. This will help to make clear which modern groups fall under the umbrella of Sunnism and which are more accurately described as ‘Khawarij’.

Most scholars and historians would agree that the “*ahl al-sunnah wal-jama’ah*”, or ‘Sunnis’, are those who follow the four Sunni schools of law (*madhabs*) (and their associated theological schools). Indeed, this should be beyond dispute as over one thousand years of history lies behind it (Makdisi 1979; Melchert 1997). Sunnism was not invented by any individual or any group; it arose gradually as a *negation* of various deviant sects that appeared in the early period. Sunnis were those who did not belong to any of those sects, they were simply the main body of Muslims who followed the teaching of the Companions, accepted the Four Caliphs as rightly-guided, and did not break the unity of the main body. An early reference to the term “*ahl al-sunnah wal-jama’ah*” occurs in the popular short treatise on Sunni creed, “The Tahawi Creed”. Tahawi begins his treatise by stating that “this is the doctrine of *ahl al-sunnah wal-jama’ah*”, showing that the term was already in wide usage by the end of the third Islamic century.

Limiting Sunnism to those who follow the four schools of law would, however, exclude a large number of today’s Muslims who have been influenced by the Non-Madhabism movement<sup>26</sup>. Shaykh Taqi Uthmani’s position is that those who do not follow a school of law yet respect the four Imams and tolerate differences of opinion, such as some who call themselves ‘*ahl al-hadith*’, fall within the Sunni orbit (Usmani 2006). This seems a reasonable position, as we have noted that the Khawarij are intolerant of differences. The boundaries between orthodoxy and heterodoxy are, by their nature, fuzzy. Some Khawarij will be closer to Sunnism (in doctrine and/or practice) than others, as is the case with all heretic/deviant sects.

An obstacle to a neat definition of Kharijism lies in another of their predominant characteristics: the tendency to splinter and in-fighting. This naturally follows from their dislike of personal authority, superior and intolerant attitudes, as they constantly reject the authority of their own leaders. Astonishingly, the original Khawarij group, the Harūriyyah, had already splintered into five separate factions by the end of Ali’s caliphate (Timani 2008:19).

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<sup>25</sup> Bukhari. *Kitāb aḥādīth al-anbiyā* (Book of stories of the prophets): *Bāb qawl-ullah wa ‘amma ‘ād fa uhliku birīḥin ṣarṣarin...* (Chapter on the words of Allah: as for ‘Ād, they were destroyed by a mighty wind...)

<sup>26</sup> For the Sunni position on following madhabs, see for example: (Būṭī 2007; Murad 1999; Usmani 1999)

In summary, the Khawarij are not, and have never been, one easily-definable sect due to their tendency to splinter into factions each with its own variant of the Khariji message. However, this difficulty should not lead us to pretend they do not exist. They clearly *did* exist for many centuries, and the various factions continued to spread their message and often fight the Muslim authorities of their time. Khawarij rebellions continued throughout the Ummayyad age up until the Fatimid era and, on occasions, succeeded in establishing Khawarij-states for brief periods (Timani 2008:22–23).

Recognising which groups today fall under the Khawarij umbrella revolves around the major characteristics described above. In summary:

1. Tendency to make takfeer of other Muslims.
2. Declaring Muslims who commit major sins, such as neglecting the obligatory prayers, to be disbelievers (Nawawi 2010:vol. 3: p.50).
3. Shedding the blood of Muslims
4. Superior attitude
5. Intolerance of opinions in religious matters which differ from their own
6. Tendency to splinter into factions and fight each other (often making takfeer of each other)
7. Rejection of traditional authorities and personal authority of any individual
  - a. Rejection of the status of the Prophet ﷺ accorded by orthodox Sunni belief<sup>27</sup>
8. Outward strict adherence to practices of the religion and excessive acts of worship (but lacking in true faith)<sup>28</sup>

On the basis of the above analysis, it should be emphasised that where I have referred to Salafis as ‘Khawarij’, I mean those Salafi factions that fulfil the criteria, the most important of which are that they make takfeer of Muslims, take up the sword against them, and do not tolerate difference of opinion. Other more moderate Salafi groups that respect the Imams and tolerate differences of opinion may fall under the orbit of orthodox Sunnism<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Early Khawarij groups rejected the intercession of the Prophet (upon him be peace). This tendency is manifested in modern Khawarij groups by their insistence on describing the Prophet as “dead”, saying that he has no power to benefit anyone after his death and that he committed major sins (all contrary to orthodox Sunni belief).

<sup>28</sup> Another ‘sign’ of this group mentioned in authentic hadiths is that they have ‘shaved heads’.

<sup>29</sup> It is not my purpose here to define Sunnism strictly. If we define Sunnism as the following of the four schools of law and their associated schools of theology, all non-Madhabists would fall outside of the orbit of Sunnism - but not necessarily into Kharijism.

Once we recognise that violent Salafi groups who are responsible for bloodshed of Muslims are Khawarij, what does this recognition entail? The example provided to us by Sayyiduna Ali is instructive, and lays the foundation of the Sunni attitude toward the Khawarij. Ali did everything he could to avoid fighting them. He tried his best to reason and make peace with them as fellow Muslims.

Contrary to *their* habit of takfeer, the Sunni majority do not return in kind. The Khawarij are viewed as a deviant sect yet within the fold of Islam, as are other deviant groups such as the Shia, Mu'tazila and others.

This recognition of their status as Muslims means that their blood, honour and property is sacred. The sword is not taken up against them, unless they take up the sword first, and all the Sharia consequences of being Muslim apply to them.

### **American and Israeli foreign policy and the Middle East**

In the summer of 2006, the entire Muslim world, Sunnis and Shias alike, were jubilant at the proclaimed victory of Hizbullah in forcing Israel to withdraw from Southern Lebanon. It was an embarrassing moment for the Zionist state and the worrying spectre of a Muslim world united in support of the Palestinian people threatened to become a reality.

By 2014, in contrast, Israel was able to invade Gaza, kill its people and destroy infrastructure at will. The Muslim Middle East was too busy tearing itself to pieces to be able to offer any support for the miserable Palestinian people. From Syria to Iraq to Egypt, the whole region was in chaos with a full-blown Shia-Sunni war becoming ever more likely.

European powers learnt long ago that instigating one's enemies to fight amongst themselves was an effective strategy. Israel, a racist, imperialistic state in the centre of the Muslim world, perceives herself as under constant potential threat from hostile neighbours.

Israel and America both fear the emergence of an authentic Sunni caliphate in the region. The idea of nationalism, imposed upon the Muslim world when it was carved into artificial nation-states by European colonial powers in the early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, never really took hold of Muslim imagination, except amongst a Western-imitating minority. As the world moves into a post-nation state era (Castells 2007:239), Muslims are increasingly looking back to their supranational and

civilizational identity, i.e. that of belonging to one *ummah*. There is increasing evidence that Muslims around the world believe in the idea of a united caliphate under the umbrella of a pious, moderate and dynamic understanding of divine law (Kull et al. 2007:21–22; Bell 2013:46–47).

The reasons for Israeli fear of such a united caliphate is fairly obvious as no strong Muslim power in the region would ignore the plight of the Palestinian people for long. It is also quite possible that Israel has territorial ambitions beyond its present borders in which case a strong, united Islamic caliphate in the region would be particularly intolerable.

America’s policy toward the Middle East and her apprehension of an authentic Sunni caliphate arising in the region is linked in part to her unconditional support of the Zionist state and, in part, to her approach toward the whole of the Asian continent which lies in preventing any one nation becoming powerful enough to challenge her global pre-eminence (Brzezinski 2007:xiv). America sees herself as the architect and protector of a “new world order”, as has been publicly announced first by President George Bush Snr and, more recently, by Barack Obama and other prominent figures (Bush Snr. 1991; Porter, Winnet, and Harnden 2009; Kissinger 2014).

An authentic Sunni caliphate arising in any part of the Middle East-Central Asian region would have the worrying propensity to quickly spread in a domino-effect across the region. This is why the Taliban, who did establish an authentic Sunni caliphate (albeit a narrow, conservative brand of Sunnism) in the heart of the region, had to be removed. In the short time of Taliban governance, the electric effects on surrounding Sunni areas was already being felt, with analysts talking of ‘Talibanization’ (a code term for the call for a united Sunni caliphate) of North-West Pakistan, the Central Asian states and spilling into the Muslim areas of Northern China as well (Ahmed 2014). The danger - anathema in Israeli eyes -of the whole region from Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Central Asian states, through Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Egypt and the Arabian peninsula being drawn under the united caliphate of a pious leader, distant though it may be, was to be removed under any circumstances.

It was necessary to get rid of the Taliban threat<sup>30</sup>. A global propaganda campaign by Zionist-controlled news media was set in motion to demonise the Taliban with spectacular effect. Soon, America and her allies, utilising the help of drug-dealers and bandit warlords that the Taliban had driven out of the country and a treacherous Pakistani president, had invaded the country, deposed the Taliban government and recreated Afghanistan as the heroin-capital of the world (Murray 2007).

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<sup>30</sup> The Taliban had, for the first time in a generation, succeeded in bringing stability and security to Afghanistan, as well as eradicating opium production (Jelsma 2005)

Manufacturing a Shia-Sunni conflict must have been an attractive proposition, but would be no easy matter in view of the reality that Shias and Sunnis had lived together, in all major Muslim cities, largely peacefully for over a thousand years. The Shia were unlikely to have any interest in declaring war on eighty-five percent of the Muslim world, and the powerful Sunni doctrines of tolerance of differences and Muslim unity, coupled with the strict prohibition of shedding Muslim blood, would make the idea of fighting the Shia, considered deviant yet still Muslim, unthinkable.

In reality, the groundwork in laying the seeds of Shia-Sunni conflict had been going on well before the Taliban and Hizbullah crises. Close US allies, the House of Saud, had been sponsoring the Salafi-Khawarij (vehemently anti-Shia) teaching for decades and had succeeded in making it a global phenomenon.

It seems likely that Salafist-Jihadi militant groups are being covertly supported to fight Muslims, such as the Shia (Hussein 2014). This serves the interests of America and Israel in the region. The fighting between Salafi-Khawarij groups and Shia forces is intentionally being misrepresented as a Sunni-Shia conflict in an effort, already bearing fruit, to instigate the latter. Once the tit-for-tat attacks between the two groups begin, the conflict escalates, and hatred and feelings of revenge on both sides begin to predominate, people stop seeing clearly and forget how it was triggered in the first place.

The rhetoric and mutual distrust and anger between Shia and Sunni groups is now threatening to blind both sides from the root cause of the conflict: the actions of Salafi-Khawarij groups blowing up Shia men, women and children. Indeed, early attempts by Shia clerics to prevent a full-blown Shia-Sunni conflict and repeatedly point out that those attacking them were not Sunnis but 'Wahhabis'<sup>31</sup> are now lost in the smoke of battle.

It is imperative for Sunni Muslims to re-educate themselves in their tradition and not to be influenced by the anti-Shia rhetoric and sentiment that is now rife in the Muslim (especially Arab) world. Sunnis need to look back in the historical timeline and clarify who started this conflict. The roots of the current fighting go back to the oil-grabbing invasion of Iraq by the US and Britain and events that followed in its wake. A careful search will reveal that repeated attacks by Salafi-Khawarij groups, posing as 'Sunnis', against Shia civilians were the instigating factors<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Another term for the strand of Salafi-Kharijism that originated with Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab of Najd

<sup>32</sup> Ayatullah Sistani, the most influential Shia cleric in Iraq tried hard to prevent conflict with Sunnis.

"Frustrated by the level of violence against the Shia, in November 2004 the prominent Shia politician and scion of a notable clerical family Muhammad Bahrul-Uloum went to Sistani. Standing before the ayatollah, he angrily

We are now witnessing the global news media repeatedly describing Salafi-Khawarij groups as “Sunni”. This serves two purposes. Firstly, to drag the Sunni majority into the conflict and widen it to a full-blown Shia-Sunni war that could extend across the region. Secondly, a particularly spectacular propaganda coup, whether planned or not, for the US-Israeli alliance is the naming of the current headline-hitting Salafi-Khawarij group simply as ‘Islamic State’. It should more accurately be called ‘Un-Islamic State’ (as many Khawarij doctrines and practices are contradictory to orthodox Islam) or, at least, ‘Khawarij State’ to clearly differentiate it from an authentic Sunni caliphate.

In this way, the Zionist-dominated global news media is able to depict the bloodthirsty, intolerant and often, downright ridiculous<sup>33</sup>, behaviour of the Salafi-Khawarij fighters as a reflection of what an ‘Islamic State’ represents.

Israel’s purpose is simply to demonise the very concept of an ‘Islamic State’ (a noble ideal to which many moderate Sunni Muslims aspire) in Western eyes so that whenever such an idea is mentioned, or even thought about, it immediately inspires fear and loathing. Whatever else is on the table, the idea of an ‘Islamic State’ or ‘Caliphate’ must be out-of-bounds.

In summary, American foreign policy is to prevent the rise of any one power in Asia that may potentially challenge its self-proclaimed role as guardian of the new world order, and an authentic Sunni caliphate, though a distant prospect, may represent such a threat. For Israel, the spectre of an authentic, powerful and pious Sunni caliphate potentially on its borders, or even a united Shia-Sunni block, is contra to its racist and imperialistic objectives. Militant non-Sunni Salafi-Khawarij groups are useful to further US-Israeli objectives by causing bloodshed and chaos and destroying infrastructure across the Arab Muslim lands, dragging the Sunni world into a conflict with the Shia, and aiding the demonization of the idea of an Islamic state.

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struck his cane on the ground and said, “We’re not going to have our families attacked by terrorists. Everything has its limits. Once that limit is passed, all that is left is God and your weapon.” He asked Sistani to call on Shia militias to fight back. Sistani replied quietly, “Please don’t do this. Please be civilized. We don’t want to start a civil war. This is the most important point.” Bahrul-Uloum bowed to Sistani’s wish. During the ensuing months of bombings and bloodshed – and even in the aftermath of the destruction of the Shia Askariyya shrine in Samarra in February 2006 – Sistani repeated his counsel. Shia clerics and preachers in turn repeated his words in their sermons across Iraq, and once again most Shias heeded his call – even after the shock of the Samarra bombing. After every bombing, the Shia mosques associated with Sistani would tell their congregations that **it was not their Sunni neighbours who were killing them but foreign ‘Wahhabis.’**” (Nasr 2007:178) (emphasis mine)

<sup>33</sup> E.g. the Hollywood-style statement of ‘Jihadi John’, “I am back”, when carrying out his second murder of an innocent man for Youtube. (Clearly, such characters are subconsciously obsessed with the West while outwardly opposing it).



*Clarity Through Revelation*

Sunni Muslims must recognise the Khawarij for who they are and realise that the conflict is a Khawarij-Shia one not a Sunni-Shia one.

Surely the time has come for the Sunni world to extend the hand of peace to the Shia, and put their differences (which should be intellectual and never physical) aside to debate another day.

And our final call is: *Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds*

*Dedicated to my esteemed teacher, Shaykh Sa'eed Ramadan al-Bouṭi, who was killed at the hands of a Khariji suicide bomber while teaching in Jami'ah al-Imān in Damascus, Syria. May Allah have mercy on his soul.*

*Authored by the Poor and Needy of his Lord,*

*Ridhwan ibn Muhammad Saleem*

*Dhul-Qa'da 1435/September 2014*



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