



A Conflicts Forum Monograph

Evolving Currents in Salafism and Shi'ism:

**'The function of transmitted knowledge
and of intellectual knowledge within
the Islamic revival'**

Pages from a meeting held in Beirut

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1 Introduction

Alastair Crooke

Why did we hold this meeting – papers from which are published in this small volume? Firstly, I should underline that *Conflicts Forum* does not see itself as a 'reconciliator', nor has it, amongst its objectives, the desire to present any of its own solutions. It seeks rather to look through the immediate symptoms expressed in conflict, to the underlying imbalances or causes: *Conflict Forum*, in short, seeks understanding, rather than to provide prescription.

The purpose of this meeting was to address the Future – and what this imminent future might bring to this region. Our purpose therefore related to a sense that this region is entering into a new era; a new political situation, which I think is going to be quite different to that which has been experienced in the past. What I mean by this is, that at the end of the last great western intervention in the Muslim world - in the early 1920s – into this void, stepped the colonial powers - primarily Britain and France.

Now, in 2009, we seem to be approaching the end of another period of direct - and damaging - western intervention in the region. Western involvement is ebbing out from the Middle East: Of course, it has not gone yet, and will not go entirely. The European and American involvement will, I suspect, be more of a proxy intervention than the direct colonial presence of the past. But we are in a very different situation than in the last era – the 1920s - because it seems, this time, there will be no colonial power ready to plunge in. There won't be a France or Britain acting as they did in the 1920s; the US is pulling back; and Russia and China have not similar colonial ambitions to those of the western states in the 1920s. Russia and China will continue to be involved; but not as France and Britain did: not in the colonial sense; but as technical and economic partners.

What this means is that it will be the peoples and the states of this region – rather than outside powers – that for the first time in centuries - will determine the future of this region. So there will be a struggle – a struggle to dictate what may be the vision and political orientation of the region, and also a struggle for the future shape direction of Islam.

So, at this meeting what we were trying to do was to look at where there might be points of common destiny, in the face of a different future; a new era, with all sorts of challenges not only politically, but economically and socially, too. And to think what form that common destiny might assume.

I have emphasised the future destiny and the common vision for the way ahead, because I think in all these things it is quite hard to let go of history. I don't mean in the sense that one can ignore it; or should ignore it, but everyone who participated will be aware that we gathered together in Lebanon. Lebanon is a state that has no 'one' history, as such, it has 14 separate and occasionally irreconcilable histories.

I think that despite these different understandings of history, and the need to benefit from its lessons, history is not necessarily the best entry to a discussion of the reality we face today; or tomorrow. That requires a different approach, which is to talk about the future. Do we want the future to be better than our reality today; or are we content with projecting our present realities into the future? Of course, in discussing the future, it might still be difficult to differentiate between the political and the sectarian; but if we separate between the principles that are common to the origins of Islam; and, on the other hand, the various sectarian heritages, it may be possible to explore where the umma can situate itself politically; and how to confront the new challenges that face us – both internal and external.

In this context, what we can address is how to mobilize people, and to help them visualize a better way of living, rather than see the problems of the region mainly in terms of competing and clashing projects.

It is clear that the old 'narratives' – even those embedded in the origins of Islam – may seem no longer so relevant to young people today immersed in a materialist world. This does not signify that a peoples' narrative and history no longer carries meaning in the contemporary world. Always, when a community is in search of solutions for newly arising problems, it needs to return to its origins; to its founding narratives for fresh insights – in this way meaning and symbolism is renewed and can provide the solutions to tomorrow's problems.

Equally, I believe that a change in language can be profoundly important in this task of refreshing 'old truths' and in giving people the energy and the hope of aspiring to a higher mode of living – of being able to see themselves as better than they now are.

I hope that in this way, it may be possible to lay down the burden of history, and to try to derive some essential principles and key causes, such as the Palestinian struggle, around which all can gather in a shared destiny that sidesteps internal confrontations, which surely will be fuelled and encouraged by outside interests.

2 Salafism and Shiism: A conflict between Text and Interpretation, or a difference in History and Politics?

Ahmad Al Katib

The ongoing conflict between Salafism and Shiism involves some disagreement in the interpretation of texts, but it is originally based on a disagreement about politics. In fact, you could say that there is no real conflict between Salafists and Shi'i today, or that there are no real reasons for the conflict between them, especially in light of their shared purpose in the struggle of oppressed people against dictatorial regimes. The dictatorial regimes use cultural slogans in their fight against the people. Salafists taking part in this effort are not real Salafists, nor are modern Shi'i the same as historical Shi'i. Hence, the conflict between them is an artificial construct. It escalates or calms down according to political circumstances.

To understand the conflict between Salafists and Shi'i accurately, then, as a means to find a better solution, we must first define the terms "Salafism" and "Shi'ism".

Salafism or Wahhabism

Salafism originated in the seventh *Hijri* century among followers of Hanbali School and among Hadith scholars. It advocated the return to the course of the *Salaf* (the initial followers of the Prophet), and taking judgement from "Authentic Hadiths," rather than conforming to the later schools, or the deviations that took place in subsequent centuries. The scholar Ahmad bin Abdul Halim, Ibn Taymiyyah (661-728 H / 1263 – 1328 A.D.) criticised many things that he considered deviations in the Muslim Ummah (community of believers), one of which was the Shi'i.

"Salafism" became the name for the school of Ibn Taymiyyah, which inherited the old intellectual disagreement between Sunnis and Imami Shi'ih. This gave the disagreement a new focus and a Salafi flavour.

When Salafism first appeared it was an intellectual and cultural school, not an armed political movement. However, it became political in the eighteenth century A.D., when the Salafi scholar Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (1703 – 1791) formed an alliance with the Nejd prince Muhammad bin Saud. This alliance led to the emergence of the first Saudi "*Wahhabi*" state (1744 – 1818 A.D.). The scholar Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab had a particularly narrow definition of monotheism and faith, and he made 10 conditions for faith, which excluded most Muslims and considered them polytheists

and infidels. He resorted to violence and "*takfir*" (declaration of apostasy) against much of the Muslim public, including Asharites, Hanbalis, Sufis, and Ibadis, and he waged an especially violent attack on the Shi'i.¹

Hence, we should, in this research, replace the general, cultural, non-political term "Salafism" with the more accurate term, which is "Wahhabism".

Shi'im

The term "Shi'i", is also very broad, and requires definition. This is due to the various varieties within Shiism. Shiism was, in the first *Hijri* century, a general title for all who supported "*Ahl Al Bayt*" (the family of the Prophet) and Shi'i represented, at the time of Imam Ali, the largest portion of the Muslim Ummah. In the second *Hijri* century, Shi'ism included many factions, one of which preached the divine right (based on infallibility, text, and appointment) of Imams of a certain bloodline among *Ahl Al Bayt* -- the descendants of Ali and Hussein. Then, in the third *Hijri* century emerged the "*Twelver*" sect, based on the belief in an absent Twelfth Imam, "Muhammad bin Al Hasan Al Askari". This sect became prevalent among Shi'i, and it became the dominant Shi'i sect in the Middle East.

When we talk about the conflict between Wahhabis and Shi'i, we mean those Shi'i of the Imami Twelver sect.

The Cultural Disagreements between Wahhabism and Shiism

When the Wahhabi movement appeared in the eighteenth century A.D., it criticised Shiism for two main issues: "visiting shrines" and "swearing at the *Sahaba*". (*Sahaba* means the companions of the Prophet.) These two issues became focal points for attacking Shi'i, and for considering them infidels worthy of violent attack, which had been adopted by the scholar Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab.

As for the first issue, it was not only about Shi'i. It was the issue that the Wahhabi movement used against Muslims in general. The scholar Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab considered the shrines of holy men as idols. He thus considered visiting them and asking them for help to be a kind of idolatry and a kind of polytheism. He destroyed the shrine of Zayd bin Al Khattab in Nejd and many other shrines of holy men. Wahhabis sent many military campaigns to Karbala and Najaf in the nineteenth century in order to burn down the shrines of the Imams in Iraq. (They managed to

¹ The scholar Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab described Shiites in his book "Answering Rafida" as the "most hostile people towards Sunnis". He likened them to monkeys and pigs and wrote, "It is said that their forms metamorphose when they die."

destroy the shrines of Baqeeh Imams -- Al Hasan, Zayn Al Abedeen, Al Baqir, Al Sadiq -- in addition to the rest of the shrines there). For their part, Shi'i considered visiting the shrines of the Imams a kind or virtuous reverence. They did not consider these visits acts of worship or supplication. They say that they visit them to read the Fatiha (the first chapter of the Koran, often read for the souls of the dead) and commemorate the causes of the Imams, and to learn lessons from their biographies, especially from the biography of the Imam Hussein, who led a revolution against injustice and deviation, and was later martyred in Karbala.

As for the second issue, "swearing at the *Sahaba*", it was not in fact a fundamental part of Shi'ism. Instead, it was a habit popularized by the Safavids, who ruled Persia between 1501 and 1722 A.D. They popularized some myths about the role of the Caliph Omar bin Al-Khattab in the attack on the house of the Imam Ali: he was said to have burned the house and assaulted Fatima, crushing her against a wall, thereby breaking her ribs and causing her to lose her fetus, "*Muhsen*". They also popularized the habit of mourning for her on the anniversary of her death. This included denouncing her murderer.

The Iranian emperor Nadir Shah, who inherited the Safavid state, followed a different policy. In the *Hijri* month of *Shawal* in the year 1156 *Hijri* (December 1743 A.D.), he held a conference of Shi'i and Sunni scholars, including Arabs, Persians, Turks, and Afghans, where he reiterated the ban on swearing and cursing, and reiterated the need for respect for all Caliphs and Sahaba.

The new Islamic Iranian regime tried since its early days to bridge these gaps between Muslims, and held cultural weeks for Islamic unity every year at the anniversaries of the births of the Prophet and the Imam Jaafar Al Sadeq. It also formed the International Council for Uniting Islamic Sects. This followed in the footsteps of the House for Uniting Islamic Sects, which was set up by the Iranian Shi'i authority Al Brujerdi, in Egypt, in the previous century. Dr Ali Shariati wrote many books criticizing the negative Safavid culture and differentiating between "Alawite Shi'i and Safavid Shi'ih". Meanwhile, the culture has been changing. The Iranian media refrained from insulting the Elder Caliphs, and Khomeini even prohibited it.² Leading

² The former Iranian home minister, one of the propagators of the Iranian Revolution, Ali Muhtashimi, said in a dialogue on the website "Islam Online" in 2/10/2008: "The higher guide of the Iranian Islamic republic Ayatollah Khamenei respects the Mother of Believers Aisha and refuses to insult her, as the Iranian policy is against swearing at the companions of the Prophet, and as a continuation of the policy of Imam Khomeini who issued a fatwa for the death of Salman Rushdie because he insulted the Prophet (PBUH) and the Mother of Believers. Anyone who insults Aisha, the wife of the Prophet is an infidel. Whoever insults her will have a death sentence issued against him or her."

Shi'i scholars reiterated last year in symposiums and conferences that swearing at the *Sahaba*, the Elder Caliphs, and the Mother of Believers, Aisha, is not a part of Shi'ism, and that this practice is an old habit that does not have any basis in the canonical books of Shi'ism.³

That said, a party of traditional Shi'i still exaggerates the political disagreements between the *Sahaba* and the Imam Ali. They accuse Abu Bakr of making a coup against the Imam Ali bin Abi Talib, "usurping" the Caliphate from him, and ignoring the "text" from the Prophet. On the other hand, reformists Shi'i reiterate that this problem has become a problem of the past, and that it is in any event not an excuse for swearing at the *Sahaba*.⁴

Any sincere Islamist movement would have welcomed these fundamental developments among Shi'i and would have cooperated with them to remove the accumulated disagreements and problems and that is what many Islamist movements did.⁵ The Wahhabi movement did the opposite. It ignored the positive developments and kept repeating the same accusations and historical points of criticism. While cultural Wahhabism refuses to make general judgments of *takfir* or to accuse someone without sentence by a court and after ruling out any doubt, or other possible interpretations, as the scholar Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab says,⁶ contemporary

³ This made the scholar Ali Jumah the Mufti of Egypt proclaim his full support for the developments that took place among Shiites in 2008, referring to Shi'ia studies that called for banning swearing at the *Sahaba* on the pulpits of mosques. *Alarabiyah.net* 5/2/2009

⁴ The scholar Hassan Al Saffar said in his meeting with the Medina Journal, on 15/10/2004, in the program "frank talks": "Any Shiite who swears at the two elders, Abu Bakr and Omar, is either an extremist or an ignorant person. Most Shiites do not practice that nor do they accept it. Shia radio and satellite channels in Iran, Lebanon, Iraq are the best evidence. Their Friday speeches are aired and their journals are everywhere and they do not have that [swearing at the two elders].... Some Shia commit a grave mistake by swearing and cursing at Caliphs because of a misunderstanding on their behalf or as a result of extremist attitudes from Sunnis. The whole sect should not be held responsible for that practice. Otherwise, the West would also have the right to hold all Arabs and Muslims responsible for the deeds of terrorists and extremist Muslims.... Of course I cannot deny that there is a portion of the Shiites who are extremists. They swear and curse, and have writings and speeches of this sort, but they are limited in terms of size and influence, and their extremism comes as a reaction against the extremism of others against Shi'ism."

⁵ The mufti Ali Jumah said: "There is no difference between a Sunni and a Shiite, and we have to recognise the development achieved by this sect, that development which allows us to cooperate with them in the present. There are people who dig into the old Shiite books in order to bring out points of disagreement. That is a grave mistake". *Alarabiah.net* on 5/2/2009

⁶ The scholar Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab refused to consider people infidels *en masse* and said, "As for *takfir*, I only declare it against those who knew the religion of the Prophet, and then cursed it, prohibited people from following it, and became hostile towards those who follow it. I declare *takfir*

"Political" Wahhabism incessantly attacked Shi'ism. Although the criticism of visiting shrines concerns most Muslims, not only Shi'i, Wahhabis turned a blind eye on its old disagreements with other Sunnis whom it had considered infidels in the past.⁷ Wahhabis claimed themselves a part of the Sunni sect and denounced the name "Wahhabism", which they were in the past proud of. They concentrated solely on their struggle against Shi'ism in the recent decades, and took an attitude which considers all Shi'i infidels.⁸ Thus, the disagreement between Shi'i and Wahhabis would not have escalated on a large scale as it did in the past decades if it was not for political factors, which I believe to be the main reason of the present disagreement.

The Political Factors of the Disagreement between Wahhabism and Shi'i

The theoretical disagreement about the political regime in Islam is probably the oldest disagreement between the Imami Shi'i and the rest of Muslims. The Shi'i believed in the theory of text while others believed in choice. This disagreement became a disagreement in thought and *Fiqh* (Islamic legislation) since the absence of the twelfth Imam, "the awaited Mahdi," in the middle of third *Hijri* century. According to the scholar Hasan Al Saffar (one of Shi'ia leaders in Saudi Arabia) the disagreement between Shi'i and Sunnis about the text regarding the imam Ali and whether he is indeed the rightful Caliph has become a "historical issue that does not need to be fought for and a simple matter that should not cause dissent"⁹. On the other hand, a revolutionary, democratic development took place among later Shi'i when the Imam Khomeini adopted the theory of "the guardianship of the Islamic jurist," a form of democratic thought that is supported by the majority of Muslims. Meanwhile, Wahhabism fell into dictatorial thought after the scholar Muhammad bin Abdul

against those people, and most people that I know are, thank God, not like that." *The Luminous Pearls* pp. 71 and 83.

⁷ See the book "*The Final Words Answering Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab*," by his brother, the scholar Suleiman bin Abdul Wahhab, in which he criticises Wahhabism and says: "Now, you declare *takfir* against those who witness that there is only one God and that Muhammad is his slave and messenger, those who pray, pay *Zakah*, fast in Ramadan and go to Mecca on pilgrimage, those who believe in God, his angels, his holy books and messengers and follow all the practices of Islam. You declare *takfir* against them and consider their lands as lands of war. You declared *takfir* against all the Ummah of the Prophet when you said that whoever does those deeds is an infidel and whoever does not consider them infidels is himself an infidel... you consider all these lands as lands of war and their inhabitants as infidels because you say that they worship idols and because you consider them all as polytheist in a grotesque way that excludes them from the followers of the religion" 5-7

⁸ See the fatwa of the Permanent Committee for Research and Fatwa in 12/3/1412 under number 2008

⁹ Al Saffar, *Al Medina* journal in 15/10/2004.

Wahhab formed an alliance with the prince Muhammad bin Saud in the middle of the eighteenth century. That alliance led to the emergence of a state which is hereditary, and with absolute dictatorship, in which the nation at large has no role in making choices. The same experience (the alliance between the Saudis and the family of the scholar Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab) was repeated in the second Saudi state in the nineteenth century and again in the third Saudi state, which emerged in the beginning of the twentieth century and still exists.

As a result of this Wahhabi-Saudi alliance, and its dictatorial nature, the Wahhabi movement assumed the role of the oppressor of public resistance. Both Saudis and Wahhabis used, while establishing the third Saudi state in the early twentieth century, a language that labels most Muslims, including Shi'i, as infidels¹⁰. Although King Abdul Aziz bin Saudi softened that language after taking over Hejaz in 1925, and acknowledged the Islam of non-Wahhabis, the relationship between Shi'i and the Saudi state remained under duress as a result of ongoing Shi'i demands for cultural, political, and economic rights as citizens. This led the Saudi state to launch a media campaign publicizing fatwas against Shi'i as infidels, in order to silence their voices and make them surrender.¹¹

"Wahhabism" against "political Shi'im"

¹⁰ The scholar Suleiman bin Sahman, a member of the committee of senior scholars who is responsible for mobilising the "*Ikhwan*"(the brothers) says: "We do not know the religion of all people in the Arab peninsula. It seems, rather, that most of them do not follow Islam. Yet, we do not say that they are all infidels because there could be Muslims among them. As for those under the rule of Muslims, it is more likely for the majority of them to be Muslims because they apparently practice the teachings of Islam. As for those who are not under the rule of the Imam of the Muslims, we do not know each of their cases, and what they follow, but it is most likely that the majority of them are, as we said before, non-Muslims". *The Course of Righteousness*, pp.79-80. The King Abdul Aziz had to give up his *takfir* language, as Muhammad Jalal Kushk says, after Laurence of Arabia conveyed to him a threat from Britain, by saying: "If Ibn Saud wants to give up Wahhabism, we welcome his occupation of Hejaz, but if he wants to keep it, we will bring Indian Muslims to rid the land of the two sacred cities from him". *Saudis and Islamic Solution*, p.496.

¹¹ Wahhabis used to call Shiah "*Rafida*" and they considered them followers of a religion other than Islam. The scholar Muhammad bin Abdul Latif (along with fourteen other scholars) issued at the end of a meeting in Shaaban, in the year 1345 (17/1/1927), a manifesto which said: "... As for *Rafida* we issued a fatwa for the Imam Ibn Saud, about them which says that he should compel them to join Islam. He should also prevent them from practicing their false religion in public. The Imam should make his deputy in Ahsa bring them to the scholar (Ibn Bishr) so that they may promise him to follow the religion of God and His messenger.... He should oblige them to follow the teachings of "The Three Sources" [a book by the scholar Abdul Wahhab], and whoever refuses should be dismissed from the land of Muslims.... As for the *Rafida* of Iraq, who spread in it and entered the desert of the Muslims, the Imam gave us a fatwa to prevent them from entering the pastures of the Muslims and their lands". Hafiz Wehbe: *The Arab Peninsula in the Twentieth Century*, p 227; and Abdul Aziz Al Tuwayjeri, "For the Travellers in the Night are the Calls in the Morning", pp 367 – 369.

The Saudi "Wahhabi" campaign against Shi'i in the whole Middle East and the Muslim World has increased as a result of the prominence of "political Shi'ism" in recent decades in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon, which is encompassed in the following:

1. The Islamic revolution in Iran, in 1979: This revolution fuelled revolutionary feelings in many Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, where the movement of *Juhaiman* broke out that same year, in Mecca, and led the Shi'i in the eastern areas of Saudi Arabia to revolt and protest in 1980. It also fuelled the resentments of Shi'i in Iraq. This led the embattled Saudi regime to form an alliance with the regime of Saddam Hussein, in order to confront the Iranian revolution, and wage a virtual sectarian world war against both Iran and Shi'i thought, which had already started spreading to Sunni youth who were supportive of the revolution everywhere.

The previous mufti of the kingdom, Abdul Aziz bin Baz , issued a strong fatwa refusing to bring together Sunnis with Shi'i in which he said, "It is impossible to bring "*Rafida*" [dissenters] and Sunnis together because their creeds are different. The creed for the Sunnis is monotheism, worshiping only God, not angels nor messenger of God, loving all the *Sahaba*, may God be satisfied with them, believing that they are the best creatures after the prophets, believing that the best one among them is Abu Bakr, then Omar, then Othman, then Ali, may god be satisfied with them all. The creed of *Rafida* is different and the two creeds cannot be brought together. Just like Jews, Christians, or Pagans cannot be brought together with Sunnis, *Rafida* also cannot be brought together with Sunnis".¹²

The *Permanent Committee for Research and Fatwa* (headed by Abdul Aziz bin Baz, Abdul Razzaq Afifi, Abdullah bin Ghudayan, and Abdullah bin Qaoud) issued sentence number 1661, which condemned Shi'i as infidels and apostates. It included, "Whoever, among laymen, follows a leader of infidels and misdirection, and wrongly supports him, is judged to be like that infidel leader: an infidel himself... because when the Prophet (PBUH) fought those polytheist leaders and their followers, and so did his companions, they did not differentiate between leaders and their followers"¹³. The above-mentioned committee issued another fatwa in 12/3/1412, under the number 2008, which addressed Shi'i infidels in general, and included the following: "Shi'i have great polytheism which excludes them from the religion of Islam. They are apostates from Islam. They are

¹² <http://www.binbaz.org.sa/mat/1744>

¹³ <http://www.ahlalhdeth.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-6878.html>

exaggerators [in their reverence of *Ahl Al Bayt*] and hypocrites. Hence, we decided the following:

- i. A ban on eating the meat of animals that they slaughter.
- ii. A ban on marrying any of them.
- iii. Refusing their claim to brotherhood in Islam".

The Committee accused Shi'i "of exaggerating the status of Imam Ali, considering him like a god, a creator, and disposer of the universe, and believing that he is omniscient and that he can protect us from evil and bring about goodness, as well as claiming that the Koran was altered so that the parts about Ahl Al Bayt and their enemies were omitted, and also that the Shi'i practiced hypocrisy and *Taqiyya* (concealing one's true faith)".¹⁴

In addition, Wahhabi media, sponsored by Saudi government (such as the Administration of Mission, Fatwa and Guidance), published a group of extremist books like "*Dispersing the Darkness and Awakening the Sleepers to the Danger of Shi'ih for Muslims and Islam*" by Ibrahim Al Jabhan who waged a violent attack on Shi'i and Shiism and the experiment of the "House for Bringing Muslim Sects together," which had appeared in Cairo in the fifties, and the book "*And Then Came the Turn of the Mag,*" by Abdullah Al Gharib, as well as other books. The Islamic Relief Organisation distributed a book titled "*One Hundred Questions and Answers about Charity,*" which stated: "It is necessary for Sunni Muslims to show hatred for heretics and show repulsion by them, to scorn them and call them *Rafida*, rejecters of God, and shrine visitors, and to call them apostates from Islam. It is the duty of a Muslim to get rid of their evil as much as he can".

The Saudi media, working as a mouthpiece for "Wahhabism" manipulated the literature of the Safavid period, referenced the sayings of some extinct extremist Shi'i factions. These media outlets kept repeating outdated ideas, and relied on negative practices. They took advantage of some flaws in the new Iranian constitution (such as a condition stating that the president of the republic must be a Twelver Shi'i). They raised the issues of the arrests and executions of a number of opposing Sunni scholars, as well as and the prohibition against building Sunni

¹⁴ This Fatwa came in contradiction with another fatwa which was issued by the same committee under the number 7308 as an answer to a question about what the creed of Shi'ism is. It says: "Shi'i are divided into a number of sects. Many of them are exaggerators and many are otherwise", and advises the one who asked the question to refer to the books of scholars about the details of the creed.

mosques in Tehran, in order to draw a negative image of the Iranian regime, and to justify a boycott of it.

We do not mean to say that the Iranian regime was perfect or flawless, but we would like to indicate that political disagreement played a role in escalating the sectarian conflict between Shi'i and Wahhabism.

2. The fall of the Iraqi regime in 2003: The Saudi regime provided logistical military support as well as air and land passages during the operation to bring down Saddam's regime in 2003, but it did not yield any positive results, as the operation resulted in Iranian-aligned Shi'i taking over Iraq. That fuelled the political disagreement which was already raging between the two sides.

The sectarian dissent later developed in Iraq because Al Qaeda (supported with money, men and arms from the Wahhabis) declared an open war on Shi'i "*Rafida*" in 20/9/2005, and started killing them indiscriminately. It also tried to topple the new Iraqi regime, especially after Al Qaeda blew up the shrines of the imams Al Hadi and Al Askari, in Samarra, in 2006.

Wahhabis recalled the negative habit of accusing Shi'i of being infidels from the days of previous conflicts, and the Ottoman Safavid conflict. They started to use that tradition as a means to mobilise suicide bombers, who started coming to Iraq to blow themselves up in public Shi'i places.¹⁵ The scholar Abdullah bin Jebrin (a member of the Committee of Research, Fatwa, Mission and Guidance in Saudi Arabia) made a manifesto on 20/1/2007 against Iraqi Shi'i, under the name of "Supporting Sunni Muslims in Iraq", which included the following: "We know [of] the hostility of Rafida in every country, and every time, towards Sunnis". He also warned against "being tricked by their propaganda and claims", and assured that the Shi'i are "the worst enemies and the worst conspirators against Muslims. Therefore, we should be wary, and warn others about the tricks and plots of Shi'i. They should be shunned, dismissed, and ostracised, so that Muslims may be safe from their evils."¹⁶

3. The Lebanese Political Dispute: The Lebanese political factor in the conflict between Wahhabis and Shi'i, occurring after the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia took a negative attitude towards Hezbollah, in the July 2006 war, made the scholar

¹⁵ As an example refer to the Saudi website "*islammemo*" which supports Al Qaeda and Zarqawi openly: http://www.islammemo.cc/news/one_news.asp?IDNews=113524

¹⁶ "*The Muslim*" website, supervised by the scholar Nasser Alomar: http://www.almoslim.net/figh_wagi3/show_news_main.cfm?id=16939

Abdullah bin Jebrin issue a fatwa which prohibited praying for Hezbollah, let alone supporting it or joining it. This fatwa aggravated the conflict between Shi'i and Wahhabis.¹⁷

When Saudi Arabia found itself facing a surge of public Sunni support for Hezbollah, which emerged victorious out of its war against Israel, it waged a new media war against Shi'ism and repeated the old accusations of swearing at the *Sahaba*, and tampering with the Koran, and so on. They started also talking about a possible Shi'i invasion of Sunni areas.

4. The Escalation in the Confrontation between Iran and the United States in the Era of Bush: Saudi Arabia became involved in the American plan to boycott Iran, alienate it, and prepare the atmosphere for attacking it. This resulted in escalating the "Wahhabi" media campaign against Shi'ism and Iran.

The Political Solution

This indicates that the internal and external political factors, the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia for influence in the Middle East, and the fight against resistant revolutionary political Shi'ia were, and continue to be, the main factors that cause the dispute between Wahhabism and Shi'ism. If we imagine the two intellectual schools of Wahhabism and Shi'ism away from present political atmosphere, and the ruling regimes, we will not find the disagreement between them to be so sharp, and probably each party will look at the other with more placidity, objectivity, and moderation. This also indicates that the disagreement between Shi'i and Wahhabis is a limited and simple disagreement, but it is being used as cover for the ongoing political conflicts in the area. If political Shi'i (in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and other countries) were

¹⁷ Ibn Jebrin tried to avoid the negative effects of the previous fatwa by issuing another fatwa, which was harsher, where he repeated his accusations against Shi'ia and said: "This fatwa is an old one, issued in 7/2/1423 *hijri*, and those who published it should have clarified what it was about. They should have returned it to the one who issued it so that he may have explained it and its reason. It is not only about what is called Hezbollah (the party of God). Because we say: the party of God are the successful ones. They are the ones about whom God said: 'Those are the party of God. The party of God are the successful ones.' As for *Rafida* everywhere, they are not the party of God, because they declare *takfir* against Sunnis and the *Sahaba*, who transmitted Islam and the Koran to us. They attack the Koran and claim that it is tampered with and has more than two thirds missing. That is because they do not find anything about *Ahl Al Bayt* in it. They also practice polytheism by supplication to their twelve imams. That is the content of that fatwa. Thus, if there was a party of God that supported the cause of God and supported Islam in Lebanon or other Islamic countries, then we would love them, encourage them and pray for them for steadfastness. As we are talking about dissent and war between Jews and those who call themselves the party of God, and the weak and helpless have suffered ...". Stated and dictated by Abdullah bin Abdul Rahman Al-Jebrin, 3/7/1427 *Hijri* <http://ibn-jebreen.com/ftawa.php?view=vmasal&subid=15294&parent=4143>

a nationalist, a leftist, or a liberalist movement, then Saudi Arabia would have confronted them with a different language, as it happened when Saudi Arabia confronted the Nasserist movement and other revolutionary Arab movements.

Hence, the solution of the disagreement between Wahhabism and Shi'i starts with a political solution, be it by establishing just and democratic regimes that recognise the rights of all citizens, or by establishing a political system that consists of Sunni and Shi'i states that recognise each other and refrain from interfering in the internal issues of each other, or conspiring against each other.

Of course, as a result of the ongoing media campaign that lasted for decades, we should expect an atmosphere of doubt and shunning between the masses on both sides. In order to get rid of this atmosphere it is necessary to promote a culture of dialogue, coexistence, human rights, self-criticism and objectivity. We should notice development and variety in the others, and observe them through reality, not through old books, stereotypes, or some irregular historical views.

3 The Salafs were the companions of the Prophet: Salafis do not practice

***takfir* -- A response to the paper of Ahmed al-Katib**

Sheikh Safwan al-Zohbi

Praise be to Allah, and blessings and peace be upon Mohammed the messenger of Allah, and on his family, companions and those who follow him.

Ahmed al-Katib has stated in his paper that Salafism originated in the seventh century *hijri* during the time of Ibn Taimiah, and referred to him as though he were the first person to establish Salafism. This is not true for many reasons, including the following:

- First: Ibn Taimiah was not an innovator and did not create anything new, neither new creeds nor ideas. Instead, his contribution was to evaluate the teachings of earlier generations of ulama (Muslim clerics) and hadith narrators. As is generally known, he followed the Hanbali school of religious thought.
- Second: The word Salafism refers to the Righteous *Salafs* (ancestors), i.e. the Prophet, Allah's blessings be upon him, and his companions, may Allah be pleased with them all. The first to use the term was the Prophet himself, Allah's blessings be upon him, when he said to his daughter Fatima, may Allah be pleased with her, "I am the best *salaf* (ancestor) for you",¹⁸ and when he said to Roqaia, may Allah be pleased with her, "Follow the lead of our good salaf (ancestor) Othman bin Mazoun".¹⁹

At a later date, Al-Bukhari stated that, "the Salafs admired potency because it was braver and bolder". Al-Hafez Ibn Hijr commented on this and explained it further in *Fat'h el-Bari* (166/6), saying, "i.e. the companions and those who came after them". The term was later used by Al-Ghazali, on page 62 of *Iljam al-Aowam an Ilm el-Kalam* where he defined the word 'salaf': "[by this word], I mean the school of the companions and those who followed them". The term was also used by Imam Al-Uzai'e, who said, "Confine yourself to the sunnah [the sayings and doings of the Prophet], refrain when the people refrained, say what they said, abstain when they

¹⁸ Narrated by al-Muslim.

¹⁹ Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad. Al-Albani regarded it as weak.

abstained; follow the lead of your good salafs, for what was good enough for them is good enough for you".²⁰

This all serves as evidence that Salafism is not attributable to Ibn Taimiah, but rather to Mohammed. As al-Katib noted, the name emerged to distinguish between the people of the hadith and of sunnah and *ijmaa* (the consensus of Muslim scholars) on the one hand, and the people of opinion on the other. The term Salafism spread during the seventh century *hijri*, and has now become particularly prominent in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The term "Wahhabism", meanwhile, is an incorrect attribution to Imam Mohammed bin Abdel-Wahhab, may Allah have mercy on him, for the correct term should be "Mohammedian" since his first name is Mohammed. "Wahhabism" correctly refers only to Al-Wahhab (the Giver, Provider), i.e. Allah the Mighty and Majestic himself. It is the same as the term "Rahmaniyun" which refers to Ar-Rahman (the Most Gracious), i.e. Allah the Mighty and Majestic. Moreover, Imam Mohammed bin Abdel-Wahhab also did not add anything new to the religion of Islam. In fact, both his creeds and religious rulings adhere closely to the Hanbali school.

When considering these two imams Ibn Taimiah and Mohammed bin Abdel-Wahhab and the practice of takfir (declaring people to be infidels) and their relationship with those who opposed them, we note the following:

Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taimiah says, 'Those who have sat with me know that I am and have always been one of those who most forbids that a certain [person] should be charged with being a kafir (infidel), debauchery, or sin, unless it is known that proof against him has been established, such that whoever violates it is a kafir at one time, debauched at another, or a sinner at another. I declare that Allah has forgiven the sin of this ummah (nation of Islam), which includes both sins of narration and practical sins.'²¹

Ibn Taimiah, may Allah have mercy on him, also said, "This is why I used to say to the Jahmia of the Hululia and the Nufat, who denied that Allah is above the throne of authority, when their ordeal occurred, 'If I agree with you, I am a kafir, because I know that what you are saying is unbelief. But you, in my opinion, are not unbelievers, for you are ignorant'. This was an address to their ulama, judges,

²⁰ *Al-Ajiri fi Sharia*, p.58.

²¹ *Majmouh al-Fatawa (The Collection of Fatwas) 229/3*

sheikhs and emirs. Their ignorance originated from intellectual obscurities that affected their minds, due to their lack of knowledge of the true word and the clear reasoning which accords with it".²²

Ibn Taimiah also said, "He who believes that his sheikh provides him with means of sustenance, grants him victory, guides him, rescues him or helps him, or who worships his sheikh, prays to him or prostrates himself to him, or who believes that the sheikh is better than the Prophet, Allah's blessings be upon him, whether in a restricted or unrestricted fashion, in any way that draws one closer to Allah, or who believes that he or his sheikh can manage without following the Prophet, Allah's blessings be upon him - all these people are kafirs if they demonstrate this unbelief, and hypocrites if they do not".

People that fall into these categories are numerous nowadays, due to the scarcity of calls for knowledge and faith and the languid impact of the message in most countries. Most of these people are not guided by the impact of the message and the heritage of prophecy, which has failed to reach many of them. At times and places of languor, a man is rewarded for the little faith he does possess, and Allah forgives those to whom proof of the faith has not been established. However, He does not forgive those to whom it has been established, as is stated in the well-known hadith, "A time will come in which people know no prayer, fasting, hajj or omra, except for the old men and women, who say, 'We follow the lead of our fathers in saying, "There is no god but Allah"'. Huthaifa bin An-No'man, may Allah be pleased with him, was asked, "What good would 'There is no god but Allah' do them?" And he said, "It would deliver them from Hell". (Selected by Ibn Majah from the hadith of Huthaifa, 134/2, h. 4049, and al-Hakem, 520/4, h. 8460. Ibn Majah says, "This is an authentic hadith according to al-Moslim, and it was also regarded as authentic by Al-Albani in his series of authentic hadiths, and given the number 87").

The basis of this is the discussion of unbelief in the Book, the sunnah and ijmaa, which says, "Unbelief is a statement uttered, as indicated by legal attestations. Faith is a ruling received from Allah and His Prophet, and is not an issue to be judged by the people with their suppositions and their preferences. Not every person who says this should be regarded as an unbeliever - not until the conditions of takfir are proven against him and all objections are removed".²³

²² Response to Al-Bakri 494/2

²³ *The Elucidation of the Asfahani Creed*, p.211.

Ibn Taimiah also said, "The philosophers and the Batiniyas²⁴ are unbelievers; their unbelief is apparent to Muslims. Nevertheless, he who does not know their true opinions does not know their unbelief. It is possible that someone who is not aware of their unbelief might take hold of some of their opinions; hence, he would be excused due to his ignorance".²⁵

These are some of Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taimiah's views on dissenters who show ambiguity over some evident aspects of unbelief, which Muslims have no doubt do constitute unbelief. In spite of this, when he debated with senior figures from these groups, he did not label them as infidels, because the truth had been concealed from them. They were ignorant of the truth because of how cut off they were from legal studies and because of how severe their confusion was.

Sheikh al-Islam Mohammed bin Abdel-Wahhab said, "And if we do not label the one who worshipped the idol on the dome of Abdel-Qader and the idol at the grave of Ahmed al-Badawi and the like as infidels because of their ignorance and because there was no one to inform them, how can we label those who have not become polytheists as infidels if they have not immigrated towards us, become unbelievers and fought? Glory to Allah; this is grave slander".²⁶

Abdel-Wahhab, may Allah have mercy on him, said in one of his writings, "Whatever you have been told about me labeling people in general as infidels, is slander from my enemies. Similarly, when they say that if one follows the religion of Allah and His Apostle while living in their country, it is not enough unless they come to me; this is slander as well. What is required is to follow the religion of Allah and His Apostle in any land whatsoever. However, we do label as infidels those who have acknowledged the religion of Allah and His Apostle, then become hostile to it and blocked people's access to it. He who worships idols after knowing that this is the religion of polytheists and who has beautified it for the people; this is the man I regard as an unbeliever. Every cleric on earth will also regard him as such, except for obstinate or ignorant men".²⁷

²⁴ Translator's note: a school of Islamic thought characterized by divining a hidden, secret meaning in the revealed texts

²⁵ *The Elucidation of the Asfahani Creed*, p.211.

²⁶ *Fatwas and Questions of Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdel-Wahhab*, p.11.

²⁷ *The Complete Works of Sheikh Mohammed: The Personal Letters*, 33/3, and 58/3.

The Sheikh – may Allah have mercy upon him – also made other statements throughout his writings, in particular in his personal letters, which show that he did not practice takfir without established proof and unless absolute unbelief was proven.

These examples of quotations by the two imams Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taimiah and Sheikh al-Islam Mohammed bin Abdel-Wahhab show that they recognize the true nature of this issue and have included this in their fatwas, and that they do not practice takfir against people accused of absolute unbelief against whom proof has not been established. These quotations demonstrate how firmly embedded this idea is in the doctrine of the people of the sunnah and how far it has spread amongst imams, as well as how they have implemented this idea scientifically and practically throughout the ages.

Finally, the lecturer Ahmed Al-Katib states that the Safavids and traditional Shi'is used to insult the companions, but he does not cite their texts to prove this. Instead, he only cites the texts of the Wahhabis which label the Shi'is as infidels.

We believe that Al-Katib should have specified the texts he cited that label the Shi'is as infidels to the Safavids and the traditional Shi'is. Had he done so, there would be no further problems. However, the rules of the Salafi school state that a person must not be labeled an infidel except under certain conditions, some of which were cited by Al-Katib. For a man may fall into unbelief, but unbelief does not fall upon him. The term 'takfir' as used by Salafis applies to those who believe the Quran was falsified, accuse the Mother of the Believers, the Prophet's wife, of adultery, or accuse the companions of being infidels or insult them. They only label people as infidels once proof has been established against them. Therefore, I cannot find any justification for the assault waged by this lecturer on those whom he calls Wahhabis, for it does not serve his argument. What is required is calm scholarly dialogue, free from the prejudgments and political considerations that govern a great deal of the actions and sayings of Sunnis and Shi'is nowadays.

4 Factors influencing the relationship between Shi'i and the Saudi

Government

Dr Tawfeeq As-Saif

The following notes address the factors influencing the relationship between Saudi Shi'i and their government. These are personal thoughts but it expresses in many aspects the views of the Shi'i elite about the development of their relationship with the government and the hardships that they have faced in this regard. My view of the above-mentioned relationship developed in various circumstances in a time span extending over 30 years of political work. I spent almost half of that time in discussions with officials and decision-makers and men from the Saudi elite. In 1993, I was on the team which negotiated with the Saudi government on behalf of the Shi'i sect, until we reached an agreement about dealing with the main problem from which Shi'i suffer, namely, sectarian discrimination. In September that year, three of my colleagues and I met with King Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz, who admitted the existence of many problems in the country, among which was this problem, and he expressed his personal interest in solving it. He gave a solemn promise that the problem of sectarian discrimination would be solved soon.

That historical agreement did not last long. Certain people in the elite worked to diminish that agreement, and hinder it. The agreement resulted in important developments in the beginning, but the later stages never saw the light. Therefore, it can be said that the agreement has actually died. However, it marked the beginning of a new stage in the relationship between Shi'i and the Saudi state, a stage that we still witness in some ways, and we hope to make further steps on this foundation.

There are no accurate statistics about the numbers of Saudi Shi'i, but the estimates that we are inclined to believe say that they represent about 20% of the Kingdom's population. Official agencies estimate them to be 10% of the whole population -- that is about 2.3 million citizens. About two thirds of Shi'i citizens live in the eastern area of the Kingdom, which is considered to be one of the most important natural reserves of petrol in the Kingdom. In that area lies 22% of the proven international petrol reserve and it represents 95% of the petrol production in the Kingdom. Along with the industrial production which is concentrated in that area, the eastern area represents at least about ninety percent of the Saudi national income. Shi'i also represent a majority among the population of the area of Najran, in the south of the

Kingdom. Others are scattered in the Medina and the main cities like Jeddah and Riyadh.

Shi'i in the Kingdom suffer from discrimination which deprives them from basic rights like the freedom of belief and worship, and the freedom of expression and publication, in addition to civil rights like holding public work positions on medium and high levels. Since the foundation of the Kingdom about a century ago, Shi'i have been deprived of holding any of the three higher levels of employment: the fifteenth level, the excellent level, and the ministry. During this long period only one member has achieved level 15, and another held the position of minister assistant and then ambassador.

But the discrimination does not apply only to high level positions. Some governmental domains bar Shi'i from holding small work positions. The Ministry of Education, for example, did not allow any Shi'i lady to be a headmaster of a girls' high school until this year, when one was appointed. No private girl's school were allowed in Shi'i areas. The Ministry of Higher Education does not allow Shi'i professors to be employed at certain universities, like the University of Imam Mohammed Bin Saud. The Foreign Ministry does not allow Shi'i to be employed in the diplomatic corps. Such discrimination is practiced in all semi-governmental agencies and major governmental companies and most companies in which the government holds shares. In the council of the eastern area, which consists of 14 members appointed by the government, only one member is a Shi'i, although Shi'i represent two thirds of the population of that area.

This situation did not result from exigent circumstances. It did not start with the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, nor with the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. It goes back a very long time and it has long been noticed by American researchers who visited the area and wrote about it. One of these researchers, for example, is George Lipsky,²⁸ who published a book about this in 1959. I can say that the present relationship between the Government and Saudi Shi'i is based on a state of distrust. The government does not trust its citizens and the Saudi Shi'i do not trust their government as well. As a matter of fact, there is a lot of talk about mutual understanding and solving the problems that escalate every now and then, but the trust needed for translating words into an applicable strategy is still bellow the required level, or even missing. I came to that impression after the failure of several attempts where there seemed to be a consensus – at least in the beginning – that

²⁸ G. Lipsky, M. Ani, M. Bigelow, F. Gillen, T. Larson, A. Matthews, C. Royce, S. Gillen, *Saudi Arabia, Its People Its Society, Its Culture*, (HRAF Press, 1959)

these attempts are necessary and can be transformed into a practical program, but then nothing changed. In addition to this personal impression I heard this explanation directly and openly from many high-ranking officials who make decisions or participate in making them.

We can regain trust if we set a new beginning, marked by putting aside the history of sectarian discrimination. However, it is first important to understand the factors that affect each parties views of the other. Any effort to regain trust requires understanding the sources of the two parties' worries.

The factors influencing the views of the Shi'i of the Saudi State:

- i. Chronic discrimination: Saudi Shi'i are treated as second rate citizens and they are, therefore, deprived of most of the civil and political rights that other Saudis enjoy. It is true that Saudis in general do not enjoy as many civil and political rights as in neighbouring states, but Shi'i are deprived even of those rights enjoyed by the rest of Saudis.
- ii. Uncertain legal status: In terms of numbers, Shi'i are treated as a minority. Any minority in any country needs a legal definition which the state institutions can work on to achieve the required national integration. We lack such a clear definition; therefore, we face astonishment from state officials when we talk about religious liberties or the rights of the minority or legal protection of these rights.
- iii. Attempts at reform in the Shi'i society failed, and attempts at reform on the national level have failed too. There was some hope, since 2003 at least, that the winds of political reform would come. Many people built their hopes on King Abdullah's rise to the throne. The prevalent belief among Shi'i was that King Abdullah was serious about dealing with the issue of discrimination. He expressed frankly, and on many occasions, his disdain towards discrimination and his desire to introduce equality among Saudis. However, attempts at reform failed unexpectedly after king Abdullah's rise to power.
- iv. Shi'i were affected by changes in the area (the Islamist revolution in Iran, the fall of the Iraqi regime, the events in Lebanon and Palestine). These changes were reproduced as political disagreement within Saudi society especially between Saudi Shi'i and the government on the one hand, and between Shi'i and the Salafi political forces on the other hand.

- v. Uneven political development: The political culture and its influences within the Shi'i community are developing much faster than they do in other communities of the Kingdom. There is a higher level of awareness and political work in this community in comparison to other areas. This is due to a previous heritage. For example, all political parties that were formed in the Kingdom were born in the eastern area, including the leftist parties that appeared in the 1960s. The same applies to political media, including books, magazines and leaflets. This is probably because of the nature of a minority, which usually has more tension than the majority. This was reflected in the form of political awareness and activity in movement and expression. This has been noted by most researchers in the political and social fields. The uneven development resulted in a contrast between the expectations of the demands of the Shi'i community, and the understanding and response of the government. It also created a state of disharmony between the concerns of Shi'i and those of the rest of Saudis.

The factors that affect the Saudi government's view of its Shi'i citizens:

- i. The prevalence of the traditional view in the culture of authority: This presents itself in the lack of the political culture in the country for the concept of the people and the concept of citizenship. The present political regime is not based on the social contract; it is based rather on the concept of the aristocratic elite.
- ii. Religious background: The area of Nejd, in the middle of the Kingdom, is the social environment for the political regime and it is the home of the governing elite. This area is also the social background for the Wahabi sect, which views Shi'i as infidels and heretics. It is true that the governing elite is not fully committed to the teachings of the Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdul Wahab, and many of them can even be considered secularists. However, the Wahabi school *fiqh* and faith is like a ruling party. The sect becomes a means to protect the social structure of the political regime, and the leaders of the sect are thus natural allies of the state. Therefore, it is natural for the ruling party and its social cohort to almost monopolize the resources and the administration of the country. Other non-Nejdi Saudis suffer from this monopoly as well, but Shi'i suffer more.
- iii. Exclusionary geography of power: Since the founding of the Kingdom, the founding King Abdul Aziz decided to share the regime between the areas of Nejd

and Hejaz. Hejaz here means Makah, not the whole geographical Hejaz. Therefore, we find that governments, and the structure of the state in general, are divided in three quarters from Nejd and one quarter from Hejaz while the other areas are considered annexed areas, and their inhabitants are considered followers, not citizens or partners. This perspective has changed to some extent, as Saudi society has gone through big economic and cultural changes. However, its philosophical basis still exists and has influence.

Attempts to bridge the gap between the government and Shi'i:

- i. The Shi'i elite has made many attempts to bridge the gap between themselves and the government. Probably the biggest of these attempts is the agreement reached in September 1993. The reformation movement, which is the main faction representing the majority of Shi'i, changed into an activist movement, attempting to deal with issues within the regime through discussion with the leaders of the state. But the actual outcome of this attempt was minute in comparison with the volume of the work required to eliminate sectarian discrimination, and with consideration of the time and effort which was spent after it.
- ii. Another significant attempt was the document "*Partners in the Homeland*," which was a statement of beliefs and demands addressed to King Abdullah in 2004, when he was crown-prince. The document was signed by 400 leading Shi'i, representing a wide range from right to left, religious and irreligious, men and women. That document expressed the general beliefs and main concerns of the Shi'i community in Saudi Arabia. In that document, they expressed their commitment to the present political regime, and their acceptance of it. As for the concerns, they concentrated on sectarian discrimination and its consequences. The document was handed to the crown-prince in person and he promised to address its content, but unfortunately nothing was achieved.
- iii. Saudi Shi'i leaders also made parallel attempts to improve their relationships with the Saudi elite, including clergymen, businessmen, intellectuals, and administrators. This is an ongoing process and it seems to have achieved some success. There are now some useful discussions ongoing with a number of influential clergymen from the Salafi school and others. These discussions are progressing better than the long discussions with politicians.
- iv. However, these men are not decision-makers. Most of them are outside the regime, yet, they have a strong influence on the public opinion. The aim of

these discussions is to reduce the stress on the street level, keeping the Saudi society from getting affected by crises that originate abroad, and reaching agreements about the value of citizenship and sharing. The Shi'i are citizens, and are – whether we want it or not – partners in this country, with its problems and resources. Therefore, there should be reached a sort of agreement, even if there are differences in beliefs, and political and intellectual opinions. These discussions progress slowly and face obstacles, the strongest of which is the insistence of the Salafis that the Shi'i submit to rigorous self-criticism. Unfortunately, we could not go public with these discussions and the state has not shown any actual support to these discussions in spite of their importance in dealing with the problems of national unity and general peace.

- v. Among the attempts that also deserve recognition is the conference of national debate sponsored by the government, especially the second session held in 2003, which represented an important breakthrough in the relationship between sects. However, the conference stopped at that, and it was not matched by any parallel advancement in the political and legal fields. The conference became an official body that attends only to minor issues that have nothing to do with the national debate.
- vi. There is as well a relatively active communication with different state agencies aimed at reducing strain and dealing with small problems that arise every now and then. The government made some praiseworthy steps in this field. One of the most significant among these is the wise manner in which the government dealt with the events in Media (February 2009) and the following protests in Qateef. Some officials showed praiseworthy cooperation in dealing with some problems resulting from the policy of discrimination. These steps cannot be considered a full solution, but they help mitigate the negative effects of that policy. I also would like to refer to the constructive role played by the (governmental) Human Rights Agency and the National Society for Human Rights (semi-private), and to thank these agencies for their praise-worthy role in this field.

Shi'i and political reform at the national level:

I believe, like many Shi'i intellectuals, that a fundamental reform of the relationship between Shi'i citizens and their government, especially ending sectarian discrimination in the Kingdom, cannot be achieved unless it is done as part of a comprehensive political reform which affects the political and legal situation broadly,

and on the national level. We are talking especially about establishing the sovereignty of the law and setting a legal and institutional framework to clarify and protect civil rights. Development in this direction will set a strong basis for dealing with the discrimination and inequality which is widespread.

As for political reform, I would like to refer to what can be called actual movement towards reform, with concentration on the fields that have to do with the freedom of expression and publication.

There is no doubt that the present status is very different from what was evident fifteen years ago. This difference is not due simply to legal changes, but due to greater social movement and an implicit agreement among intellectuals to cross boundaries that were set in the past. In the domain of journalism, for example, the same old system is still valid, and journalists and writers still lack any clear legal protection for their freedom of expression. Yet, in reality, there is much greater freedom than we knew in the past. Today we can read and publish things that we could only dream of in the past. Journals have not been notified about any changes in the state's policy towards journalism and the old narrow law has not changed. What happened, instead, is that there has been a kind of turning of a blind eye. Some brave writers crossed into new territory in their writings, and were not punished. That was interpreted by others as a sign of change, and they started extending their own horizons.

The difference between legislation and practice appears more clearly in the field of televised media. Legally speaking, TV channels (and journals as well) cannot be founded without a license -- and for thirty years the government has not issued any new journalistic licenses. This has proven an effective limitation on journals: at present, all journals are more than thirty years old. Yet, according to basic statistics that I collected in the beginning of this year, there are currently 42 independent satellite TV channels (not including those owned by the government or the princes of the ruling family). Twelve of these channels are broadcast and produced within the Saudi land. None of these channels have licenses and yet they have not been shut down, and their owners have not been punished for breaking the law. In other words, they are working outside the law, but they have not faced any problems for it.

Another example is found among civil society organizations. From a legal point of view, no organization or private society can be formed without a license, and even now there is no special system for these societies. (There are professional societies or charities, founded within a frame of a narrowly defined system, but a system for

voluntary work is still kept on paper in the drawers of cabinet; we hope that it will be issued soon.) Nevertheless, there are dozens of private organizations founded outside the law, and these organizations function in the same way as the TV channels. They are not fully legal but they are not punished either.

I wanted to refer to this situation to clarify a side of the present status of the Shi'i community. There are – in spite of the lack of legal frameworks – various activities that contribute in development, locally and nationally, and they are all outside the law. There is no active prevention of private initiatives as there is in other countries. The government and the people seem inclined to respect certain boundaries which keep them from confronting each other, but at the same time do not prevent all activities.

In general, Shi'i contribute actively and forcefully to reform on the national level, in addition to the many initiatives directed at the Shi'i community, which obviously exceeds the activities in any other area throughout the Kingdom.

The way out of the crisis:

We believe that failing to deal with the problem of sectarian discrimination in the Kingdom will keep the Kingdom in a state of distress especially in a region which is sensitive for the Kingdom and the world, the eastern region. The situation could escalate with every major change in the area. Therefore, it is in the interest of the government, the country, and its citizens to move seriously towards getting rid of the infamous policy of sectarian discrimination. We know the limits of the possible solution within the tradition and the nature of the present authority. We know that we will not reach a status that resembles democracies. Yet, we accept any solution, even if it is gradual and slow, even if it is partial. What we really desire is the state's recognition of the need for a solution for the problem of discrimination – followed by the imposition of a tangible, measurable, and accountable work program.

In this context we presented to the state a work program which we called "Shi'i integration into the political and national framework." This program included an analysis of the problem and a roadmap towards the solution, in addition to specified measures for the solution to start. This program was designed to be politically inexpensive and to be practical within the present circumstances of the country. We have not yet received a response from the government, but we hope that this program will be viewed with understanding, and will be discussed seriously.

Conclusion:

Saudi Shi'i are in much better situation now than they were 20 years ago. Their relation with the government is much better that it was it was in 1993. The prospects and hopes of Saudi society are great, but the response of the government has been very slow. We hope that coming years will be different, and will have better results.

5 Shaping a vision for the future of Islam: Prospects for a common intellectual/political understanding

Sheikh Shafiq Jaradeh

A researcher studying religions, sects or movements may distinguish in his studies between lofty religious ideals and between the managerial or procedural behavior and policies adopted by religious people, particularly within religious and sectarian movements. If we study religious interpretations and readings, we find them polarized around two concepts: purposes and policies. From this starting point, it is evident that Shi'i and Salafi movements are at a point of rupture, or even of conflict, at every level. This may suggest to a researcher that there is no possibility of communication and coexistence between these two projects. However, in cases like this it is useful to consider our evaluations and recommendations from three perspectives:

- First: studying the possibility of a convergence between the two projects, even if only in spirit, with a cool head, uninfluenced by heated emotions aroused by reality and by events
- Second: considering real greater interests when assessing the situation, even if this should anger others. This identification of priorities should take into account actual interests, not sectarian feelings and emotions.
- Third: one of the most important ways to overcome obstacles in any situation is to push the situation itself towards the goal, in order to escape the quagmire of crises and broken will.

Accordingly, we believe that the main purpose of the Shi'i movement is to exert continuous efforts to achieve what they consider a genuine Mohammedian approach. This is exactly the same thing as the Salafi movement wants to achieve, through following the spirituality, mentality and behavior of the righteous ancestors (*al-salaf al-salih*). The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace be upon him) is thus the basis for the Islamic approach of both parties. We should recognize this real common denominator of the two sides and use it as a standard measure for all interpretations and behaviors. This requires us to:

- First: grasp the interpretative spirit necessary for understanding Islam and its knowledge

- Second: rationalize the other's interpretations and judge him on the basis of the original root source and scientific criteria
- Third: neutralize sectarian emotions stemming from our sectarian political history, having made these the basis for our stereotypes of the other and for forming his cognitive and behavioral structure in the past, and return to a neutral position.

As well as being a religious and gnostic necessity, this type of review has become a practical necessity of life. It is ill advised for any of us to turn a blind eye to the fact that the spirit of modern life is based on religious and cultural plurality, standing together on the surface of this land which has become a single village, or one house with multiple rooms. If the people of this earth will not adapt to this pluralism, they will experience only stifling isolation and self-destruction. And what is the situation in the Third World we live in, with its Islamic, Middle Eastern and Arab identity? What happens when we delve deeper and deeper into the universal characteristics of a single people or nation, such as the Islamic nation, which is experiencing existential crises and in which Shi'i and Salafi Muslims are experiencing crises of poverty and hollowness caused by the moral, economic, cultural, political and military invasion of the world's aggrandizing powers, led by the United States of America? These feelings of fear require us to put aside our own interests and to forget the fight for an Islamic Caliphate or Guardianship of Islamic jurists, for as long as the origins and existence of the entire Islamic entity are at risk. We must therefore work towards a common resurrection in order to save our nation and our existence. Accordingly, I suggest the following:

Firstly: that we move from the stage of sectarianism and discussions of a sectarian nature to a "shared" stage of issues of common destiny, which must include the option of resistance, a spirit and culture of resistance based upon only one classification - defending the oppressed and righteous, and confronting the unjust and oppressive occupier. In this sense, I as a Shi'i can say that the Sunnis who share this common cause with me are a thousand times closer than to me than the Shi'is who disagree with me on this issue, which concerns nothing less than reinstating the original Islamic entity and restoring Islamic pride.

Second: we must all join together in a global dialogue of different religions and groups. We must also begin to establish the fundamentals of Eastern civilizational values which stem from a history of overlapping pain, wars and conciliation, as well establishing the major ideologies, doctrines, beliefs and policies that still govern the behavior of many Islamic and national movements today. By dialogue here, we do

not mean the kind of dialogue that is on offer today, which led to the sight of Shimon Peres engaging in interfaith dialogue, as such dialogue seems to ignore the interests and concerns of the people of the region. Rather, we mean the type of dialogue from which we can proceed to determine the features of the future.

Third: Shi'is should utilize the theory of the discretionary sphere of the law proposed by martyr Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, the theory of provisions for the management of the state established by Imam Khomeini and the use of Islamic politics within the task and functions of the Governance of Muslims as devised by Sheikh Ibn Taimiah. Doing so will allow us to consider the dialectics of the interests and requirements of reality alongside the constants of the text, in order to extract the necessary provisions to save the Islamic message and community.

Fourth: a central issue must be to join together to identify the enemy. What are the priorities of the conflict, and where should we start - with the near or distant enemy, or by settling accounts between ourselves and our neighbors? How should we begin this conflict, how should we fight it, and what are the goals we want to achieve? We must not be governed by a desire to show off our strength (I believe many parties can be accused of sometimes resisting only to show off the nature of their power), but by a desire to use our abilities which are a combination of strength, courage and wisdom.

Fifth: we must highlight the culture of the Islamic message. My own understanding is that when the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace be upon him) started spreading his message in its early moments, he was talking to infidels, atheists and the People of the Book, and that he first selected this group, then launched his message to be a message to the whole world. We are part of a historical Islam, and not the Islam of Muhammad bin Abdullah. We have turned the message of Islam into a sectarian message which has become stuck in a blind alley and is unable to move forward. We need to regain the spirit of the culture of the Islamic message, and the culture of Mohammed bin Abdullah. This is a mission for all of us.

Sixth: despite the difficulties I envisage in achieving a convergence between Shi'is and Salafis, I am more convinced than ever after these meetings that it is possible to find common ground between the two parties. This is due to both the reasonable and judicious mediation of Sunnis, who have shown great patience in overcoming the obstacles involved, and also due to the initiatives of some Shi'i and Salafi movements which have created a spirit of positive interaction, based on crucial issues and on adopting a spirit, culture and behavior of resistance against the occupation.

6 Creating the intellectual basis for a new vision: How to confront the Islamic world's internal and external challenges

Sheikh Maher Hammoud

For more than thirty years, we have been concerned with issues of unity, cooperation and closeness. Perhaps in this collaborative project it would be appropriate to discuss our experiences, rather than ideals or theories. The indisputable problem with these dialogues and discussions is that they do not result in any clear decisions, as if the participants involved were not the decision-makers who can agree to something and then have their decisions carried out. A second problem is that the cultural and religious elite seldom have any real influence on the common people. Popular culture is still mostly based on tribal solidarity and partisanship, ideas which are much more influential than intellectuals and elites, even when the latter are able to support their statements with legal proofs. Scholars have always lived in a strained and problematic relation with the general populace, so that when they call for renewal, or less fanaticism, or reforms, they face many accusations and reproofs. For example, we can consider the words of Imam al-Shafi'i, who said:

Let everybody know that if loving the Prophet Muhammad's descendants means being a *Rafidi*, then I am a *Rafidi*.²⁹

This does not refer only to loving the Prophet Muhammad's descendants – the context makes it clear that Imam al-Shafi'i was defending himself. Imam al-Shafi'i, one of the main pillars of Islamic Sunni jurisprudence, was accused by the people (clearly zealots and ignorant people) of deviating from the religious school solely because he loved the Prophet Muhammad's descendants.

Moving on to consider the situation today, it seems certain that the men in key positions who illuminate and cast light upon their people will not be remembered in the future. They are unable to disclose all their beliefs because if they did so, a large part of their followers would turn on them, and they would lose a significant amount of their control over these people. They remain in positions of influence, rather than taking a historical stance. Anyone who does this has essentially decided to live in isolation.

Accordingly, the problem is that even should we be able to agree on many of the essential points which must be cleared up between Sunnis and Shi'i, either in the texts

²⁹ Translator's note: '*Rafidi*' means 'apostate' or 'defector', from the Arabic word for 'refuse'. It is used to refer to Shi'i, who do not accept the caliphates of Abu Bakr, Omar and Othman.

or in our souls, there is no easy way to put this into practice. Are we talking about texts or about facts?! If texts, this would mean that I venerate the Sunni judicial texts or the Sunni establishment and say, "Oh Sunnis, you have made errors here, and here..." I am sure this would only produce negative results. I would end up isolating myself and I would not have any effect on the general populace. Similarly, if I addressed the Shi'is and said "Oh Shi'is, you have made errors regarding this point, and that point", this also would mean I would lose the general populace and my connection with them, and would not be able to change them.

If we want to remain optimistic, we can say that changes to the texts, whether Sunni or Shi'i, could be made by a man with the status of the Mahdi, or a man who is able to say and prove that he has received inspiration from Allah - not inspiration from Gabriel, of course. The Quran uses the word '*wahy*' to mean 'inspiration' more than once, such as when talking about the inspiration of Moses' mother, "We inspired Moses' mother"³⁰, and "I inspired the disciples"³¹. Inspiration from Allah would assure this person of some success, for what he says is from Allah and can transcend texts, discussions, dialogue and interventions. He can tell people, "This is correct, and this is wrong", and they will accept what he says automatically. This is of course a semi-miracle. I believe that naturally Allah could grant us this type of leadership or this type of change if our souls were to reach a high enough level of devotion. When differences do emerge, they are the result of sinfulness and ignoring what is right. Consider the words of Allah the Most High: "Corruption has flourished on land and sea as a result of people's actions"³², i.e. corruption emerges because of what people do, and not for any other reason. If our souls reach a high enough level of devotion they will supersede the texts, some of which were after all written by men who claimed they were from Allah. I say this with full confidence, addressing both the Sunnis and the Shi'i equally.

A discussion of the texts, real changes to the judicial texts or the general judicial establishments of Sunnism or Shi'ism are thus almost impossible. As we have said, such actions would require a divine leader who could prove the divine nature of his role. Sadly, some people dispute even the idea of shared actions or common spaces, even though we can be so sure of these concepts that they appear as certain as the radiant sun. This applies to both Sunnis and Shi'i, but particularly to Sunnis and particularly over the past thirty years. During these thirty years the Islamic Revolution in Iran has established a clear degree of historical distinction for the Shi'i and has provided contexts

³⁰ *Sura of the Story (al-Qasas): 7*

³¹ *Sura of the Feast (al-Maida): 111*

³² *Sura of the Byzantiums (al-Roum): 41*

in which Sunnis and Shi'i can work together. Naturally these have so far been political and practical contexts rather than textual, which I do not think will happen. However, neither this event nor the resounding victory in Gaza, the result of a real, genuine, total and comprehensive association between Iran, Syria, Hizbollah, Hamas, Jihad and other opposition groups, both distinguishing moments of enlightenment in our history, have convinced people. What is truly amazing is that even at these moments of enlightenment, we are told by satellite channels, newspapers and conferences that Iran has ulterior motives, that its soldiers are hostile to the Arab world, and that it is only looking out for its own interests. One sceptical figure said, "I advise Khaled Mashaal not to go to the tomb of Khomeini, or to praise Imam Khamenei". This type of statement sadly has no legal basis, and is not borne out by the facts on the ground.

Iran and Hizbollah have clearly established their superiority in the past thirty years, but even their exemplary leadership, headed by Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah and Khamenei, has not been received appropriately by many Sunnis, even though Sunnis have not had any motivating experiences of their own in the past thirty years to compare to those of Iran and Hizbollah. Their greatest moment may be the experience of Osama bin Laden, but unfortunately his political speeches show that he does not regard matters correctly, either in terms of organising the priorities of Islamic action by putting the most important tasks first, or in terms of overcoming sectarian obstacles for the greater good. The same is true of the Muslim Brotherhood, even though we appreciate that they predate all other actors, including many Iranians, and informed many of their ideas. Rafsanjani and Khamenei's many translations of the works of Sayid Qutb and others into Farsi are testament to this fact. We have said more than once that the venerated ideological inheritance of the Muslim Brothers is great and noble. However, it has not resulted in exemplary political practices. This matter needs to be discussed further so that we can uncover the reason for this. We are obviously not talking about Hamas here - Hamas is an exception because it has broken through the sectarian barriers and has established a natural continuity with Iran and Hizbollah. It has achieved practical results on the ground by adopting this stance and by taking appropriate actions.

From the practical side, we can say that Iran has taken up a prominent role on this stage during the last thirty years, which I believe could be enough to create a shared space for both Sunnis and Shi'is who wish to stand up to imperialism. This applies mostly to Sunnis. The issues which Shi'is must consider are more concerned with history than the present. If Sunnis are required to acknowledge the many positive things achieved by the leadership of Imam Khomeini in Iran and Hizbollah in Lebanon, then Shi'is must acknowledge the many positive things achieved under Sunni leadership throughout history which they currently do not remember favourably, including,

naturally, Omar bin al-Khattab, considered by Sunnis to be a fundamental figure of political Islam. If we review Islamic history, I do not believe we will ever be able to find a practical form of Islamic rule as to equal those of Omar bin al-Khattab and Omar bin Abdul Aziz. Abu Bakr al-Siddiq ruled for two years and played a great role in the Wars of Apostasy, and we honour him as a great leader. We cannot say that Othman bin Affan was a successful ruler, for reasons which are well known and which I don't want to go into here, whilst Ali bin Abu Talib was forced to fight three wars and was not able to rule for long enough for us to see the practical results.

When we consider the reign of Omar bin al-Khattab, who made Ali his right-hand man, we see that the brains of the operation was Ali, whilst the executive power was Omar himself. Omar's importance derives not from his knowledge, but from the fact that he put Ali's knowledge into practice. His declaration, "Were it not for Ali, Omar would have perished", is well known. What is required here is not only for us to tell our respected Shi'i brothers not to insult this or that person – that is not the real problem. We appreciate that some Shi'i admit that "this insult and this story were invented by the Sufis", which is a wonderful thing. However, I want to go further than this – what is required of us is not only to put a stop to invective but also to respect the exceptional political experiences of Omar bin al-Khattab and Omar bin Abdul Aziz, whose justice even the murderous infidel *Kharijites* respected, because he was fair during a period of injustice and because he did not adopt the normal trappings of a king and was not concerned with money and palaces (although we shall not go into details of this here).

We come now to Salah al-Din al-Ayoubi – why is he not remembered kindly? For did he not kill the Crusaders? Even if we say he was a Shafi'ite fanatic who was merciless towards the apostates in northern Syria and the Fatimids who cooperated with the Crusaders, which we could describe as fanatical behaviour, did he not at least fight the Crusaders?!

Therefore, if it is necessary for Sunnis to clearly accept the positive aspects of the Iranian Revolution, in return Shi'is must accept the positive aspects of successful Sunni political experiences. Here, however – and with due respect to all – I am reproaching (with reservation at using such a strong word) contemporary Sunni movements due to their refusal to work with Iran and Hizbollah, because they are constantly seeking accusations to level at Iran. Naturally Iran is not infallible, and nor are Hizbollah or Hassan Nasrallah or anyone else, but we are talking in general here. However, as the poet said, "Opposites reveal each other's beauty". Given the state of Arab backwardness and the absence of any successful Sunni Islamic experience, we must radically change the way we interact with Iran and with Hizbollah. At the same time and in the same context, I reiterate that in return the Shi'is must be bold enough to

review history and the Islamic experiences embedded within it, without which our history cannot be understood. I also refer once again to the examples of Omar bin al-Khattab, Omar bin Abdul Aziz, Salah al-Din al-Ayubi and al-Izz bin Abdul Salam. These experiences and these four examples must be taken into consideration and must be included in any Shi'i reading of history in a positive way if we are to break through the barriers.

Ultimately, if we want to outline the practical common ground, we can say that whoever performs good deeds for the Islamic nation must be respected and we must have a good opinion of him. We must search for this common ground upon which we can work, rather than the other way round. Trying to reach a temporary textual solution before the coming of a leader like the Mahdi can be summed up in one word as "ridiculous" – the idea that through the elites, we can reach all Islamists together and use a sporting analogy, i.e. the idea of one of us defeating the other with a decisive blow. A Shi'i may produce a text, even a great one agreed upon by all such as the Hadith of the Pond, and say it is a decisive proof that the Shi'is are right and the Sunnis are wrong, or a Sunni may produce a noble verse from the Sura of the Triumph or the Gathering or Repentance discussing the noble Companions, and say that the Shi'is are wrong and the Sunnis are right... No, this must be eradicated from our agenda. There can be no decisive blow – Sunnis are Muslims and Shi'is are Muslim. Sunni Muslims must respect the Shi'i sect, exactly as Shi'i Muslims must respect the Sunni sect. I had wanted to write this argument in a book but I have refrained from doing so, because I would be vilified equally by both Shi'is and Sunnis and would not achieve anything. I would end up creating a new sect, with only one follower.

In conclusion, I believe that no one in history can accuse his opponent of unbelief and fight him directly. The Buyid state, a Shi'i state, used to proclaim allegiance to the Abbasid caliph. If there were an overarching canopy of Sunni Islamic rule today, I can only believe that Khomeini would place himself under it. However, there is not, and there are distinctions and splits under the large canopy. The tent is a Sunni tent, and history is Sunni history, and Sunnis have the numerical advantage. As we have said more than once, Sunnis who encourage other Sunnis to fear the Shi'i movement are like those who make the sea afraid of the river which flows into it. The river pours into the sea to become part of it and to make it greater. This rhetoric, which sadly we sometimes hear from major scholars and political leaders, making the Sunnis afraid of the Shi'is, is ridiculous! Where has happened to Shi'ism after thirty years?!

7 Organizing the political troubles: Practical steps to creating a common destiny

Abdullah Anas

We all know that in intellectual and cultural dialogue on delicate, sensitive, interrelated and complicated subjects, we do not all look at the subject in the same way, or even the same two or three ways, and thus it is hard to arrive at one solution or reach one conclusion. Rather, such dialogue is the first step on a long journey. Various interrelated issues are involved here; religious, sectarian, economic and political dimensions all come into play. The important thing is that we recognize that there is a "problem". We must recognize that the process of diagnosing a problem, searching for solutions, discussing issues and offering proposals is not an easy one, but it can be accomplished, God willing. My second point is that I believe no one holds the absolute truth, but rather people share what they have gained from their accumulated experience, expertise, and knowledge. We present to others the highlights of our own knowledge, and to try and take advantage of the new information and new insights they can offer to us.

I would now like to consider some lessons drawn from the experiences of Arabs and non-Arabs in this Islamic nation. Its history has been filled with challenges, which were not planned by us but which the destiny of God decreed we should face, beginning in 1984. We travelled to Afghanistan from Algeria, a land very far away. We did not know its language, customs or nature. However, we believed that if so much as a foot of the Islamic lands were lost, we must defend it. It was this logic that brought us to Afghanistan to defend the land of God and to free it from the Russian occupiers. I do not want to go into all the details or to cover this scene in detail here, because time is short. However, I do believe specialists, researchers, politicians, journalists and scholars should study this episode in some detail, as it is filled with lessons, warnings and challenges and is a very rich stage.

My journey began with a meeting with Sheikh Abdullah Azzam in 1984. At that time I was 24 years old. I asked him how a man like me could go to Afghanistan to join the jihad, hoping to be a martyr or to see Afghanistan freed. He said, "I will give you my telephone number. I am a professor at the Islamic University in Islamabad, and I'm close to the Afghans there. If you decide to come to Pakistan, contact me at this number and I will, God willing, put you in touch with the Afghan mujahedeen". I called him from Mecca two weeks later, and then went to Islamabad

and met with him there. Three days later we moved together to Peshawar. At that time, there was no Services Office, no Osama bin Laden, no al-Qaeda and no "Arab Afghans". When I arrived, I was only the fourteenth Arab. In fact, the Arab brothers I met there had mostly escaped from the Syrian and Iraqi regimes, and were not in Pakistan for jihad but to try to escape death and persecution. They were in Peshawar to look for an opportunity to go to Europe and claim political asylum. As far as I knew, about ten men had come to Pakistan for jihad.

Then began a period full of events. I'm not here to discuss the details, but I do want to consider the results of these events, because historical narratives may play a role and may help us to avoid mistakes in the future, God willing. I hope that this study can be of use to everyone, as it can be beneficial not just to Salafis and Shi'is (the subject of this conference), nor East and West, nor Muslims and non-Muslims, but to absolutely everyone.

Many lessons emerge from these three decades of transition from one battlefield to another. At that time, we were not members of an international office which was providing us with plans saying where we have to go in this decade or that, and which guided us to Afghanistan, Algeria, Europe or elsewhere. All of this was God's destiny, and remains an experience. The Afghan jihad ended after we had spent ten years in Afghanistan. Of course the judgment and views of a 24 year old who goes to Afghanistan will not be absolutely right. Things cannot be seen in white and black; we must see things in many colors. Talking about infidelity as one denomination, talking about Muslims versus non-Muslims etc... this classification is no longer the crisis. There are many other elements in play. We thought we were fighting to turn Afghanistan into the paradise of God, but things did not happen as we had hoped. The problem was not with the FBI or the CIA, or with Mossad or anyone else - the problem was an internal one, a problem of power. I am forty years old now and my background is as an imam entering the pulpit and saying, "Your nation is one nation", so I know how we conceive things and judge them with this superficiality. However, the challenge is really a much greater one. We must face many obstacles before we can see the results we are working for on the ground. I say this not to discourage or to depress. We can achieve it, and I am optimistic, but we must realize the dangers, obstacles, difficulties and horrors involved. Ultimately, diagnosing a problem is part of its solution.

Afghanistan turned to ashes. I remember entering the five-star Intercontinental Hotel in the first week after we arrived in Kabul with Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, may God have mercy on him. I went to the hotel manager, who was a former communist and who said, "We have twice earned a best service award, even

in the days of jihad". Unfortunately, when I went back to the Intercontinental a month later, I did not find the same hotel I had entered a month before. For example, there were no refrigerators or televisions in the rooms! It's easy to say that Afghans are not good people, but this is not a correct analysis of the problem at all. I would say that I am part of the country's failure. Shi'is and Sunnis, Pashtus and Tajiks, North and South... all bear a certain responsibility. We could level accusations at each other and at our enemies, but really we must be honest with ourselves and realize that the challenge is greater than that. These contradictions exist within my community of believers, not within my religion or my Islam, and they have made me look at things with some imagination and patience. The matter cannot be treated, as some believe, on a superficial level.

We are here to discuss the conflict between Shi'ism and Salafism. There is nothing wrong with discussing this conflict as a challenge hindering the prosperity of the Islamic nation, but it is not the only issue to consider. In my opinion, and I am not reciting the Koran here but merely expressing my personal point of view, these are all alternative names for the real conflict, the conflict of power. A conflict of power which the West can solve by organizing these bacteria which are called "power", after rivers of blood have guided us to the mechanism of "democracy". How can I accept these slogans after my personal experiences, and when I say the differences between Shi'is and Sunnis, Wahhabis and Rawafids, Arabs and Persians are superficial? I say that it is much more complicated than that. Here I call to mind a distinguished group of young people, whom I still mourn, who fought alongside me in the jihad against the Russians. They died in the ranks of Hekmatyar, fighting Ahmad Shah Massoud because he was fighting alongside Shi'is. Should we fight Massoud because the Shi'is with him?! I'm not talking about a gap of five or ten years here, I'm talking about a period of months – roughly one year – in which we saw Hekmatyar, who fought Massoud because he had sided with the Shi'i, turning into a Shi'i ally to fight and resist the Taliban! The Taliban are Hanafi and Hekmatyar is Hanafi, the Taliban are Pashtun and Hekmatyar is Pashtun, the Taliban are Sunni and Hekmatyar is Sunni. However, he preferred to turn to Tehran, which is Shi'i and Persian, in order to reorganize himself to fight the Taliban. The real goal was "power".

Next, I want to consider my country, Algeria, and head into another battle on another field. Here, we are discussing the Islamic Front for Salvation, which won the elections in Algeria. Conflict broke out, and the outcome was two hundred thousand people killed. This was not a battle between Sunnis and Shi'is, between unbelievers and Islam, or between Americans and Arabs. The battle here was

between Ahmad and Muhammad, but caused by what?! The battle was between Ahmad and Muhammad, both of whom are Malikis, both of who are Sunnis, both of who are Algerian. Imagine a table with 4 chairs - one for Abbas Medani, one for Bouteflika, one for General Tawfiq, chairman of the Algerian intelligence, and one for Ahmed Ben Bella, for them to sit down and seek a solution to this dilemma. There are no problems of Shiism, or occupation, or sectarian conflict. All of these people are Malikis, all of them are Algerians, all of them are Sunnis. The problem here also a problem of "power".

I do not excuse anyone when considering this problem. We can also consider the Islamic Republic of Iran that now defends Islam. However, when it had two choices - to cooperate with the Great Satan (the United States) or to topple its rival the dictator Saddam Hussein, it acted according to its own interests.

Now let us leave the battle of slogans. I am sure that the historical problems between Sunnis and Shi'is are not as great as the psychological barriers which the American public had to overcome to select a black African man with a Muslim father as president. The obstacles which had to be overcome to make such a shift in American society were much more difficult than the obstacles between us. In short, let's go directly to the cause of the disease, and let's look at how we can organize the issue of power and how to solve our political dilemmas. These are undoubtedly complicated issues, and I don't want to be simplistic but God willing it can be achieved.

7 Jihadi Salafism: Converging with the mainstream or continuing in isolation

Fidaa Itani

There are a number of different Salafist trends in existence today, although the one which the world is most preoccupied with and which is most frequently discussed is Jihadi Salafism. This has been labeled as "*takfiriyah*" and "al-Qaeda", amongst other things. However, the movement refers to itself as Jihadi Salafism, and so from the outset we too should agree to use this appellation. If a party calls itself "the People's Party", for example, then researchers and observers should use this name too, even if the People's Party is actually a distinctly right-wing force. Describing Jihadi Salafists as terrorists is imprecise and subjective, even though this is done by all researchers and media outlets in the West. This is especially noticeable in the case of the Jihadi Salafists who fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets, who have now turned from "freedom fighters" into "terrorists and extremists".

This covers the form of our discussion. As for the substance, we already know that Jihadi Salafism is the intellectual and combative marriage of Wahhabism and the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. It arose at almost exactly the same time as the Shi'i Islamic movements in Iran under Khomeini, which culminated in the revolution of 1979, with the growth of Shi'ism in Lebanon under Imam Musa al-Sadr, and later, after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, with the emergence of Hezbollah, which was inspired by the ideology of the Iranian Islamic Revolution.

Throughout the conflict in the Arab and Islamic region, competition between the two sides of Sunnism and Shi'ism, each adhering to a different school of Islamic thought, increased. Whenever there is competition, new heroes will appear on the scene to lead the competition and try to eliminate the other side. This particular competition is the same as all other political conflicts throughout history, and plays by the same rules. Both sides try to impose a balance of power in their favor, to "demonize" the other and to oust them politically, aiming for the most highly fantastic ultimate goal: the elimination and purging of all human elements of the other side.

Before I began preparing for this seminar, I obtained a booklet of one Jihadi who at one point described himself as part of the formation of al-Qaeda's ideology. The booklet repeated the "*takfeer*" ideology, firstly by talking about the American and Israeli enemy and then by naming all the opponents of al-Qaeda's ideology - the

Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic movements, Hezbollah and Shi'i in general. However, the fiercest attack the booklet makes is primarily directed against the Shi'i.

During my many years as a journalist endeavoring to understand Jihadi Salafism, I tried very hard to distinguish between the tactics and strategies of Jihadi Salafists. These attempts covered events in Iraq, Nahr al-Bared, Ein el-Hilweh and Bekaa, and targeted Jihadi Salafism. Ultimately I discovered that the strategy of Jihadi Salafist groups is to slaughter and expel Jews and Crusaders from the land of Islam, and their tactic is to send suicide bombers to blow themselves up in Shi'i areas. It is hard to come to any other conclusions regarding the tactical and strategic planning of Jihadi Salafism.

In fact, this disagreement is not about ideology, neither Salafist nor Shi'i ideology, but essentially boils down to a divergence of interests. In the face of the growing Iranian project, whatever its identity or methods, there was a tendency amongst Salafists, primarily in Saudi Arabia, to support not an opposition project offering an alternative to the rise of the Iranian project, but a project which opposed and was incompatible with the Iranian project. This encounter led to the creation of a temporary political operation based on interests, which has not yet been successfully tackled. I believe that this policy covers a range of factors that can unite or divide depending on this basis of interests.

The divergence that we are currently faced with is about interests, whether direct or indirect. An example of this is what happened on May 7th 2007 in Lebanon, when Hezbollah, which has adopted the notion of liberating Jerusalem as a central strategic issue, was forced to perform a potentially damaging operation by making a decisive military strike against its rivals in power in Lebanon, after these rivals tried to put the party's Signal Corps out of action by stopping the party's telephone network. This military operation led to an almost complete split between Sunnis and Shi'i. However, Hezbollah took this step without hesitation, compelled by its need to maintain the resistance and uphold the Palestinian issue.

I therefore think it is important to focus on the idea of interests when examining the political behavior of any party. If we want to talk about the issue of Sunnis and Shi'i, or Salafists and Shi'i in particular, I do not think that we should look first at religious elements. If we consider historical factors, we find that they played a key role in increasing the distance between the two sides, especially as Sunni Islam was the official doctrine of the regimes that ruled the Islamic region for hundreds of years. Moreover, the alliance established between the Al-Sauds and the Al-Sheikhs in Saudi Arabia was established on the basis of interests in order to gain power in the first,

second and third Saudi states. Shiis perceived some form of inequity, injustice and exclusion in this, and these feelings later led to aspirations for liberalization and liberation, which the Shi'i believed in and worked for. They also drew on their heritage and their revolutionary and emancipatory stances in their recent and distant history. For Sunnis, meanwhile, the issue of liberation remained only a partial concern. They did not feel any great concern over the issue of liberation since they were the ones in power enforcing their own doctrines.

In conclusion, we can say that Jihadi Salafism has failed to create a political vision for the general Islamic project, with clear tactics and strategies dealing with issues of society, the economy, education, health, etc. Jihadi Salafists find it difficult to provide examples from their history of moments of revolutionary articulation at the level of liberating countries or at the level of internal liberalization. They can mainly draw on the Islamic conquests, though which the Islamic empire was established, and the struggle against the Crusader invasions.

At the same time, no one has rushed to engage in political dialogue with these Jihadi Salafist groups, which may be able to produce a mutual understanding such as that resulting from the dialogue between the primary representative of the Shi'i in Lebanon (Hezbollah) and representatives of the Lebanese Salafist movement, Hassan Shahal and Safwan Al Zoubi. This was frozen because some parties did not believe it was compatible with Sunni interests in Lebanon.

The beginning of the road towards a solution with Jihadi Salafism is political dialogue and researching the issue of interests which the parties can compromise and work on, whilst taking into account the interests of major countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and other countries linked directly with this issue. This requires in-depth, serious new studies which seek to understand the interests of both sides and to bring them closer together in order to create a political project based on convergence, and not competition.

8 Iran and Saudi Arabia: Developing Shi'ite and Salafist tendencies in the Islamic consciousness --- Possible solution to a situation of struggle and competition for leadership

Amir Mosawi

Before the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, there were no significant disagreements between Saudi Arabia and the Shah's Kingdom of Iran. On the contrary, there was a definite mutual understanding between the two sides, in spite of their different doctrines, nationalisms and languages. This understanding even went so far as to allow for the distribution of roles and tasks in the region between the two sides. The Shah of Iran was a political and economic supporter of Israel, in particular providing it with oil either for free or for nominal prices, actions which Saudi Arabia supported. There is no reason to believe Saudi Arabia ever objected to the Shah's policies of supporting Israel, and in fact all the evidence indicates the contrary.

As long as the Iranian and Saudi kingdoms were both sheltered under the American umbrella, their bilateral relations were marked by understanding, cordiality and cooperation. Religious differences did not affect these good relations, and the Shi'i Shah was not considered a polytheist or anti-Sunni by the Saudis at that time. He too had total faith in the great Satan, his true *kiblah* was the White House, and the Israeli flag was raised in the centre of the Iranian capital Tehran. In short, there were no problems between the two sides, only compatible visions and policies. Locking up mosques, hounding worshipers, torturing believers in prisons and executing them, forbidding Islamic books, attacking the Koran and the Arabic language, persecuting and exiling scholars, opening up the country for Jews, Baha'is, and American advisers, and fighting religion in all its forms, did not at the time trouble the Saudis, the people of monotheism and the fighters of polytheism and innovation. This is because they viewed all this in the context of an Islam which would not harm U.S. interests and would not threaten the security of Israel. This was seen as the key religious issue, not whether or not Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was a Shi'i, visited graves and believed in Imam Mahdi. All of this was acceptable as long as it was consistent with American objectives and plans for the region.

The two kingdoms had stood together against Jamal Abdel Nasser to defeat his emancipatory and revolutionary policies, and to weaken him in the face of Israel.

This led to his demise, the defeat of Egypt and the Arab nation, and defeat over the central issue of Palestine. After this major setback, the Arabs were forced to accept the U.S.A.'s insulting, delusive and worthless solutions. Saudi Arabia then put pressure on Saddam Hussein to make peace with the Shah, and to sign the Algiers Agreement of 1975, which led to the creation of a three-fold axis to confront the growing revolutionary Islamic movement in Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon and other Arab countries. In this context, they also politicised the PLO and made its armed forces move away from their previous revolutionary course towards the search for political solutions. Yasser Arafat was encouraged to follow the diplomatic route and to switch his revolutionary discourse to looking for peaceful political solutions which relied on the United States to support the Palestinian people and the issue of Palestine by putting pressure on Israel. All this helped to create a peaceful atmosphere in the region which made Israel the dominant force controlling the fate of the people of the region. There was a quickening movement toward a secret normalization of relations with Israel. The Shah was the godfather of this process through his special and public relations with Tel Aviv, and great friendship with Sadat's Egypt and most other Arab states, with the exception of Syria and Libya. In parallel, these normalized governments persecuted those who rejected this approach, threw them into prison and eliminated them both physically and politically. Pressure on the clerics in Iran doubled because of Imam Khomeini's stance on the Zionist entity, which from his exile in Najaf Al-Ashraf in Iraq he declared to be a cancerous gland in the body of the Islamic nation which must be rooted out. This declaration gave new momentum and spirit to the Islamic nation, which helped to create a new climate in Iran and the Arab countries, supporting the Palestinian people and opposing the Zionist occupation. This in turn weakened and undermined the normalization policies of the Shah and his Arab allies.

Iranian-Saudi relations

After the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Iranian-Saudi relations were poor as a result of the policies and slogans of the Islamic Revolution and its leadership, which opposed American policies and the Zionist entity, and offered the highest levels of support to the Palestinian issue.

As a result, immediately after the Iranian revolution political partisanship began to appear amongst the countries in the region, and political differences between these countries began to rise to the surface.

Whilst the growing influence of Iran under the Shah across the Arab region harmonized with American and Israeli policies, the expansionist tendencies of the

Iran of the Islamic Revolution were at odds with and opposed American and Israeli desires and ambitions in the region. During the earlier phase, the Arab countries of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Morocco had all supported the Shah's policies in the region. By contrast, Syria, Libya, Lebanon, and later Sudan, all supported and assisted the second period of Iranian expansion in the Arab world. Looking at these political divisions, we can see that religious or sectarian elements played no part in forming these political axes. Instead, the main criteria for these regional groupings was and still is how closely these countries adhered to the American and Israeli view of the Palestinian issue and the rights of Arab and Islamic peoples. Whenever a state or organization upholds the principles of supporting the Palestinian people, returning to them their usurped rights and rejecting arrogant American plans for hegemony in the region, this state will find itself closer to Iran and further removed from the American and Israeli axis. Whenever these states step back from supporting the Palestinian people, they find themselves moving away from Iran towards siding with America and making peace with Israel.

Saudi-Iranian differences are based on politics, not on ideology or religion. They are directly linked to a specific international strategy which wants to use these political differences to prevent any political action or vision from endangering the security and stability of the Jewish state. I therefore do not believe that disputes between the Arab states and Iran are local or regional disputes directing concerning these countries. Rather, they are artificial disputes stirred up by factions who want the Arab countries to distract Iran with secondary problems and distance it from its basic political objectives, especially those of supporting the oppressed Palestinian people, confronting all attempts at hegemony and control over the people's wealth, confronting attempts to plunder and confiscate their decision-making powers and sovereignty, extending justice and equality in international relations and implementing internal socio-economic plans which would make Iran an economically, industrially, technically and culturally developed country, a model for independent countries with true authority and political decision-making powers. Of course, these Iranian objectives do not entice the dominating and arrogant countries of America and Israel to want this experiment to succeed in Iran. Instead, they have begun to encourage some Arab countries to disturb Iran, a state established on an Islamic basis. These countries have begun to close ranks against Iran, aiming to destroy it and remove it from the regional scene forever.

The most significant action of these Arab states to date was encouraging and supporting Saddam Hussein's attack on Iran, which destroyed its infrastructure and killed and wounded tens of thousands of Iraqis and Iranians. Saudi Arabia was one

of the greatest supporters of this inhuman aggression against the Muslim people of Iran, giving Saddam financial rewards of around 27 billion dollars, in addition to allowing Iraqi military intelligence the use of AWACS American intelligence aircrafts to monitor Iranian military movements. Saudi Arabia also supported Saddam in regional and international forums. It helped to issue a resolution at an Arab summit to cut off all diplomatic relations with Iran, with the exception of relations with Syria, Libya, Yemen and Lebanon. Saudi Arabia also helped issue resolutions in the UN Security Council which leveled accusations against Iran and obliged it to accept an immediate ceasefire, after the Iraqi army had penetrated 75km into Iranian territory and taken up positions over 1,200km along the Iranian border. Saudi Arabia also offered Iraq its full political and media support. This animosity from Saudi Arabia, and some other Arab countries, came at a time when Iran was losing its organised military force, due to the disintegration of the army and the collapse of its institutions after the fall of the Shah. At this time there was still no missile construction, no nuclear program, no Hezbollah in Lebanon and no Hamas in Palestine. Iraq was not yet ruled by the Supreme Council and the Dawa party, there was no so-called Shi'i crescent in the region, and there was no Iranian threat to close the Strait of Hormuz. There was only evident anger from Saudi Arabia and most other Arab countries over the fall of the Shah, who was a pillar of the American axis in the region. The establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as a regime with different objectives and policies, changed Iran from an American base for supporting Israel into a fortress of support for the Palestinian people and the Islamic nation. The Israeli flag no longer flew in the skies over Iran from atop the Israeli embassy in the middle of Tehran –it was ripped and burnt, and then swapped with the Palestinian flag. The embassy building and all other Israeli establishments in Tehran were given over to the Palestinian Embassy. Herein began the animosity and desire for revenge of the Iranian people, governed by the new political system which they had chosen through the greatest, most vehement and most comprehensive popular revolution. The revolutionary forces were empty-handed, yet full of belief and endurance, and the desire to challenge the strongest best-armed military force in the region. Accordingly, they set up their Islamic government and swore in their leader Imam Khomeini with the blood of the martyrs.

As a result of all this, we cannot consider current political movements between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran to consist of competition for regional leadership or, as some like to call it, a sectarian conflict between Shi'i and Sunnis or between Arabs and Persians. Particular issues and causes have placed these two countries in a situation of continuous and permanent disagreement, and we cannot put an end to these disagreements until Western countries - particularly

the U.S.A. and the United Kingdom - stop encouraging Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries to challenge Iran and to distract it from engaging in the major issues of the Islamic nation.

The most important issues that have helped to perpetuate the political disagreement between Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries on the one hand and Iran on the other hand are:

- i. The American and Israeli desire for revenge on the Iranian people and their leadership, after losing their ally the Shah, their military and intelligence bases, a large market for their consumer goods and their ability to plunder the wealth of Iran
- ii. Attempts to topple the Islamic regime in Iran or to undermine it in order to weaken its ability to counteract American and Israeli plans in the region
- iii. Attempts to turn Iran, rather than Israeli, into the greatest and most dangerous enemy of the Arabs. This replacement has been made through the Arab-Israeli reconciliation and coexistence process which involves concessionary initiatives and proposals under the humiliating Arab Initiative, which Syrian president Bashar al-Assad has called "the dead initiative"
- iv. Attempts to confuse Arab and Islamic public opinion over the intellectual and political tendencies of the Iranian leadership and attempts to scare Islamic movements away from Iran, portrayed as a country with a national and sectarian agenda and its own regional objectives, through raising sectarian and nationalist suspicions and inhibiting Iranian policies, especially those relating to the Palestinian issue and challenging American global hegemony
- v. Stirring up a fight over Iran's military capabilities, especially its missiles, through emotional addresses questioning the credibility of Iranian attitudes and policies towards the Palestinian people, and asking why Iran does not launch her missiles against Israel in support of Palestine, with full knowledge that the use of these missiles would mark the beginning of a ferocious war that could result in a major and totally destructive world war that no country in the region could escape, even its instigators.

How can we calm the region down?

- i. The countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the League of Arab States must assign a member state (probably Saudi Arabia, because of its weight

with other Arab and the Islamic countries, its strategic location and its other capabilities) to enter into dialogue with the Islamic Republic of Iran to clarify the concerns of the two sides and each side's expectations of the other, and to identify all important common points shared by the two sides which could act as the basis for comprehensive dialogue between the Arabs and Iran, in order to reach fixed and practical solutions to extricate both sides from the current circle of accusations and obstacles.

- ii. The two sides must be persuaded that the Arab-Iranian conflict does not benefit anyone except Israel and those who want to control the region's resources. If the two sides can arrive at this conviction, they can then smoothly and easily extricate themselves from the arena of conflict and move towards the field of peaceful understanding, cooperation and friendship. They will both enjoy security, stability and prosperity, whilst those benefiting from the disagreement between the two sides will lose out.
- iii. Just as the Iranian-Saudi understanding achieved with the help of Qatari efforts helped achieve reconciliation and peace in Lebanon, this understanding can also help to end Iraq's crises by supporting the choices of the Iraqi people and helping them to regain their full sovereignty through a serious demand for the exit of the occupying forces from the country. It can also help to come up with a definitive solution for the Palestinian issue, through supporting the idea of a general referendum for all Palestinians within Palestine and abroad of all religions, to freely determine the type of political system they want, without any interference. Under this system, Muslims, Christians and Jews could live together peacefully to build their beloved nation of Palestine, free from conflict or strife. They will share power in a natural and democratic way, with everyone able to live anywhere they choose, and practice their religion wherever and however they wish. This is not a dream or an illusion, but a reality. The people of Palestine could repeat the experience of the people of South Africa, who were able to overcome all their historical problems and obstacles to put an end to racism and to turn a new page in the history book, so that whites and blacks could live together. After fifteen years of peaceful coexistence, we see that South Africa is progressing flawlessly every day in all spheres, and that the reason for this is its success in realising the desire within the country and abroad for this process of political change. If all Muslims, in particular the Arab states and Iran, could understand this and use their numbers to put pressure on the superpowers, they would be able to impose this logical, historical and

democratic solution and make ensure its acceptance. They could make it work just as it has worked in South Africa. The region has seen more than 60 years of conflict, fighting and instability, but no solution to this humanitarian and historical crisis can be found. All the solutions currently on the table lack gravity and do not grant the Palestinian people their full rights. In fact, they are insults and not solutions, as they deny the Palestinians their identity and their basic and real rights. Thus, the conflict will remain, and the battle and the war of attrition will continue.

- iv. Put an end to the incitement of sectarian and religious differences. Experience has proved the futility of such acts - all the massacres committed against the followers of Islam in previous ages (against the Umayyads, the Abbasids and the Ottomans) failed to undermine the ideas of Muslims, and instead these ideas spread more than ever before. Saudi Arabia should accept this reality and deal with it positively to benefit from the unity of the Islamic nation in a way which will benefit everyone. Hundreds of billions of dollars have been paid since the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 in order to distort its religious and political image in the region and across the world, but this has only increased its powers of resistance, its strength, its expanse and its acceptability.
- v. The United Arab Emirates should stop inciting Arab and Western countries against Iran over the issue of the three islands in the Arabian Gulf. It should sit with the Iranians and engage in dialogue in order to reach an understanding on this issue, within the framework of the 1971 agreement.

If this vision could be achieved, we would see a positive and encouraging atmosphere of stability, understanding and cooperation in the region. The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia would become strong and complementary forces for peace, coexistence and cooperation in the region and the world. The position of Muslims would thus rise, in the face of those who want to threaten and harm them.

9 Commentary

Ayman Mohamad

In the last three decades, the Arab and Islamic region has witnessed a significant growth of Shi'i and Salafi currents, as part of the so-called Islamic revival. Both currents have spread hugely, and are a significant feature of religious activity across all continents. The rise of these two currents has been accompanied by an interlinked relationship between them based on competition and antagonism. It seems that they are operating in parallel, unable ever to come together and converge. Even issues which might be considered common elements shared between the two parties are actually used to increase hostility and divergence rather than achieve convergence or integration.

The conflict between Shi'is and Salafis was limited in its ideological scope until the late 1970s. Up to this point, any divergences were expressed within a limited framework and never led to violence or direct fighting. However, the historical sectarian conflict erupted again immediately after the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980. This period witnessed the excessive saturation of the Arab and Islamic arena with sectarian books, writings and letters which concentrated on the differences between the two sides. With political factors entering the ideological dispute, the relationship between the two sides became more and more dangerous, culminating in the intensification of the conflict in all its forms in Iraq after the occupation in 2003. Many feared that the conflict would also be repeated in a similar form in Lebanon.

Neglected by leading researchers, thinkers and scholars, the conflict increased and the floodgates were opened. Cultural and structural gaps created many opportunities for extremist ideas and waves of violence to break out in the Muslim world. This has created real new dangers for the people of the region, leading Professor Angelo Kudfia to say that the "war within Islam is more dangerous for Muslims than their conflicts with the rest of the world".

This serious challenge plaguing the region can no longer be considered solely a matter of assigning responsibility, or deciding who is in the right. We must create a new process of thinking about the future of Islam in general and its presence in the field of cultural challenges, and use this process to consider all the components of the Islamic nation, including Salafis, Shi'is and others. This will then allow for the reformulation of internal relations within the Islamic community and the reform of

Islamic discourse, firstly so that it can better reflect itself, and secondly so that it can harmonize with the issues and events of the modern age, and with any processes of thought or analysis where Muslims are currently out of date and prevented from contributing to the progress of the human civilization.

This state of tension and conflict within the Islamic nation undoubtedly weakens its ability to confront both internal and external challenges. There are many major internal challenges which everyone should share responsibility for, the foremost of which are issues of democracy, political participation and reforming systems of governance. It is also necessary to achieve greater economic development, followed by social mobility and development, and to achieve greater intellectual and cultural freedom. All of these issues collectively constitute the basis of the cultural and renaissance project of the Islamic nation.

The most prominent external challenges are possibly direct and indirect foreign interventions in the Arab and Islamic region, which are often aimed at controlling its resources and often go against the interests of the region, and the Palestinian issue. This represents the major internal and external challenge, as it includes overlapping local, regional and international elements and ramifications. Finally we are left with the question of the inter-cultural, civilizational and religious dialogue which has come to prominence on the world stage in recent years. The Islamic nation must contribute and participate in this dialogue to develop contemporary Islamic thought in all spheres, whether social, political or cultural. In this climate of communication, the Islamic nation can better shape its responses, attitudes, hopes and cultural aspirations.

Returning once again to the discussion of Salafism and Shi'ism, we can observe that Shi'ism originally emerged as a movement opposing the deviations of the state, whilst Salafism emerged as a movement opposing the deviations of society. It could thus be argued that in terms of composition, both currents are projects of resistance against what they consider to be deviations from the essence of Islam. Accordingly, if we initiate processes of communication, dialogue, discussion and understanding, we will find that we can actually provide decisive and unequivocal answers to questions of the deviations of the state and society, and ways to resist them. The Islamic nation sorely needs such answers, and this process will help it to emerge from its quagmire of political, cultural, social and economic problems.

Such meetings and dialogues and the different views, ideas and proposals they offer from peoples of different viewpoints and cultures are vitally important, as they can enrich our thinking and dialogue. They allow the exchange of views and the

dissemination of beneficial ideas and proposals. Many important thinkers are eager to move away from subjective analysis, isolation and polarization, and this could result in a contribution – however small – to stimulating and motivating thinking about controversial issues in order to understand these problems and to propose intellectual alternatives based on deeper and wiser interpretations.

Biographies of writers

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