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Violence in History and in Contemporary Conflicts: Why History Matter's for Today's Politics

In his famous work *Muqaddimah*, fourteenth century Ibn Khaldun complains heavily about the works of his contemporary historians. He accuses them of disregarding

> the changes in conditions and in customs of nations and races that the passing of time had brought about. Thus, they presented historical information about dynasties and stories of events from the early period as mere forms without substance, [...] as knowledge that must be considered ignorance [...].[1]

> Moreover, in addition to not taking changing conditions into account, he accuses them of neglecting evidence, probability, and credibility. Repeatedly, Ibn Khaldun points to "silly reports" or "silly information" that cannot be true but nonetheless made it into works of history.[2] Yet, for Ibn Khaldun there is more to history than evidence based critical investigation. He demands that

> today, the scholar in the field [of history] needs to know the principles of politics, the (true) nature of existing things, and the difference among nations, places, and periods with regard to ways of life, character, qualities, customs, sects, schools, and everything else.[3]

Although Ibn Khaldun's "today" is the fourteenth century Eastern Mediterranean, I aim at following his demands by focusing on the conflict in Syria. For this purpose, I will first outline the current internal and external conflict lines. Thereafter, I will elaborate on the Islamic State movement that also plays a role in the region and certainly got and continuously gets the vast amount of media attention. To get a better grasps of the current violent conditions in Syria, history needs to be consulted in order to understand how the current situation emerged. For some issues, it is sufficient to consider developments of the last decades; for others, in particular if we want to understand Islamic State ideology, it is necessary to dig into medieval writings, particularly into those of fourteenth century Ibn Taymiyya. Here, again, it is pertinent to observe Ibn Khaldun's demand and pay attention to change. While most contemporary commentators on the Islamic State fail to take the history of its ideological into account, other commentators draw a straight line from a strand in fourteenth century Islamic theology without considering change. Though history matters, it is not always that obvious how much and to what extent. I should note, however, that I have no intension of suggesting any solutions to the current humanitarian disaster in Syria and Iraq; rather, I like to add more complexity to the issue. In other words, I like to make a difficult problem even more difficult. If one looks at the beginning of the current humanitarian crisis in Syria, it is useful to recall Machiavelli's teaching how wars get started. Machiavelli suggests a) because at least one party wants to go to war and b) by accident. In the Syrian case, there certainly was an "accident" that eventually sparked the conflict.

I.   The Spark

February 2011, Dara'a, Syria. 10 years old Abdulrahman al-Krad meets with his friends after school in the school yard for play. Inspired by the graffiti Abdulrahman and his friends have seen on TV from the uprisings in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, Abdulrahman buys a spray can with yellow paint and he and his friends start spraying some graffiti on the school walls. First some hearts with an arrow, then, inspired by what they had seen on TV, replacing Gaddafi with Assad, Abdulrahman intended to spray "You've plundered the country, al-Assad." Because Abdulrahman is not good at spelling, accidentally, he omits the Alif in Assad, thus writing al-Sad, the dam or dike, instead of al-Assad, the lion. Neither

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Abdulrahman nor his friends realized that they did something that could get them into trouble; they were just playing and absolutely clueless about any of the political implications of their doing.

The next day of class, the wall got painted over and all students at the school had to take part in a spelling competition. Abdulrahman repeats his initial spelling error and was identified as the one who was responsible for the graffito. He got arrested. For days he was interrogated and tortured by the Syrian secret police. His father and at least 16, maybe 20, other children, all between nine and 15 years old, also got arrested and tortured.

At first, only their fathers protested in front of the secret service headquarters, demanding their children back. Instead of getting theirs sons back, the fathers experienced further humiliation. Eventually, this was one humiliation too many. Thereafter, the protesters demanded not just their children back, but also the governor's resignation. First, the regime responded with teargas; soon, the regime moved from teargas to sharp munition. On March 18, the first protestors died. With the slogan, "Our Souls, our blood, we sacrifice for you, Dara'a," the protests spread throughout Syria.[4] The regime's reaction, thus, has unnecessarily provoked the Syrian uprising that eventually escalated into the current civil war in Syria.

As many other ruler in the past, Bashar al-Assad has ignored fourteenth century Ibn Jamaʿa's advice when dealing with sectarians who revolt against their ruler because they have suffered injustice. Ibn Jamaʿa suggests that the ruler is advised to remove the injustice and fight the protesters only if they continue to revolt after the injustice has been removed. If they repent, he should accept their repentance. If they persist, he has to fight them.[5] Instead of removing the apparent injustice, the Assad regime instantly turned to violence against the Syrian citizens.

II.   Domestic and Regional Issues prior to the Revolution

If one keeps in mind what actually sparked the conflict in Syria, one may instantly have some doubts about the narrative that in Syria, as well as elsewhere in the Middle East, we are simply confronted with a sectarian or religious conflict. As the beginning, this was certainly not the case. How we speak about a conflict or how the conflict is narrated, however, is not meaningless. As Hans G. Kippenberg notes, even if a conflict is not caused by religion, this does not mean that religious interpretations of a conflict are avoided. A religious interpretation alters the conflict's nature.[6] What is meant is that as soon as we narrate a conflict as sectarian, eventually the perception of the conflict turns religious; all initial causes get forgotten; even if one addresses the initial causes, it does not necessarily mean that the conflict can be resolved. This is also what we can observe in a number of Middle Eastern conflicts today. Syria is no exception to the rule. Yet, reframing the narrative of the conflict instantly took place. The regime accused the opposition of being sectarian Islamists. Eventually, each group accused the others of pursuing sectarian goals. By its enemies, the Assad-regime was and still is frequently framed as "Alawite regime."[7]

Yet, this does not mean that there is no religious dimension to it. But let us look first into the internal conflict lines in Syria prior to the uprising. The standard narrative goes along the line, the al-Assad regime is Alawite. The majority population in Syria are Sunni Muslims; however there are also Christian and Shiite minorities plus the ethnic minority of the Kurds. It is well known that these different religious groups do not go along well and, thus, a multi-religious society of such sort is doomed to be broiled in violent conflict. Even if one follows the narrative, where does one place the Alawites? In news reports they are instantly made into a Shiite sect. However, things are somewhat complicate because the *Nuṣayrī or ʿAlawī* faith is first and foremost a secretive "syncretistic religion." Bar-Asher and Kofsky, who have written one of the most substantial books about the Alawites, note that the *ʿAlawī* religion

combines and fuses elements of cults and creeds of very disparate and remote origins. Among these are various Pagan beliefs (residues of ancient Mesopotamian and Syrian cults), as well as Persian, Christian, Gnostic, and Muslim—both Sunnī and Shī'ī—religious precepts and practices. All these components have been brought together in a syncretistic religious system that has assumed a heterodox Shī'ī garb.[8]

The Alawites do not consider the Qur'an a holy book; they celebrate the Christian feasts of Christmas and Easter, they believe in reincarnation, though only for men, not for women; and they consider 'Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law, divine. Nonetheless, they regard themselves Muslim.[9] This self-identity is important because, although Syria defines itself as a secular state, according to the Syrian constitution, the head of state has to be a Muslim. I will come back to the religious issue in a little while, although it is worth noting that in 2011, Assad's supporters, based on preexisting fears, instantly assumed that the opposition could adopt a sectarian agenda. Yet, as Christopher Phillips puts it

On the regime side numerous Sunni bureaucrats dependent on government pay checks remained loyal, as did many in the middle class, including conservative Sunni merchants in Damascus and Aleppo, even if some secretly aided the opposition. [...] Indeed, after the rebels attacked Aleppo in 2012, the mostly Sunni city was divided among economic, not sectarian lines: the wealthy west remained loyal while the rebels made a base in the poor east.[10]

The sectarian fear, however, was not totally without reason. Since Hafez al-Assad took power for real in 1970, both members of the Assad family as well as high-ranked officials of the Ba'th Party had to suffer through periods of, although not always successful, assassination attempts, usually exercised by members of a more militant branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Yet, neither Hafez al-Assad nor his son Bashar, who is in power since 2000, has any sympathy any Islamist movements or ideas.

It is worth noting, however, that Hafez al-Assad was preoccupied with security. By security, he meant the regime's or the state's security, nor the Syrian citizens' security. Hafez al-Assad's obsession with security certainly displayed some paranoid features; regime security, Hafez al-Assad considered an end in itself. The paranoia and regime's security obsession certainly did not go away when Bashar al-Assad took power in 2000. As Bente Scheller notes, in order to consolidate his power base but also to address economic stagnation, Bashar al-Assad initiated economic reform that aimed at the integration of the Syrian economy into world economy through market liberalization.

Yet, as it turned out, these reforms were almost exclusively to the advantage of the "'sons and daughters of the Ba'this' nomenklatura', who chose business careers rather than following their fathers in political or military careers." As the result, wealth became accumulated in even fewer hands. Simultaneously, Bashar al-Assad cut the farmers' diesel and fertilizer subsidies. These economic reforms that disfavored the mostly Sunni peasant population coincided with the 2006-2010 major draught and caused mass migrations into urban areas and certainly undermined the Sunni peasantry's support of the regime. In addition, the economic reforms weakened state institutions. Some of the state functions, particularly in the social sector, were filled by sub-state groups with a religious or ethnic identity and, thus, fueling sectarian identities.[11]

Yet, Bashar al-Assad also fueled sectarian identities, although unintentionally, through other means. Similar to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia[12] but also Iran and Iraq, Bashar al-Assad supported opposition groups in neighboring states in order to undermine his neighbors' regional power aspirations. When Turkey increased the pressure on the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK), al-Assad, both father and son, actively supported the PKK. Before the 2003 Iraq war, he actively supported Iraqi opposition groups. Most of them had a sectarian outlook. At the beginning of the Iraq war, Syria kept its borders open and allowed busloads of (radicalized) foreign fighters into Iraq.[13] Although the motivation was either weakening the neighboring states or keeping the US in Iraq busy to prevent an invasion of Syria, his

policy fueled sectarian tensions and emerging sectarian identities throughout the region as well as in Syria itself. In addition to the power vacuum that was created through the uprising in Syria, the Assads' policy of the previous decades certainly filled Pandora's Box with more evils that eventually got released in what has turned into the twenty-first century's most violent conflict—so far.

III.   Insight Syria and Geopolitical Interests[14]

If we take a look a look into Syria and asked who is fighting whom, then the picture looks more or less like:
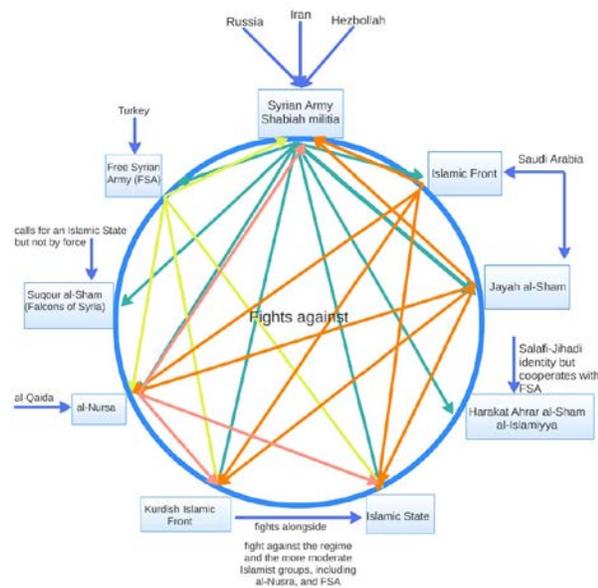
I have ignored the Kurdish problem here, primarily because, except for the Kurdish Islamic Front, the Kurds in Syria are relatively passive. The situation is different in Northern Iraq, where Kurdish militia are among the more active groups fighting against Islamic State.

The question is, of course, not only who is fighting whom, but also, and more importantly, for what reason. Moreover, it is also important to notice, which external forces, because the civil war in Syria is also a proxy war, is supporting whom and what is the rationale behind it.

First, the al-Assad regime: Their main domestic forces are the regular Syrian army or what is left of it and *Shabiah* militia. The *Shabiah*, recruited primarily from Alawite communities usually fight alongside the Syrian army and are known for their brutality. The Alawite communities and particularly the *Shabiah*-militia stand and fall with the Assad regime. Thus, they have nothing or all to lose and, consequently, fight until the very end, which might be also their end.

Although the Assad regime is basically bankrupt, it has three external allies: Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah. All three promised unconditional support to the Assad-regime whose one and only goal is the survival and ideally restoration of the regime. In a way, Russia is among the most puzzling cases here. Before the Syrian revolution, Russian-Syrian relations had significantly cooled down; during the fifteen years period prior to the Syrian revolution, Russia has treated Syria at best indifferently. Yet, the more isolated Syria becomes internationally, the tighter the Assad-Russian relations have become. While the Arab League early on has supported in one way or another Syrian opposition groups in order to achieve regime change, if necessary, by force, Russia had much stronger economic ties with some of the Gulf States than with Syria. Yet, Russia supports the Assad-regime basically for three reasons:

1) Fear of Islamism: Russia's fear of Islamism is rooted in the country's own experience in the Northern Caucasus and "projects its own security concerns from its experiences in the Northern Caucasus on Syria."[15]
2) Its rivalry with the United States.
3) Geopolitical interests in the region: Presently, Russia has just one military base in the Middle East, which is based in Syria. In addition, Russia sees Syria as its entry gate to the Middle East for increased economic activities.

Russia supports the Assad-regime with military equipment and is itself involved in military activities in Syria, primarily air-strikes. Because Syria is bankrupt, the question is, who pays for the military support and weaponry. It has been suggested, although for obvious reasons not confirmed, that Iran is picking up the bill.

Iran: With Iran, Hafez al-Assad had built ties immediately after the Iranian Revolution. Both regimes are tied rather by power-political reasons than by shared ideology. Since the Iranian Revolution, both countries are also rivals for regional leadership; nonetheless they share a number of similar interests:

1) They oppose US-American Influences in the region
2) Both are similarly anti-Israel
3) Both feared Iraq's expansionist aspirations

Moreover, in phases of increasing international isolation, Syria was almost the only ally Iran possessed in the region—and vice versa. What Iran fears presently most is regime change in Syria that might replace the current regime with a Sunni dominated one. A Sunni regime would certainly cooperate rather with Saudi Arabia or the Gulf States than with Iran. Thus, for Iran, the survival of the Assad-regime essentially means avoiding regional and international isolation.

Hezbollah: over the last decades, Syria has more or less constantly supported Hezbollah in Lebanon. Particularly after the end of the civil war in Lebanon, Syria had an interest in keeping its neighboring state in Syrian dependence, especially as far as foreign policy is concerned. For Syria, Hezbollah was also a factor in Syria's opposition to Israel and in its support of the Palestinian cause. However, Hezbollah's unconditional support of the Assad-regime has caused a legitimacy crisis for Hezbollah; by now, their survival depends almost entirely on the survival of the al-Assad regime.

The almost only, they are a few more but they are so marginal that we can ignore them here, secular opposition group in Syria is the *Free Syrian Army* (FSA). Their recruits are primarily deserter from the Syrian army; although not perfectly well organized and, thus less effective than they could be, their one and only goal is the removal of the Assad-regime. Early on, they were supported, both with weaponry as well as through military training, by Turkey.

Islamic Front and *Jayah al-Sham* are rather umbrella-terms. In order to identify opposition groups that may be Islamist in its outlook but distance themselves from al-Qaida and Islamic State, Saudi Arabia insisted that they unite under one umbrella. *Islamic Front* was formed in November 2013 "in response to Saudi Arabian concerns over ISIS and al-Nusra." *Jayah al-Sham* is a similar umbrella group supported by Saudi Arabia and formed in September 2013. It consists of more than fifty different opposition groups from the Damascus region. It has been suggested, of course, unconfirmed, that Saudi Arabia has supported Islamist Syrian opposition groups with approximately $5 billion.[16]

Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya and *Suqour al-Sham* (Falcons of Syria) have a strong Islamist identity. While *Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya* has a Salafist-jihadi identity, it nonetheless cooperates with the *Free Syrian Army*. *Suqour al-Sham* shares much of Islamic State ideology but differs on one significant issue: Their commander Abu Issa or Ahmed al Sheikh "has called for an Islamic State but does not believe this should be imposed by force, as Islamic State does."[17]

In addition to a number of other groups with marginal influence, *al-Nusra* and Islamic State related groups play a key role in opposing the Assad regime. The *al-Nusra* group, originally initiated by al-Baghadi, who later called the caliphate, and led by Abu Muhammad al-Julani, was for al-Baghadi the Syrian arm of Islamic State in Iraq, thus forming ISIS. Yet, al-Julani saw his allegiance with al-Qaida's al-Zawahiri. Thus, *al-Nusra* is more of an al-Qaida than an IS related group, though the differences may appear marginal. However, under Haji Bakr, a former colonel of Saddam Hussein's air force intelligence who is closely related to al-Baghadi, ISI had had already a stronghold in the Aleppo area.[18]

While I will come to al-Qaida and Islamic State in a second, it is important to note that the opposition to the Assad-regime is highly fragmented and, consequently, not very effective. While all opposition groups oppose the Assad regime; some opposition groups also fight against each other. Moreover, while politics depends on the ability and willingness to compromise, none of the parties involved, whether they are on the grounds or whether they are foreign powers who use Syria for proxy war-fare, seem to be willing and able to compromise.

IV.   Islamic State and al-Qaida

As soon as al-Qaida in the previous decade or Islamic State in this decade are concerned, the usual perception seems to be somewhat misleading. Frequently, al-Qaida or Islamic State are perceived as the major problem. If we get rid of them, all problems are solved. However, if we look at the current situation in Syria, as we have just done, even if we take IS and al-Qaida out of the picture, we are still confronted with a conflict that can hardly be solved. Throughout the Syrian revolution, it seems to be that the revolution has become more and more a Salafi outlook and it has been argued that Salafi groups, including al-Qaida and IS, have hijacked the revolution. Yet, as Bente Scheller notes,

> it may be more accurate to say that they [the Salafists] hijacked media attention—partly due to their agenda, but to no lesser extent because of the special focus on them that blew their significance out of proportion.[19]

Media attention is one thing, the changing perspective of who is friend and who is foe is another. In 1985, Ronald Reagan considered the Afghan Mujahidin, including members of the Taliban and Usama bin Laden, "the moral equivalent of our founding fathers." "In 1998, another American president or-dered missile strikes [...] to kill Osama bin Laden and his men in Afghanistan."[20] In August 2015 re-tired Army general and former CIA Director David Petraeus suggested that the US should use "mod-erate members of al Qaeda's Nusra Front to fight ISIS in Syria."[21]
Although the Western perception is frequently changing, it does not mean that al-Qaida has suddenly given up its militancy; it is only in comparison to the Islamic State that this movement looks less extreme. And, indeed, al-Nusra is fighting Islamic State related groups in Iraq, Libya, and Syria be-cause al-Zawahiri and his followers consider Islamic State ideology too extreme and potentially dam-aging al-Qaida's cause.

So, what does Islamic State stand for? As indicated earlier, some commentators treat the Islamic State as something that has popped up more or less from nowhere as a completely no phenomenon, others see the link to previous authorities, particularly Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) by projecting contempo-rary IS-ideology into the fourteenth century thinker of the Hanbali School.[22] Both camps fall into the trap Ibn Khaldun, who was a member of the Maliki School, demands from the historians of his day to avoid. Because innovations, as in medieval Christendom, are deviations of the true belief, for a mod-ern Islamic ideologist, it is essential to demonstrate that his or her, mostly his, interpretation is in keeping with the initial teachings of Islam. One way of doing it is through past authorities. Ibn Tay-miyya is a very useful source for such enterprise because he is part of a purifying movement that aimed at cleaning the faith from previous innovations and external influences. Because Ibn Taymiyya responded to a very particular context in history, his teachings of Islam are not necessarily 100 per-cent attuned to twenty-first century Salafi needs. I will address Ibn Taymiyya's teaching in context in a second. First, it is necessary to take a look at where Ibn Taymiyya and Salafi movements stand in the wider context of Sunni Islam:
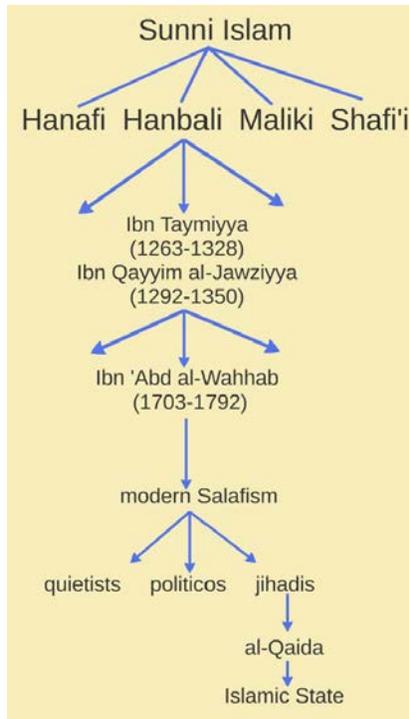
First, as Hanbali theologian, Ibn Taymiyya belongs to one of the four major theological school in Sunni Islam but he is not the one and only Hanbali theologian in the fourteenth century. Indeed, most of his contemporaries considered him too extreme.[23]

Other major influences on modern Salafism are Ibn Taymiyya's student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and eighteenth-century Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. Identifying with modern Salafism does not automatically mean promoting Islamic State militancy. One needs to distinguish at least between, first, *Quietists*, who are in tendency apolitical and focus on promoting the message through missionary work and lessons. Politics and the use of violence remain in the ruler's domain. Second, *Politicos*, who "engage in political debate or even participate in elections and parliaments." And, third, *Jihadis*. In general Salafis support jihad in principle if non-Muslims invade Muslim lands, though whether jihad may actually be wages depends on other objectives. By contrast, Jihadi-Salafis promote the idea that revolutionary jihad should be waged "against 'apostate' rulers in their own midst."[24] These distinctions are more didactical tools than true representations of reality.

Yet, what is the attraction of Ibn Taymiyya and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab? As far as Ibn Taymiyya is concerned, different groups were attracted by different parts of his oeuvre. Al-Wahhab, who aimed for a purified Islam and joined forces with Muhammad Ibn Saud, which led to the formation of the first Saudi state, relied on different writings of Ibn Taymiyya[25] than contemporary Islamist extremists. As Yahya Michot notes, for the latter group, Ibn Taymiyya's Mardin fatwa and three anti-Mongol fatwas have become the "obligatory references."[26]

Although Ibn Taymiyya also argues against non-Sunni (heretical) sects, his teaching that justifies waging jihad against the Mongols is primarily an argument for jihad as a tool in foreign affairs. Both arguments follow a similar logic and are interdependent. Under ordinary circumstances, Ibn Taymiyya considers it sufficient for a ruler to qualify as a Muslim against whom rebellion is not allowed, if the ruler performs *salah*, the ritual prayer. Whoever performs *salah* qualifies as a Muslim believer. He even warns about being too critical and dismissing a person who sins or does not fulfill all obligations as heretic or unbeliever. Under certain circumstances, even a tyrannical or *kafir* ruler is preferable over disorder. The social order of Islam cannot exist without political rule.[27] Ibn Taymiyya never "challenges the legitimacy of any particular sultan, or a fortiori that of the Mamluk regime."[28]

Yet, the Mongol invasion was a serious threat to the Mamluk dynasty. The problem was that Muslims are not allowed to wage war or *jihad* against their fellow Muslim brothers and sisters. Thus, to be able to fight against the Mongols, the Mamluks needed to argue that the Mongols were not Muslims. Ibn Taymiyya, however, willingly complied, not simply out of political motives, but also and perhaps primarily on the grounds of his own religious orthodoxy and his personal experiences. He argued that the Mongol ruler could not be considered a legitimate (Sunni) Muslim ruler because "a Sunni ruler becomes illegitimate if he does not apply a substantial part of the Shariʿa. [T]he ruler who neglects or transgresses Islamic law is ipso facto an infidel, or rather an apostate, and hence the object of jihad."[29]

Yet, jihad remains primarily a collective duty, and his teachings are not meant to imply that individuals can rise against the authority as concluded by later readers. One of Ibn Taymiyya's key issues is the fact that the Mongols, while they formally converted to Islam, see no contradiction between Islamic law and traditional Mongol law; they did not abandon their traditional law for the Shariʿa.

Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya raises doubts as to whether the Mongol ruler Ghazan truly converted to Islam. He accuses him and his court of not following the pillars of Islam such as pilgrimage, prayer, and fasting. Instead of Shariʿa, they preferred the Law of Chinggis Khan, whom the Mongols considered as important as Muhammad. In his case against the Mongols, Ibn Taymiyya also invents a very strict definition of a Muslim. Here, he claims that what would be otherwise sinning or not following all pillars and precepts of Islam makes for an apostate.

For Ibn Wahhab, in his attempt to purify Islam, *tawhid*, worshipping God alone, became one of the key principles of his teaching. As Roel Meijer notes, al-Wahhab "was willing to call all those who did not adhere to the doctrine of *tawhid* unbelievers [...] or apostates [...], who can be excommunicated [...], which was a precondition for waging *jihad* against them." However, al-Wahhab also stresses a xenophobic attitude towards foreigners and sectarianism against non-Wahhabis. While born in the Saudi Arabian desert and not in response to any foreign/Western occupation experience, al-Wahhab discourages Wahhabis' interactions with people who do not belong to the very same creed. He even goes so far to urge his fellow Wahhabi Muslims "to wage *jihad* against them." Through hatred, they would grow closer to God.[30] Al-Wahhab's understanding of Islam is apolitical as it is reflected in the set-up in Saudi Arabia. The sheikhs' domain is the believers' moral conduct. As in the Calvinist city republic of Emden in the early seventeenth century, the sheikhs fulfill a similar role as the church council: supervision and, if necessary, enforcement of decent conduct. The Sauds', by contrast, were and still are responsible for the political sphere, though the sheikhs usually complied by sanctioning political decisions that were in violation of strict doctrine.

Movements like Islamic State who fall broadly under the label Salafi-Jihadis take both Ibn Taymiyya and al-Wahhab teaching into the twenty-first century. Whereas al-Wahhab teaches disengagement with the corrupt world, a Salafi-Jihadi does the opposite. As Reuven Paz suggests, contemporary Salafi-Jihadis have given their cause "a kind of Marxist-Leninist touch with the signs of destruction of the 'old society' in favour of building a new type of Muslim and a new Muslim society." What is important here is the application of an extreme version of "Othering." It is not just the infidel, but whoever does not completely comply with the Salafi-Jihadis' understanding of Islam qualifies as an enemy against whom waging jihad is not only legitimate, but mandatory. This teaching derives, although in a very extreme reading, from "Wahhabi zealotry"[31]—but it also turns against quietist Wahhabis and, in consequence, also against the Saudi State. Simply out of political necessity, the Saudi regime does not follow all requirements of a Salafi-Jihadi reading of Islam. Moreover, even an apolitical quietist may qualify as an enemy of Islam, because he or she does not support the doctrine of jihad and by not acting the quietist, indirectly, supports the current regime that is perceived as sinful and un-Islamic.

Moving from Ibn Taymiyya's treatment of the Mongol problem to contemporary jihadi doctrine does not work without some significant reinterpretations. If one considers Ibn Taymiyya in context then waging jihad against a pseudo-Muslim enemy *always* depends on state authority and does not fall in the domain of an individual believer. What one can observe in the contemporary Ibn Taymiyya reception is a modernized and particularly individualized Ibn Taymiyya and as such it is utterly (post-)modern.

However, there is another aspect in Wahhabi/Salafi Islam that needs to be considered because it tells us something about the attraction of Islamic State. It is its capacity of empowerment and changing identities:

> Salafism transforms the humiliated, the downtrodden, disgruntled young people, the discriminated migrant, or the politically oppressed into a chosen sect (*al-firqa al-najiya*) that immediately gains privileged access to the Truth. Salafis are therefore able to contest the hege-

> monic power of their opponents: parents, the elite, the state, the dominant cultural or economic values of the global capitalist system as well as total identification with an alien nation which nation-states in Europe impose.[32]

Thus, the ideology provides its followers with a tool that allows him or her to claim that they are better than others and to "morally upstage the opponent" based on an understanding of a superior religious knowledge. This does not necessarily have to take an extreme form of regarding it obligatory to kill all those who do not share the very same identity, as in Islamic State's Salafi-Jihadi ideology.

As indicated earlier, even if one would take Islamic State out of the current war in Syria, one is confronted with a situation that is hardly solvable through political means. Whether one can win against a movement like Islamic State militarily is a rather different question. However, it may make sense to start at home aiming at preventing humiliated, downtrodden, and disgruntled young people.

Thank you for your time.