

THE ISLAMIC RIGHT

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Numerous people have asked me about the various political tendencies within what is called 'Islamism' or 'political Islam' or 'Islamic fundamentalism'. This article describes briefly some relevant strands of the Islamic Right's political ideology. It is a short description of complex and sometimes highly overlapping political tendencies, organizations and networks.

I deliberately do not include here other political or apolitical tendencies, typically of the kind termed 'orthodox', 'reformist' or 'mainstream'. I emphasise that the tendencies described below are not the organized beliefs of the vast majority of Muslim populations in the UK. The Islamic Right have little relation to, and usually vociferously oppose the ethnic, cultural, religious, national or secular beliefs and practices of the majority of south Asian Muslims in the UK, including most Barelwi orders, Deobandi sects (especially hayati, but also mamati), Bohras and Khojas and, of course, Ahmaddiyas. Instead, the key aims of the first three tendencies (1.- 3.) described below are to hegemonize, claim to represent nationally, or discipline UK south Asian Muslim populations (especially younger people) under their political ideologies and their organizations.

There is currently, in the environment of the so-called 'war on terror', a witch hunt politics directed against Muslim individuals and groups in the UK, US and across Europe. This demonising is frequently indiscriminate, bigoted and fails to distinguish the Islamic Right from the vast majority of Muslims in the UK. Additionally, terms such as 'moderate', 'mainstream' and 'representative' are used by government, media and various political tendencies in deceptive ways. For example, 'moderate' or 'mainstream' can be used to describe what are misleadingly called 'Sufis', or groups who do not criticise Israel's alleged abuse of human rights and contraventions of international law, or groups who say Muslims should not be involved at all in the political process, or extremist groups of the Islamic Right.

Similarly, the terms 'terrorism' and 'violent' are often used misleadingly to characterise non-salafi-jihadi groups as 'terrorist'. But conversely, the popular conflation of 'violent' with 'terrorism' can mean that the forms of systematic, legalised gender-based violence (such as hudud punishments) promoted by various political Islamists can be ignored by governments and other official bodies who wish to work with them.

The UK government operates a dual strategy of, on the one hand, weakening human rights and civil liberties in the name of the so-called 'war on terror' and, on the other, directly sponsoring some of the Islamic Right tendencies described below (under 1. - 3) The government puts the onus on all Muslims collectively to deal with extremism, and yet the government also promotes and fosters the source of ideological extremism - the organised political parties of the Islamic Right - thus placing unworkable demands on UK Muslim populations. Extremely serious questions remain both about why the state and security services allowed groups with violent connections abroad to operate freely in the UK, and about the role of the Foreign and Home Offices in the systematic and sustained promotion of the Islamic Right in the UK. We also fully acknowledge the previous role of the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in creating, sponsoring, funding and arming many groups in the 1980s and early 1990s during the war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, groups which later became independently important in south Asia and the middle East (6. - 7.)

One key strategy the Islamic Right (like the Hindu Right in the UK) uses is to disguise itself through a wide range of organizations and hide its political aims by claiming to be representative of ordinary Muslims. It claims any criticism of it is an 'attack on all Muslims' and their religion (just as the Hindu Right claims any criticism of it is 'an attack on all Hindus'.) In this way, the Islamic Right attempts to avoid very serious issues of accountability and political transparency. As with our reports on Hindu fundamentalism, our main aim in producing this (and future) documents is to make information available on the Islamic Right, its ideologies and methods, and the mask of religion and culture it uses to hide its deeply political agendas.

1. Key Ideological Themes

A range of different tendencies are described below in eleven brief sections (a - k). These tendencies are not the same in terms of their specific ideologies, political aims or methods and forms of organization. They can also differ considerably in sectarian terms, specific political goals, and in religious-theological belief. However, the majority of the tendencies below share some very broad themes, which include:

•a) a 'return' to the salaf, which they claim is the same as the actual early history of Islam as exemplified by the first generations of Muslims, their beliefs and practices; this typically entails rejecting some or all of the entire canon of Islamic historical-legal traditions

•b) a belief in the imposition of shari'a upon all Muslims, and the added belief that they know what shari'a is, and that their particular version of shari'a is the only correct one

•c) a deep sectarianism, especially among the salafi tendencies, which often manifests itself in claiming to be able to define who is the true Muslim and who is not

•d) a belief that only (their favoured) clerics can know, define and interpret the will and intention of God

•e) the aim to seriously curtail women's rights, freedoms and liberties, and place women primarily in a domestic and child-rearing role

•f) a deeply conservative or authoritarian view of the family, gender roles and issues of sexuality

•g) an inherently undemocratic world-view, moreover one in which other minority rights should be diminished or erased

•h) a belief in jihad such that jihad is primarily defined as physical fighting (qital), or the use of one's wealth for the purposes of supporting physical fighting, in the path of whatever is interpreted to be the way of God

•i) a chauvinism regarding other beliefs, religious or otherwise

•j) a view of faith and politics as inherently the same and to be mixed together, such that religion is something that has to be regularly politicized

•k) a belief in the ultimate goal of an Islamic state (and their interpretation of shari'a) as the answer to all of the problems affecting humanity in general and (especially) Muslims in particular.

2. The Older Islamic Right Political Parties

Jamaati-i Islami (JI)

The Jamaati-i Islami (JI) was formed in 1941 in colonial India and exists today in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Kashmir, India, UK and elsewhere. The JI is based firmly on the ideology of one of the key founders and thinkers of fundamentalist Islam, Abul a'la Maududi. Maududi was one of the first modern Islamic Right thinkers to have outlined a theory of the Islamic State and a theory of modern jihad. He developed an Islamic Right political party based on a hierarchical command structure. Maududi opposed initially the partition of India, but became involved in Pakistani politics following independence. The JI developed numerous wings, including an extremely violent student wing (Islami Jamiat Tulaba, IJT). Associates of the JI were directly implicated in the massive genocide in (what is now) Bangladesh during the war of liberation in 1971, as well as other acts of systematic repression, anti-minority hatred or violence in Pakistan. The JI was instrumental in influencing the ideology of Islamicization during the highly authoritarian and repressive Zia dictatorship. Currently, the JI is part of a political alliance of mostly Islamic Right parties that controls the North West Frontier Province in Pakistan. It also has a jihadi wing which is also part of a broader alliance of jihadi forces operating in Kashmir and Afghanistan. The Jamaat-e Islami is also highly active in Bangladesh and has a violent youth wing, the Islami Chhatra Shibir. In the UK, JI influences are best represented in the UK Islamic Mission, the Islamic Foundation, the Markfield Institute of Higher Education, Dawatul Islam, the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB), Young Muslims UK (YMUK), Young Muslim Organization UK (YMO), Muslim Educational Trust, Islamic Forum Europe (IFE), London Muslim Centre / East London Mosque, Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), Muslim Aid, several mosques, madrassah and various other projects and organizations. The Muslim Brotherhood also has key influence or control over some of the organizations listed above.

Muslim Brotherhood (MB)

The Brotherhood was formed in the late 1920s in Egypt under the influence of Hassan al-Banna and now exists as a large international movement active in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Algeria, Sudan and other mid-East and North African countries, western and eastern Europe, south-East Asia and elsewhere. The MB, like the JI, has an ideology of the Islamic State, political jihad and political struggle. The MB and its offshoots also have a long history of political violence. It is possible to trace the histories of most contemporary salafi-jihadi groups to the ideological thinking of the Muslim Brotherhood and especially to several of its key figures, including (but not only) Sayyid Qutb. In the UK, the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) is the most important MB influence and Islamic Relief is a Muslim Brotherhood

influenced charity. MB is also very strongly represented in several organizations listed under JI above.

Hizb-ut Tahrir (HT)

Hizb-ut Tahrir is a political movement based in Europe, the middle-east, Pakistan and

Bangladesh, central Asia and elsewhere. Its ideology is based on the political theory of the 'caliphate' developed in the 1950s by Taqiuddin an Nabhani, an Islamist ideologue and former MB associate. HT is vigorously opposed in principle to the idea of democracy. In the UK, HT has presented itself as respectable, though its history in the UK and abroad would suggest otherwise. It is fair to say that HT is committed to the struggle for a global Caliphate through political means and ideological struggle, but that offshoot organizations and individuals associated with HT have not necessarily followed this strictly political approach.

Sectarian Salafi International Networks

'Salafism' has come to mean several different things. We use it to describe new political ideologies which arose through and represent a merging of two main tendencies:

The ideological influence from the late-1960s and especially the 1970s onwards of 'new Brotherhood' thinking. From the mid-1960s onwards there were important agreements between Saudi Arabia and Egypt that allowed (expelled) members of the Egyptian MB to operate in Saudi, other Gulf States and elsewhere. A significant number of intellectuals and activists from the Egyptian MB ended up in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other gulf states, Jordan and Palestine, even Pakistan and Malaysia, acquiring jobs as teachers, preachers, activists and university lecturers following the expansion of the education sector in the aftermath of the oil price boom.

The development of revivalist and dogmatic neo-Wahabbi thinking in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, again from the late-1960s, but accelerating following the OPEC oil price boom, the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, and then the 1979 Iranian revolution. This last factor caused Saudis, and Wahabbis more generally, to attempt to assert their control over 'Islam' and Muslims worldwide against what they perceived as a Shi'ite threat. Many billions of dollars went into the global export of Wahabbism among Muslim populations across the world. Contemporary salafism is often indistinguishable from Wahabbism, but it represents a broader tendency that has had political influence well beyond Wahabbi areas and sectarian Wahabbi doctrines. (So, from the late-1970s and throughout the 1980s, salafism became an important strand in MB political thinking and practice.) One way of conceptualising 'official salafism' is that it is a broad name for the attempt to export globally neo-Wahabbi thinking as the dominant form of Islam, despite the fact that Wahabbism has traditionally been considered a grossly peculiar, heterodox and marginal tradition within Islamic history. It is also useful to distinguish between: 'Saudi court Wahabbism' as represented by the late Sheikh Bin Baz and the coterie of clerics associated with him; and salafism that rejects the legitimacy of both Saudi official clerics and the Saudi state. However, salafi-jihadi clerics have arisen from both anti- and pro-Saudi salafi tendencies. Similarly, the 'Afghan-Arabs' who went to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan, were strongly supported by the Saudi government (and the US and Pakistan), but later became the core of the international salafi-jihadi network and rejected the Saudi state. After 9/11, there was also a concerted global campaign by the Saudis to whitewash salafism/Wahabbism and present it as non-violent, mainstream, 'the middle path', and opposed to terrorism.

In salafi thinking, the theological and political dimensions are often merged. Theologically, salafis reject the four main legal schools (maddhabs) that make up contemporary Sunni Islam, they reject the methodology (manhaj) and pathway of these schools and they reject the legitimacy of all other Muslim histories, forms and traditions. Many salafis are also quick to pronounce takfir (essentially 'excommunication') on other Muslims with whom they disagree, and can readily accuse other Muslims (including all other Muslims apart from themselves) of apostasy or blasphemy. Salafi ideology is extremely and unremittingly sectarian and dogmatic and it shares with political fundamentalism a belief that only its narrow vision is the correct and valid one, and all other beliefs, ideologies, doctrines and interpretations must be suppressed, expunged or rejected. Salafism is highly authoritarian in gender and social purity terms. It is also typically at the core of some marginal tendencies that believe Muslims should not listen to musical instruments (or even human song), cannot dance, watch television, fly kites or take part in many other leisure activities. Salafism and MB practices are also at the core of the imposition of new dress codes and styles on women (and men), especially from the 1970s. These developments do not necessarily have any relation to religious custom or traditions of the women upon whom these proscriptions regarding dress, private space, domesticity and sexuality are imposed. For example, the spread of the modern (black) niqab style to other areas owes to Wahabbi-Salafi influences globally, and to the spread of the dress worn by Egyptian Muslim Sisters during the 1970s.

Salafis claim they are returning to the true and authentic tradition of the Quran and Sunna and the community of the early believers of Islam. Virtually everything that has come since has to be rejected, except perhaps the most conservative of legal traditions (Hanbali) and the most severe and militant of medieval jurists (typically Ibn Taymiyya), and of course their own political interpretations today, especially their selective and narrow interpretations of some ahadith and passages from the Quran. Similarly, by shari'a, salafis typically mean the strictest opinions of the Hanbali schools, as reinterpreted by them, together with the most conservative elements of Wahabbism. Wahabbi-Salafism is widespread in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and other gulf states, Yemen, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, and among some key (but small) groups in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and India. Salafi ideology has strong Europe-wide influence, including extensive UK organizational influence, often overlapping with JI / MB organizations. Salafism is mainly (but not exclusively) sponsored by official as well as independent Saudi largesse (especially through the Muslim World League - Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami). Globally, salafism probably represents the views of less than a tenth of all Sunnis (and Wahabbism a tiny fraction of this), and yet it can be the most vocal where it gains a foothold.

In the UK, Salafi-Wahabbi groups usually present themselves as 'moderate', 'mainstream', 'non-violent' and opposed to terrorism. For a wide variety of political and theological reasons, they can also severely criticise salafi-jihadi groups, but this can also disguise the authoritarian and dogmatic nature of their own beliefs and ideologies.

3. The intersections of JI / MB and Salafi tendencies

In the UK, there can also be considerable overlap in personnel between JI / MB organizations and the kind of Salafi-Wahabbi organizations and networks represented under 2. The JI and MB, under independent and official Saudi and gulf patronage, effectively operate under a division of labour globally regarding their respective spheres of influence. Usually, the JI and MB act in concert with each other and in a complementary way. Individuals from both also work together under a single group, as in the case of several UK organizations. It is not at all unusual to find, for example, a JI-controlled 'centre', with strong MB representation in its management (as well as some Deobandi representation). The centre may have extensive Saudi funding, employ a Wahabbi-Salafi (inevitably Saudi approved) cleric for mosque or religious functions, run salafi study circles for young people (a key inculcation strategy), house a fundraising charity run by the JI or MB, have a youth branch, receive local authority funding and support, and is considered 'moderate' and 'representative' by the public sector. For example, key individuals involved in the highly authoritarian (Wahabbi) World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY, Riyadh, London) may also be involved in the MB, the MCB, the MAB and would work with followers of Jamaati ideology. Similarly, in the example of the East London Mosque / London Muslim Centre, there is a noticeable convergence of JI political ideology and authoritarian forms of salafi theology.

It is also possible to speak of a broader political 'axis' of organizations comprising JI, MB, Wahabbi-Salafis, Ahl-e Hadith, other right-wing political Deobandi groups, and even the Tablighi Jamaat. On sectarian grounds, Wahabbi-Salafi clerics would oppose each of the other groups as 'deviates' or worse; but on practical grounds, wealthy Saudis and others would fund them. So, this JI / MB / Salafi /political Deobandi 'axis' may have internal sectarian and theological differences, but collectively has come to represent what is called 'moderate Islam' by the UK government. It bears little relation to the religious, ethnic, cultural and secular traditions and practices of the majority of south Asian Muslims in the UK. {mosgoogle right}

4. Independent Salafi exile groups

This includes groups such as the original Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR, Tajdeed) and the offshoot Movement for Reform in Saudi Arabia (MIRA). Individuals from this set of groups have formed surprising alliances with groups that would otherwise be opposed on sectarian grounds. For example, Mohammed al-Masari of CDLR ran the tajdeed forum and website, worked with Omar Bakri of Al Muhajiroun, and was also allegedly close to some Shi'ite Khomenist organizations. A different set of salafi exile groups have included representatives of Algerian (including GIA) and other jihadi tendencies.

5. The 'Khilafa groups'

Several small offshoots of Hizb-ut Tahrir or groups influenced by an Nabhani's ideology of the global Caliphate, or by the ideologies of later activists, including Omar Bakri Mohammed of Al Muhajiroun. Numerous 'Khilafa groups' exist across Europe (especially Germany and France).

In the UK, Al Muhajiroun has been the most openly influential of this set of groups. It has recently adopted numerous other names, including Al Ghurabaa the Saviour Sect (Saved Sect, al-Firqat un-Naajiyah), the so-called 'Ahlus Sunna wal Jamaa' (ASWJ) and various other front names (all run by a very small group of people). Al Muhajiroun has branches in the UK and Pakistan. While Omar Bakri Mohammed may have been characterised by the media as a clown, it is the case that his organization facilitated young people from the UK to go to conflict zones abroad.

6. Salafi-Jihadi groups

Militant armed religious right groups outside the UK, mostly engaged in sub-national or local conflict with real or allegedly occupying state military forces. The political violence of these groups can be directed against civilians, often brutally and indiscriminately, though this is not necessarily their definitive mode of operation. Active in Egypt, Kashmir, Saudi Arabia,

Algeria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Chechnya, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Philippines and elsewhere. Numerous people from the UK have travelled to conflicts zones abroad that were also sites of salafi-jihadi activity. Several people from the UK have become directly involved with salafi-jihadi groups. The most important UK group that openly (rather than quietly) espoused salafi-jihadi ideology was the cluster of people around Abu Hamza, the Supporters of Sharia and Finsbury Park Mosque. A number of young British people who became involved in salafi-jihadi activities (abroad and in the UK) were associated heavily or loosely with Finsbury Park Mosque or, like two of the July 7 bombers, attended its events. Similarly, while Abu Hamza was treated as both a hate figure and a buffoon by the media, some of his political-theological writings were of significant influence and were taken seriously by salafi-jihadi tendencies, both in the UK and abroad.

A note on 'Irhabi' groups

The term 'irhabi' is simply used to describe religious right groups whose primary method of operation is to attack and kill civilians, ideally on a large scale. These are typically transnational groups and networks whose main mode of operation is based on covert methods and spectacular attacks that target civilians and civilian institutions. For these groups, the international human rights legal distinction between combatants and non combatants is irrelevant and they have a very wide and detailed range of 'justifications' (typically based on the opinions of some salafi-jihadi clerics) regarding the intentional killing of civilians. Their ideologies are also quite different from the older Islamist parties and can also be different from many salafi-jihadi groups, though they can overlap with the latter. What is called 'Al Qaeda' mostly (but not exclusively) constitutes several shifting and relatively independent groups and alliances of the kind described under 6. and 7. that have formally pledged allegiance to the overall authority of Bin Laden and his organization. These groups do not necessarily possess a 'command and control' or hierarchical form of organization internationally. It is conceivable, for example, for a small independent group of men in one country to coalesce around a crude form of salafi-jihadi ideology through bookshops and centres, gain knowledge and expertise through Internet resources, for one or two to independently gain detailed training from an organization abroad, such as a faction of or group from the Harakat-ul Mujahideen (or Lashkar-e Tayyiba) in border areas of Pakistan, Kashmir or Afghanistan, and then return to undertake activities in their home or other countries.

7. South Asian Jihadi organizations

A very important set of religious right organizations from Pakistan, Kashmir, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, a few of which are international or operate cross-nationally. All possess jihadi wings. Some organisations and their jihadi fronts overlap (sometimes extensively) with the types of salafi-jihadi groups described above (6.) These groups do not always fit neatly into sectarian salafiyya ideology of the Wahabbi type, nor are they necessarily associated with JI / MB networks (though, for example, the Hizb-ul Mujahideen is), nor can they be said to be definitively influenced by Wahabbi funding (though, for example, the Ahle Hadees and its militias are.) In the south Asian context, political groups arising from Deobandi sectarian traditions, or influenced by Wahabbi-Salafism are the most relevant. There is a nexus of extremely important organizations and offshoots which are best represented under the name 'Harakat-ul Mujahideen'. These include the initial Harakat-ul Jihad-al Islami, the Harakat-ul Mujahideen, the Harakat-ul Ansar, the breakaway Harakat-ul Jihad-al Mujahideen al-Alami / Brigade 313, and the very important Khudamul Islam / Jaish-e Mohammed. The Harakat-ul Jihad-al Mujahideen is active in Bangladesh, and the extremely violent Jamiat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) is currently highly active there. A different but equally important set of sectarian (Ahle Hadees) organizations are represented by the extremely violent Lashkar-e Tayyiba and the (associated) Jamaat-ud Dawa. Another set of violently sectarian organizations are represented by the Sipah-e Sahaba, the Lashkar-e Jhangvi and their offshoots. Some of the Pakistan and Kashmir-based jihadi organizations are active beyond south Asia. They, and key ideological figures (such as Masood Azhar), have had ideological and inspirational influence well beyond south Asia, including among groups in the UK.

8. 'Independent' Salafi-Jihadi clerics

A wide range of usually mid-eastern, sometimes south Asian, occasionally Europe-based clerics, including younger 'self-taught' individuals, who provide guidance, including on request, which is adopted or debated by salafi-jihadi and irhabi networks and tendencies. Some key clerics are considered extremely important by various salafi-jihadi groups who take seriously their legal rulings (whatever their legitimacy elsewhere). In the UK, Abu Qatada and to a lesser extent Abu Hamza were important in this respect, and both wrote texts and provided opinions that are considered important by salafi-jihadi groups; a wide range of other more important clerics exist, and the relation between clerics and activists/operatives is a dynamic and changing one - some formerly very important clerics have latterly renounced violence against civilians, whereas others continue to provide rulings for the continuation of such violence.

9. Other Significant International groups

The 'modernising' international sections of or previously associated with the transnational Muslim Brotherhood. The European Council for Fatwa and Research and Yusuf al Qaradawi are key representatives; minority jurisprudence (minority fiqh, itself arising from the efforts of earlier Saudi salafi clerics) is one of their key projects, and is especially relevant to Muslim populations in Europe. Tariq Ramadan emerged, and somewhat broke away, from this modernising MB-associated tendency. This tendency covers groups that range from highly authoritarian and literalist in their interpretations of religion to ones that are very socially conservative, particularly around gender and women's rights.

10. Groups following (neo-) Khomeinist ideology

A small number of UK political organizations that came to prominence initially in the 1990s and which adhere to the ideology of the 'absolute rulership of the clerics' and 'Islamic government' advocated by Khomeini and developed by other representatives of political Shi'ism. The Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) in the UK can be said to represent an association with this kind of ideological influence.

11. Other groupings and 'virtual' networks

Primarily based around certain bookshops (though key ones have been closed since 9/11 or 7/7 or have changed radically the nature of the materials they openly sell) and through jihadi oriented electronic forums and websites. A considerable amount of salafi-jihadi propaganda - books, pamphlets, videos, cassettes, CDs, DVDs - was available in the UK (some of it was produced in the UK) and disseminated through key bookshops, or through a few religious centres that had been taken over by salafi-jihadi tendencies. Clusters of young people, either associated with some bookshops or independently, became politicized and actively radicalized through such material and related discussion groups. Through this process, some formed associations with groups abroad, including in Bosnia, Chechnya, Pakistan, Kashmir and Afghanistan (the main jihadi corridors during the 1990s). A tiny number of UK individuals became important figures, inspirers and ideologues in their own right, both in the UK and abroad. There are also copious examples of regularly-maintained as well as temporary salafi-jihadi and irhabi forums, websites, chatrooms, as well as the hijacking of independent fileservers to store material. The Internet has become a key element in the dissemination of propaganda and highly sophisticated technical resources, as well as in the recruitment functions of some salafi-jihadi groups. It was through the Internet that publishing and propaganda sites, such as Azzam.com and, later, at-Tibyan became influential. For media outfits, such as as-Sahhab (Al Qaeda's 'media wing') and the so-called Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), the Internet is a critically important medium.

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