



# THE EMERGENCE OF THE 'INFALLIBLE JIHAD FIGHTER' – THE SALAFI JIHADISTS' QUEST FOR RELIGIOUS LEGITIMACY

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, the Salafi movement has seen the emergence of a new conception of, and basis for, religious authority. In the past, religious authority within this movement stemmed primarily from the scholarly credentials and reputation of the individual. This changed with the advent of a new group, namely the jihadi Salafi camp. Characterized by an extremist militant orientation, this group condoned the 9/11 attacks as well as acts of terrorism within Saudi Arabia itself (including the 2003 bombing in Riyadh) – a stance which was widely condemned by the non-jihadi Salafi scholars. Though the members of this movement could not compete with the traditional Salafi scholars in erudition or devoutness, they nevertheless wished to gain religious authority. Consequently, they sought a new basis for religious authority that would include them within its scope.

To this end, the jihadists began promoting the idea that charisma – a personal trait that endows one with extraordinary and even supernatural qualities – was also a basis for authority on religious and social matters. Moreover, the jihadists modified the prevailing concept of religious authority by presenting the mujahideen as infallible (*ma'sumin*) – a quality which, in the Sunni Islamic tradition, is generally attributed only to the prophets. By describing the *mujahideen* as infallible, the jihadi Salafis removed them from the earthly realm of learning and erudition – a sphere monopolized by the traditional Salafi scholars – and elevated them to the level of individuals blessed with supernatural spiritual powers. Characterized thus, the mujahideen not only become objects of admiration, but can claim socio-religious legitimacy despite the scholars' condemnation of their ideology and activities. Furthermore, they can advance innovative legal arguments to justify their jihad.

Ironically, however, this notion of charisma-based authority has also become a source of friction within the jihadi movement, which undermines its unity and in fact threatens to plunge it into anarchy.

## INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, the authority<sup>1</sup> of a Salafi religious scholar derived from his erudition, knowledge, and scholarly reputation. However, events in recent decades triggered a shift in the concept of religious authority – specifically in what is considered grounds for such authority. The process unfolded gradually throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and peaked with Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1991. Following the invasion, senior figures among the traditional Salafi scholars issued a fatwa (legal opinion) permitting American troops to enter Saudi Arabia. The fatwa created an open rift within the Salafi camp, since it was vehemently opposed by many of the younger scholars.

Underlying the conflict was a long-standing struggle for authority within the Salafi movement between the older and the younger generations of scholars. The reputable and erudite scholars of the older generation (known as the "purists")<sup>2</sup> – represented by former Saudi Mufti 'Abd Al-'Aziz Ibn Baz (d. 1999), for example – believed that they alone, by virtue of their extensive knowledge and training, had the authority to rule on complex religious issues. Their hegemony was challenged by the younger scholars, most of them politicians like Safar Al-Hawali<sup>3</sup> and Salman Al-'Awda, who wished to gain legitimacy and authority despite lacking the experience, knowledge, and training of their elders.

The younger scholars – founders of the Sahwa ("Islamic awakening") movement<sup>4</sup> – criticized the older scholars as rigid in their views and as detached from current politics. They argued that the purists focused on a fixed set of doctrinal issues, such as *tawhid* and purity, instead of addressing issues relevant to the Muslims' lives and situation in the world.<sup>5</sup> However, challenging the purists' status was no simple task in a culture where religious authority had for generations been closely (albeit not exclusively) linked to scholarly credentials and qualifications. Since the purists were clearly superior in their knowledge in Islamic law,

the politicians had to reconfigure the very concept of religious authority in order to gain legitimacy in their highly traditional environment.<sup>6</sup>

To wrest authority from the purists, the politicians invoked the long-established principle of Islamic law requiring a mufti to base his rulings on thorough knowledge of all the specific, real-life circumstances relevant to the issue at hand.<sup>7</sup> They argued that because of their age and narrow traditional training, the purists had little grasp of the modern world, and therefore lacked an essential qualification to issue rulings. In contrast, the politicians presented themselves as well-versed in current affairs and in modern ways of thinking, and thus better equipped to apply the Salafi creed to modern life.<sup>8</sup> By emphasizing the importance of understanding the world while playing down the importance of erudition and scholarship, the politicians managed to shift the focus from the question of “who has a deeper understanding of the Salafi creed” to the question of “who can better interpret modern reality.”

The debate peaked with the purists’ issuance of the Gulf War fatwa in 1991. The politicians argued that in sanctioning the deployment of American troops in Saudi Arabia, the purists had demonstrated their inability to understand a crucial aspect of current politics – namely the Americans’ true intentions. The Americans, they argued, were not using Saudi Arabia merely as a base from which to attack Saddam Hussein; they were using it as a springboard towards complete domination of the Islamic world and its invaluable economic resources. Suleiman Al-Alwan stated that the Americans had entered Saudi Arabia in order “to grab the necks of all those who would not profess servitude to them, just as they had usurped [the Muslims’] property and legal rights...”<sup>9</sup>

### **THE RISE OF THE JIHADI SALAFIS**

The imprisonment of key figures among the politicians during the mid-1990s for their outspoken criticism of the regime and of the established clerics created a political vacuum, which was immediate-

ly filled by a new breed of Salafis who grew out of the politico camp – namely the jihadi Salafis. Unlike the politicians, the jihadis were not content with a drawn-out, gradual change in the political reality. They demanded an immediate end to what they viewed as the corrupt state of the Islamic nation, and hoped to achieve this through uncompromising jihad against both the Arab regimes and the non-Muslim powers. Their sense of urgency derived, at least partially, from their belief that the West was waging, in collaboration with the Arab regimes, a relentless economic, political, religious and cultural war against the Muslims, aimed at weakening their faith and diluting their unique identity. The West, they believed, intended to infuse the Muslim world with non-Islamic values and norms, which would gradually erode the Muslims’ loyalty to Islamic values. Ultimately, this would lead to the complete elimination of Islam as a moral and religious system.<sup>10</sup>

Though the politicians and the jihadi Salafis both opposed the purist scholars, they differed considerably in their ideological orientation, the jihadis being far more extremist. For example, the jihadi Salafis sanctioned the use of extreme violence, and hastened to engage in *takfir* (i.e., to accuse other Muslims of heresy) – positions that the politicians explicitly denounced.<sup>11</sup> The rift between the two camps deepened when the politicians condemned the 9/11 attacks, and later when they criticized the Riyadh bombing in 2003.<sup>12</sup> As in the case of the 1991 Gulf War fatwa, the controversy about these issues was not about the tenets of the creed, but about their interpretation. The question at stake was whose interpretation of reality was correct, and whose ruling should thus be considered binding.

### **“A PERSON WHO WISHES TO RULE ON A SPECIFIC ISSUE RELATED TO JIHAD MUST FIRST OF ALL CONSULT THE JIHADIS”**

The jihadis could not claim an understanding of modern reality superior to that of the politicians,

since the latter's writings had clearly demonstrate their capability in this area. Therefore, the jihadis now shifted the debate from the general question of "who has a better grasp of modern reality" to the question of "whose insight into specific issues of jihad is more profound and nuanced, and thus more authoritative."

Yousef Al-'Uyairi, one of the most distinguished representatives of the early jihadi Salafi movement, set out the new line of argumentation in a 2003 article, in which he supported suicide attacks in Chechnya.<sup>13</sup> He wrote: "Before criticizing [the use of martyrdom operations as a military and political strategy], one must understand the specific circumstances [in which they take place]. Not all martyrdom operations are forbidden and not all are permitted... [It depends on various] details... [including] the state of the enemy, the circumstances of the war... and the conditions under which the operation [is carried out]. One cannot issue a [religious] legal opinion on this matter until one obtains full knowledge of the circumstances... How can you [i.e. the politicians] accuse us [jihadis] of ignorance when you yourselves are not familiar with the circumstances [of the war in Chechnya]? [Since the application of] jihad-related laws [requires] familiarity with the circumstances... a person who wishes to issue a legal opinion about a specific matter of jihad must first of all consult the jihad [fighters]... Information about the reality of jihad must come from the *mujahideen*, not from the apostates."



Yousef Al-'Uyairi

Al-'Uyairi then argues that a jurist who wishes to rule on matters of jihad must consult the *mujahideen*, regardless of his own knowledge

and qualifications. In fact, the article presents the *mujahideen* as the only legitimate source of information on matters of jihad, and implies that in the absence of such information, the jurist's ruling would be less well-grounded.

Al-'Uyairi's argument is essentially a claim to and about authority. He states that owing to their familiarity with the circumstances of jihad, the *mujahideen* are the only authoritative source of information in this area. Consequently, a scholar's ruling on matters of jihad can only be valid if based on consultation with the *mujahideen* – just as his ruling on a medical question would only be valid if grounded in information received from a doctor.<sup>14</sup>

**"[THE MUJAHID'S] COMPREHENSION, KNOWLEDGE, AND GRASP OF THE TRUTH ARE MUCH GREATER THAN [THOSE OF] OTHER PEOPLE"**

A more radical opinion is presented by Sheikh Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi, a Jordanian scholar of Palestinian origin who is greatly respected by the *mujahideen* (and regarded as Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi's mentor). He does not only characterize the *mujahideen* experts on the reality of jihad,<sup>15</sup> but claims that they possess divinely inspired insight. "The faithful *mujahideen*," he writes, "are among the most knowledgeable of persons, and possess superior insight. This, because the *mujahid* is forced to study the reality... around him [i.e. the circumstances of jihad] just as he masters the [theoretical religious] laws pertaining to jihad. [However, even] if he does not [adequately master the laws of jihad], but is faithful in his [efforts to wage] jihad, *Allah grants him insight as a reward for his jihad... [and as a result,] his comprehension, knowledge, and grasp of the truth are much greater than [those of] other people* [italics mine – E.A.]" In support of his view, Al-Maqdisi cites Koran 29:69: "Those who fight for Our cause, We will surely guide [them] to Our path." He explains that in this verse, "Allah indicates that he bestows

upon the *mujahideen* the ability to receive guidance to the truth, to prosperity, and to the right path to Him, [as well as] an understanding of Him and His way.”

In Al-Maqdisi’s view, then, the *mujahid* is not just an indispensable source of information on the facts and realities of jihad – he is also endowed by Allah with special jurisprudential insight superior to that of other human beings.



Sheikh Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi

Al-Maqdisi adds that, when they require religious guidance, the *mujahideen* should seek the advice of divinely inspired scholars (*rabaniyin*) from their own ranks. He argues that despite their intellectual superiority, the *mujahideen* themselves are not qualified to issue religious rulings, for that is the prerogative of authorized scholars. Nevertheless, they “should not [rely on] the outdated [*muhtari*] jurisprudence of [scholars] who shirk [the jihad] (*qa’idin*),” but should turn to the jihadi scholars. The knowledge of these scholars, he says, “emanates from the very womb of jihad, from the battlefield and trenches... where [the *mujahideen*] display the sincerest [devotion] to Allah [in their willingness to die for His cause], and [where they are] far removed from the deviant heretic tendencies and desires that cause [people] to slip. When [one] considers all this... along with the scholars’ jurisprudential knowledge and thorough grasp of the reality [of jihad, one realizes that] their insight will seldom be wrong.”<sup>16</sup>

According to Al-Maqdisi, jihadi scholars embody an ideal combination: they are not only scholars of profound religious knowledge, but also jihad fighters, who have firsthand knowledge of jihad,

and who – more importantly – have attained the highest possible spiritual level. This spiritual level is attained only on the battlefield, where the believer is in a state of constant readiness to sacrifice his life for the sake of Allah, and where he is far from all temptations and corrupting influences. Al-Maqdisi argues that this environment and this state of mind are best conducive to attaining profound jurisprudential insights.<sup>17</sup> In his view, the jihadi scholar is thus inevitably superior to the non-jihadi scholar, whose legal opinions are necessarily less authoritative and more likely to be mistaken.

### **“ALLAH WILL GUIDE [THE MUJAHIDEEN] TO HIS PATH, AND WILL NOT LET THEM STRAY FROM THE TRUTH”**

While all the individuals quoted above attribute superiority to jurisprudential rulings informed by the *mujahid’s* expert knowledge, they all maintain that such rulings can only be issued by qualified jurists. In other words, though information about and/or participation in jihad is seen as a necessary condition for possessing legal authority, it is not considered sufficient in and of itself to confer such authority. However, this notion was contested in a highly influential article from 2003 by Sheikh Hossein Ibn Mahmoud, a respected legal scholar and prolific contributor to Islamist websites.<sup>18</sup> In the article, titled “Presenting the Unbelievers with the Secrets and Mysteries of the *Mujahideen*,”<sup>19</sup> Ibn Mahmoud takes Al-Maqdisi’s argument one step further by describing the *mujahideen* as infallible.

In setting out his argument, Ibn Mahmoud first explains that the “enemies of Islam” use three methods to divert the Muslims’ attention away from jihad: they arouse the Muslims’ desire for this world and its pleasures, they cause them to fear death, and they plant doubt in their minds. Ibn Mahmoud then explains why these schemes will never work against the *mujahideen*: “With respect to the doubts, whoever... devotes his soul to Allah, Allah will render him immune [*ya’simuhu*

allah] to the lies of the deceitful... For Allah said: 'Those who fight for Our cause, We will surely guide [them] to Our path [Koran 29:69].' This indicates that it is the *mujahideen* who are most likely to agree on the correct [view]..."<sup>20</sup>

The reference to "agreeing on the correct [view]" in this passage is very revealing. Islamic tradition (*hadith*) maintains that the Islamic nation as a collective can never agree on a mistaken view, since the Prophet Muhammad said, "My nation will never agree on an error." Ibn Mahmoud, however, attributes this inability to err exclusively to the *mujahideen*, who, in his opinion, are uniquely invulnerable to deception and spiritual weakness. Accordingly, he maintains that the *mujahideen* have privileged access to "the truth."

Ibn Mahmoud reiterates this argument in a 2004 article titled "Resolutions and Ideological Principles of Jihad."<sup>21</sup> In discussing the question of scholars who disagree with the *mujahideen*, he states: "Undoubtedly, whoever risks his life and rushes towards danger for the sake of his religion has total faith in the truth of his path and in the validity of his course of action... Whoever wishes to contradict the *mujahideen* in matters of jihad should first visit the fronts himself, witness the conditions [there], and taste the taste of [divine] grace [*karama*] on the battlefield for a few moments. Then he can issue a fatwa [based on] the inspiration he receives from Allah..."

According to this view, it is not erudition and scholarship that provide access to the truth, but the willingness to sacrifice one's life for the sake of Allah on the battlefield. In a 2006 article, Ibn Mahmoud stresses that, once the *mujahideen* attain this exalted spiritual level on the battlefield, "Allah guides [them] to His path, [and] prevents [them] from straying from the truth [*yanfi 'an al-mujahidin al-dalal*]."<sup>22</sup>

In other words, while Al-Maqdisi describes the *mujahideen* as intellectually superior, Ibn Mahmoud regards them as actually infallible. It is important to note that there is a crucial difference between the

claims made by Yousef Al-'Uyairi and Al-Maqdisi, on the one hand, and those made by Ibn Mahmoud, on the other. According to Al-'Uyairi and Al-Maqdisi, the *mujahid's* authority is grounded in unique – but essentially earthly – knowledge. This knowledge is obtained through direct familiarity with jihad, and also by virtue of the *mujahid's* exalted spiritual level, which can only be attained in a specific environment, namely on the battlefield. These factors – along with some divine help – endow the *mujahid* with profound jurisprudential insight. According to Ibn Mahmoud, on the other hand, the *mujahid's* authority derives from a supernatural ability bestowed upon him by Allah. According to this view – which is endorsed by the *mujahideen* themselves – a *mujahid* who risks his life on the battlefield is actually granted infallibility, a virtue that Islamic tradition generally attributes only to prophets. This gift obviously grants the *mujahid* greater authority than that of a scholar who gained his authority through mere study and learning. Religious rulings issued by the *mujahid* are absolutely binding, because his decisions, conduct, and statements are guided by Allah and thus represent the divine truth.

In essence, the texts cited above, and other like them, present a concept of authority that is grounded in charisma, defined by Max Weber as "a certain personal quality by virtue of which an individual is considered extraordinary and regarded as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional power or quality."<sup>23</sup> The *mujahid's* authority, as presented in these texts, is not based on his scholarship or intellectual credentials, but is essentially metaphysical:<sup>24</sup> it is anchored in a unique relation with Allah, which grants him at least some immunity from the human propensity to err.<sup>25</sup>

### **THE YOUTH BELIEVE IN "THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE MUJAHIDEEN"**

A 2005 article by Abu Basir Al-Tartusi, a prominent scholar respected by the jihadi Salafis, suggests that a belief in the infallibility of the *mujahideen* had indeed taken root in their circles.<sup>26</sup> In the ar-

ticle, titled “Known Prevalent Mistakes that Must Be Corrected,” Al-Tartusi protests:

“I have long noticed... an erroneous approach among some of the youth who are eager to wage jihad... They regard the opinion of those on the front and of the *mujahideen* as the only valid opinion – even if it contradicts the Koran and the Sunna... Apparently, [they believe in] the infallibility [*isma’*] of the *mujahideen*, [even] when there is [an apparent flaw in their views]... [The youths] refuse to accept the opinion of anyone who is not a [jihad] fighter, even if [the latter] is a devout man or a scholar whose view is the correct one. [They think that,] as long as the *mujahid* engages in jihad and combat, he is always right... while those who contradict the *mujahid* are always wrong, even if they are scholars...”

Tartusi adds: “The claim [that the *mujahideen* are infallible]... is based on an erroneous understanding of the verse: ‘Those who fight for Our cause, We will surely guide [them] to Our path [Koran 29:69].’ Some regard this [verse] as proof that Allah has promised to lead the *mujahideen* – and only the *mujahideen* – to the path of truth and [right] guidance... Hence, [they think that] when [the *mujahideen*] disagree with others, they must necessarily be right... while those who disagree with them must be wrong...”

### **BIN LADEN: THE MUJAHIDEEN HAVE COME TO REGARD THEIR COMMANDERS’ ORDERS AS INFALLIBLE**



Osama Bin Laden

Statements made by bin Laden in an October 2007 audio recording provide further evidence that the notion of infallibility has taken root among the jihadis.<sup>27</sup> Bin Laden condemns this new trend, saying: “I [address] the jihad fighters [in Iraq] in order to oppose the growing [tendency] that has appeared among them, [namely the tendency] to assign great weight to the orders of the group and its commanders, to the extent that some of them have come to regard these orders as [representing absolute] truth. In practice, they regard [these orders] as infallible, even though they believe, in theory, that infallibility is a virtue that only Allah’s Messenger possesses. A person [who holds such a view] becomes a fanatical [follower] of his group and its commanders, instead of obeying a Koranic verse or a *hadith* from the Sunna of Allah’s Messenger.”

### **WHY DO DEVOUT JIHADI SCHOLARS ATTRIBUTE INFALLIBILITY TO THE MUJAHIDEEN?**

The question still remains why the devout jihadi scholars choose infallibility – a trait generally reserved for the prophets – as the basis for the authority attributed to the *mujahideen*. As suggested above, the answer is at least partially rooted in their need to legitimize their jihad activities despite the condemnation of the traditional scholars.

The jihadi Salafis believe that the West (with the assistance of the Arab regimes) has launched an intense and multi-leveled “crusade” against Islam, which aims not only to defeat it militarily but also to eradicate it as a value system. They believe that the West has deliberately undermined the Muslims’ faith by distributing drugs and alcohol among them, by encouraging their women to dress permissively, and by exposing their youth to secularism – so much so that Islam is now on the brink of annihilation.<sup>28</sup>

As mentioned above, their use of violence as a means of redressing this situation<sup>29</sup> met with sharp criticism on the part of prominent Muslim

scholars inside and outside Saudi Arabia. It was this broad condemnation – which was especially vociferous following the 2003 Riyadh bombings – that compelled the jihadi Salafis to justify their policies. Since the purists clearly outshone them in erudition and learning, and scholarship-based authority was therefore beyond their grasp, the jihadists began to promote the concept of charisma-based authority, similar to that claimed by, and attributed to, the Shi'ite Imams.<sup>30</sup> By endowing the *mujahideen* with infallibility, the jihadi Salafis removed them from the earthly sphere of learning and scholarship – which is squarely monopolized by the non-jihadi Salafi clerics – and elevated them to the level of the metaphysical. In this manner they avoided the comparison with the scholars, and at the same time cloaked the *mujahideen* in an aura of mystical power and divine grace which positioned them as objects of admiration. Shown in this light, the *mujahideen* gained socio-religious legitimacy and authority despite the scholars' condemnation of their actions. This also allowed them to redefine the boundaries of legitimate jihad by eliminating some of the legal constraints imposed by traditional scholarship.

## CONCLUSION

It is difficult to assess to what extent the notion of the *mujahideens'* infallibility has taken root among the *mujahideen* and their supporters. However, the protest voiced by bin Laden in his October 2007 address, and also by Sheikh Abu Basir Al-Tartusi – a figure greatly respected by the jihadists themselves – suggest that this is not a marginal ideological trend. Moreover, bin Laden's reaction indicates that this trend has practical repercussions, such as a tendency on the part of the *mujahideen* to obey their commanders' orders even when they appear to contradict the Koran or *hadith*.

If this ideological trend gains currency in Salafi jihadi circles, it could lead to complete anarchy within this camp, with each faction blindly following the orders of its "infallible" leaders. Presum-

ably, this is what prompted bin Laden to warn that *mujahideen* may become "fanatical [followers of their] group and its commanders." Belief in the infallibility of the *mujahideen* could indeed accelerate the disintegration of the already fragmented Salafi-jihadi camp.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, it may create an unmanageable, and thus more dangerous, breed of jihad fighter who is totally unsusceptible to criticism by devout Muslims, and who refuses to heed the calls of the scholars – even when these scholars are from the jihadi camp.

Ironically, the Salafi movement, which opposed the worship of saints among the Sufis, gave birth to a cult which attributes supernatural powers to the *mujahideen*, and thus sets them up as objects of admiration and worship.

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The term "authority," as used here, refers to an individual's right and ability to shape and influence other people's conduct based on his supposedly "correct" interpretation of religious precepts.

<sup>2</sup>The purists do not regard themselves as a political movement, but as a circle of pious scholars who aim to protect Islam – and in particular the belief in *tawhid* (the unity of God) – from corruptive influences.

<sup>3</sup>For background on Hawali and his views, see Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (New York, 1999), especially Chapter 2.

<sup>4</sup>The term *sahwa* – Islamic awakening – was coined by the politicians to describe their shift to political activism. The members of this camp refer to themselves as *shabab al-sahwa* (the youth of the awakening). For a brief description of the politicians' activism, see Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton, 1996) pp. 60-63. For a comprehensive study of the *Sahwa* movement in Saudi Arabia, see Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State* (New York, 2007), especially pp. 59-101.

<sup>5</sup>In fact, the purists actively discouraged involvement – of both scholars and the public at large – in political affairs. As Madawi Al-Rasheed points out, the purists, who were affiliated with the Saudi regime, "removed not only themselves but the rest of society from political matters. They prohibited engagement in public affairs. Their religious discourse, especially that which confirmed the potential corruption and blasphemy of the *umma*, reinforced the marginalization of the public and their exclusion from the political decision-making process." (Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, p. 59). Complaining of the purists' detachment from

current affairs, Salman Al-'Awda said: "You come upon a preacher (who gives the Friday sermon), and you find that it is as if his ears have become deaf and he's not able to hear anything. He is speaking about a subject which is far (from the reality which we experience). Either he is speaking about that which is under the ground in that which is related with the conditions of the hereafter, the grace and death, or he is speaking about that which is above the heavens in that which is related to the conditions of Paradise, Hell, the Resurrection, the Reckoning and..." Abu Ibraaheem Al-Canadee, "The knowledge of Current Affairs of Safar al-Hawaalee and Salmaan al-Awdah Weighed upon the Scales," p. 9. <http://www.spubs.com/sps/downloads/pdf/GRV070023.pdf>

<sup>6</sup>Wiktorowicz writes that "the popularity of the younger generation had very little to do with their depth of religious knowledge. At the time of the Gulf War fatwa, most of the popular preachers like Safar Al-Hawali and Salman Al-Awadah were only in their late thirties and early forties, hardly seasoned enough to contend with the religious training and experience of the senior purists, who were much older. There were hardly any politicians ... who would have claimed greater religious knowledge. Their sense of authority and legitimacy was instead rooted in their political analysis." Quintan Wiktorowicz, "The Anatomy of the Salafi Movement" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 29, No. 3 (2006) 224-225.

<sup>7</sup>Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya, *I'lam al-muwaqqi'in 'an rabb al-'alamin* (Cairo: Maktabat Al-kulliyat Al-Azhariyya, 1968) v. 1, p. 87. This principle was also evoked by Ibn Taymiyya in his well-known fatwa about fighting the Tatars. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu' al-fatawa* (n.p.: Dar Al-wafa', 2005) v. 28, p. 510.

<sup>8</sup>Wiktorowicz, "The Anatomy," p. 225.

<sup>9</sup>Sheikh Suleiman Al-'Alwan, "*Ala ikhraj al-mushrikin min jazirat al-'Arab*" ("On Expelling the Infidels from the Arabian Peninsula"). An electronic copy of the article is available from MEMRI.

<sup>10</sup>Roel Meijer, "Yusef Al-'Uyairi and the Making of a Revolutionary Salafi Praxis," *Die Welt des Islams*, 47 (2007), pp 431-2.

<sup>11</sup>This is evident, for example, from an open letter by Yusef Al-'Uyairi, founder of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia and the organization's most prominent ideologist (who died in 2004 in a clash with the Saudi police). In the letter, Al-'Uyairi complains that politico Safar Al-Hawali publicly condemned the *mujahideen*, characterizing them as "violent" people who "thoughtlessly rush to excommunicate people [i.e. accuse them of heresy]," and who have been "overtaken by extremism." Yusef Al-'Uyairi, "*Difa'an 'an al-mujahidin risala maftuha lifadilat al-shaykh Safar al-Hawali*" (Defending the Mujahideen: An Open Letter to the Outstanding Sheikh Safar Al-Hawali) pp. 8-9. An electronic copy of the article is available from MEMRI.

<sup>12</sup>This, in contrast to the jihadis, who justified the bombings. See, for example, Yusef Al-'Uyairi's article "A Legal Perspective on the Riyadh Events" (*Al-Nazra al-shar'iyya li-ahdath al-Riyadh*).

<sup>13</sup>Yusef Al-'Uyairi, "*Al-Amaliyyat al-istishhadiyya*," pp. 5-6.

<sup>14</sup>A similar approach was taken by Ayman Al-Zawahiri in his response to claims made by Sayyed Imam, a widely respected Islamic scholar currently imprisoned in Egypt. In his response to

Sayyed Imam's book, titled *Document of Right Guidance for Jihad*, Al-Zawahiri argued that Imam has been away from the front for many years, and is thus no longer an authority on matters of jihad. He wrote: "The author of *Document of Right Guidance* admits that he ceased [his active participation in] jihad fifteen years ago, and that he has been a prisoner for the last six years. How then can [we] accept his statements regarding [the *mujahideen*'s] ability, strength... and situation?" Ayman Al-Zawahiri, *Al-Tabri'a: Risala fi tabri'a ummati al-qalam wa'l-sayf min manqasa tuhmata al-kawar wa'l-du'f* (e-book), p. 52. On Sayyed Imam's book, see MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 1826, "Major Jihadi Cleric and Author of Al-Qaeda's Shari'a Guide to Jihad Sayyed Imam vs. Al-Qaeda" January 25, 2008, <http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP182608>.

<sup>15</sup>Sheikh Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi, "*Al-Kilab tanbahu wa'l-qafila tasir*" ("The Dogs Bark and the Caravan Moves On"), published 2003. <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=2978&PHPSESSID=6e7cd3991ebce2b89175bbbac81ca16>.

<sup>16</sup>The view that only jihadi scholars are qualified to issue rulings on matters of jihad is also expressed in an August 2006 article titled "An Open Letter to the Sunnis in Iraq" by "Shihab Al-Thaqib" – a prolific contributor to Islamist websites whose real identity is unknown. The websites characterize him as a prominent scholar of Islamic law who has so far posted over 400 articles online. <http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=ed7f9fd26dd8fcfd63a2fa793b2deb1b&threadid=44097>.

<sup>17</sup>A similar view extolling the intellectual and moral superiority of jihadi scholars is presented by Sheikh 'Abd Al-Salam Al-'Abd Al-Wahhab, a frequent contributor to Islamist websites. <http://www.al-hesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=103445>.

<sup>18</sup>Jihadist websites recently published a 800-page e-book of Ibn Mahmoud's major articles. The book contains around 200 articles on a wide range of subjects – from purely jurisprudential matters to issues of jihad and politics.

<sup>19</sup>Hossein Ibn Mahmoud, *Majmu' maqalat Hossein Ibn Mahmoud*, e-book, pp. 679-682.

<sup>20</sup>To substantiate his argument, Ibn Mahmoud cites classical Koran commentators, including Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurtubi.

<sup>21</sup><http://www.al-ekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=12990&s=1af88298ed904da6d4be1f2b3e7ffb518>

<sup>22</sup><http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=b7254fc974367d993900de4b9df42ae18&threadid=43320>

<sup>23</sup>Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, cited in Hamid Dabashi, *Authority in Islam from the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyad* (New Jersey, 2006) p. 34.

<sup>24</sup>Charismatic authority, albeit in a slightly different sense, has also been attributed to Shi'ite imams. See Dabashi, *Authority in Islam*, pp. 95-120.

<sup>25</sup>According to some academics, charisma-based authority was an attribute of the Prophet Muhammad, and ceased to exist after his death. However, Patricia Crone assesses that later Muslim leaders also possessed charisma-based authority, and that the

transition from this type of authority to knowledge-based authority took place in the post-Umayyad or even early Abbasid period. According to her "[t]he caliphs (or the caliphal institution) [of the Umayyad period] are described as a 'refuge' or 'stronghold' (*'isma*), a word with Koranic resonances (cf. 3:96, 'he who seeks refuge in/holds fast to God (*ya'tasimu bi'llah*) is guided to the straight path'). The metaphor conveys that it was the caliphs who saved the believers from error in both a political and a religious sense... [and not the scholars as happened once scholars turned themselves the guardian of the Prophet's tradition]." Patricia Crone, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (New York, 2003) p. 38. For further discussion about the separation of the sacred and the political in early Islam, see Ira Lapidus, "The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of Early Islamic Society," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (1975) 6, 363-85.

<sup>26</sup><http://www.abubaseer.bizland.com/articles.htm>

<sup>27</sup>See MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 1751 "Bin Laden Calls on All Jihad Groups to Unite under One Banner...", October 26, 2007, <http://memriiwp.org/content/en/report.htm?report=2437>.

<sup>28</sup>Yousef Al-'Uyairi, "Mustaqbal al-'Iraq wa'l-Jazira al-'Arabiyya ba'd suqut Baghdad," pp. 7-8.

<sup>29</sup>Yousef Al-'Uyairi, "Difa'an 'an al-mujahidin," pp. 14-16.

<sup>30</sup>See Dabashi, *Authority in Islam*, pp. 95-120. In some ways, this notion of authority also resembles the type of authority attributed to the Sufi saints. See Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: Texas, 1998), especially pp. 272-285.

<sup>31</sup>Online discussions and articles indicate that the notion of the *mujahideen's* infallibility certainly preoccupies the jihad fighters and their sympathizers, and generates considerable controversy among them. See, for example, two threads on the Al-Hesbah forum titled "The *mujahideen* are not immune to mistakes" (<http://al-hesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=143571>), and "A reply to those who claim that the *mujahideen* do not err" (<http://al-hesbah1.net/v/showthread.php?t=179670>), as well as a GIMF article from 2007 about the 9/11 attacks, which stresses that the *mujahideen* make mistakes (<http://al-hesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=146202>). Forum members also allude to the rift caused by this notion within the jihadi camp (<http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=162512>).