

## Part 5: Ideological root of extremism part B: Flaws in the formulation of Ideology<sup>1</sup>

I have chosen to stick with Al Mutairi's title in this instance as it encapsulates the ensuing examination and discussion. He suggests that flaws '*in the formulation of thoughts and ideology were a major cause of extremism.*'<sup>2</sup> He then refers to scholastic concern over such flaws and the subsequent evolvement of methodological approaches to the derivation of Islamic legislature from religious sources. This methodological approach became known as '*Ilm Usool al-Fiqh*' or what can be translated to mean '*Islamic Legal Theory.*'<sup>3</sup> This approach comprised of two essential aspects, i. the sources of law and ii. the manner and methodology of derivation of laws from those sources. Al Mutairi suggests that:

*"Most of the deviations that occurred in Muslim history, regardless of whether they be related to creed or law, have been as a result of a shortcoming related to one of those two matters [or aspects]."*<sup>4</sup>

He then provides a general outline of three major causes behind such deviations:

- i. Ignorance of the sources of the Shari'ah, Qur'an, Sunnah, consensus ('*Ijma*') and analogy ('*Qiyas*')
- ii. Refusal to acknowledge and benefit from those sources and not rely solely on human reasoning and intellect and;
- iii. Contradicting established principles and methodologies generally accepted by the Muslim community.<sup>5</sup>

Before commenting on the nature of these deviations in more detail, Al Mutairi concludes from his inspection of contemporary extremists that there is 'definitely' a shortcoming in their formation of ideology.<sup>6</sup> Ali-Shaykh, one of the more prominent contemporary scholars today, confirms Al Mutairi's conclusion and provides a detailed critique behind the causes of contemporary extremism which, unlike Al Mutairi, he holds similar to that of the Khawaarij.<sup>7</sup> Ali-Shaykh outlines five main causes behind extremist's flawed ideology and methodology:

---

<sup>1</sup> Al-Mutairi, Dr. A R M L: 'Religious Extremism in the Lives of Contemporary Muslims' translated by Zarabozo, J M M, Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2001, p.114

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp.114-115

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp.115

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Al-Mutairi holds those who equate the call to haakimiyyah to the slogan of the Khawaarij to have erred. He asserts Khawaarij's dissent was as a result of their disagreeing with Ali ibn Abi Taalib's acceptance of arbiters in his dispute with Mu'awiyah, believing he had replaced Allah's judgment with man-made judgment. Refer to Dr.

- i. **Ignorance:** Ali-Shaykh's observation corresponds with al-Mutairi's insofar as ignorance of the religion, its dictates and principles are concerned.
- ii. **Adherence to 'ambiguous' evidences and ignoring the clear, unequivocal evidences:** In this regard, reference is made by Ali-Shaykh to extremist's attention to the more allegorical verses of the Qur'an as opposed to the concise, easy to understand verses.<sup>8</sup>
- iii. **Misinterpretations:** Here, Ali-Shaykh summarises the extremist approach to Islamic sources that, in actuality, further emphasise point ii. above:

*"Issues are constantly misinterpreted, distorted to mean something other than [what] they actually mean [to]...fit whatever the person wants them to mean. It is such misinterpretations that harm people, whether they be twisting the meanings in issues of creedal beliefs or in practice."*<sup>9</sup>

- iv. **Worldly and political aspirations:** Reference is made here to Ibn Taymiyyah's comments concerning dissension and the conclusion that:

*"Anyone...that leaves the obedience and allegiance to the legitimate [Muslim] leader (government, president, authority etc.), it is only an inner love for worldly affairs and leadership that leads him to that. He then uses some religious issues or even his enthusiasm for imposing Islamic law and uses that as an excuse to fulfill his inner desires."*<sup>10</sup>

- v. **Opposition to scholars and refusing to refer to them:**<sup>11</sup> An important observation is made here; namely, the Khawaarij refused to consult or even refer to the companions of Prophet Muhammad for advice or guidance in the matters over which they disputed. The companions were conversant with Islam and its legislature, having witnessed its introduction, evolution and implementation during the life of its envoy. The Khawaarij resorted to reliance upon their own understanding of the religion, preferring this over the more scholastic, contextualised approach of the Companions. Ali-Shaykh elaborates further on this point by confirming:

---

A R M L: 'Religious Extremism in the Lives of Contemporary Muslims' translated by Zarabozo, J M M, Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2001, p.111

<sup>8</sup> "It is He (Allah) who has sent down to you the Book (i.e. the Qur'an). In it are verses clear and precise – they are the foundation of the Book, and others are unspecific. As for those in whose hearts is deviation, they follow what is unspecific, unclear to them, seeking to cause fitnah (trial and tribulations) and seeking an interpretation (suitable to them)". The Qur'an, Surah (Chapter) al-Imran (3, verse 7).

<sup>9</sup> Ali-Shaykh, S A A; 'The Fitnah of the Khawaarij' [www.answering-extremism.com](http://www.answering-extremism.com), p.9

<sup>10</sup> Taymiyyah, I cited in Ali-Shaykh, S A A; 'The Fitnah of the Khawaarij' [www.answering-extremism.com](http://www.answering-extremism.com), pp.9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Ali-Shaykh, S A A; 'A Warning Against Extremism' Jamiah Media, 2008, pp. 20-45 & 'The Fitnah of the Khawaarij' [www.answering-extremism.com](http://www.answering-extremism.com), pp.4-12

*"It is not the case that anyone who simply reads becomes a scholar.... Religious knowledge has specialized people that are to be referred back to and consulted with. Therefore, it must be known that one of the causes of tribulations is opposing the scholars and never consulting those who are firmly-grounded in knowledge."*<sup>12</sup>

In fact, this accords with a Qur'anic principle which states: **'So ask the people of the Reminder if you do not know.'**<sup>13</sup> An additional observation made by the researcher is the extremist's almost exclusive reliance upon, and reference to, classical texts and scholars. Little or no reference is made to bona fide and reputed contemporary scholars or their works that often expound upon classical texts. Any reference made by them in this regard is usually one of disparagement and/or belittlement, i.e. 'government stooges' or 'scholars for dollars' etc. The researcher suggests that such reliance and reference to classical/historical works etc. enables extremists and their protagonists to manipulate and distort texts, unchallenged by those who originally authored them. They subsequently purport their understanding and explanations of such works to equate or even supersede that of recognised contemporary scholars. By adopting this strategy, they effectively entrench their ideology historically with that of the Khawaarij who also believed their understanding of Islam to be superior to that of Prophet Muhammad's companions.

#### **Differentiating between Shar'i (Shari'ah) and Administrative Systems<sup>14</sup>**

Al-Mahmood introduces another dimension to the issue of ruling by Allah's laws; that of differentiation between the systematic application of various laws. He discusses the misunderstanding that surrounds this particular issue and attempts to provide some clarity on how to approach the subject. Groups approach this issue from one of two angles; either holding every system devised by the authority to be deemed as ruling by other than the Shari'ah and therefore impermissible or, on the opposite end of the spectrum, assuming the belief that an authority can justifiably administer legislation with the aim of benefiting society based on the premise of declaring a commitment to Islam, irrespective of whether it governs according to the Shari'ah or not.<sup>15</sup> Al-Mahmood argues that both groups have misunderstood the issue and asserts the necessity of differentiating between systems that contravene Shari'ah and those that accord with it. He cites the late contemporary scholar, Shaykh Ash-Shanqeeti as the one who drew attention this important demarcation. Reference is cited of the second caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab being the first to institute a prison service in Makkah as well as devising an administrative system to maintain a record of army personnel.<sup>16</sup> Al-Mahmood continues to assert the permissibility of introducing

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.12

<sup>13</sup> The Qur'an, surah (chapter) 21, verse 7.

<sup>14</sup> al-Mahmood, Dr. A R S: 'Man-Made Laws vs. Shari'ah: Ruling by Laws other than what Allah Revealed - Conditions and Rulings', International Islamic Publishing House, Riyadh, 2003, pp.339

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.340

effective and efficient administrative systems that complement the Shari'ah without conflict. Discussion around this subject must not be confused with or mistaken for secularism which is considered an alien concept to Islam,<sup>17</sup> and to which many of the '*liberal extremists*' subscribe. Advocates of secularism insist its establishment in the Muslim world is in the interest of the religion and that the sacredness of the latter must be kept apart from the '*profanity*' of the former.<sup>18</sup> Some of the observations made by Dr. Shaker are typical of the liberal perspective when discussing the subject of secularism and religion. For the sake of brevity, it should suffice to acknowledge his position; namely, that:

*"There is no enmity between secularism and Religion – the enmity is between secularism and the clerics."*<sup>19</sup>

It is interesting to note that, although Shaker holds opposing views to takfeeri thought (which vehemently opposes anything resembling secularism), his position so far as reducing or removing the influential role of scholars (clerics) is similar to proponents of takfeer and violent extremism. That said, some resonance can be found with his observation that:

*"Terrorism in the Arab world has not arisen because of religious objectives, but because of political ones."*<sup>20</sup>

### **Manifestations of extremism**

This section complements earlier discussions on the religion's historical and ideological relevance to contemporary violent extremism by examining the latter's various manifestations. It also revisits Islamic lexicology describing the various categories of extremism.<sup>21</sup> Acknowledgement is given to the existence of other precursors to violent extremist manifestations;<sup>22</sup> however, this chapter's major focus is on ideological drivers in view of the relative scarcity of data pertaining to this area of study amongst western academia today. This is especially valid when considering the subject from a Western, convert Muslim insider perspective.

---

<sup>17</sup> "The word for secularism in Arabic; '*almaniyya*'...is new in Arab political literature. It is derived from the word for 'world' (*'alam*) and not from the word for 'science' (*'ilm*) – that is, [it refers] to the world we live in", cited in interview with Shaker, A N: 'Secularism will Triumph in the Arab World; Terrorism's Crimes are the Death Struggle of Fundamentalism', The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) December 11 2008, no.2148, <http://www.memri.org>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp.1-2

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.2

<sup>21</sup> Refer to Section 1, page 3 of this chapter

<sup>22</sup> Elworthy, S & Rifkind, G: 'Making Terrorism History', Rider Books 2006

Wiktorowicz discusses '*cognitive openings and religious seeking*' once an individual has experienced or become aware of adverse factors affecting either him/her or areas of the Muslim community. This newly discovered 'awareness' often leads to membership or affiliation with groups or causes considered to be active against such perceived 'oppression.'<sup>23</sup> Although Wiktorowicz limits the extent of his discussion to an individual merely *choosing* to join a radical group (which, in itself, cannot be deemed to be a direct manifestation of extremism,) he points to the fact that:

Participation [in a radical group] entails costs and risks, especially since the movement supports the use of violence and is highly contentious.<sup>24</sup> I would suggest it is necessary to first establish the extent of affiliation to a group or cause and what this entails by way of beliefs. Thereafter, the behavioral traits that manifest themselves as a result of such beliefs should be examined to determine whether these are symptomatic of violent extremist tendencies, or whether the characteristics displayed are attributable to what may be commonly considered to be idiosyncratic behavior synonymous to the lexical definitions of extremist, (or excessive,) behavioral tendencies/traits. For example, an individual who decides to become reclusive in order to preserve his religion may fall under the lexicological definition of '*al-Ghulu*' – excessiveness; however, the *degree* of this particular manifestation is not a sole predictor of violent extremism.

Conversely, an individual who, after experiencing a '*cognitive opening*', legitimises violence against innocent civilians based upon misunderstood tenets of the religion, manifests '*al-Ghulu*' of a violent extremist predisposition. Al-Mutairi poses the question of whether violent religious extremism is an individual or group (collective) phenomenon.<sup>25</sup> His subsequent findings provide two distinctive definitions; namely, i. if the extremism emanates from a general, belief-related premise, it is to be considered a collective problem or phenomenon. In other words, it can affect and galvanize the masses. The second distinction relates to extremism manifesting itself on an individualistic '*deed-related*' basis. In this case the manifestation can be considered an isolated or personal phenomenon in the initial instance that only has resonance with the agent of such deeds/acts.<sup>26</sup> The above mentioned examples, propounded by the researcher, may serve as accurate illustrations of Al-Mutairi's distinctions, (i.e. the belief in legitimising violence against innocent civilians and the behavioral trait of reclusiveness.) Whilst keeping this in mind, reference must again be made to the origin of the type of religious extremism under examination today; Dhul Khuwaisarah and the Khawaarij, (discussed earlier in this chapter. The researcher suggested the existence of *belief - related* and *deed-related* manifestations of extremism in

---

<sup>23</sup> Wiktorowicz, Q: 'Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West', Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC. 2006, pp. 85-86

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.85

<sup>25</sup> Al- Mutairi, Dr. A R M L: 'Religious Extremism in the Lives of Contemporary Muslims' translated by Zarabozo, J M M, Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2001, p.131

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

Dhul Khuwaisarah's *understanding (belief-related)* that a divinely guided Prophet could be unjust/oppressive to his followers. His harshness when addressing the Prophet also confirmed the *deed-related* or *behavioural* nature of his extremism in accordance with the lexicological definition of '*Al-Unf.*' Effectively, it is further suggested that, in the event of the first category of extremism being present in an individual, (namely, *belief-related* extremism), alongside a particular mosaic of traits from the second category (i.e. deed-related extremism), the resultant manifestation is highly likely to be one constituting a violent extremist predisposition. Further examination of this theoretical supposition will be made when examining data from the chapter on case studies.

Suffice it to refer at this stage to Hassan's illustration of ideology being a '*centre of gravity*' and a '*tool for rallying support*' reinforcing Al-Mutairi's assertion of belief-related extremism being a group/collective phenomenon and not an individualistic one.<sup>27</sup> As has been intimated above, various manifestations of *deed-related* extremism, in isolation, do not necessarily lead to violent extremist tendencies. That said, a brief discussion on a few relevant categories pertaining to *deed-related* extremism becomes necessary.

Remaining with Al Mutairi's extensive research in this field, it is apparent he categorised deed-related manifestations of extremism in an attempt to highlight that not all behavioral traits prove a predilection of terrorism. He identifies at least thirty manifestations of extremism in the lives of contemporary Muslims that are connected to both belief-related and deed-related extremism.<sup>28</sup> To discuss each category at this stage would prove exhaustive; it will be sufficient therefore, to cite a few significant categories so as to illustrate the nature of these manifestations. The earlier example of reclusiveness or, seclusion, will be revisited to illustrate the degrees to which it can manifest itself. The religious terminology of reclusiveness or, seclusion, is called '*uzlah*' and the lexicological definition is isolation or 'retirement' from society.<sup>29</sup> There are differences of opinions amongst classical scholars regarding the merits of *uzlah*, with one position giving preference to interaction/participation in society as being the normative requirement of all citizens. The second opinion recommends *uzlah* in adverse circumstances when societies have become morally and spiritually bankrupt and an individual feels that his / her religious values and practice are under threat of being corrupted or eroded.<sup>30</sup> In fact, it becomes a praiseworthy deed and in itself, cannot be considered a manifestation of violent extremism unless its underlying foundation or *belief-related* premise is of a Muslim society being considered as one of major disbelief and, therefore, *jahiliyyah*. This was the belief encapsulated by Sayid Qutb as has been expounded upon earlier in this chapter and Mustafa

---

<sup>27</sup> Hassan, M H B: 'Key Considerations in Counterideological Work against Terrorist Ideology,' Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006, 29:531-558

<sup>28</sup> Al- Mutairi, Dr. A R M L: 'Religious Extremism in the Lives of Contemporary Muslims' translated by Zarabozo, J M M, Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2001, pp.590-591.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, pp.526

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pp.526-559

Shukri, another proponent of violent extremism from Egypt.<sup>31</sup> Shukri had already adopted and propagated a *belief-related* extremism based upon his understanding of al-haakimiyyah. Aspects of *deed-related*, behavioural characteristics simply served as a personification of this belief. *Uzlah (seclusion)* was one of the characteristics he considered a natural consequence of residing in what he and his followers considered a society functioning according to the precepts of *'jahiliyyah'*.<sup>32</sup> It is important to note that only Qutb preceded Shukri in declaring Egypt to be a non-Muslim populated country; not even the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (to which Qutb subscribed), Hasan al-Banna, ventured into such unchartered domains by declaring takfeer upon a predominantly Muslim populated country. Kepel notes:

*"Qutb's trans-historical use of the concept of jahiliyyah marks a notable departure in Muslim Brother dogma. Al-Banna, for example, never dreamed of accusing the Egyptian society...of being non-Islamic."*<sup>33</sup>

In conclusion to this aspect of the discourse, I consider it necessary to reiterate his summation that historical and ideological origins of violent extremism serve as important insights/markers of contemporary extremism and its counterparts. Similarly, it is important to acknowledge that deed-related manifestations of extremism can be attributable to individuals who, whilst not inclined towards violent extremism, possess overzealousness/excessiveness in the practice of their religion. This can often be misconstrued as being characteristic or, part of the mosaic that contributes towards a violent extremist's profile. Such behavioral characteristics may fall into any of the lexicographical classifications of extremism given earlier. One of the purposes of the above discourse was to highlight the necessary prerequisites of *belief-related* extremism taking root *prior to* particular *deed-related* characteristics, and that the latter can serve as conclusive components, or drivers, towards violent extremist manifestations.

Psychological, socioeconomic and religious drivers also form part of the more general mosaic that affect the *pace* of radicalisation towards extremism.<sup>34</sup> Many studies investigating fanaticism suggest that psychological imbalance is a recurring feature in a

---

<sup>31</sup> "...Mustafa Ahmad Shukri... was born in Asyut in 1362 A.H. He was imprisoned in 1885 A.H., being accused of belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood. He was released in 1391 A.H. In prison he established a group that spread greatly after his release from prison. Its name was Jamaah al-Muslimeen (the community of the Muslims). It is known by the name Jamaat al-Takfeer wa al-Hijra (the community of declaring other Muslims disbelievers and of emigration). He was executed by [the Egyptian government] in 1398 A.H." Cited from Muhammad Suroor ibn Naaif Zain al-Abideen; 'al-Hukum bi Ghair ma Anzalallah wa Ahl al-Ghulu', pp.10, 304-306, cited by Al- Mutairi, Dr. A R M L: 'Religious Extremism in the Lives of Contemporary Muslims' translated by Zarabozo, J M M, Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2001, p.21

<sup>32</sup> Mustafa, S: 'Kitaab al-Khilaafah,' vol.3, p.20 cited in Al- Mutairi, Dr. A R M L: 'Religious Extremism in the Lives of Contemporary Muslims' translated by Zarabozo, J M M, Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2001, pp.590-591.

<sup>33</sup> Kepel, G: 'The Roots of Radicalism', Saqi, 2005, p.45

<sup>34</sup> Elworthy, S & Rifkind, G: 'Making Terrorism History', Rider, 2006, pp.43-46

number of case studies.<sup>35</sup> Further studies even suggest the existence of a primal trait that enhances the development of fanaticism within an individual.<sup>36</sup> That said, I would argue that these still serve as secondary factors to existing ideological/belief-related precursors and often run parallel to deed-related characteristics. Increasing academic research examining the effects of the ideological effectiveness of extremist propaganda support this above assertion, arguing the need to focus on and develop effective counter responses to the theological thread.<sup>37</sup> Hassan observes:

*“Many scholars and analysts have said that terrorism cannot be defeated either by military or law and order means only. It requires a multipronged and multifaceted approach, which includes strategies to eliminate the roots and causes of terrorism. One of the root causes...is the ideology that drives and motivates terrorists. Although it has been widely accepted that counterideology or ideological response to extremist groups’ propaganda is an important part of counterterrorism strategy, up until now there is no single concrete and coherent doctrine or framework for conducting it.”*<sup>38</sup>

Boucek’s observation’s, while examining Saudi Arabia’s counterterrorism strategy, is more optimistic in that he highlights the country’s successful efforts and:

*“...use of unconventional “soft” measures [that are] designed to combat the intellectual and ideological justifications for violent extremism. The primary objective...is to engage and combat an ideology that...is based on corrupted and deviant interpretations of Islam.”*<sup>39</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this section was to introduce a historical and ideological perspective to the subject of violent extremism whilst addressing, at the same time, language used to define this phenomenon. Furthermore, specific areas of ideological and behavioural tendencies attributable to violent extremism were highlighted in an attempt to place context around succeeding chapters and research findings that will look at particular individuals and movements who purportedly subscribe to extremist ideologies. I would proffer that, after examination and discussion of the various trends which actually define extremism, particular groups such as Salafists, are actually positioned closer to

---

<sup>35</sup> Al- Mutairi, Dr. A R M L: ‘Religious Extremism in the Lives of Contemporary Muslims’ translated by Zarabozo, J M M, Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2001, pp. 116-117

<sup>36</sup> Abdullah, M: ‘al-Itijaahaat al-Taasabiyyah,’ p.26 cited in Al- Mutairi, Dr. A R M L: ‘Religious Extremism in the Lives of Contemporary Muslims’ translated by Zarabozo, J M M, Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2001, pp.590-591.

<sup>37</sup> Hassan, M H B: ‘Key Considerations in Counterideological Work against Terrorist Ideology’, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Routledge Taylor Francis Group, 2006, 29: 531-558.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.531

<sup>39</sup> Bouerk, C: Saudi Arabia’s “Soft” Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation and Aftercare,’ Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Middle East Program, no.97, September 2008.



toward a more moderate perspective between violent and liberal socio-religious extremes.