**Part 8: Contemporary takfeerism and its relation to historical extremist ideology and movements.**

Reference has been made in this and the previous chapter to the emergence of the Khawaarij and, more recently, the ideology and thoughts of Syed Qutb. Osama bin Laden's beliefs relating to murdering non-Muslim civilians in retaliation to Western aggression against Muslim countries have also been highlighted. It is not; therefore, necessary to reiterate the contemporary position of takfeer and its protagonists extensively; however, recent scholastic discourses that have addressed extremism in the Muslim world should be examined. In response to a question regarding the possible resemblance of contemporary terrorists to the Khawaarj, Shaikh Saleh al-Fawzan, one of the leading contemporary scholars in Saudi Arabia today, confirmed the former's congruity, adding:

> *"Rather, they are even more violent and extreme than the (original) Khawaarij. The (past) Khawaarij did not destroy buildings and residents. [They] used to show up face-to-face on the battlefield…but they did not use to collapse buildings [with] everyone inside them – women, children, the innocent, those at peace with the Muslims…This is worse and more violent than the actions of the (original) Khawaarij."* [1]

A common claim of extremists and their sympathisers is that any individual that opposes them and/or notifies the authorities against them are in essence disbelievers and has exited the fold of Islam as a result of such actions. Shaikh al-Fawzan was questioned in relation to the counter terrorist work of police in Saudi Arabia. His answer is significant in that its applicability can arguably be extended to Muslim police and security personnel in any country. In refutation of a fatwa that equated terrorists with *mujahideen* (Islamic holy warriors) and the suggestion that the police were impeding the latter's efforts to wage jihad, al-Fawzan highlighted that it was in fact the security forces that were conducting the proper jihad against these terrorists. His subsequent doubts surrounding the veracity of the fatwa legitimising terrorism are pertinent in that he rejected the scholasticism of anyone issuing such an edict:

> *"They…are definitely not scholars…Has a single, dependable and respectable scholar ever said that this [terrorism] is Jihad? Never. It is a lie. This (the actions of the terrorists) is not Jihad."* [2]

Other more recent examples which possibly resonates with the extremist mindset can be witnessed in the storming of the Kaa'ba in Makkah (Mecca) in 1979 by Juhayman al-'Utaybi and his followers. Hegghammer and Lacroix observe the continuing effect of this individual on the Saudi political landscape:

> *"Our research shows that the group that stormed the Mecca mosque in 1979 was a radicalized fraction of a much broader pietistic organization set up in Medina in the mid 1960s under the name of al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba (JSM), i.e. "The Salafi Group that Commands*

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[1] Al-Fawzan, S: 'Are the Terrorists of Today the Khawaarij?' http://www.fatwa1.com/anti-erhab/Irhabion.html audio clip no. 20

[2] Ibid, audio clip no. 22

*Right and Forbids Wrongdoing". The JSM and its radical offshoot, "Juhayman's Ikhwan", were among the first manifestations of a particular type of Saudi Islamism which outlived Juhayman and has played an important yet subtle role in the shaping of the country's political landscape until today. It is characterized by a strong focus on ritual practices, a declared disdain for politics yet active rejection of the state and its institutions. This so-called "rejectionist Islamism" is intellectually and organizationally separate from the other and more visible forms of Saudi Islamist opposition such as the so-called "Awakening" (al-Sahwa) movement or the Bin Ladin-style jihadists." [3]*

Shaikh Salih Ali-Shaikh, whilst commenting on Juhayman's asceticism and religiosity makes reference to his focus on unspecific and ambiguous evidences as a cause of the resultant misguidance which, in turn, led to his extremist act of laying siege to the holiest sanctuary in Muslim world.[4]

**Violent extremism/takfeerism in relation to extremist manifestations.**

Similarities can be drawn between some of the behavioural characteristics of Salafis and Takfeeris; therefore, reference should be made to previous sections. It must, however, be acknowledged that the aforementioned behavioural characteristics are not exclusive to these movements alone and can be identified across a spectrum of Muslim personalities and groups. In view of the ambit of this research paper examination of these characteristics are limited to only Salafi and takfeeri adherents.

**Al-Uzlah (seclusion/isolation):** This was introduced and discussed earlier; however, an important demarcation should be made in this particular behavioural tendency so far as the Salafi and takfeeri extremist movements are concerned. Al Mutairi illustrates the purport behind the extremist's seclusion when describing Shukri Mustafa's increased influence among his followers in Egypt. Shukri (as he is commonly referred to) propagated an emotional as well as behavioural separation at the same time, in view of his position that disbelievers populated Egyptian society. It was, therefore, incumbent to institute a complete separation or withdrawal from society.[5] This method of seclusion is considered by al-Mutairi to contravene the Shari'ah. His critique of Shukri's arguments for an extreme form of *uzlah* highlights at least ten errors in the latter's understanding and application of this act.[6] Whilst intrinsically similar in nature to the classification described above, Salafi's implementation of *uzlah*, so far as it relates to their residing in a Western society, is

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[3] Hegghammer, T. and Lacroix, S: 'Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman al-'Utaybi Revisited,' Cambridge University, in International Journal of Middle East Studies (vol. 39, no. 1, 2007, pp. 103-122), published by Cambridge University Press
(see http://www.cambridge.org/journals/mes)

[4] Ali-Shaikh, S: 'The Fitnah of the Khawaarij' www.answering-extremism.com p. 17

[5] 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.555-6

[6] Ibid, pp.557-559

based on the premise of preservation of the Islamic identity. This is especially true of converts who are careful to abstain from former lifestyles. However, such abstinence is contrary to the basis of Shukri's understanding and practice of *uzlah.* Salafis *acknowledge* the wider society and its conventions, and are apolitical regarding incitement towards violent revolutionary changes that attempt to precipitate Islamic law (Shari'ah). In some instances the Salafi motives for *uzlah* may be considered by some to be socially regressive in today's society; however, in any event, they remain in contrast to the violent extremist/takfeeri standpoint.[7]

**Prohibition of academic education vs. illiteracy:** Al-Mutairi refers to the prohibition of education and advocacy of illiteracy as one of the extremists' behavioural characteristics.[8] This extreme trait became prominent and was considered synonymous with the Taliban's ascendancy to power in Afghanistan during the late nineties and up until their demise following the US led coalition's 'War on Terror' in October 2001. Al-Mutairi, highlights Shukri Mustafa's justification for eschewing education in preference for illiteracy and correctly counters the latter's claim while, at the same time, contextualising the misapplication of the prophetic narratives (ahadeeth) cited by him:

> *'Forbidding attaining knowledge via newly introduced means, such as colleges...is also forbidding something while there is no evidence for that prohibition. Hence, it is also a form of extremism.'* [9]

Shukri Mustafa's reliance on an authentic text stating the Muslim Ummah to be an illiterate nation[10] is misunderstood and misapplied according to al-Mutairi as, upon close examination of Quranic and prophetic texts, the following can be determined:

i.      Prior to the advent of Islam the Arabs combined two characteristics; namely, they were *ummiyoon* (illiterate) in the sense of not being recipients of a divinely revealed book/message, and they were illiterate according to the more commonly understood meaning of, on the whole, not possessing the ability to read or write.

ii.     Illiteracy was (and remains) an academic deficiency that is highlighted as such in the Qur'an;[11] however, it is important to note that it is considered a commendable (praiseworthy) characteristic of Prophet Muhammad in view of the affirmation surrounding the miraculous nature in which the Qur'an was imparted and preserved via him. His

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[7] Ibid, pp.526-551

[8] Ibid, pp.488-506

[9] Ibid, p.494

[10] Prophet Muhammad stated, when talking about calculating the Islamic calendar (lunar months): *"We are an illiterate nation. We neither write nor do we calculate. The month is like this," and he motioned twenty-nine [once] and thirty once."* Hadeeth recorded by Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, al-Nasaa'ee and Ahmad 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, p.497

[11] **"And there are among the illiterates, who know not the Book, but (see therein their own) desires, and they do nothing but conjecture"** The Qur'an, Surah [chapter] al-Baqarah verse 78

illiteracy continues to serve as strong irrefutable evidence as to the divine and unadulterated nature of the Muslim holy Book against assertions that he authored the Book with his own hands.[12]

iii.     Quranic verses referring to illiteracy are in the form of statements of fact as opposed to injunctions to remain illiterate or indeed, eschew literacy.

iv.     Further, in support of point iii above, the Prophet's statement regarding the Ummah's illiteracy during that time was again, a statement of fact regarding many of the Arab's condition prior to Islam. However, following its advent, Muslims were ordered to maintain a state of illiteracy so far as specific matters were concerned; especially those pertaining to astronomy, for example, in an attempt to preserve a simple, attainable method of calculating new Islamic (lunar) months.[13]

Al-Mutairi provides a more detailed critique of Shukri Mustafa's misapplication regarding illiteracy and the eschewal of academic progress that is beyond the remit of this paper. It is, however, necessary to make a distinction at this stage between Salafism's position regarding the pursuit and acquisition of academic education and that of the takfeeri extremist approach, the latter of which has been expounded upon in the above discussion.  Salafis continue to receive criticism for their general abstention from academia in the West. They are further accused of fostering regression among the women which in turn contributes towards the ghettoisation and further stigmatisation of their communities.[14] While this position, (which is no longer predominant among many segments of the Salafi community), is an understandable societal cause for concern, the raison d'être behind the Salafi position emanates from the prohibition of free mixing between the sexes.[15]  Roald cites the Quranic injunction: '*And stay in your houses; adorn not yourselves [publicly] with the adornment of the Time of Ignorance [jahiliyyah],*[16]as evidence cited by Salafis in support of the position for segregation. It should be noted that segregation of this type is a long established practice in Islam and is not restricted to Salafism alone – much of the Muslim world adheres to this principle in varying degrees depending on societal and religious customs and dictates. Increasingly however, a few Muslim societies and organisations that consider themselves progressive, advocate free mixing on the premise that the segregation of sexes is impractical or backward in today's global society. Interestingly, Roald cites the former Hizb ut-Tahrir ideologue and founder, al-Nabhani's juxtaposed position of '*equal gender opportunities*' being a western concept that is alien to Islam and created as

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[12] **"And you [Prophet Muhammad] were not (able) to recite a book before this (Book came), nor were you (able) to transcribe it with your right hand. In that case, indeed, would the talkers of vanities have doubted."** The Qur'an, Surah [chapter] al-Ankaboot verse 48.

[13] 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.503-504

[14]  Roald, S R:'New Muslims in the European Context: The Experience of Scandinavian Converts' Brill, 2004, p.159

[15] Ibid, p.153

[16] The Qur'an, Surah [chapter] Al-Ahzab, (33: verse 32)

a result of the oppression of Western women.[17] Salafis actively support the pursuit of academia on the condition of institutions or, to the lesser extent, classes being segregated; this should not be confused or misconstrued as being equivocal to the some of the takfeeri extremist positions regarding the eschewal of academia in its entirety in preference for illiteracy. In this regard, Muslims of various ideological persuasions alongside academic research also concur with the Salafi position regarding whether single sex or mixed educational institutions are more beneficial for students' academic success.[18]

**Prohibiting congregational prayers in mosques:**[19] A further manifestation of behavioural extremism can also be illustrated when examining Shukri and his group's position regarding the performance of congregational prayers in the mosques. It is necessary to reiterate that the prayer forms one of the fundamental pillars of Islam and its congregational performance in Mosques is deemed obligatory on adult males.[20] It is a deed-related characteristic regularly practiced by the majority of Muslims. Despite this religious obligation, Shukri censured his followers from participating in and attending Mosques which he, (like Qutb,) considered being from '*jahilliyyah*' and, therefore, by extension they were considered non-Muslim places of worship. I am able to elucidate further on this particular example following my personal experiences as chairman of Brixton Mosque between 1997 and 2009. During the mid 90s, the mosque witnessed an increased takfeeri/extremist presence amongst its congregation. Takfeeri protagonists and their sympathisers would attend the congregational prayers and, upon completion, proceed to repeat the prayer (again, in congregation) in another area of the Mosque. Some would deliberately avoid attending the Mosque until the second, unauthorised congregational prayer was conducted. When challenged regarding this act, their response was unequivocal; the management of the Mosque and

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[17] Roald, S R:'New Muslims in the European Context: The Experience of Scandinavian Converts' Brill, 2004, p. 148

[18] Refer to The National Foundation for Educational Research Report (NFER); 'The impact of school size and single-sex education' in which it observes: "*The analysis of the impact of **single-sex education** on pupil performance indicated that, even after controlling for prior achievement and other background factors, girls in single-sex comprehensive schools achieved better results than their peers in mixed schools for all the outcomes measured, except the number of GCSEs taken. The measured difference was particularly striking for average GCSE science score, for which girls in single-sex schools could be expected to achieve over a third of a grade better than similar pupils in mixed schools. The analysis also suggested that single-sex schooling particularly benefited girls at the lower end of the ability range. In contrast, no performance gains were detected for girls attending single-sex grammar schools.*

*No overall differences were found between the performance of boys in single-sex and mixed comprehensive schools. However, more detailed investigation revealed that boys with lower prior attainment achieved better average GCSE scores in single-sex schools, while boys with higher prior attainment took slightly more science GCSEs and achieved higher total GCSE science scores in single-sex schools. It was also found that boys attending single-sex grammar schools* achieved better results than those in mixed grammar schools for many of the outcomes measured." http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research-areas/pims-data/summaries/spp-the-impact-of-school-size-and-single-sex-education.cfm

[19] **Important note:** This does not refer to and nor equates to the closure of mosques due to the Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) of 20191-2020.

[20] **Important note:** Whilst this obligation is not applicable to Muslim women, they are entitled to attend the Mosque for prayers and any other communal activity or event. The practice of censuring women from Mosques is an alien concept in Islam and comes from cultural practices that are in fact unacceptable and against established religious dictates.

its imams were considered disbelievers, or at the very least, the validity of their religion was in doubt, therefore, it was incumbent on them (the takfeeris) to repeat their prayer. Suffice it to say, this act was immediately censured and only one congregational prayer subsequently permitted at specified times of the day. The deed related or behavioural bases of Shukri, his followers and the takfeeri protagonists attending Brixton Mosque at that time are synonymous and conclusive – the excommunication (takfeer) of Muslims attending Mosques based upon their incorrect belief-related extremism.

**Prohibiting employment in government positions:** This behavioural trait is prominent among a small section of the Muslim community in the UK today and emanates from the extremist perspective that entails the following observations; i. accepting a position from an oppressive (and disbelieving) regime / government is, in actuality, a display of loyalty and support for them and that ii. it constitutes a type of attestation of the regime's / government's legitimacy and manifesto or agenda.[21] Despite Quranic, historic and scholastic evidence that clearly illustrate examples of either Muslim rule over non-Muslims on the basis of non-Muslim law (as in the case of the Abyssinian ruler, An-Najashi who converted to Islam during the Prophet Muhammad's era) or, the employment of Muslims under non-Muslim leadership, (as in the case of Prophet Yusuf),[22] the position of extremists and those sympathetic to their call remains unequivocal: Muslim employees of despotic or non-Muslim governments are considered apostates to the religion due to their indirect support and subscription to policies and legislature that does not govern in accordance with the Shari'ah and/or is designed to suppress the Muslim world. Al-Mutairi asserts that this behavioural characteristic also constitutes extremism, citing as evidence Maahir Bakri's observation that:

> *"Every work, permissible or forbidden, in this jaahili society, must, in the long run, flow to one end: the help and support of the foundation of this disbelieving society (Egypt)."* [23]

Shukri's subsequent observation only serves to elucidate Bakri's summation even further:

> *"All of that…is but the authority of the taaghoot (false god), his jurisdiction and the sources of his godhood. Those who enter his system are nothing but his slaves and custodians of his pulpit."* [24]

Al-Mutairi confirms that the above extremist positions focused on the Arab and predominantly Muslim society of Egypt during the late 60s/early 70s, however, it is not difficult to observe how the same criterion is easily transferable in description to contemporary Western society.[25]

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[21] 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.582

[22] The Qur'an: Surah [chapter] Yusuf, (12: verses 54-102).

[23] Bakri, M: 'Al Hijrah,' p.10 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, p.585.

[24] Mustafa, S:'Al-Khilaafah,' vol.5 p.13 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, p.585.

**The justification for criminality:** Since the mid to late nineties, the researcher has observed an increasing trend of criminality among a minority of Muslims, some of whom are inclined towards the violent extremist rhetoric. The premise for criminality is that Western societies, especially the US and UK, by virtue of their foreign policy against Muslim countries, are abodes of war, (*Darul Harb*). The authentic prophetic description of conditions pertaining to war entailing deception is erroneously cited when attempting to legitimise criminality. Invariably, this provides an attractive alternative to conventional societal participation via employment and training etc. for disenfranchised young Muslims who are unable or have refused to engage with wider society. The most severe examples of criminality can be witnessed in cases involving violent extremist protagonists like Abdullah el-Faisal who was convicted for inciting murder against non-Muslims.[26] Additionally, Abu Qatada espoused beliefs surrounding the legitimacy of breaking Western laws, stealing from and deceiving non-Muslims as well as entering illicit sexual relationships with non-Muslim women.[27] These behavioural characteristics are promoted on the premise of the society being an abode of war can, in some instances, lead to hiding religious identities in an effort to 'blend in' and operate below the radar, so to speak. Although the removal of apparent religious identity, such as the beard or Islamic attire, cannot in every instance be attributable to a more clandestine intent, (i.e. some individuals may genuinely grow to believe their outward display of their faith to no longer be necessary or, indeed, they may have become weaker in their practice of the religion), the researcher has witnessed this behaviour amongst individuals who went on to become terrorists – Zacarius Moussaoui is such an example. The question remains, whether a correlation exists between criminality, especially violent criminality such as gun related crimes etc. and violent extremism. The researcher intends to conduct separate research around this particular issue.

## Conclusions

This 8-part discourse has endeavoured to provide a comprehensive account of Salafism in relation to academic and journalistic discourses that have adversely influenced societal perceptions of the movement. Emerging research, which has sought to provide a more balanced academic perspective, has enabled further insight into the ideological and methodological practices of the movement; however, they have achieved limited success in causing a paradigm shift among policy makers and statutory bodies who continue to perceive Salafism as intrinsic to violent extremism. This section, together with the previous ones, has introduced an insider's perspective which aimed to provide additional dimensions to existing and emerging research on Salafism, and whether an affinity with violent extremist ideology exists. Similarities between Salafi behavioural tendencies and that of takfeeri extremism were also explored, illustrating unequivocal differences between the two movements.

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[25] 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.585-6.

[26] Refer to Chapter 8, case study 3

[27] Cole, J & Cole, B: 'Martyrdom: Radicalisation and Terrorist Violence among British Muslims', Pennant Books, 2009, p.164 citing 'The Home Office case against Abu Qatadah', Daily Telegraph, 27 February 2007, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1543944/The-Home-Office-case-against-Abu-Qatada.html

It should suffice at this stage to provide a summary of the fundamental and methodological/behavioural variations of takfeerism from that of Salafism in order to refocus on subject at hand:[28]

1. The belief of takfeer; namely, rendering a Muslim a disbeliever as a result of him committing a major sin is contrary to mainstream Islamic belief that such sins do not expel one from the pale of the religion;

2. Their categorisation of Tawheed Al-Haakimiyah as a fourth category, distinguishing it from the three established existing categories, in an attempt to politicise a rudimentary aspect of the religion and utilise it as a tool for revolt in the Muslim world;

3. Rendering all Muslim societies *jaahiliyah, (the era of pre-Islamic ignorance)* thereby legitimising the pronouncement of takfeer of leaders and/or governments etc. in an effort to institute point 2 above;

4. Their justification of suicide bombings and terror attacks on innocent civilians including Muslims (the latter of whom are considered collateral damage) as a response to Western aggression against Muslims etc.

5. Considering Western societies to be *darul Harb* (an abode of war), despite the absence of religious edicts from established scholars, thereby legitimising various acts of criminality in the name of Islam.[29]

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[28] **Important note:** This summary is by no means exhaustive and does not encapsulate all ideological and methodological variations of extremism. Indeed, Islamic scholars have identified numbers significantly higher than the overview provided above.

[29] These characteristics accord with significant traits identified in al-Mutairi's research in which he refers to thirty manifestations of extremism as well as Al-Fawzan and Al-Khumayyis' work in which they identified fifty eight characteristics of extremism: 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.590-1 and Al-Fawzan, S & Al-Khumayyis, A R: 'The Characteristics of the Extremist Khawaarij' al-ebaanah ebooks, 2005 pp.8-16