

Weakening al-Qaeda

Literature Review Challenges Its Authority

MARWAN SHEHADEH

Researcher, Jordan

As a phenomenon, jurisprudential revisions implemented by contemporary jihadist Salafist groups have garnered the attention of observers and analysts in the recent past. This is largely because these revisions emerged from within jihadist Salafist groups themselves following their entry into violent and armed conflicts with all political regimes, ranging from Arab and Islamic non-Arab regimes to powerful non-Islamic countries, particularly the United States and Western countries. Such conflicts have been established on an ideology based on takfir (labeling other Muslims as kuffar or disbelievers) and the violent combat strategy adopted by these groups during the past decades. These groups have posed a major challenge for Arab and Islamic political regimes. In addition, large numbers of Arabs and Muslims have fallen victim to these clashes, exceeding the number of victims of the Arab-Israeli wars.

Throughout their history, jihadist Salafist groups have committed the most despicable deeds in the name of jihad by expanding the circle of violence and the practice of takfir. This expansion was based on a series of fiqhi (jurisprudential) concepts and traditions such as “martyrdom operations,” “al-tatarrus” (taking of human shields by the enemy), “reciprocity,” the distinction between “dar al-Islam” (home of Islam) and “dar al-kufr” (home of kufr or disbelief), “al-wala` wa al-bara” (loyalty towards the believers and disavowal of the disbelievers), and “the near enemy and the far enemy.” These and other concepts have been employed by jihadist Salafist groups during the past decades to justify their violent actions against Arab and Islamic states or societies,

as well as against foreign countries.

This expansion implied more targets for the jihadist Salafist groups. Since the events of Sept. 11, the world has witnessed a change in the combat strategy of the global jihadist Salafist movement, which placed the West entirely at the core of its “jihadist” operations. The movement has employed a rule stating that jihad against the far enemy takes precedence over the near enemy. Nonetheless, the movement has not necessarily ceased the fight against the near enemy of Arab and Islamic regimes that

Throughout their history, jihadist Salafist groups have committed the most despicable deeds in the name of jihad by expanding the circle of violence and the practice of takfir.

the movement considers regimes of “kuffar” and “apostasy.” This ideology and strategy led to armed operations open-ended in terms of time and place. In addition to the violent tactics that have spread in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan over the past seven years, incidents of gratuitous killings emerged inside the United States and Europe, as well

as throughout the rest of the world. Examples include the attacks on New York and Washington in 2001, the bombings in Bali in 2002, Casablanca and Riyadh in 2003, Madrid in 2004, Amman in 2005, and London in 2007.

However, contrary and parallel to this trend, which is mainly associated with a certain faction of the global and domestic jihadist Salafist movement, in recent years the arena of Islamic movements has witnessed the emergence of a countertrend founded on a revision of all the concepts and ideas that laid the foundation for killings and violence in the name of jihad. As previously stated, these revisions are significant because they emerged from within the violent jihadist Salafist organization itself. The most prominent and oldest revisions are those conducted by the leaders and historic figures of the Egyptian “al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya” (the Islamic Group). The group produced more than 14 books addressing the theoretical and practical foundations of this jurisprudential revision that covered most importantly the abandonment of violence, of jihad as the only way to advance change, and of the overall traditional arguments of the jihadist Salafist movement that call for labeling the state and society as kuffar (disbelievers).

At a later stage, another significant revision process began within the al-Jihad Organization, the second largest jihadist Salafist organization in Egypt that produced al-Qaeda’s number two figure, Ayman al-Zawahiri. Although al-Jihad Organization renounced violence over a decade ago, this cessation did not transform into a comprehensive and systematic revision of the organization’s theoretical and practical foundations until the November 2007 manifesto by al-Jihad’s former commander

Sayyed Imam al-Sharif.

Consequently, two significant revision experiences materialized within the two largest and most important domestic violent jihadist Salafist organizations. Principally, this article attempts to identify the potential effects of such revisions on the fiqh (jurisprudence) and practice of al-Qaeda.

Revisions lead to revision attempts within the violent jihadist Salafist movement

The initial impact of the revisions conducted by al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya in Egypt was that they triggered a series of revisions – varying in maturity and comprehensive-

ness – within the violent jihadist Salafist movement in the Arab world. Such revisions have encouraged many prominent leaders within the movement to revisit their overall arguments. The most widely known revisions were conducted by key figures of jihadist Salafism in Saudi Arabia including Sheikh Ali al-Khudair, Nasser al-Fahd, and Hamoud al-Khalidi. These revisions played a significant role in the decline of al-Qaeda's

The most important impact of revisions on the violent jihadist Salafist movement is the creation of confusion within the movement, particularly within the mother organization al-Qaeda, which rejects these revisions.

influence in Saudi Arabia, and culminated in the publication of two books by al-Sharif on rationalizing jihadist activities. One cannot understand the motives of al-Sharif (better known within the group as “Abd al-Qader,” “Abd al-Aziz” or “Dr. Fadl”) and of al-Jihad Organization in general for conducting such revisions in isolation from the successful revision experience of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya. Undoubtedly, this success was a key factor behind al-Jihad Organization's adoption of its own revision experience.

In Jordan, Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi, one of the most prominent theorists of the Jordanian and the global jihadist Salafist movements, expressed several reservations regarding the approach adopted by al-Qaeda, particularly its branch in Iraq under the command of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Al-Maqdisi started his revisions late into his prison term by authoring “al-risala al-thalathiniyya fi al-tahdhir min al-gulu fi al-takfir” (The Thirty-Part Letter Warning against Exceeding the Bounds of Takfir). In his book, al-Maqdisi criticizes the intellectual errors and wrongful conduct of the followers of his movement. However, his criticism touched a nerve as he spoke of the errors of al-Zarqawi and his group in Iraq, as well as his methodological differences with al-Zarqawi. In his famous letter “al-Zarqawi: munasara wa munasaha” (al-Zarqawi: Support and Advice), al-Maqdisi summarized his sharp critique to al-Zarqawi's ap-

proach. The letter caused wide controversy within al-Maqdisi's movement to the point that some followers even threatened the theorist while he was in Qafqafa prison in northern Jordan. This occurred a few months before he was released after Jordan's state security court decreed that he was not responsible in a case involving an armed faction.

The highlights of al-Maqdisi's revisions are reflected in his criticism of al-Zarqawi's increased use of suicide operations, targeting of civilians and acute hostility toward Shiites. He also criticized al-Zarqawi's media discourse, which involved videos of beheadings carried out by his organization. Furthermore, al-Maqdisi criticized al-Zarqawi's involvement in planning to conduct armed operations in Jordan. He reiterated that despite his refusal to accept the political process and recognize the legitimacy of Arab governments he, nonetheless, rejects armed action in Jordan because the conditions for such action are not met and it would imply annihilation for his movement's followers. It is true that al-Maqdisi's revisions neither yielded complete results nor created a profound imbalance within al-Qaeda in Iraq or within his movement, which turned against him until he was in de facto isolation, despite the fact that his followers continue to draw from his books and literature. Nonetheless, al-Maqdisi's revisions are a manifestation of the existing imbalance within the jihadist Salafist movement, and of the ongoing revision therein.

Revisions and the deconstruction of the jurisprudential foundations of al-Qaeda and the violent jihadist Salafist movement

The second most important impact of such revisions on the violent jihadist Salafist movement is the creation of confusion within the movement, particularly within the

Al-Qaeda's response to these revisions and to Sayyed Imam al-Sharif's manifesto was significant for several reasons.

mother organization al-Qaeda, which rejects these revisions. This confusion is caused by the revisions' important role in deconstructing the jurisprudential foundations upon which the jihadist activities of al-Qaeda are based. This impact evidently manifested as al-Qaeda's number two issued a book titled "tabri'at

ʿa`imat al-qalam wa al-sayef min manqasat tuhmat al-khawar wa al-da'f" (Vindicating Masters of Pen and Sword from the Demeaning Accusation of Weakness and Inanition), best known in the media as "al-tabri'a" (The Vindication). In his book, al-Zawahiri focused on refuting the jurisprudential foundations of the revisions presented by al-Jihad Organization and outlined in Sayyed Imam's manifesto "tarshid al-'amal al-

jihadi fi misr wa al-'alam" (Rationalization of Jihad in Egypt and the World). He also attempted to invalidate the content of those revisions and rebut them. In addition, other al-Qaeda leaders issued numerous statements and audiotapes as they realized the hazards of such revisions for the future of the organization.

Al-Qaeda's response to these revisions and to Sayyed Imam al-Sharif's manifesto was significant for several reasons, the first of which being the status of Sayyed Imam himself within the violent jihadist Salafist movement. Sayyed Imam is a founder and former Amir of the Egyptian al-Jihad Organization that produced al-Zawahiri. Nonetheless, he resigned as leader of the organization in the early 1990s because of disagreements with al-Zawahiri regarding al-Jihad's practices at the time, particularly its operations in Egypt under the directives of al-Zawahiri. They included most importantly an attempt to assassinate the then interior minister, Hasan al-Alfi, and Prime Minister Atef Sedki. Sayyed Imam worked as a doctor at a hospital in Yemen until he was arrested in 2001, eventually being extradited to Egypt in 2004. Until this date, he had supported the overall jihadist Salafist argument in theory and practice as well as from the Shariah (Islamic law) perspective. He also supported the Sept. 11 attacks. However, he began opposing the expansion of jihad based on the rule of "fighting the far enemy." While in prison, he embarked on a jurisprudential revision of al-Jihad's overall jurisprudential arguments that he himself helped construct. In this sense, al-Qaeda's negative reactions to al-Jihad's revisions could be partially explained by the rivalry and personal sensitivities between Sayyed Imam and al-Zawahiri within the jihadist Salafist movement. Perhaps this explains why the reaction came from al-Zawahiri specifically rather than al-Qaeda's leader Osama bin Laden.

The second reason involves Sayyed Imam's scholarly status within the jihadist Salafist movement. His writings, especially his two major books: "al-'Umda fi 'Idad al-'Udda" (The Essentials for Making Ready [for Jihad]), and "al-Jami' fi Talab al-'Ilm al-Sharif" (The Compilation on Seeking Honorable Knowledge) are key sources of jurisprudence for the violent jihadist Salafist movement. According to many sources, the two books are among the primary sources being taught within the organization and even surpass al-Zawahiri's writings, which are limited in nature. Therefore, for Sayyed Imam to retract his principles and fatwas (religious decrees) outlined in these two books that provided the foundation for the activities of al-Jihad Organization would certainly create a state of confusion within the jihadist Salafist movement that rejects those revisions. His retraction of what he had previously stated in his books will undoubtedly weaken the argument that others should continue to depend on their content for the jurisprudential and Shariah-based justifications for practicing

that which was termed jihad.

The third reason is related to the considerable attention the “Rationalization of Jihad” document by Sayyed Imam received from scholars, media and the security apparatus. This amplified al-Qaeda’s fears of the long-term effects of this document and the other revisions on its future on both the ideological and organizational levels.

The impact of such revisions on al-Qaeda and the violent jihadist Salafist movement includes deconstruction of the theoretical and jurisprudential foundations of many concepts applied by the followers of this movement to practice violence, which they termed “jihad,” that claimed the lives of many civilians (Muslims and non-Muslims).

1 – The concept of “al-wala` wa al-bara`,” according to al-Qaeda and the violent jihadist Salafist movement, refers to the commitment of the Muslim to loyalty towards the believers and disavowal of the kuffar (disbelievers) and mushrikin (polytheists). Al-Qaeda and the violent jihadist Salafist movement also divide kuffar into occupiers (in cases of occupation perpetrated by actual kuffar, i.e. non-Muslim occupation of Muslim lands) and apostates, a term used to describe Muslim regimes that do not enforce the rule of God on earth. They believe that Muslims who ally with either of these two categories lose immunity against having their blood spilled and wealth confiscated. The immunity condition is met, from their point of view, if the Muslim person does not ally or aid the occupier or the regimes that do not enforce the divine law. This classification corresponds with their categorization of enemies who are either the near enemy represented by Arab and Islamic regimes that do not apply the rule of God, or the far enemy represented by the West in general and the United States and its allies in particular.

The concept of al-wala` wa al-bara` and the subsequent classification of kuffar have had a direct impact on the theoretical and practical approaches of contemporary jihadist Salafist movements. According to this concept of kufr, the world was divided into two parties: Dar al-Harb [home of war] and Dar al-Islam [home of Islam]. This division entailed several crucial statements: a fundamental rule was formulated by these groups, which stipulates that kufr per se is a sufficient reason to kill. Also, “the world, for committing kufr and apostasy, must be battled and eliminated” in order to establish a caliphate and impose divine governance by force. The third statement says that there is “no way to reclaim the caliphate system except through jihad and warfare.”

According to these rules, the world has become a stage for a multitude of combat operations that begin with direct engagement and end with suicide, or martyrdom, operations, depending on available capabilities and the ability to make change. In the same fashion that conventional warfare applies to armies and states, guerrilla warfare

applies to contemporary jihadist Salafist groups, particularly al-Qaeda.

Sayyed Imam's revisions retracted the legitimacy of kufr-based killings by setting several key constraints and conditions to determine the kufr of a Muslim. These made it difficult to label Muslims as kafirs, or unbelievers. The first constraint states that the perpetrator of the action in question must be a legally competent adult. The second condition involves examining the text upon which a Muslim is judged to be a kafir. In this regard, Sayyed Imam explains that Quranic texts mention two types of kufr: al-kufr al-Akbar (major kufr), which drives a Muslim out of Islam; and al-kufr al-Asghar (minor kufr), which does not render Muslims kuffar. The second type involves deadly sins called kufr for emphasis; therefore, the texts that describe certain actions as kufr do not necessarily indicate that their perpetrator is a kafir. Moreover, there are differences between the texts that mention kufr in the Quran and those in the Sunnah (the ways and the manners of the Prophet).

“Martyrdom operations” is a concept associated with al-tatarrus and is part of the jihadist combative doctrine and tools used by jihadist movements.

The third constraint is to investigate the state of the perpetrator of a kufr act, since it is possible that perpetrators commit kufr acts absent-mindedly, by force or out of ignorance. The fourth constraint involves calling on the perpetrator of kufr to repent after ensuring that all the above-mentioned exceptions are inapplicable and the conditions are duly met. The fifth constraint entails considering the capacity to punish the perpetrator of kufr. In this respect, Sayyed Imam distinguishes between takfir and punishing a kafir, in that the punishment cannot be executed unless there exists a capacity to do so. The sixth constraint involves contemplating the advantages and disadvantages of punishing the kafir after the capacity to do so is proven.¹

2 - The second concept that Sayyed Imam criticizes is al-tatarrus, an important concept in the context of the combative jihadist doctrine of al-Qaeda and the violent jihadist Salafist movement. Al-tatarrus refers to enemy soldiers' practice of using innocent Muslim civilians as shields directly or indirectly during confrontation, which entails, in cases of clashes with non-Muslim soldiers, killing the civilians. Historically, Muslims experienced al-tatarrus in many battles, and therefore scholars determined precise conditions for permitting the killing of shielded soldiers. They also obligated

1 See: Chapter 9 entitled “Takfir Controls,” “Rationalization of Jihad in Egypt and the World,” *al-Jarida* newspaper, Kuwait, November 27, 2007.

military leaders not to expand the application of this concept themselves, i.e. not to use non-Muslim civilians as shields for Muslim soldiers in order to preserve human life. Scholars classified al-tatarrus under the “necessities” that can only be resorted to in cases of absolute need. However, al-tatarrus has been greatly abused by contemporary jihadist groups who ignored most of the constraints and conditions that scholars agreed upon unanimously. Killings started to target innocent civilians without observing those restrictions and conditions or considering the preventions that guard against the spilling of “protected” blood based on insubstantial excuses and arguments. Perhaps all post Sept. 11 bombings involved lack of commitment on behalf of these groups to the concept of al-tatarrus and its constraints.

3 – “Martyrdom operations” is a concept associated with al-tatarrus and is part of the jihadist combative doctrine and tools used by jihadist movements. After a long-standing debate with their various religious authorities, armed Islamist groups have arrived at the conclusion that such operations are permissible, especially considering the imbalance of power between warring parties. The permissibility of suicide – martyrdom – operations witnessed heated extensive debates among scholars and thinkers from jihadist movements in the Islamic world. Jihadist Salafist groups carried out suicide operations systematically and frequently before 1998, with the exception of individual cases such as the al-Khobar and al-Riaydh bombings in 1994 and 1996. In addition, the arenas of jihad, particularly Afghanistan, Kashmir, the Philippines and Chechnya had not witnessed martyrdom operations on a large scale because of their disputed legitimacy. Most theorists of those groups viewed such operations as haram (forbidden in Islam) and bid’ah (innovated matter in the religion).

The first to use martyrdom operations in the Arab world were nationalist movements like Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Subsequently, Islamist nationalist movements, such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine, adopted this practice after 1987 and issued several books demonstrating its permissibility. In light of the Zionist occupation, many contemporary scholars, notably Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, upheld the permissibility of these operations. In contrast, several other scholars, especially Sheikh Ibn Baz, strongly opposed them.

Before 1998, jihadist Salafist movements had not viewed such operations as permissible and used the word suicidal to describe them. Among those theorists were Sheikh Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi, Abu Qatada al-Falastini, Ayman al-Zawahiri, ‘Abd al-Qadir bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and others. However, this attitude on the part of the jihadist Salafist movements started to change in the mid-1990s as they zealously began to explore the permissibility of such operations. This led to a radical change, permit-

ting those operations that later became a duty and a desirable act to seek proximity to God. The imbalance of power probably forced these movements to permit martyrdom operations. Consequently, these operations have become the most widely used combat technique because of their low cost and great effectiveness in causing extensive losses to the enemy (not to mention the ease of execution), the inability of enemies to detect or repel them, and the ability to attract media attention given their dramatic display.

Sayyed Imam rejected the aforementioned theoretical and jurisprudential grounds to expand the circle of violence and killings whether targeting non-Muslims in their countries or in Muslim countries, and whether in accordance with the al-tatarrus concept or judgments of kufr. He reiterated

that “it is not permissible to kill Muslims mixed with kuffar on grounds of al-tatarrus because the killing of Muslim shields is not permitted by a text but rather by ijihad (independent reasoning in Islamic jurisprudence)... Combat operations in the lands of kuffar are not a necessity because they fall under offensive operations (jihad al-talab, or offensive jihad) which do not harm Muslims if abandoned or deferred... Scholars who permit killing Muslim shields only do so in case of jihad al-daf’ (defensive jihad) when necessary.” Sayyed Imam refused to draw an analogy between the operations taking place today and the situation for which scholars permitted the killing of Muslim shields (the situation involves the image of the kuffar army using Muslim captives as a front shield to compel the Muslim army to shy away from killing them and thus be protected by human shields. However, Muslims today are mixed with the kuffar in their countries and are not their captives, but rather their fellow citizens or residents among them. In this situation, the Muslims are not with an army in a battlefield so they may shelter themselves by escaping the battleground; they are rather suddenly killed without prior warning from the attackers.²

Sayyed Imam not only rejected fighting kuffar in their own countries but also rejected betraying them. He says “whoever enters the countries of kuffar after being granted security has no right to betray them in any respect. Today, the visa is an entry permit and definitely constitutes a covenant of security that these countries give to

Sayyed Imam rejected the aforementioned theoretical and jurisprudential grounds to expand the circle of violence and killings whether targeting non-Muslims in their countries or in Muslim countries.

2 See: Chapter 7 entitled “Betraying Foreigners in their Countries,” “Rationalization of Jihad in Egypt and the World,” *al-Jarida* newspaper, Kuwait, November 25, 2007.

those admitted to work, trade, study, tour and travel, and the like. The covenant of security is basically a guarantee of immunity against appropriation of life and wealth.”

Furthermore, Sayyed Imam rejected the killing of noncombatant civilian kuffar in the countries of kuffar that some deemed permissible on the grounds that killing “kafir shields” (human shields) is permissible if the need arises. He says “this understanding is erroneous because whoever enters their (the kuffar’s) countries after being granted their security may not betray them and may not kill their military or civilian populations, even supposing that the Muslim in question is not bound by a covenant of security with kuffar and is absolutely certain of the civilians’ kufr. Killing those civilians on commercial airplanes and trains, as well as in buildings and hotels is not the permissible form of killing kafir shields because such facilities are not military installations; they are rather civilian installations the bombing of which implies killing civilians directly and deliberately, and therefore does not fall under al-tatarrus in any way and is not permissible. This applies to both times of war and peace.” Accordingly, Sayyed Imam rejects the killing of tourists. He concludes that targeting foreigners and tourists in Muslim countries, conducting combat operations in dar al-harb (foreign countries), and killing civilians in the fashion prevalent in recent years are all “forbidden sins that involved unlawful bloodshed and destruction of wealth, as well as treachery and aggression, all of which are major sins that Muslims may not celebrate or take pride in.”³

There is no doubt that these groups’ expansion of the concept of al-wala’ wa al-bara’, the permissibility of kufr-based killings, al-tatarrus and martyrdom operations has led to grave errors, forcing the jihadist Salafist movement to admit for the first time in its history to the mistakes committed by followers and branches especially in Iraq. In his letter “To Our People in Iraq,” (dated Oct. 22, 2007) al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden mentioned those errors and urged the mujahideen to avoid mistakes and deviation and correct their course because of the declining power of the jihadist Salafist movement in various regions of Iraq.⁴ This compelled Sheikh Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, amir of the so-called “Islamic State of Iraq,” to outline the mistakes of his state, and strongly defend his ideology and practices that primarily target the occupier and secondly its allies who are involved in the political process. Despite their attempt to regulate jihad activities within al-Qaeda and among its followers in the jihadist Salafist movement, these calls fall short of being jurisprudential revisions of the foundations of “jihadist” activities, such as those conducted by the Egyptian al-Gama’a

3 See: Chapter 8 entitled “Ruling on the Killing of Civilians,” “Rationalization of Jihad in Egypt and the World”, *al-Jarida* newspaper, Kuwait, November 26, 2007.

4 See letter content on Aljazeera.net, <http://www.aljazeera.net/News/archive/archive?ArchiveId=1072551>.

al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad Organization. In the final analysis, however, they do reflect the impact of these revisions on the “jihadist” attitude of al-Qaeda and the jihadist Salafist movement.

The impact of the revisions on the popularity of al-Qaeda and the global jihadist Salafist movement

In addition to creating disorder and imbalance within al-Qaeda and the violent jihadist Salafist movement on the levels of ideology, intellectual construction, and jurisprudential and conceptual structure, the revisions are expected to play a vital role in curbing the movement’s ability to recruit new members because they stripped many of the movement’s ijtehad of their legitimacy on the jurisprudential and practical levels. This stands in contrast to the military and security approach, which, although it has achieved short-term concrete results, played a conflicting role in the long and medium terms. The experience of the past decades teaches that a large part of the recruitment process into the violent jihadist Salafist movement took place in prisons because of the arrest campaigns that targeted affiliates with this movement, as jails provided a suitable environment to raise new generations. The recruitment process also depended on the enmities created by security persecution against the state and in favor of the violent jihadist Salafist movement and its jurisprudential position.

The wrongful practices of these movements and their expansion of jihad and warfare by resorting to suicide bombings and killing people in the name of al-tatarrus have incited strong popular anger against them and made them lose credibility in various places including Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Algeria and Egypt. In Egypt, for example, where jihadist movements, notably al-Jihad and al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya, emerged in the 1970s and included among their ranks senior first generation theorists and scholars, random and undisciplined combat operations provided a broad framework for revision and rationalization. Following the Luxor massacre in 1997, al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya embarked on revising its intellectual foundation, leading to a unilateral cessation of all combat operations against the Egyptian regime. This effort culminated in the issuance of more than 20 books pointing out the errors inherent in expanding the concept of kufr, killing, suicide operations and al-tatarrus. Following the bombings that took place after the events of Sept. 11 in various parts of the Arab and Islamic world, al-Jihad Organization embarked on its revisions that culminated

Sayyed Imam criticizes al-tatarrus, an important concept in the context of the combative jihadist doctrine of al-Qaeda and the violent jihadist Salafist movement.

in the “Rationalization of Jihad in Egypt and the World” document. Such revisions continue to be pursued by followers of these movements as a natural response to developments and the grave mistakes that Salafist movements made in the world. These revisions are expected to have a significant impact on third generation jihadist Salafists within al-Qaeda and its adherents from the jihadist Salafist movement.

However, it should be noted that the manifestations mentioned above do not necessarily indicate inevitable influence. The magnitude and course of this impact remain very controversial and disputed among those influenced by the revisions. There are many, particularly activists in the global jihadist Salafist movement, who argue that the revisions’ impact on al-Qaeda and the movement is limited and that probably the revisions are insignificant in themselves for several reasons. They argue that the revisions surfaced under supervision from the security apparatus and the severe pressures of imprisonment and detention, in addition to the fact that they do not provide explicit answers to an array of precise questions on governance, political construction, and the obligation of jihad. Al-Zawahiri’s book “al-tabri`a” expresses this trend outright.

Advocates of this trend believe that the revisions will lose their importance among the supporters of global jihad, and among Arabs and Muslims, in view of the thematic conditions that produced this phenomenon. Most notable is the international arena under United States dominance, the continued occupation of Muslim countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq and bias towards Israel. Another condition is the lack of fundamental reforms of political regimes in the Arab and Islamic world that enhance democracy, pluralism and political participation, as well as the inability of such regimes to meet citizens’ basic needs. The advocates also cite other reasons that incite large segments of angry youth to join the ranks of the jihadist Salafist movement and resistance movements. Therefore, the desired effect of these revisions will not materialize without real political and economic reforms on the ground.

Perhaps the points raised by al-Zawahiri in “al-tabri`a” in response to the “Rationalization of Jihad in Egypt and the World” document pushed Sayyed Imam into a corner whereupon he issued yet another document entitled “al-ta`ria li-tabri`a” (Deconstructing the Vindication). However, he transcended the scholarly dispute by turning to personal ethical matters related to al-Zawahiri and bin Laden, which weakened his document and diminished its influence in contrast to his “Rationalization of Jihad in Egypt and the World” document. ■