

War Studies Advanced Program, Winter 2017
THE IDEOLOGY AND STRATEGY OF AL QAEDA AND ISIS
Instructors: Fred Kagan, Kim Kagan, Gen. John Allen (Ret.), LTG. Jim Dubik
(Ret.)
Washington, D.C.

This is a lesson by lesson list for the Hertog War Studies Program Advanced Course on Salafi- Jihadi ideology and strategy. The course will introduce students to some major intellectual discussions underpinning the Salafi-jihadist ideology of al Qaeda and ISIS, while exploring the differences between the two groups as of December 2016. The faculty will divide the students into sections (circulated on Monday morning at the all-hands introductory lecture) in order to ensure that students can participate actively in guided, seminar style discussions. Each group will be responsible for writing a series of position papers and briefing them on Friday, January 6. The faculty will give paper assignments at intervals through the course. Each group MUST use its time out of the seminar to discuss and prepare the position papers.

Questions for consideration throughout the course:

- What constitutes the Muslim community?
- What constitutes apostasy?
- Who decides who is a believer?
- How can a human know if someone is really a believer or is a hypocrite or apostate?
- What kind of government is legitimate, and why?
- What kind of government is illegitimate, and why?
- What actions are permitted to Muslims living under illegitimate governments?
- Is worldly success a sign of divine approval?
- When is it right for humans to punish sins against Allah, and when should the punishment be left for Allah?

Some Specialized Vocabulary used throughout the Course

- *Allah*—we will refer to the God presented in the Qu’ran, hadith, and all discussions of Islam as Allah, recognizing that by those writings He is the same as the God of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament.
- *Hadith*—the sayings and deeds of the Prophet that serve as guides for right behavior for Muslims
- *Qu’ran*—literally “recitation,” the word of Allah revealed to Muhammad orally and presented orally by Muhammad to his community. It was not written down completely for many years after Muhammad’s death. In its current form, it is arranged in chapters (suras) by length from longest to shortest, except for the first sura, which is the statement of the creed of Islam
- *Islam*—submission (to Allah)
- *Muslim*—one who submits (to Allah)
- *Umma*—the Muslim community, those who believe in Allah
- *Ulema*—religious scholars (singular: ‘Alim)
- *Jahiliya*—the period of ignorance of Allah’s word before Allah revealed it to Muhammad (Qutb will modify this meaning somewhat)

- *Tawhid*—the unity of Allah (it means “unity”, but in the religious context it usually means monotheism or the worshipping of Allah alone without any divine partners)
- *Shirk*—apostasy, turning away from Allah
- *Ikhwan*—the Brotherhood, short for Muslim Brotherhood
- *Takfir*—the act of declaring another Muslim an unbeliever (kufr); it is an accusation of apostasy
- *Fitna*—conflict within the Umma
- *Ansar*—those who accompanied and supported Muhammad
- *Sunna*—the way of the Prophet (orthodoxy—those who are orthodox are, thus, Sunni)
- *Shi’a*—short for “shi’at ‘Ali,” or the party of ‘Ali; supporters of the claims of the descendants of the fourth Caliph, ‘Ali, to the Caliphate as opposed to the Sunni Caliphs.
- *La ilaha illa Allah*—the central statement of the Muslim creed, meaning “there is no deity but Allah”

Monday, January 2, 2017, 9:00 am to 6:00 PM

Background Reading

- Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume I*
Offers a good, if detailed, overview of the origins and development of Islam, Mohammad’s role, and the evolution of the Muslim polity after Mohammad’s death. It includes a lengthy and interesting section on Arabia before Mohammad, which you can skip for purposes of this course. If you are totally unfamiliar with Islam, its history, and its traditions, or with the historical figure of Mohammad and the history of the early Muslim polity, it’s worth reading Chapters 2 and 3, especially starting with the section entitled “The Meccan System.”
- G. R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*, Chapter 2: “Rise of the Umayyads and the Kharijites”
The history of the first four Caliphs (Abu Bakr, Omar, Uthman, and Ali) is vitally important to Islam. Known as the rashidan, or the period of the Rightly- Guided Caliphs, this era is significant because it is the only period in Islam when there was a unified Muslim community (Ummah), not riven by any sort of sectarianism. When people say that the Salafi-jihadis want to return the world to the 7th Century (which is largely untrue), this is what they actually mean. For our purposes, the history of the Kharijites is particularly important. The Kharijites are almost universally regarded as heretics within Islam, and Salafi- jihadis take it very hard when they are compared with Kharijites. We will nevertheless consider the degree to which current Salafi-jihadi ideology is or is not an intellectual descendent of Kharajitism. For those of you wondering about it, this chapter will also explain the crux of the schism between Shi’ism and Sunnism.
- *Qu’ran*, suras (chapters) 1 (introduction), 2 (the cow), 4 (women), and 7 (the heights)
Islam is governed by a number of texts and practices. The Qu’ran is, of course, the most important. Muslims believe that it is the literal word of God narrated to Mohammad, his Prophet. We read sections of the Qu’ran in Lesson One, but it is, for the most part, relatively less important for our study than the hadith that we will read in Lesson 2.

- Genesis 11:27- 25:11, (Abraham), from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha, Revised Edition*. (Scholarly edition.)

Orthodox Theology Relating to What Is Required of a Good Muslim

- Abdullah Saeed, "The official ulema and religious legitimacy of the modern nation state" in Shahram Akbarzadeh and Abdullah Saeed, *Islam and Political Legitimacy*, Chapter 2.
- Sahih Bukhari, *Hadith*, Books 2, 84, and 89. "Belief."
The hadith are the sayings and actions of Mohammad, whose speech and behavior were (and are) regarded as divinely-guided and therefore suitable for emulation by the faithful. Muslims from earliest times recognized both the importance and the difficulty of ensuring that hadith are reported accurately, and so an extensive and intricate system was developed to authenticate them. That is why each one begins with a description of who heard or witnessed it (reproduced in this translation), and also the precise chain of transmission from that witness to the compiler. There are many apocryphal hadith, and Salafi-jihadis often rely on them for some of the more extreme rulings. Note that Shi'a have their own hadith derived from the sayings and actions of Ali bin abi Talib, the fourth Caliph and the first Shi'a Imam. Bukhari is one of the most important and respected compilers of hadith. It is worth reading the examples he brings to bear of the definition of faith and belief in order to compare this orthodox and widely-held view with the much more esoteric notions held by Salafi-jihadis. It is also a good idea to familiarize yourself with the manner in which hadith are narrated in order to understand the mannerisms that suffuse Salafi-jihadi writings and the feasibility of inserting apocryphal hadith among populations lacking highly-educated theologians.

Tuesday, January 3, 2017, 9:00 am to 6:00 PM

Medieval and Early Modern Salafi Theology

- Ibn Taymiyyah, *Enjoining Right and Forbidding Wrong*.
Try to read or at least skim the whole thing. Focus on both the imperatives and on the modifications and qualifiers to the imperatives—should the righteous Muslim always forbid wrong and enjoin right? Are there restrictions to the methods, means, or times for doing so? Salafi-jihadis rely heavily on ibn Taymiyyah for a variety of rulings. But they read him very selectively.
- Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahhab, *Kitab at-Tauhid*, Chapters 1-6.
The originator of Wahhabism, Wahhab engages in an interesting effort to interpret right behavior by engaging heavily with hadith. The principle that interpreting the Qu'ran is impermissible was well-established by Wahhab's time, but hadith is fair game for interpretation, and that is his focus. Note especially what he says about the significance of the creed—la ilaha illa Allah— for recognizing a righteous Muslim, as well as his manner of argumentation and interpretation.

Wednesday, January 4, 2017, 9:00 am to 6:00 PM

Sayyed Qutb

- Sayyed Qutb, *Milestones*.
One of the most important seminal works of contemporary Salafi- jihadi theory. It is an action-oriented distillation of a massive work of theology by an Egyptian Salafi jailed and ultimately killed by Nasser. We will discuss it in detail.
- Shahram Akbarzadeh and Abdullah, "Islam and Politics" in Shahram Akbarzadeh and Abdullah Saeed, *Islam and Political Legitimacy*, Chapter 1.
This is critical background reading to contextualize Qutb, but, more importantly, how his ideas and writings were received by elements of the Muslim community.

al Qaeda

- Giles Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*:
 - Osama bin Laden: "Declaration of Jihad against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Sanctuaries," Interview with Al Jazeera
 - Abdullah Azzam: Introduction by Thomas Hegghammer, especially the section "Legacy and Influence" starting on p. 97; Azzam himself: "The Defense of Muslim Territories Constitutes the First Individual Duty"
 - Ayman al Zawahiri, "Knights under the Prophet's Banner" and "Loyalty and Separation: Changing an Article of Faith and Losing Sight of Reality"
- Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery* (trans. William McCants)
- Yassin Musharbash, *What al-Qaida Really Wants*

Thursday, January 5, 2017, 9:00 am to 6:00 PM

ISIS and Jabhat al Nusra

Background:

- Zarqawi letter to bin Laden: <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/letter-abu-musab-al-zarqawi-osama-bin-laden/p9863>
- Zawahiri letter to Zarqawi, available at: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-english-translation-2>
- Aaron Reese, *Sectarian Conflict and Regional War in the Middle East*, only executive summary required, www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/SectarianandRegionalConflictintheMiddleEast_3_JUL.pdf

ISIS:

- ISIS's official magazine: Dabiq, issues 1 (complete) and 10 (excerpt)
- ISIS Leader Omar al-Baghdadi, sermon declaring the Caliphate, 7/5/2014
- ISIS Spokesman and External Networks Leader (until death in 2016) Adnani, speech 9/21/2014

Jabhat al Nusra:

- Announcement of the creation of Jabhat al Nusra, January 2012
Abu Mohammad al Joulani announced the creation of a new Syrian rebel group in an audio statement in January 2012 after months of recruiting in the Syrian countryside. He does not declare outright affiliation to al Qaeda, but offers an overview of the status of the Umma and announces the formation of the Al Nusra Front to Protect the Levant (AKA Jabhat al Nusra or JN or JAN) “in order to return Allah’s authority to the earth”. He states that the only salvation in Syria is to “go back to the heritage of Islam”
- Abdullah bin Mohammed (alias, real name unknown), *Regional War Strategy in the Land of al Sham* (استراتيجية الحرب الإقليمية على أرض الشام), Al Monitor translation of al Hayat summary: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ru/contents/articles/security/2013/01/jabhat-al-nusras-goals-extend-beyond-syria.html>
This document circulated among Jabhat al Nusra’s ranks early in the war and is believed to have been written by Jabhat al Nusra’s emir or one of its senior Shura council members. It outlines a strategy for war in Syria, with which Jabhat al Nusra’s behavior to date closely aligns. It is not available in English, but a translated summary of the document is available.
- Interview with Jabhat al Nusra Shari’a Committee member, Abu Sulayman al Muhajir, April 2014
Abu Sulayman al Muhajir discusses the fitna between al Qaeda and ISIS in Syria, expanding on al Qaeda’s methodology which distinguishes the group from ISIS.
- Abu Mohammad al Joulani interview, Al Jazeera, December 2013
In Joulani’s first international media interview, he gives an overview of the status of the Syrian war and al Qaeda’s strategy in Syria.
- Al Risalah Magazine, July 2015, “Heirs of Glory”, White Minaret Foundation for Media Production.
Jabhat al Nusra released a 2-part documentary of the “history of Jihad” from the time of Mohammad to Jabhat al Nusra’s activity up through early 2016. The documentary illustrates how Jabhat al Nusra & al Qaeda view their position and role within the history of Islam.

Safe viewing links:

- PART 1, June 2015: <http://jihadology.net/2015/06/26/al-manarah-al-bay%E1%B8%8Da-foundation-for-media-production-presents-a-new-video-message-from-jabhat-al-nu%E1%B9%A3rah-heirs-of-glory/>
- PART 2, March 2016: <http://jihadology.net/2016/03/18/new-video-message-from-jabhat-al-nu%E1%B9%A3rah-heirs-of-glory-2/>