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Sectarianism in the service of Salafism: Shiites as a political tool for Jordanian Salafis

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ABSTRACT

Jordanian Salafis are often anti-Shiite and employ the religious and conspiratorial arguments against Shiism found among Salafis elsewhere. Yet the specific arguments they use show that they are not merely the Jordanian exponents of a global anti-Shiite Salafi trend, but also have reasons of their own to exploit sectarianism. These reasons have to do with the near absence of Shiite communities in Jordan (meaning that anti-Shiite sentiments will not lead to civil strife in Jordanian society itself), the regime's ecumenical attitude towards Twelver and Fiver Shiites and its highly critical views of 'political Shiism' and 'Shiitizers'. At the same time, the position of Salafis in Jordan, whose beliefs are viewed with scepticism by a regime that supports 'moderate' Islam, also plays a role. Quietist Salafis, who shun political activism, are keen to show the regime their non-violent, obedient and loyalist credentials as allies in the fight against radical Islamism. Political Salafis, who do engage in political activism, also want to show that there is nothing to fear from them and that they can be trusted. Both groups have used Shiism to make these points, showing that Salafi anti-Shiism is not just a global phenomenon, but is also locally shaped.

Introduction

Salafis, defined as the adherents to Sunni Islam who claim to emulate 'the pious predecessors' (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*)—usually equated with the first three generations of Muslims—as closely and in as many spheres of life as possible, are known to have critical views towards Shiites. These views are not always limited to Salafis and can also be found among other Sunni Muslims,¹ but—as Haykel points out—'this animus toward the Shi'a is a marker of identity for the Salafis, which is not the case for other Sunnis'.² The anti-Shiite views espoused by Salafis can be divided into two different categories: religious and

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¹Geneive Abdo, *The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide*, Analysis Paper no. 29 (Washington, D.C.: The Saban Centre for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, 2013); Fanar Haddad, 'Anti-Sunnism and Anti-Shiism: Minorities, Majorities and the Question of Equivalence', *Mediterranean Politics* (forthcoming); Sabrina Mervin, 'On Sunnite-Shiite Doctrinal and Contemporary Geopolitical Tensions', in *The Dynamics of Sunni-Shia Relationships: Doctrine, Transnationalism, Intellectuals and the Media*, ed. Brigitte Maréchal and Sami Zemni (London: Hurst & Co., 2013), 16–18.

²Bernard Haykel, 'Jihadis and the Shi'a', in *Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions within al-Qa'ida and its Periphery*, ed. Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Centre, 2010), 209, note 663.

conspiratorial. In the discourse employed by Salafis, these are often mixed and used to support each other, particularly when linked to modern politics.

The religious objections to Shiism that Salafis use are probably the oldest of the two types of criticism and go back to how one views early Islam. Sunnis believe that the Prophet Muhammad was legitimately succeeded as a political leader after his death in 632 by Abu Bakr (r. 632–634), ‘Umar b. al-Khattab (r. 634–644), ‘Uthman b. ‘Affan (r. 644–656) and ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (656–661) and that this period of the four ‘rightly guided caliphs’ actually constitutes the golden age of Islam. As a result, Sunnis see this period as a source of inspiration and, in the case of Salafis, even as a source of emulation. Sunni scholars have therefore long attached great value to traditions (hadiths) of the Prophet Muhammad and these first generations of Muslims as containing important guidelines and rules of what (not) to do, say or believe in their lives today.

Shiites, by contrast, view the first three caliphs as interlopers who kept ‘Ali from obtaining the caliphate. As a result, their view of early Islam is entirely different from the Sunni one and especially the Salafī one. It is therefore not surprising that major Hadith-scholars like Ahmad b. Hanbal (780–855), the eponymous ‘founder’ of the Hanbalī school of Islamic law (*madhhab*) whose work is very influential among Salafis, were highly critical of Shiites. Such views were adopted by other Hanbalī scholars like Ahmad b. Taymiyya (1263–1328), whose work has also had a huge impact on Salafis, and later by Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), whose ideas laid the ideological foundation for Saudi Arabia. These scholars and their followers, as well as nineteenth- and twentieth-century reformers from Iraq and Syria, such as Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi (1857–1924) and Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib (1886–1969), have all had a major impact on Salafis’ anti-Shiite views.³

The actual religious reasons Salafis have to criticize Shiites are the latter’s rejection of the first three caliphs—hence the pejorative title of ‘Rāfiḍa’ or ‘Rawāfiḍ’ (rejectors) Salafis use for Shiites—and their supposed cursing of the Prophet’s companions, but also include other aspects that are related to Shiism as it developed later. Salafis attach great value to the unity of God (*tawḥīd*) and, as such, condemn Shiites as deviants (*munḥarifūn*) or even as unbelievers (*kuffār*) for their veneration of the Shiite imams, the family of the Prophet and the tombs in which these people are buried.⁴ Other, more specific points of criticism include the accusation that Shiites introduced anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) into Islam, ascribe sinlessness (*‘isma*) to their imams, practise dissimulation of their true beliefs (*taqiyya*), engage in temporary marriages (*mut‘a*) and use self-flagellation during their commemoration of the martyrdom of Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad.⁵

The conspiratorial reasons for Salafī anti-Shiite discourse lie in the alleged secret Shiite plots Salafis discern at key points in Islamic history. These include the idea that Shiism was actually founded by a Jew named ‘Abdallah b. Saba’⁶ and that a Shiite named Ibn al-‘Alqami assisted the then non-Muslim Mongols in conquering Baghdad from the Islamic Abbasid Empire.⁷ It is easy to see how conspiracy theories such as these can be combined

³Guido Steinberg, ‘Jihadi-Salafism and the Shiites: Remarks about the Intellectual Roots of Anti-Shiism’, in *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (London: Hurst & Co., 2009), 112–18.

⁴Haykel, ‘Jihadis and the Shiites’, 203.

⁵Ibid., 209.

⁶Ibid. Ibn Saba has, in fact, played an important role in the construction of Sunni identity for some Sunni Muslims. See Abbas Barzegar, ‘The Persistency of Heresy: Paul of Tarsus, Ibn Saba, and Historical Narrative in Sunni Identity Formation’, *Numen* 58 (2011): 207–31, especially 212–16, 219–27.

with aspects of religious criticism of Shiism, especially *taqiyya*, to present Shiites in general as a dark, dangerous and deviant presence acting to bring down Islam from within. Simultaneously, they can also be coupled with political reasons against Shiism, with grievances supposedly caused by Shiite 'enemies' such as Iran and organizations in Iraq and Lebanon (particularly Hizbullah) acting as modern-day exponents of an age-old problem.⁸

This combination of religious and conspiratorial arguments against Shiites has found its way to various types of Salafi actors in the Middle East who have conflictual relations with Shiites and who often present their rejection of the latter as a mixture of these different accusations. These actors include Saudi Arabia, which has a Shiite minority in its Eastern Province that is often discriminated against by the regime in Riyadh and the Salafi scholars who underpin its rule,⁹ but also Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi (1966–2006), the late leader of Al-Qa'ida in Mesopotamia, whose organization committed terrorist attacks against Iraqi Shiites.¹⁰ The successor to al-Zarqawi's organization, the Islamic State (IS), has similarly engaged in sectarian violence against Shiites in Iraq and Syria¹¹ and the past few years—partly spurred by the 'Arab Spring'¹²—have also witnessed a growing Salafi anti-Shiite presence on social media such as Twitter.¹³

Of course, all the examples mentioned above applied a Salafi anti-Shiite discourse, but this was adapted to local circumstances. In fact, one could argue that al-Zarqawi, for example, would not have emphasized anti-Shiism so much if there had not been a relative Shiite majority in Iraq in the first place. Continuing this line of thought, one would expect Jordanian Salafis, who live in a country that is overwhelmingly Sunni (with a small minority of Christians),¹⁴ not to engage in talk of sectarianism in general or Shiism in particular. Yet despite having no sizable Shiite community itself, some Jordanian Salafis—like Salafis in Egypt, who are in a similar situation¹⁵—are quite involved in waging sectarian battles through their publications and, interestingly, do so in a way that is specific to their own situation in the Jordanian context.¹⁶

Salafism in Jordan, as elsewhere, is roughly divided into three different groups: quietists, who focus on preaching (*da'wa*) or cleansing Islamic tradition from human

⁷Steinberg, 'Jihadi-Salafism and the Shi'is', 111.

⁸For an analysis of tensions between Salafis and Hizbullah, see Joseph Alagha, 'Ideological Tensions Between Hizbullah and Jihadi Salafism: Mutual Perceptions and Mutual Fears', in *The Dynamics of Sunni-Shia Relationships: Doctrine, Transnationalism, Intellectuals and the Media*, ed. Brigitte Maréchal and Sami Zemni (London: Hurst & Co., 2013), 61–82, 268–277.

⁹See Fouad Ibrahim, *The Shi'is of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 2006); Roel Meijer and Joas Wagemakers, 'The Struggle for Citizenship of the Shiites of Saudi Arabia', in *The Dynamics of Sunni-Shia Relationships: Doctrine, Transnationalism, Intellectuals and the Media*, ed. Brigitte Maréchal and Sami Zemni (London: Hurst & Co., 2013), 117–38.

¹⁰Nibras Kazimi, 'Zarqawi's Anti-Shia Legacy: Original or Borrowed?', in *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. IV, ed. Hillel Fradkin, Husain Haqqani and Eric Brown (Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute, 2006), 53–72.

¹¹Hassan Hassan, *The Sectarianism of the Islamic State: Ideological Roots and Political Context* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016).

¹²Abdo, *New Sectarianism*, 41–50.

¹³*Id.*, *Salafists and Sectarianism: Twitter and Communal Conflict in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: The Centre for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, 2015).

¹⁴See the CIA World Factbook on Jordan: www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html (accessed 16 February 2018).

¹⁵Adam Saleh and Hendrick Kraetzschmar, 'Politicized Identities, Securitized Politics: Sunni-Shi'a Politics in Egypt', *Middle East Journal* 69, no. 4 (2015): 545–55.

¹⁶In fact, sectarian discussions even take place in non-Muslim contexts, where both Sunni and Shiite Muslims are a minority. See, for example, Susanne Olsson, 'Shia as Internal Others: A Salafi Rejection of the "Rejecters"', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 28, 4 (2017): 416–24.

religious innovations (*bidaʿ*, sing. *bidʿa*) and teaching the ‘purified’ result (*al-taṣfiya wa-l-tarbiya*) while staying away from political activism; politicians, who do engage in political action of various sorts and, depending on the circumstances, try to express their contention in demonstrations, petitions, politically committed discourse or electoral participation; and jihadis, who believe the Muslim world is ruled by apostates (*murtaddūn*), who are labelled as such through excommunication because of their alleged failure to apply Islamic law (Sharia) in full and who therefore deserve to be overthrown through jihad.¹⁷ Because Jihadi-Salafis in Jordan have produced relatively little anti-Shiite discourse and because quite some attention has already been paid to the Jordanian al-Zarqawi—whose anti-Shiite views were applied in Iraq, not Jordan—only quietists and politicians will be dealt with in this article.

The research for this article is mostly based on Jordanian Salafi primary sources that I obtained in Jordan during visits there from 2012–2014 as well as fieldwork conducted among Jordanian Salafis during that period or on sources that I collected later. Most of the primary sources cited have not been presented in academic research before and, as such, throw a new light on Jordanian Salafi anti-Shiism. This article shows that some leading Jordanian Salafis, despite not encountering Shiites in the Hashemite Kingdom itself, nevertheless have a strongly anti-Shiite discourse of their own. It first deals with the Jordanian context, including the regime’s stance on Shiism and the position of Salafis in the kingdom. It then moves on to analyse what some prominent Jordanian Salafi authors write about Shiism and why they do so.

I argue that both quietist and political Salafis in Jordan try to integrate their own discourse on Shiites into that of the regime, use their anti-Shiism to portray themselves as trustworthy partners of the state, employ this topic to vilify their supposedly pro-Shiite local opponents and present themselves as preferable alternatives. This shows that Jordanian Salafi anti-Shiite discourse, while part of and building on the global religious and conspiratorial narratives we saw above, is also uniquely Jordanian in the sense that it clearly squares with the regime’s stance on Shiism and incorporates the specific issues that Jordanian Salafis have to deal with, thereby in effect using sectarianism for their own interests. As such, this article seeks to contribute not only to our knowledge of sectarianism in the Middle East in general, but also to how this is appropriated and adapted to suit specific local circumstances.

The Jordanian context

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has long had a strong yet complicated relationship with Islam. The country’s founder, King ʿAbdallah I (1882–1951), was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, which gave him some religious legitimacy, and he also started a process of setting up religious institutes in the country that continued in the decades after his death.¹⁸ The Islamic credentials of the regime were further abetted by King

¹⁷For more on the different categories of Salafis, see *id.*, ‘Revisiting Wiktorowicz: Categorising and Defining the Branches of Salafism’, in *Salafism After the Arab Awakening: Contending with People’s Power*, ed. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 7–24, 241–8.

¹⁸Muhammad Abū Rummān and Ḥasan Abū Haniyya, *Al-Ḥall al-Islāmī: Al-Islāmiyyūn wa-l-Dawla wa-Rihānāt al-Dimuqrāṭiyya wa-l-Amn* (Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung/Centre for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, 2012), 38–53.

‘Abdallah I’s decision to officially allow the Muslim Brotherhood to be active in the kingdom in 1946.¹⁹ Yet Jordan has never been an Islamic state and has, in fact, always been somewhat sceptical towards Islamic groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which was partly accepted by the regime as a counterweight to leftist opponents of the Jordanian state.²⁰ The relationship with the Brotherhood, which has deteriorated in the past two decades and particularly in the last few years,²¹ partly because of the organization’s critical calls for the regime’s reform, exemplifies the fact that the Jordanian state is not anti-religious, but does not want Islam to be used as a source of opposition either.

The Jordanian regime’s view of Shiites

Shiism had apparently not caught the attention of the Jordanian regime before 1979, when the Islamic Revolution in Iran occurred. In fact, the Jordanian King Husayn (r. 1953–1999) is said to have believed that Shiites had a positive attitude towards his rule because of the great value they attach to the family of the Prophet Muhammad, of which he—as a member of the Hashemite family—claimed to be a direct descendant.²² Confronted with the revolutionary Shiite rhetoric from Tehran after 1979 and taking a highly critical view towards it, the king is said to have noticed the clearly anti-Shiite preaching of Muhammad Ibrahim Shaqra (1933–2017), one of the founders of the modern-day Salafi trend in Jordan, and invited him to talk about this subject. Shaqra, in turn, informed the king of the supposed dangers of Shiism and stated that Salafi scholars could help the regime make a stronger case against Iran because of their antipathy towards Shiism. The king was apparently so impressed with Shaqra’s words that he granted him the request of allowing Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani (1914–1999), a major Salafi scholar of Albanian-Syrian origins who had briefly lived in Jordan but had later been exiled, back into the country.²³

King Husayn’s negative view of the Islamic Revolution in Iran seems to have been motivated more by his opposition to the new Iranian regime than by anti-Shiism. As a supporter of revolutionary forces wanting to overthrow conservative, pro-Western monarchies, post-1979 Iran was seen as a direct threat to the kingdoms in the Gulf that financially supported Jordan and thus an indirect threat to Jordan itself.²⁴ Another reason Jordan feared Iran was the inspiration it provided to Islamists elsewhere, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in the Hashemite Kingdom itself. If an Islamically inspired revolution could take place in Iran, why not in Jordan? These factors help explain the staunchly anti-Iranian stance the Jordanian regime took during the Iran-Iraq war in 1980–1988,²⁵ although the strong personal ties King Husayn enjoyed with both the Shah of Iran prior to the revolution²⁶ and Iraqi President Saddam Husayn also helped, of course.²⁷

¹⁹ Marion Boulby, *The Muslim Brotherhood and the Kings of Jordan, 1945–1993* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999), 46.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 46–7.

²¹ Mohammed Torki Bani Salameh, ‘Muslim Brotherhood and the Jordanian State: Containment or Fragmentation Bets? (1999–2018)’, *Asian Journal of Comparative Studies* 20, no. 10 (2019): 1–19; Joas Wagemakers, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 95–116 (forthcoming).

²² Interview with Isâm Hâdi, Amman, 19 January 2013.

²³ Joas Wagemakers, *Salafism in Jordan: Political Islam in a Quietist Community* (Cambridge, etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 108–9.

²⁴ Curtis R. Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 11.

²⁵ *Id.*, *Inter-Arab Alliances: Regime Security and Jordanian Foreign Policy* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2009), 107–8.

A similar policy has been adopted by King Husayn's son, 'Abdallah II, who succeeded his father after the latter's death in 1999. Like his father, King 'Abdallah II has enjoyed a strong relationship with Western countries, especially the United States, and has accompanied this by the desire to represent and promote 'moderate' Islam. The latter trend can also be traced back to 1979, when the regime—in an effort to ward off Iranian revolutionary influence and the Islamists it inspired—began building and promoting an 'official Islam' that was autonomous but ultimately controlled by the regime.²⁸ Concretely, this led to the founding of several Islamic institutes, including what was eventually called the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, founded in 1980.²⁹

The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute, which expressly intended to bring together various types of Muslims (including Shiites), has been bolstered by King 'Abdallah II since he became king and—given the rise of terrorism by radical Islamist groups such as al-Qa'ida and IS—has also taken on an increasingly 'moderating' character on his watch.³⁰ While the king and queen of Jordan, as well as government officials, have been personally involved in these efforts, explicitly presenting Islam as moderate and tolerant,³¹ the regime has also sought to define Islam and draw boundaries so as to make clear who is included in it (and who is not). With the help of Muslim scholars from all over the world, the ecumenical Amman Message (Risālat 'Ammān) was drawn up in 2004 and states as its first of three points that

[w]hosoever is an adherent to one of the four *Sunni* schools (*Mathahib*) of Islamic jurisprudence (*Hanafi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi'i* and *Hanbali*), the two *Shi'i* schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*Ja'fari* and *Zaydi*), the *Ibadi* school of Islamic jurisprudence and the *Thahiri* school of Islamic jurisprudence, is a Muslim. Declaring that person an apostate is impossible and impermissible. Verily his (or her) blood, honour, and property are inviolable.³²

The statement given above thus indicates that one of the primary institutes of 'official Islam' in Jordan explicitly acknowledges Twelver³³ (Ja'fari) and Fiver (Zaydi) Shiites as Muslims and expressly forbids excommunication (*takfir*) of these people. Given the importance King 'Abdallah II attaches to this, such an accepting attitude towards Shiites clearly sets certain parameters within which Salafis have to operate, meaning that much of their ideological arsenal against Shiism cannot be used for fear of offending or embarrassing the regime. Yet the statement above does leave some room for Salafis to express themselves on this subject by not including Ismā'īlīs, 'Alawīs and other, more heterodox forms of Shiism. Moreover, like his father, King 'Abdallah II has also been highly critical of what Jordanian officials term 'political Shiism' (political expressions by Shiite powers in the region).³⁴ In an interview on American television recorded in 2004, King

²⁶Avi Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 414.

²⁷Nigel Ashton, *King Hussein of Jordan: A Political Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 210–12.

²⁸Michael Robbins and Lawrence Rubin, 'The Rise of Official Islam in Jordan', *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 14, no. 1 (2013): 61.

²⁹See the institute's website at www.aalabayt.org/en/index.html (accessed 19 February 2018).

³⁰Robbins and Rubin, 'Rise of Official Islam', 65–9. For more on how this trend has been used to fight radical Islamist ideas, see Yair Minzili, 'The Jordanian Regime Fights the War of Ideas', in *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. V, ed. Hillel Fradkin, Hussain Haqqani and Eric Brown (Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute, 2007), 55–69.

³¹Wagemakers, *Salafism in Jordan*, 148–50.

³²See <http://ammanmessage.com/the-three-points-of-the-amman-message-v-1/> (accessed 19 February 2018). Italics and spelling adopted from the original text.

³³Terms such as 'Twelver' (Imāmi), 'Sevener' (Ismā'īli) and 'Fiver' (Zaydi) refer to the number of imams recognized by the adherents to a particular branch of Shiism.

‘Abdallah openly spoke of his concerns of Iranian influence in the region, especially in Iraq, and warned of a ‘Shi‘a crescent’ stretching from Iran to Lebanon.³⁵ Such concerns, moreover, are part of a much broader belief held by the Jordanian king and other rulers in the region that Shiite political powers are on the rise and that this needs to be countered.³⁶

What the absence of a Shiite community in Jordan combined with the regime’s stance on this issue means is that the regime is susceptible to a discourse that paints Shiites as dangerous, as long as one focusses on heterodox Shiites or on Shiite politics, not their doctrines. As such, criticizing political Shiism as dangerous to Jordan is a way of showing one’s commitment to its security and, in line with this, one’s loyalty to the state. It also means that anti-Shiite discourse will not cause strife in Jordanian society since it has no sizable Shiite community. It is this situation that Salafis have to deal with when criticizing Shiism. This becomes even clearer when we look at Salafis’ own position in Jordan.

Salafism in Jordan

Salafism in Jordan started out as a quietist trend and came to be dominated by the aforementioned al-Albani, whose knowledge (particularly of hadiths) was superior to anybody else’s in Jordan. While al-Albani was fiercely independent and aloof from politics altogether, some of his students grew increasingly loyal towards the Jordanian regime.³⁷ Various factors have contributed to this, including the perceived threat from political Salafis and the need to differentiate oneself from Jihadi-Salafis. The regime has made clear that it distinguishes between quietists, on the one hand, and political and Jihadi-Salafis, on the other, yet it continues to be sceptical of Salafism as a fundamentalist movement whose ‘purist’ views are clearly at odds with its own ecumenical ones.³⁸ Partly as a result, some quietist Salafis in Jordan, especially their most important scholar ‘Ali al-Halabi (b. 1960), have done their utmost to show that they are not Jihadi-Salafis and, instead, are deeply committed to the security of the country and are fiercely loyal to the state and its king. Thus, for some quietist Salafis in Jordan, condemning threats to the kingdom has become an important way of showing that they, unlike the enemies of the state, can be trusted.³⁹

Yet not all Salafis in Jordan appreciated the quietism of parts of their community. Those politically inclined felt that Salafism was about more than merely cleansing and teaching and founded the political Salafi Jam‘iyyat al-Kitab wa-l-Sunna (the Association of the Book and the Sunna) in 1993.⁴⁰ This organization engages in charitable activities and spreads a highly politicized Salafi discourse through its publications, but cannot go so far as to found a political party, partly because of the regime’s scepticism of Salafism and its fear of too much power in the hands of Islamists.⁴¹ This is particularly the case since Jordan, like other Arab countries, has its own Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated political party, the Islamic

³⁴Abū Rummān and Abū Haniyya, *Al-Hall al-Islāmi*, 29.

³⁵See www.youtube.com/watch?v=08d_CYzqa-Y and www.nbcnews.com/id/6679774/ns/msnbc-hardball_with_chris_matthews/t/king-abdullah-ii-jordan/#.WordvExFzIX (accessed 19 February 2018).

³⁶Maximilian Terhalle, ‘Are the Shia Rising?’, *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 2 (2007): 69–53.

³⁷For more on the different shades of quietist Salafism, see Wagemakers, *Salafism in Jordan*, 15–17.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 150–2.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 152–5.

⁴⁰For more on this organization’s activities, see its website: www.ktabsona.com/ (accessed 26 February 2018).

Action Front, which is the country's greatest force of political opposition and is viewed with scepticism by the regime.⁴² As a result, political Salafis, like their quietist counterparts, have a vested interest in showing the regime that they can be relied upon and that they have the country's best political and security interests at heart. As we will see below, both quietist and political Salafis have used Shiism to underline this.

Shiism in the service of quietist loyalty

Quietists' religious arguments against Shiism

Jordanian quietist Salafi publications dealing with Shiism echo the global Salafi discourse on the subject that we saw above. Shiites are frequently referred to as 'Rāfiḍa' and are accused of believing in 'their error and deviance from the Sunna' and having 'corrupt doctrines'.⁴³ Unsurprisingly, any suggestion of *rapprochement* (*taqrīb*) between Sunnis and Shiites is rejected. One Salafi author, in response to an intra-faith conference seeking common ground between Sunnis and Shiites, writes in the Jordanian quietist journal *Al-Asāla* that 'the Rāfiḍa have no intention whatsoever to make concessions in their doctrines and ideas'. The fact that they claim they will is 'taken from their doctrine of *taqiyya*, which is three quarters of their religion'.⁴⁴

Other publications accuse Shiites of, among other things, cursing the companions of the Prophet Muhammad. 'Unfortunately', one author writes in an article about Shiites in Turkey, 'there are [nevertheless] Sunni Islamic groups who cooperate with them'. This happens, the author claims, because some Muslims in Turkey 'do not have sufficient knowledge of the truth of the Rawāfiḍ'.⁴⁵ It is presumably to counter such a lack of knowledge that one Salafi author has written an entire book in which he not only severely criticizes Shiites for their supposedly faulty doctrines, but also points out that Salafis should not marry Shiites.⁴⁶

The current unofficial leader of the quietist Salafi community, 'Ali al-Halabi, goes even further than others and criticizes the Egyptian mufti 'Ali Jum'a for declaring that 'Shiites are Muslims and there is no harm in following their school of Islamic law' and that 'the Islamic community (*umma*) is one body; there is no difference between a Sunni and a Shiite'.⁴⁷ Such criticism, especially coming from the scholar who has done more than anyone in Jordan to portray Salafism as loyal to the country and its regime, is rather surprising, perhaps, because it partly seems to consciously contradict the state's ecumenical discourse, which also explicitly describes Shiites as Muslims, as we saw above. This

⁴¹ Joas Wagemakers, 'The Dual Effect of the Arab Spring on Salafi Integration: Political Salafism in Jordan', in *Salafism After the Arab Awakening: Contending with People's Power*, ed. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 122–33.

⁴² For more on this, see Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge, etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁴³ Ibrāhīm al-Ruḥaylī, 'Mawāqif Ahl al-Bayt min al-Rāfiḍa wa-Min Aqīdatihim', *Al-Aṣāla* 4, no. 21 (15 Rabi' al-Ākhar [29 July 1999]): 17.

⁴⁴ Sa'īd b. Muḥammad al-ʿAbd al-Latīf, 'Qirāʾa fī l-Muṭamar al-Khāmis li-l-Taqrīb bayna Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Shiʿa', *Al-Aṣāla* 1, no. 5 (15 Dhū l-Hijja 1413 [6 June 1993]): 45.

⁴⁵ Abū Muḥammad al-Atharī, 'Nashāt al-Rāfiḍa fī Turkiyā', *Al-Aṣāla* 1, no. 9 (15 Sha'bān 1414 [28 January 1994]): 64.

⁴⁶ Abū Talḥa Umar b. Ibrāhīm ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Rahmān, *Ḥukm al-Shariʿa fī l-Zawāj min al-Shiʿa* (Cairo: Dār al-Minhāj, 2004).

⁴⁷ ʿAlī b. Ḥasan al-Ḥalabī al-Atharī, *Al-Shiʿa Fitnat al-ʿAsr Yā Saʿādāt Muftī Masr!* (www.alhalaby.com/play.php?catsmktba=969 (accessed 22 February 2018), 2009). Al-Ḥalabī has a tendency to use excessive punctuation. Because this tends to obscure what he is saying, I have left out any unnecessary punctuation when citing or referring to his writings.

contradiction is explained, however, when we look at how quietist Salafis in Jordan frame their criticism of Shiites.

Quietists' conspiratorial arguments against Shiism

Religious arguments against Shiism mentioned by Jordanian Salafis are virtually always couched in accusations of a Shiite conspiracy—supposedly led by Iran—against Sunni Muslims. This not only shows that Jordanian quietists, like Salafis elsewhere, mix different types of arguments against Shiites,⁴⁸ but also that they try to incorporate their own anti-Shiite discourse into the regime's narrative about this subject. Iran, for example, is portrayed as a 'Shiite regime' bent on 'spreading their erroneous *da'wa*'. To Jordanian quietist Salafis, this is more than mere Shiite missionary work or an attempt by Iran to expand its sphere of political influence, however. They see it as aimed at 'slandering the Sunni creed' (*tashwih 'aqīdat ahl al-Sunna wa-l-jamā'a*).⁴⁹

In such a reasoning, Iran (and other Shiite actors) are tools in the service of what is often labelled 'disgusting Shiism' (*al-Shi'a al-shani'a*). Al-Halabi underlines this by stating that 'Shiism is raiding Egypt with its money (*bi-amwālihā*), its spurious arguments (*shubhātihā*) and its desires (*shahawātihā*). So watch out, wake up and be careful'. He therefore warns the leaders of Muslim countries against 'the danger of Shiism to their countries'.⁵⁰ Al-Halabi pushes this reasoning even further by pointing out that

God—may He be exalted—has made the ruler of our country (*walī amr bilādinā*)—may God preserve him and watch over him—successful in paying attention to (*al-tanabbuh*) and pointing out (*al-tanbih*) the danger of the disgusting Shiism for a number of years by warning against what they work hard for and agree on, [namely] establishing the evil 'Shi'a crescent'.⁵¹

The manifestations of this 'Shi'a crescent' can be seen, according to al-Halabi, in 'Iranian meddling' in Syria and 'Hizbullah's despicable support (*madad Hizb Allāh al-sāfil*) for the unbelieving Nuṣayrī army [of Syria]'.⁵² Similar words were used by Muhammad b. Musa Al Nasr (1954–2017), one of the leading quietist Salafi scholars in Jordan until his recent death, who described the Syrian state as 'a Nuṣayrī and Ba'thī regime', which 'slaughters the Sunnis with the cooperation of Iran and Hizbullah'. The latter term is a pun suggesting that the Lebanese party-cum-militia is not 'the party of God' (*ḥizb Allāh*) but 'the party of al-Lat' (*ḥizb al-Lāt*), a pre-Islamic goddess.⁵³

The topic of Syria—or, more specifically, the war between the Syrian regime and several militias—is dealt with in greater detail by al-Halabi and shows that his efforts to integrate his own anti-Shiite discourse into the regime's narrative on this subject are quite

⁴⁸For a very clear example of this, in which all the different conspiracies mentioned above are combined, see 'Al-Rawāfi al-Shi'a wa-Mawāqifuhum al-Shani'a min Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Shari'ah!', *Al-Aṣāla* 11, no. 54 (15 Dhū l-Hijja 1427 [6 December 2006]): 5–6.

⁴⁹Al-Atharī, 'Nashāt al-Rāfi'a', 65.

⁵⁰Alī b. Hasan al-Halabī al-Atharī, *Al-Shi'a Taghzū Miṣr bi-Amwālihā wa-Shubhātihā wa-Shahawātihā fa-ntabihū, wa-Tayaqqazū wa-ḥdharū* (www.alhalaby.com/play.php?catsmktba=3438 (accessed 22 February 2018), 2013).

⁵¹*Id.*, *Risāla ilā Kull Man Wallahu llāh Umūr al-Muslimin fī l-Muḥādharah min Tasallul al-Shi'a 'ibrah l-Mutaṣawwifin* (www.alhalaby.com/play.php?catsmktba=3470 (accessed 22 February 2018), 2013).

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³Interview with Muḥammad b. Mūsā Āl Nasr, Amman, 20 June 2012.

extensive. As will be recalled, the regime's ecumenical statement on who is a Muslim included Ja'farīs and Zaydīs, but no other Shiites. This may help explain why al-Halabi, knowing that he will face no repercussions from the Jordanian regime, openly calls Syrian President Bashar al-Asad a 'Ba'thī, Nuṣayrī, unbelieving' leader, 'in fact, someone who is not originally a Muslim (*ghayr al-Muslim aṣlan*)'.⁵⁴

These words about the Syrian leader seem remarkable because they indicate that quietist Salafis like al-Halabi are willing to declare that a nominally Muslim leader from a Muslim country is, in fact, an unbeliever, which is precisely what quietist Salafis usually refrain from doing. In fact, *takfir* of Muslim rulers is perhaps the main point distinguishing quietist Salafis from Jihadi-Salafis. If one looks at his words more precisely, however, it turns out that they are not so remarkable. The fact that al-Halabi never saw al-Asad as a Muslim in the first place ('not originally a Muslim') means that he does not apply *takfir* here, since that assumes that the accused was originally a Muslim. Moreover, the space offered by the regime's discourse on Shiites, which excludes 'Alawīs ('Nuṣayrīs') from its definition of Muslims, gives Salafis the room they need to vilify the 'Alawī Bashar al-Asad.

For these reasons, al-Halabi probably feels quite unrestrained to condemn 'Alawīs in Syria, citing Ibn Taymiyya's words, which state that 'Alawīs are non-Muslims, that it is forbidden to eat the animals they slaughtered or marry their women,⁵⁵ that they do not pray five times a day, fast during Ramadan, perform the pilgrimage to Mecca or pay alms and that, in fact, they condone drinking wine and believe 'Ali b. Abi Talib is God.⁵⁶ In order to link this type of behaviour with the Syrian state, he also quotes the important Saudi Salafi scholar 'Abd al-'Aziz b. Baz (d. 1999), who calls the Syrian state 'an unbelieving, Nuṣayrī, 'Alawī, Rāfiḍī, esoteric (*bāṭinī*) state'.⁵⁷

Using Shiites as tools for quietists' own position in Jordan

Al-Halabi goes further, however, than merely tying his religious arguments to accusations of Shiite conspiracies and using the space the state leaves him on anti-Shiite discourse. As mentioned, quietist Salafis in Jordan—especially al-Halabi—have tried to show their loyalty to the state and have portrayed themselves as the regime's ideal Islamic allies to fight Jihadi-Salafis and the terrorism they help inspire. As analysed by Sedgwick, Sufis have been used by regimes and governments for this very purpose and, in a broader sense, to promote 'moderate' Islam, albeit with limited success.⁵⁸ Al-Halabi claims, however, that Sufis in Jordan⁵⁹ have not done much to answer King 'Abdallah II's call to counter radical Islamism and asks: 'Where are the Sufi efforts in refuting this *takfirī* thinking, which is the most important

⁵⁴ Ali b. Ḥasan b. Ali b. 'Abd al-Ḥamid al-Ḥalabī al-Atharī, *Kalimat Ḥaqq 'Ilmiyya fi Ahdāth Suriyā* (N.p.: Manshūrāt Muntadayāt Kull al-Salafiyyin, 2012), 23.

⁵⁵ Al-Ḥalabī, *Kalimat Ḥaqq 'Ilmiyya*, 38.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 45–6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 63. The accusation of being esoteric is an important one to Salafis, since the term refers to Muslims who believe the Quran has an inner, hidden meaning that is not immediately clear from the text itself. This clashes with Salafis' literal and exoteric (*zāhirī*) reading of the Quran.

⁵⁸ Mark Sedgwick, 'Sufis as "Good Muslims": Sufism in the Battle against Jihadi Salafism', in *Sufis and Salafis in the Contemporary Age*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 105–17.

⁵⁹ For more on Sufism in Jordan, see Hasan Abū Haniyya, *Al-Turuq al-Sūfiyya: Durūb Allāh al-Rūḥiyya: Al-Takayyuf wa-l-Tajdid fi Siyāq al-Tahdith* (Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2011).

problem of this age, and its challenges that our Islamic *umma* faces [...]?! Salafis, on the other hand, 'have engaged in this [attempt to counter radical Islamist ideas]—and still do that—with efforts in this regard, striving, writing, lecturing, teaching, meeting, refuting, condemning and securing'.⁶⁰

The reason this attempt to delegitimize Sufis is relevant to Shiism is that al-Halabi explicitly tries to discredit Sufism by linking it to Shiism and Iran. Asking rhetorically whether 'Sufism is a secure culture', al-Halabi answers his own question by pointing to the alleged 'link between Sufism and Shiism (*al-tashayyu*)'.⁶¹ According to him, this link is very strong and is expressed in a shared basis between Sufism and Shiism, a shared belief in the Shiite imams, the Mahdi and the practice of *taqiyya*, among other things.⁶² In fact, al-Halabi claims, it is even worse than that. Not only is Sufism not a safe choice in helping the regime against radical Islamism; the Sufi-related Shiites actually view Sunnis as unbelievers and practice *takfir* in the same way as the Khawārij,⁶³ an early-Islamic radical group that is often compared with today's Jihadi-Salafis.⁶⁴

The allegedly dangerous Shiite ideas on *takfir* can only naturally lead to collective excommunication, al-Halabi claims, causing the very problem that regimes are trying to counter in their fight against Jihadi-Salafism. Given the strong links that he claims exist between Shiism and Sufism, the latter cannot possibly be expected to stand up to radical Islamism, which 'the rulers of our blessed Sunni land have clearly warned against'.⁶⁵ Because al-Halabi blurs the lines between Shiism, which the regime—in its political forms—has warned against, and Sufism, which the regime explicitly accepts, he can seemingly credibly portray Sufis as a security threat, can claim that the regime is (indirectly) aware of this and that he and the king are therefore on the same page on this issue. Thus, al-Halabi employs Shiism to discredit Sufis as partners in the regime's fight against Jihadi-Salafism and thereby uses them as an indirect tool to serve his own interests, namely to underline Salafis' loyalty to the regime and their usefulness as refuters of radical Islamism.

Shiism in the service of politicians' ambitions

The intellectual output of political Salafis in Jordan, both within and outside of the Jam'iyat al-Kitab wa-l-Sunna, is dominated by several writers, most prominently Usama Shahada (b. 1971), a baker from Amman. This is particularly the case with regard to Shiism, on which Shahada has written no fewer than eight books, making him the most prolific Salafi author on this issue in Jordan. To be sure, others have written about this issue too, for example in the Jam'iyat al-Kitab wa-l-Sunna's magazine *Al-Qibla*,⁶⁶ in which Shahada

⁶⁰ Alī b. Ḥasan b. Alī b. Abd al-Ḥamid al-Ḥalabī al-Atharī, *Mujmal Tārīkh al-Da'wa al-Salafiyya fī l-Diyār al-Urdunniyya* (Amman: Al-Dār al-Athariyya, 2009), 87–9. The quotations are on 89.

⁶¹ *Id.*, *Al-Da'wa al-Salafiyya bayna l-Turuq al-Sūfiyya wa-l-Da'wa al-Ṣāḥafiyya wa-Kashf al-Sīla bayna l-Taṣawwuf wa-l-Afkār al-Shī'iyya* (Amman: Al-Dār al-Athariyya, 2009), 35.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 37–53.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 62–3.

⁶⁴ For more on this, see Johannes J.G. Jansen, 'The Early Islamic Movement of the Kharidjites and Modern Muslim Extremism: Similarities and Differences', *Orient: Deutsche Zeitschrift für den modernen Orient* 27, no. 1 (1986): 127–35; Jeffrey T. Kenney, *Muslim Rebels: Kharijites and the Politics of Extremism in Egypt* (Oxford, etc.: Oxford University Press, 2006); Hussam S. Timani, *Modern Intellectual Readings of the Kharijites* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008); Joas Wagemakers, "'Seceders" and "Postponers"? An Analysis of the "Khawarij" and "Murji'a" Labels in Polemical Debates between Quietist and Jihadi-Salafis', in *Contextualizing Jihadi Thought*, ed. Jeevan Deol and Zaheer Kazmi (London: Hurst & Co., 2012), 145–64.

⁶⁵ Al-Ḥalabī, *Al-Da'wa al-Salafiyya*, 66.

has published some articles about this topic as well.⁶⁷ The most important publication on sectarianism from a Salafi point of view that Shahada has contributed to, however, is *Al-Rasid*, a magazine that ran from 2003–2017 and published articles by authors from all over the Arab world, including other Jordanian Salafis, such as Fadi Qaraqara and Haytham al-Kaswani.⁶⁸ Shahada was this magazine's editor-in-chief and several of his books are, in fact, collections of his articles for this magazine.

Political Salafis' dilemmas in Jordan are somewhat different from those of their quietist brethren. Firstly, they are equally against Jihadi-Salafism, radicalization and terrorism, but—unlike quietist Salafis—they do not often portray themselves as the best partners for the regime to help fight these phenomena; secondly, although politicians have in common with quietists that they want to come across as trustworthy and reliable to the regime, they do not use Shiites to delegitimize Sufis, but—as we will see later on—employ the former to take on an enemy of their own.

Politicos' religious arguments against Shiism

Like quietists, political Salafis in Jordan have few good things to say about minority groups within Shiism. Zaydīs—the only non-Twelve Shiite group acknowledged as Muslim by the Jordanian regime, as we saw above—are described by Shahada and al-Kaswani relatively positively, however. The authors state that Zaydīs 'are the closest of the Shiites to the Sunnis because of their lack of extremism (*li-'adam ghulūhum*)', 'do not curse the companions like the [Twelver] Imāmī Shiites',⁶⁹ 'acknowledge the straying of the Rāfīdī Shiites (*dalāl al-Shī'a al-rawāfiḍ*) and warn against them'⁷⁰ and 'have fought esotericism (*al-bāṭiniyya*) and the [Sevener] Ismā'iliyya'.⁷¹ This same, relatively positive attitude is not there with regard to other non-Twelve Shiites, however. Esotericism,⁷² Ismā'īlīs⁷³ and the followers of the Āghā Khān,⁷⁴ as well as self-proclaimed non-Islamic groups such as the Bahá'í faith,⁷⁵ among others, are all treated as deviant sects.

Political Salafis in Jordan—and particularly Shahada—are mostly concerned, however, with Twelver Shiites. He and al-Kaswani, like the quietist Salafis mentioned above, discuss Twelver Shiites' ideas about the imams, their negative views of some of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad and their use of *taqiyya*⁷⁶ and Shahada labels the sometimes bloody rituals associated with the commemoration of the martyrdom of Husayn—'Āshūrā'—a *bid'a*.⁷⁷ He further claims that Shiites

⁶⁶Zāyid Hammād, 'Al-Shī'a wa-Filastīn', *Al-Qibla* 6, no. 16 (2008): 78–95. The author of this article is the current leader of the Jam'iyyat al-Kitāb wa-l-Sunna.

⁶⁷Usāma Shahāda, 'Al-Tashayyu fi Khidmat al-Mashrū al-Īrānī', *Al-Qibla* 6, no. 17 (2008): 78–80; *id.*, 'Limādhā Yufshilu l-Shī'a Maṣīrat al-Wahda al-Islāmiyya??', *Al-Qibla* 7, no. 18 (2009): 66–75.

⁶⁸See www.alrased.net/main/ (accessed 15 April 2020).

⁶⁹Usāma Shahāda and Haytham al-Kaswāni, *Al-Mawsū'a al-Shāmīla li-l-Firaq al-Mu'āsira fi l-Ālam: 1—Firaq al-Shī'a* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūli, 2007), 189.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 191.

⁷¹*Id.*, *Al-Mawsū'a al-Shāmīla li-l-Firaq al-Mu'āsira fi l-Ālam: 2—Al-Tajammu'āt al-Shī'iyya fi l-Jazīra al-'Arabiyya* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūli, 2009), 145.

⁷²*Id.*, *Al-Mawsū'a* 1, 86–100.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 102–10.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 155–84.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 53–82.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 25–9.

differ with Sunnis on fundamental tenets of Islam, such as the position of the imams, the role of 'Ali and the text of the Quran⁷⁸ and states that Shiism should be seen as a deviant sect (*firqa*), not a legitimate legal school (*madhhab fiqhī*).⁷⁹ In fact, Shahada links Shiites to what he deems extreme forms of *takfir*⁸⁰ and writes that they have shared origins with the Khawārij (and similarly partake in spreading disunity and disobedience to rulers),⁸¹ just like the quietist al-Halabi claims.

As a result, Shahada—again, like his quietist Salafi counterparts in Jordan—is sceptical about a dialogue between Sunnis and Shiites. He claims it is useless and unlikely to yield positive results, citing the negative experiences other Sunnis have had in this regard.⁸² According to Shahada, all major Shiite scholarly authorities should acknowledge that the Quranic text Sunnis use has not been tampered with, that all the Prophet's companions and wives are free from 'polytheism and innovations (*al-shirk wa-l-bida*)' and that no divine characteristics should be ascribed to Muhammad's family.⁸³ As Haddad points out, while Shiite efforts of *taqrib* are aimed at gaining acceptance, the desire to dilute 'aspects of Shiism deemed offensive or blasphemous' is not uncommon among Sunnis engaged in dialogue with Shiites and reflects the majority status they enjoy over a minority of Shiites.⁸⁴

Politicos' conspiratorial arguments against Shiism

Besides religious arguments, Shahada also offers another reason for why he is sceptical of a dialogue with Shiites: he believes their efforts to engage with Sunnis are, in fact, a prelude to attempts to expand Iran's Islamic Revolution to other countries.⁸⁵ This hints at a much more conspiratorial approach to the subject of Shiism, which is what dominates Shahada's writings on sectarianism. The belief in an evil Shiite plot to bring down Islam from within starts at the very beginning of Islam, with the aforementioned Jewish convert 'Abdallah b. Saba'. The latter was part of an effort by 'our enemies—and the Jews in particular—to fight us of old by founding, patronizing and directing deviant and innovating sects (*inshā' wa-ri'āya wa-tawjih al-firaq al-dālla wa-l-mubtdi'a*) and coalescing with them'.⁸⁶ Ibn Saba' himself, according to Shahada and al-Kaswani, remained an unbeliever, although he had converted to Islam outwardly, and spoke ill of the first three caliphs but 'exaggerated in praising 'Ali almost to the point of deifying him (*ḥattā qtaraba min ta'lihihi*)'.⁸⁷ Ibn Saba's followers, presumably building on these ideas, subsequently split up into two groups, Shahada claims: the Khawārij and the Shiites.⁸⁸

⁷⁷Usāma Shahāda, *Al-Sunna wa-l-Shī'a: Ru'ya Wāqī'iyya* (www.alrased.net, 2010), 119.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 126–7.

⁷⁹*Id.*, *Al-Mushkila al-Shī'iyya* (www.alrased.net, 2008), 17–23.

⁸⁰'Al-Firaq al-ālla ... Khatar Mutajaddid', *Al-Rāsīd* 171 (Dhū l-Hijja 1438 [August/September 2017]): 3; 'Haqiqat al-Tashayyu : Takfir wa-Irhāb fi l-Fikr wa-l-Sulūk', *Al-Rāsīd* 153 (Jumādā l-Ākhira 1437 [March/April 2016]): 2–3.

⁸¹'Al-Dawā'ish al-Khawārij Yumahhidūna l-Tariq li-l-Shī'a al-Rawāfi', *Al-Rāsīd* 163 (Rabī al-Thānī 1438 [December 2016/January 2017]): 2–3; 'Al-Khawārij wa-l-Shī'a Nitāj al-Yahūdi Ibn Saba', *Al-Rāsīd* 141 (Rabī al-Awwal 1436 [December 2014/January 2015]): 2–3.

⁸²Shahāda, *Al-Mushkila al-Shī'iyya*, 28–31, 240–61; *id.*, 'Silat al-Ḥarakāt al-Sunniyya bi-l-Shī'a wa-l-Īrān: Bayna Wahm al-Wahda wa-Khubth al-Firqa wa-l-Tā'ifiyya!', *Al-Rāsīd* 161 (Ṣafar 1438 [November 2016]): 27–8.

⁸³*Id.*, *Al-Sunna wa-l-Shī'a*, 154.

⁸⁴Haddad, 'Anti-Sunnism and Anti-Shiism.'

⁸⁵Shahāda, *Al-Mushkila*, 204.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, *Al-Sunna wa-l-Shī'a*, 11.

⁸⁷Shahāda and al-Kaswānī, *Al-Mawsū'a* 1, 13.

The continued relevance of Ibn Saba' to Shahada is not just found in the belief that there are still Jews who try to sow discord within Islam—including, apparently, professor of Islamic Studies Meir J. Kister (1914–2010) of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem⁸⁹—but also in the idea that this was the start of a large-scale Shiite conspiracy against Islam. This continued with, among others,⁹⁰ the aforementioned Ibn al-'Alqami. Shahada and al-Kaswani echo the claim we saw above, namely that this was a Shiite official working for the Abbasid caliph who assisted the Mongols in conquering Baghdad, which led to the fall of the caliphate and the killing of hundreds of thousands of Muslims.⁹¹ The attempts to sow discord were consolidated in the Shiite Safavid Empire (r. 1501–1722), which the authors claim imposed Shiism by massacring the Sunni population.⁹² Shahada and al-Kaswani also state that this empire conspired with Portuguese colonial powers⁹³ and against the Sunni Ottoman Empire (r. 1299–1923).⁹⁴ After the fall of the latter, Shiites are accused of cooperating with the French colonial powers in Lebanon.⁹⁵ Shahada writes that Ibn al-'Alqami's attitude of betrayal can also be discerned among Iraqi Shiites cooperating with the United States today,⁹⁶ while Iran's sowing of division is rooted in the efforts by Ibn Saba' to do the same.⁹⁷

The Islamic Republic of Iran is, in fact, at the very centre of Shahada's conspiratorial arguments about Shiism. He does not just see the latter as a repressive power against Sunnis,⁹⁸ but also views Iran as the driving force behind this, accusing it of aggressively meddling in other countries,⁹⁹ including—most prominently—Syria.¹⁰⁰ Yet apart from this overt and aggressive influence he ascribes to Iran, Shahada also discerns a more cunning way the country tries to have an impact on the Muslim world. Central in this is an alleged 50-year plan,¹⁰¹ a secret plot supposedly devised by Shiite scholars from the Iranian city of Qom and exposed by the League of Sunnis in Iran. As has been pointed out, the similarities with the anti-Semitic trope of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion are striking,¹⁰² but Shahada nevertheless treats the plan as serious proof of a conspiracy by Iran to spread the Islamic Revolution through peaceful means. Some of these may be described as disruptive, such as inciting Sunni youngsters to rise up against their

⁸⁸Shahāda, 'Al-Khawārij wa-l-Shī'a', 3.

⁸⁹'Kam Min Ibn Saba fi Aṣrinā?!', *Al-Rāsid* 158 (Dhū l-Qa'da 1437 [August/September 2016]): 3.

⁹⁰'Haqīqat al-Tashayyu', 2–3.

⁹¹Shahāda and al-Kaswānī, *Al-Mawsū'a* 1, 33.

⁹²*Id.*, *Al-Mawsū'a* 2, 17.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 126–7.

⁹⁴*Id.*, *Al-Mawsū'a* 1, 34–5.

⁹⁵*Id.*, *Al-Mawsū'a al-Shāmīya li-l-Firaq al-Mu'āsira fi l-'Ālam: 3—Al-Tajammu'āt al-Shī'iyya fi Bilād al-Shām* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūli, 2010), 24.

⁹⁶Shahāda, *Al-Sunna wa-l-Shī'a*, 243. Interestingly, the connection between Ibn al-'Alqami and Iraqi Shiites cooperating with the United States was also made by some opponents of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. See Amir Butler, 'The Mongol Invasion of Iraq: Lessons Never Learned', Anti-War.Com (<https://original.antiwar.com/abutler/2004/05/12/the-mongol-invasion-of-iraq-lessons-never-learned/>), accessed 16 April 2020.

⁹⁷Shahāda, *Al-Sunna wa-l-Shī'a*, 114.

⁹⁸*Id.*, *Al-Mushkila*, 71–6, 80; *id.*, *Al-Sunna wa-l-Shī'a*, 137–8.

⁹⁹'Adawāt al-Mashrū' al-Irānī al-Shī'i al-Udwānī', *Al-Rāsid* (Jumādā l-Ulā 1438 [February/March 2017]): 2–3; 'Al-Udwān al-Irānī wa-l-Mashrū' al-Shī'i Sharr Yatafaqamu wa-Yata'āzamu', *Al-Rāsid* 159 (Dhū l-Hijja 1437 [September/October 2016]): 2–3.

¹⁰⁰Usāma Shahāda, *Hadm min al-Dākhil* (N.p.: no publisher, 2013), 16–17.

¹⁰¹Hādīf al-Shamārī, *Al-Khuttā al-Khamsīniyya wa-lsqtātuhā fi Mamlakat al-Bahrayn* (N.p.: No publisher, 2008).

¹⁰²Haddād, 'Anti-Sunnism and Anti-Shiism.' Interestingly, this comparison is not lost on Shahāda either. See Shahāda, *Al-Mushkila*, 271.

governments,¹⁰³ and Shahada accuses Iran of, in effect, cooperating with militant groups like al-Qa‘ida and IS¹⁰⁴ as well as waging a ‘soft war’ through the media.¹⁰⁵

The crux of the 50-year plan, however, appears to lie in Iran’s efforts to spread its Islamic Revolution in ways that would not appear to be offensive in and of themselves. According to Shahada, these ways include: establishing ties with neighbouring states, finding houses and jobs for Shiite immigrants in Sunni countries, forging relations with foreign officials, obtaining citizenship for Shiites and giving pious Sunnis a bad reputation.¹⁰⁶ A result of the latter, according to Shahada’s reading of the plan, would be to create fissures between Sunni Muslim groups and regimes, which Shiite groups exploit to gain more power and eventually challenge the authorities. As such, while Iran’s activities may seem innocuous, Shahada warns Sunnis not to fall for them.¹⁰⁷ It is thus not surprising that Shahada and al-Kaswani very often focus on the supposedly nefarious role Iran plays in Shiite communities through financial, educational or religious aid. This is the case with countries that have large Shiite communities, such as Lebanon¹⁰⁸ (including Hizbullah),¹⁰⁹ Iraq¹¹⁰ and Bahrein,¹¹¹ but also with states that are not known to have a large number of Shiite citizens, such as Morocco,¹¹² the Palestinian territories¹¹³ and Sudan.¹¹⁴

Using Shiites as tools for politicians’ own position in Jordan

Another state included in the group of countries without large numbers of Shiite citizens is Jordan, of course. Shahada describes Jordanian policies towards Iran since the Islamic Revolution as tense and difficult for reasons we saw earlier,¹¹⁵ although they have improved since the death of the revolution’s leader, ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in 1989.¹¹⁶ He is also keenly aware of the scepticism that both King Husayn and King ‘Abdallah II displayed towards Iranian influence in Iraq, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, of their concern over Iran’s alleged attempts to acquire nuclear weapons¹¹⁷ and of the current monarch’s fear of the aforementioned ‘Shi’a crescent’, which Shahada frequently refers to.¹¹⁸ At the same time, he and al-Kaswani also display a clear understanding of Jordan’s regional needs and realize that the kingdom does not want any confrontation with Iran.¹¹⁹

¹⁰³Kam Min Ibn Saba , 3.

¹⁰⁴Haqiqat al-Tashayyu , 3; Shahāda, *Min Tārīkh al-Ḥarakāt al-Islāmiyya ma‘a l-Shi‘a wa-Īrān* (www.alrased.net, n.d.), 154–7.

¹⁰⁵Usāma Shahāda, ‘Al-Ḥarb al-Shi‘iyya al-Nā‘ima ... Al-Ilām Numūdhijān’, *Al-Rāṣid* 149 (Dhū l-Hijja 1436 [August/September 2015]): 10–21.

¹⁰⁶*Id.*, *Al-Mushkila*, 271–3.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 273–5.

¹⁰⁸Shahāda and al-Kaswāni, *Al-Mawsū‘a* 3, 7–8, 58–62.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 63, 71–4.

¹¹⁰*Id.*, *Al-Mawsū‘a* 2, 15–16, 64–7.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 131–6.

¹¹²*Id.*, *Al-Mawsū‘a al-Shāmīla li-l-Firaq al-Mu‘āsira fi l-‘Ālam: 4—Al-Tajammu‘at al-Shi‘iyya fi Bilād Ifriqiyyā al-‘Arabiyya* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūli, 2011), 160–3, 164–8.

¹¹³*Id.*, *Al-Mawsū‘a* 3, 183, 188–202.

¹¹⁴*Id.*, *Al-Mawsū‘a* 4, 138–41.

¹¹⁵Usāma Shahāda, ‘Al-Urdunn wa-l-Istiṣā‘ al-Ātmā al-Īrāniyya’, *Al-Rāṣid* 154 (Rajab 1437 [April/May 2016]): 12–14.

¹¹⁶Shahāda and al-Kaswāni, *Al-Mawsū‘a* 3, 175–6.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 176–7.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 145, 176; Shahāda, *Al-Mushkila*, 42, 77; *id.*, *Al-Sunna wa-l-Shi‘a*, 153.

¹¹⁹Shahāda and al-Kaswāni, *Al-Mawsū‘a* 3, 177; Shahāda, ‘Al-Urdunn wa-l-Istiṣā‘ , 17.

In this context, Shahada and al-Kaswani point out that Iran is also trying to gain influence in Jordan itself. They claim that this must be seen in the context of the aforementioned 50-year plan, ‘the secret plan that Iran has prepared to make the region Shiite (*tashyī‘ al-mintāqa*) over 50 years’.¹²⁰ In Jordan, this involves the Iranian embassy’s participation in book fairs, its organization of Persian language courses, its offer of grants for Jordanian students to study in Iran, the development of economic relations between the two countries and the organization of the ‘Jerusalem Week’ at the end of Ramadan to show its involvement with the Palestinians.¹²¹ Such activities may be successful in Jordan because of Shiite immigrants from countries like Iraq and Lebanon,¹²² small sympathetic newspapers¹²³ and—most importantly—the people Shahada and al-Kaswani call ‘Shiitizers’.

The term ‘Shiitizers’ (*mutashayyi‘ūn*) is derived from *tashayyu‘* (Shiitization), which literally means ‘self-Shiitization’ and seems to refer to the spreading of Shiism through its positive reception by Sunnis who have either converted to Shiite Islam or are otherwise sympathetic to Iran and/or Shiism. In Jordan, these supposedly include converts to Shiism, advocates of Sunni-Shiite *taqrīb*, people who have come to admire Iran and Hizbullah (particularly with regard to their pro-Palestinian rhetoric) and those who have been influenced by Shiite immigrants or material aid provided by Shiites.¹²⁴ This phenomenon of ‘Shiitization’ has also raised concerns among Jordanian officials, who fear Iranian and political Shiite influence and reject proselytization so as not to increase societal tensions. Several ‘Shiitizers’ have, in fact, been arrested and some Iraqi Shiites have even been expelled from Jordan for this reason,¹²⁵ which Shahada and al-Kaswani are also aware of.¹²⁶ They also give the impression that the most prominent ‘Shiitizers’ in Jordan are the members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The international Muslim Brotherhood was initially enthusiastic about the Islamic Revolution in Iran, but many of its members eventually became disenchanted with the country and its policies,¹²⁷ although this was generally more out of political considerations than strictly anti-Shiite ones.¹²⁸ Yet the Brotherhood has been quite divided on this issue, with some, such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (a split-off from the Brotherhood), remaining pro-Iran,¹²⁹ while others, like the Syrian Brotherhood, became increasingly anti-Shiite and anti-Iran after the Syrian regime—a long-time ally of Iran—killed thousands of its supporters in Hama in 1982.¹³⁰

Shahāda acknowledges the divisions within the Brotherhood on Iran/Shiites, but he states that ‘support for unity with Shiites, the Khomeinian Revolution and cooperation

¹²⁰Shahāda and al-Kaswāni, *Al-Mawsū‘a* 3, 146–7. The quotation is on page 146.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 178–80.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 148–52.

¹²³*Ibid.*, 162–4.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 153–60.

¹²⁵Abū Rummān and Abū Haniyya, *Al-Ḥall al-Islāmī*, 29–30.

¹²⁶Shahāda and al-Kaswāni, *Al-Mawsū‘a* 3, 178.

¹²⁷Rudi Matthee, ‘The Egyptian Opposition on the Iranian Revolution’, in *Shi‘ism and Social Protest*, ed. Juan R. I. Cole and Nikkie R. Keddie (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 251–65; Toby Matthiesen, ‘The Iranian Revolution and Sunni Political Islam’, in *New Analysis of Shia Politics*, POMEPS Studies no. 28, ed. Marc Lynch (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Middle East Studies at George Washington University, 2017), 36–8.

¹²⁸Shadi Hamid, ‘The Lesser Threat: How the Muslim Brotherhood Views Shias and Shiism’, *Mediterranean Politics* (forthcoming).

¹²⁹Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine* (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, 2001), 107–15.

¹³⁰Dara Conduit, ‘The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and the Spectacle of Hama’, *Middle East Journal* 70, no. 2 (2016): 211–26; Raphaël Lefèvre, *Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria* (Oxford, etc.: Oxford University Press, 2013); Yvette Talhamy, ‘The Syrian Muslim Brothers and the Syrian-Iranian Relationship’, *Middle East Journal* 63, no. 4 (2009): 561–80.

with Iran—politically, at least—is the general line (*al-khatt al-‘amm*) of the Muslim Brotherhood’ and claims that dissenting voices ‘have remained individual positions’.¹³¹ As such, he points out that Brotherhood-leaders have long sought *rapprochement* with Shiites¹³² and have often had personal and ideological ties with Shiites.¹³³ Shahada writes that this positive attitude is not reciprocated by Iran and Shiites, however. He mentions examples of Shiites describing Brotherhood-leaders, affiliated scholars and Hamas as terrorists, *takfiris* and anti-Shiites,¹³⁴ points to Iran’s repression of its own Brotherhood¹³⁵ and frequently states that Iran stood by as Syria massacred Muslim Brothers in Hama in 1982,¹³⁶ which he equates with Iran’s current support for Damascus’ repression.¹³⁷ While Shahada deals extensively with some ‘individual positions’ of Brothers critical of Iran,¹³⁸ he maintains that the organization’s leaders silenced such voices.¹³⁹ He also wonders why the Brotherhood as a whole has not cut ties with Iran¹⁴⁰ and claims that it should understand that the Islamic Republic’s conflict with America and Israel is merely tactical, while its enmity to Sunnis is strategic.¹⁴¹

Given this analysis of the Brotherhood’s relationship with Iran and Shiites, it is not surprising that Shahada and al-Kaswani state that the organization has helped ‘the spread of Shiitization in Jordan’.¹⁴² They state that the Jordanian branch’s then leader, Muhammad ‘Abd al-Rahman Khalifa (1919–2006), led a delegation to Tehran to congratulate the new regime after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and that Yusuf al-‘Azm, a prominent member of the organization, even wrote a poem in praise of Khomeini. This remained the Brotherhood’s attitude, the authors claim, out of a shared pro-Palestinian tendency, admiration for Iran’s opposition to America in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001 and support for the country’s nuclear ambitions. Given the Brotherhood’s strength in Jordan, Shahada and al-Kaswani state that the organization’s views on this subject have undoubtedly made this attitude more acceptable locally and have therefore contributed to ‘Shiitization’ led by Iran.¹⁴³

Thus, while quietists stress the ties between Shiism and Sufism to vilify the latter, political Salafis like Shahada use ‘Shiitization’ to do the same to the Muslim Brotherhood. One could ascribe this to Salafis’ general animosity towards the Brotherhood for its supposedly faulty doctrines, willingness to compromise and embrace of democracy,¹⁴⁴ particularly since Shahada agrees with this criticism.¹⁴⁵ Yet given Shahada’s and al-

¹³¹Shahāda, *Al-Mushkila*, 172–3.

¹³²Ibid., 168–72; Shahāda and al-Kaswānī, *Al-Mawsū‘a* 4, 63–4.

¹³³Shahāda and al-Kaswānī, *Al-Mawsū‘a* 4, 65–6, 129–31; Shahāda, *Min Tārikh*, 31–6.

¹³⁴Shahāda, *Al-Mushkila*, 177–81, 211–15. See also *id.*, *Min Tārikh*, 62–70.

¹³⁵*Id.*, *Min Tārikh*, 71–81.

¹³⁶Fitnat Dā‘ish min Jins Fitnat al-Khumayni wa-Hizb Allāh’, *Al-Rāsid* 150 (Safar 1437 [November/December 2015]): 3; Shahāda, *Al-Mushkila*, 176; *id.*, ‘Sīlat al-Harakāt’, 28–9.

¹³⁷‘Al-Firaq al-‘allā’, 3; ‘Inqilāb al-Shī‘a wa-Īrān alā Hamās wa-l-Ikhwān’, *Al-Rāsid* 112 (Shawwāl 1433 [August/September 2012]): 2–3; Shahāda, *Al-Hadm min al-Dākhil*, 15–23; *id.*, *Min Tārikh*, 45–9.

¹³⁸Shahāda, *Min Tārikh*, 82–136.

¹³⁹Fitnat Dā‘ish’, 2.

¹⁴⁰Shahāda, ‘Sīlat al-Harakāt’, 28–30.

¹⁴¹‘Khalal Ru‘yat al-Ikhwān Tijāh Īrān wa-l-Shī‘a’, *Al-Rāsid* 114 (Dhū l-Hijja [September/October 2012]): 3.

¹⁴²Shahāda and al-Kaswānī, *Al-Mawsū‘a* 3, 169.

¹⁴³Ibid., 171–3.

¹⁴⁴See, for example, Marc Lynch, ‘Jihadis and the Ikhwan’, in *Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions within al-Qa’ida and its Periphery*, ed. Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Centre, 2010), 155–82; Noah Solomon, ‘The Salafi Critique of Islamism: Doctrine, Difference and the Problem of Islamic Political Action in Contemporary Sudan’, in *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (London: Hurst & Co., 2009), 143–68.

¹⁴⁵Interview with Usāma Shahāda, Amman, 7 June 2012.

Kaswani's knowledge of the regime's views and policies on 'political Shiism' and 'Shiitizers' and considering political Salafis' own, somewhat precarious position in Jordan, their discourse on the Brotherhood can partially be interpreted as an attempt to 'prove' their own trustworthiness by tying the Brotherhood to a shared enemy. Moreover, the Brotherhood in Jordan is not only the direct reason the regime fears Islamism, but is also a challenger to political Salafism. While there are no concrete plans to start a Salafi political party in Jordan,¹⁴⁶ political Salafis and the Muslim Brotherhood are, in fact, broadly aiming for the same politically pious people and are, as such, competitors.¹⁴⁷ Their views on this subject are thus part of a global anti-Shiite Salafi discourse, but are also distinctly Jordanian.

Conclusion

Jordanian Salafis are often anti-Shiite and employ the religious and conspiratorial arguments against Shiism often found among Salafis elsewhere. Yet the specific arguments they use show that they are not merely the Jordanian exponents of a global anti-Shiite Salafi trend, but also have reasons of their own to exploit sectarianism. These reasons have to do with the near absence of Shiite communities in Jordan (meaning that anti-Shiite sentiments will not lead to civil strife in Jordanian society itself), the regime's ecumenical attitude towards Twelver and Fiver Shiites and its highly critical views of 'political Shiism' and 'Shiitizers'. At the same time, the position of Salafis in Jordan, whose beliefs are viewed with scepticism by a regime that supports 'moderate' Islam, also plays a role. Quietist Salafis, who shun political activism, are keen to show the regime their non-violent, obedient and loyalist credentials as allies in the fight against radical Islamism. Political Salafis, who do engage in political activism of various types, also want to show that there is nothing to fear from them and that they can be trusted.

In this context, quietist Jordanian Salafis connect their antipathy towards Shiites with Iran and its allies and single out the Syrian 'Alawī president for particular criticism, knowing that the regime's own discourse does not describe him as a true Muslim either. More specifically, some also try to discredit Sufis as useless in the fight against radical Islamism, partly by linking them to Shiism and Iran. This way, they use Shiites to vilify Sufis, while presenting Salafis as a trustworthy alternative that can be relied upon to counter radical Islamism. Jordanian political Salafis, meanwhile, focus on 'political Shiism' and particularly Iran. They believe the latter to be a threat to Sunni communities in and of itself, but also claim it is helped in this by the very people political Salafis see as their competitors in Jordan: the 'Shiitizing' Muslim Brotherhood. This way, political Salafis not only portray Iran as the main threat, but also use it as a tool to present themselves—albeit implicitly—as an alternative to an Islamist organization viewed with scepticism by the regime, thereby serving their own very local, Jordanian political interests. This shows that Salafi anti-Shiism is not just a global phenomenon, but is also locally shaped.

Although Jordan is an overwhelmingly Sunni country, its Salafi movement is clearly concerned about Shiism and Iran and has sought to integrate its own anti-Shiite rhetoric into that of the regime. As such, they have not only appropriated a general Salafi anti-

¹⁴⁶Wagemakers, 'Dual Effect', 129.

¹⁴⁷See also Saleh and Kraetzschmar, 'Politicized Identities, Securitized Politics', 555–7.

Shiite message, but have also adapted it to a specific Jordanian context and, by portraying themselves as being on the same page as the regime with regard to this issue, also reinforce the state's own anti-(political) Shiite discourse. This, in turn, means that while one is unlikely to encounter Shiites in Jordan itself, the country's Salafi community has nevertheless contributed to a more anti-Shiite attitude in the kingdom and, by extension, also in the region as a whole.

Disclosure statement

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