The Role of Formalism in Spread of Contemporary Religious Fanaticism

Mansour Mir-Ahmadi[1]
Ali Akbar Valad-Beygi[2]

Research Article

Abstract

In the present age, the religious fanaticism among followers of *Takfiri* Salafism has had a tremendous effect on the sociopolitical evolutions in some Islamic countries. This movement has issued decrees about the exit of Islamic denominations from the realm of Islam and has caused the emergence of numerous violent behaviors in those countries. Thus, understanding the factors for formation of that movement is so important. In this article, we have attempted to deal with the effect of formalism on religious fanaticism in the framework of 'legal reasoning' (*ijtihād*) as the common framework in understanding Islamic texts. The findings of this study show that the factors leading to formation of religious fanaticism in that movement are as follows: formalist legal

---

1. Professor, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran. m_mirahmadi@sbu.ac.ir

2. PhD Student, Political Sciences, Baqir al-Olum University, Qom, Iran. valadbig@yahoo.com

reasoning; priority of transmitting hadiths over contextual study of them; *Takfiri* Salafist approach to following religious experts; and formalist understanding of some religious concepts and doctrines such as 'association with God's friends' (*walā*') and dissociation from God's enemies (*barā*'), *takfīr* (excommunication), tyrant (*ṭāqūt*), *tatarrus,* jihad and the like.

Introduction

In the contemporary era, religious fanaticism among the adherents of *Takfiri* Salafism has had a tremendous effect on sociopolitical evolutions in some Islamic countries. The course of events shows that wherever the conditions are prepared for religious fanaticism, this movement has expressed itself. This movement has issued decrees that the Islamic denominations have exited religion, leading to violent behaviors in those countries. Thus, religious fanaticism is affected by a certain perception of religion investigated under the title of formalism. The background of formalism goes back to Ahmad bin Hanbal, especially the Hanbali Ibn Taymiya. Although they have a formalist and irrational approach to sources of legal reasoning, they have some common points, as an understanding of religion, in using some sources of legal reasoning, the Quran and Sunnah in particular, with other Islamic denominations; and the method of legal reasoning is a common framework in understanding Islamic texts. Thus, to answer the question of 'how formalism has affected religious fanaticism', we will deal with this issues in the framework of legal reasoning understanding. Since some of the readings of religious texts lead to fanaticism, the dominant view in this study is founded on the assumption that understanding religious formalism is effective in spread of religious fanaticism. To clarify the discussion more, we have investigated the background of legal reasoning and Salafi formalism, priority of transmitting hadiths over the thoughts of Ahmad bin Hanbal, Ibn Taymiya, and the effect of Mohammad bin Abdul-Wahhab on Salafi formalism. Similarly, we will analyze the despicable approach of Salafism and formalist interpretation to some religious concepts and beliefs including *walā' and barā', takfīr, ṭāqūt, tatarrus*[1],

---

1. Protecting oneself by placing others, especially women and children, as human shields in a war.

inghimās and jihad to investigate the effect of these factors on religious fanaticism.

1. The background of legal reasoning and religious formalism in Salafism

The term 'formalism' refers to an intellectual and doctrinal trend that considers the best way to know religion and religious orders to be resorting to appearance and form of religious texts, and believes that the intellect cannot understand anything beyond the words of the Quran and Sunnah or to extract the hidden essence of religion (Jabbari and Sajjadi, 1388 SH, p. 11). In general, Salafi denomination is known as an understanding of religion in the way the previous nations would do before the emergence of differences and returning to the first-hand knowledge and sources ('Amara, 1429 AH, p. 11). Sheikh Mohammad Abu Zohreh defines Salafi people as those who 'have followed the way of previous people in understanding religious laws from the Quran and Sunnah'; however, this epithet is applied for those who appeared in the fourth century and were Hanbali, claiming that the collection of their opinions goes back to Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal. Then, in the seventh century, they were revived by the appearance of Ibn Taymiya. Afterwards, in Arabia Peninsula, this idea was seriously considered again by Mohammad bin Abdul-Wahhab in 12th century (Mohsen Ramadhan, 2009, p. 71).

Those who had this understanding of religion maintained that we may achieve the understanding of divine words through religious texts, and that the appearance of the texts is considered as foundations in all times and places regardless of allegorical expressions (Kamalizadeh, 1384 SH, p. 135). In the present era, however, Salafism – affected by Ahmad bin Hanbal's formalism, and more, by Hanbali Ibn Taymiya – appeared in the Sunnite society in the form of an intellectual and doctrinal trend, and various groups such as Jāmi'iya, Surūriya,

Quṭbiya, al-Qaeda and ISIS emerged from this trend.

Jāmiʿiya considered obedience to the ruler as "the one in authority" (*uli-l amr*) a religious obligation, considering other Salafists who believed in rioting against the sultan as rebellious or *khārijī*s. Surūriya raised doubts about *taqlīd* or following religious decrees of Salafi religious men, and had the most effect in contemporary religious fanaticism. This paved the way for criticizing the ruler and rioting against those in authority. They considered *taqlīd* as a tool for doom, and maintained that the result of *taqlīd* is neglecting the religious legal text. They believed that Muslims must discern the time of jihad through personal inference and must act according to their individual taste where violence is needed, without the ruler's permission. The consequence of this formalist and fanatic understanding was promotion and spread of formalist and fanatic interpretations of religion and an increase in violence. Quṭbiya, as the third group of Salafism, along with Surūriya, called the existing condition 'ignorance' and renounced Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic states to present a more fanatic method (Mir-Ahmadi and Valad Beygi, 1393 SH, p. 129).

Al-Qaeda and ISIS, inspired by Surūriya and Quṭbiya and under the influence of formalist understanding of religious texts, displayed a vivid example of practical fanaticism. There have been various studies in this regard, but the present study focuses on this last trend. (i.e. al-Qaeda and ISIS). This fanatic movement has had the most violent behaviors towards innocent people. They showed no mercy even towards women and children, journalists, diplomats and embassies. They considered all other individuals as infidel and shedding their blood as licit. They wanted to found a united Islamic state through fanatic method (Mir-Ahmadi and Valad Beygi, 1393 SH, p. 129). Their formalist approach to jihad forms their fanatic understanding of religious texts as well as their practice.

The legal reasoning understanding is the rational understanding of

the doctrines and teachings of the religious law by using the mechanism of legal reasoning. The legal reasoning understanding based on certain epistemic presuppositions (Mir-Ahmadi, 1383 SH, p. 35) faces a complicated and intangible situation and, throughout the history of Islam – including both Shiite and Sunnite Islam – it was formed in a traditional way and was influential variously in the Muslims' life including its political, social, economic, security and other aspects. But since the relationship between knowledge and power is a closed one, and every power is a reflection of a certain knowledge (Zabetpour, 1387 SH, p. 206), it is possible for some cases of legal reasoning to turn into a foundation for a formalist knowledge and, finally, into fanaticism. On the other hand, using a certain legal reasoning understanding may lead to a certain approach in politics that is inconsistent with other inferences. For instance, one inference may believe in accompanying the Sultan, and another approach may infer jihad against the Sultan (Mir-Ahmadi and Valad Beygi, 1393 SH, pp. 114-116). However, in the history of Salafism, the concepts of legal reasoning and legal imitation have undergone evolutions, and non-definiteness of these concepts shows a non-definiteness of the scholars founding them. for instance, although the main concern of Ibn Taymiya was 'belief', he has issued fatwas in a growing manner. This is while legal reasoning is not a main feature in his practices and the practices of the school founded by Ahmad bin Hanbal (Bin Ali, 2015, p. 69).

The textual Salafism has had a religiously formalist view of itself and an unrealistic and exaggerating view of the Prophet's companions. Not using the intellect and the right legal reasoning has led to their boldness and excommunicating other denominations (Ramadhan al-Bouti, 1379 SH, pp. 29-30). Since the course of time and emergence of new situations lead to various jurisprudential perceptions, nobody may deserve to impose his ideas on others. Otherwise, the right to legal reasoning would not exist for all (Ramadhan al-Bouti, 1379 SH, pp. 31-32).

Although the Salafist thought was reproduced by persons such as Sayyid Jamal, ʿAbdoh and Kavakebi in the new era, they would pursue a relatively rational method and would never excommunicate other Muslims in the name of Salafism. After them, however, Salafism went in another way and one of the important factors for losing its effect was being involved in formalist understanding of Hanbali school, especially Ibn Taymiya's (Motahhari, 1376 SH, pp. 46-47).

They would accuse even many Sunnite Muslims of heresy and exiting religion, and would consider absurd and wrong going to pilgrimage in the Prophet's mosque that most Sunnite jurists would consider permissible. This fanatic understanding is considered among the emblems of heresy and fabrication in religion (Ramadhan al-Bouti, 1379 SH, pp. 260-263).

2. Priority of transmission over contextual study of hadiths in the thoughts of Ahmad bin Hanbal, Ibn Taymiya and Mohammad bin ʿAbdul-Wahhab

The followers of Hanbali school are more biased compared to the followers of other denominations in the school of people of hadith, in a way that they have preferred even the weak hadiths to analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) and juristic opinion (*raʾy*). The followers of that school, due to their bias for hadith and Sunnah, have had fanatic behaviors towards any Islamic denominations without that bias, disturbing other denominations like Shafeʿi and Shiʿism (Fazaʾi, 1393 SH, p. 159).

From Ahmad bin Hanbal's view, a hadith must be transmitted like the early *Salaf* without interpreting or inquiry about its nature. The hidden issues must be relegated to God, because there is no need to make efforts for contemplating on the text of hadith and its rationality. Such formalist view of Sunnah has caused them to attribute to God some things from the appearances, and describe God with members

and organs like a man (Mohsen Ramadhan, 2009, p. 80).

Formalism led them to the direction of considering *Salaf*s (i.e. early companions) as perfect and flawless due to being beside the Prophet. But seeing the Prophet does not alter individuals' nature. Even the Quran has called some of them 'evil-doers' or a 'vicious character' (*fāsiq*): "If a vicious character brings you some news, verify it" (the Quran, Ḥujurāt: 6). Verily, Valid bin ʿUqba was one of the companions and reported some false news in the 6th year AH (Sobhani, 1381 SH, pp. 40-41). Thus, one cannot prove the flawlessness of the *Salaf*s in an absolute way. However, according to that claim, since falsehood has no access to religious law and *Salaf*s are flawless, one must give priority to traditions over contextual study of them (Mohsen Ramadhan, 2009, p. 75).

Priority of religious law over intellect leads to reliance on appearances and not interpreting the transmission. But Ibn Taymiya considered using intellect and logics as a cause for going astray. This formalist view of the Quran and Sunnah has been the cause for most aggressive and religiously fanatic attitudes among the Islamic denominations (Mohsen Ramadhan, 2009, pp. 78-79). This is because we must consider how one can achieve the fact of rightness of hadith or its denoting what he means without using the intellect (Sobhani, 1364 SH, p. 57).

After the pure textualist Salafism in reaction to Greek rationality and textual Salafism with the appearance of Ibn Taymiya who turned somewhat towards rational Salafism in a struggle with closure of legal reasoning, "Salafism of Najd", with the appearance of Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdul-Wahhab (1702-1792) returned to Hanbali pure textual Salafism again. Mohammad bin Abdul-Wahhab, due to his Bedouin milieu as well as intellectual and philosophical poverty, believed that innovations and heresies have caused surplus or deficiency in religion; thus, we must return to the Islam before conquests (ʿAmara, 1419 AH, p. 55). Like the early textual Salafism, he

would avoid referring to anything except text. Thus, *qiyās* (analogical reasoning), *tafsīr* (interpretation), *raʾy* (juristic opinion), and – altogether – intellect was invalid for him. He went so far in this path that he was criticized even by other Salafists. Mohammad ʿAbdoh would admire combating heresies, but he criticized Mohammad bin Abdul-Wahhab's irrational method (ʿAmara, 1429 AH, p. 58). This was because they would treat – with a formalist and fanatic understanding – many issues under the title of polytheism and heresy. They would excommunicate other Muslims and would transgress their lives and properties, while afflicting no harms to non-Muslims and foreigners. They did not add anything to Ibn Taymiya's opinions, but acted more severely and more violently. They destroyed many of the cultural heritages and historical monuments of the Muslims in Arabia and Iraq, and even destroyed the tombs of the Prophet's companions, opposing things that were neither idolatry nor leading to it (Movathaqi, 1389 SH, pp. 157-184).

3. Salafist formalism and denouncing *taqlid* (religious imitation)

Since the second half of seventh century, the Sunnite jurisprudential denominations were divided and restricted into four (Hanafi, Maleki, Shafeʿi, and Hanbali), and the door of absolute legal reasoning was closed. Ibn Taymiya was among those who severely opposed *taqlīd* and denounced restriction of denominations into four. He went so far that issued a fatwa and considered following (*taqlīd*) the four imams as infidelity. Besides, Ibn Amir Sanʿani, one of the great personages of Salafism who was affected by Ibn Taymiya, believed that the texts of the Quran and Sunnah are limited and are not capable to be adjusted to the needs of the time. Thus, legal reasoning (*ijtihād*) is necessary. Shah Valiollah Dehlavi, due to his familiarity with Ibn Taymiya's thoughts, adhered to opening the gate of legal reasoning. Along with them, Mohammad bin Abdul-Wahhab repeated Ibn Taymiya's words

in denunciation of *taqlīd*. Similarly, Naseroddin Albani did not permit, based on the initial principle, *taqlīd* (Mohiti and Farmanian, 1400 SH, pp. 463-464).

In general, from the Salafis' viewpoint, *ijtihad* has various orders, and there are classifications such as independent absolute *mujtahid;* attributed absolute *mujtahid; mujtahid* in denomination, following reasons (*ittibāʿ*) and following a certain denomination (*tama<u>dh</u>hub*) (Qaradawi, 1388 SH, p. 114). However, the two last ones are some sort of *ijtihād*ism (i.e. legal reasoning-centrism) and have had the greatest effect in formalist understanding of denomination, preparing the ground for fanaticism.

***Ittibāʿ*:** in Salafist terminology, *ittibāʿ* means following reasons and proofs. Those who have religious knowledge but has not achieved the position of *ijtihad* (i.e. ability to do legal reasoning) will be offered to use the method of *ittibāʿ*. That is, one must not do *taqlīd* as far as one can. The legally competent person (*mukallaf*) investigates the reasons presented by *mujtahid*s, in conformation with the religious text, and may choose those opinions closer to truth. The theory of *ittibāʿ* means following the [religious] text. Naseroddin Albani believes that the one who is a scholar must do legal reasoning; but those who are unable to do that (i.e. educated persons) must do *ittibāʿ*. And *taqlīd* (i.e. following a qualified jurist's religious decrees) is for the ordinary people in case of necessity (Mohiti and Farmanian, 1400 SH, p. 472).

But the most important objection to the idea of *ittibāʿ* is giving the right to choosing to a competent person (*mukallaf*) not yet achieved the level of legal reasoning, who cannot confirm the reasons with the Quran and Sunnah. Such a person may decide based on the appearances and choose the wrong opinion or follow the person, without sufficient expertise in religion, who has issued fanatic fatwas according to his own passions or under the influence of political issues. And discerning this is not possible except for experts.

Tamadhhub: it means following a certain denomination. For most *Salafi*s, if the religiously competent person (*mukallaf*) prefers his denomination to other denominations, this negation of other denominations will lead to giving priority to the opinions of one's imam over the Quran and Sunnah, which is the same as *taqlīd*. Instead, he may compare them to the Quran and Sunnah. If they oppose those two, he must leave his denomination and choose the views of the imam nearer to the truth (Mohiti and Farmanian, 1400 SH, p. 473).

This caused the process of legal reasoning-centrism to come among the non-jurists and denunciation of following jurists, permitting any person with any level of education to do legal reasoning. Such a process reinforced the fanatic understanding of religion. In Shokri Mostafa's view, since the Quran has been reveled in Arabic, just a good dictionary can help us in explaining some terminologies (Kepel, 1986, p. 88). Thus, we must put aside jurisprudential work, because, in his view, opening the gate of legal reasoning does not need the science of *ijtihād*. We may interpret the Quran and Sunnah with the non-specialized perception of jurisprudence. He considers the history of Islamic civilization outdated, and criticizes the symbols of Islamic society in the name of ignorant and wild society before Islam (Kepel, 1986, pp. 89-91).

From Qaradawi's viewpoint, however, the fanatic formalists are satisfied with the literal understanding of the religious reasons and ignore the Legislator's purpose beyond those words. This trend is called *fiqh al-nuṣūṣ bi-maʿzal ʿan al-maqāṣid* (jurisprudence of the texts by putting aside the purposes); that is, they pay attention to the appearance of the texts, but pay no heed to the Legislator's purpose. Indeed, they rely on their own opinion, excommunicate their opponents and indulge in fomentation (Ghaffari, 1393 SH, p. 266).

This is because the fanatic formalist insists on the ignorance of the society and maintains that there is no need to do legal reasoning for

resolving the issues of the time in the light of the Islamic jurisprudence, for – in the Islamic society – the opinions of former jurists are detached from the present era. Such a society has no relations with Islam, although it apparently claims to be Islamic (Qaradawi, 1388 SH, pp. 302-308).

Qaradawi would describe such a view, that belongs to Sayyid Qotb, among the ambushed mysteries of rigidity and fanaticism towards the society. By referring to the views of ʿAbdul-Qader ʿOwda, he says that the Islamic jurisprudential rules include rules, opinions and laws that can be used – if arranged in a collection of codes – as an excellent sample of legislative laws in human life in any time (Qaradawi, 1388 SH, p. 319).

Qaradawi believes that due to Salafist fanatic approach in dislodging jurisprudential reasoning, if the whole jurisprudence – due to its being jurisprudence – is ignored, it will lead to ignoring *Shariʿa,* because *Shariʿa* has come out of the jurisprudence. And if the commentator does his exegetical work on the basis of appearance, without referring to the opinions of the former and later scholars, the result will be nothing except deviation (Qaradawi, 1388 SH, pp. 329-330). Thus, superficial understanding far from legal reasoning and contemplating on the Quranic verses sees the genuine movement of jurisprudential reasoning as an obstacle in its way and something that necessitates violence and fanatic behaviors (al-Azhari, 2015, pp. 125-130). This is evident in understanding some doctrinal concepts in line with religious fanaticism.

4. Formalist and fanatic understanding of some religious concepts and beliefs

4-1. *Walāʾ* and *Barāʾ* and more vivid role of *Barāʾ*

Many of the fatwas related to *takfīr* (excommunication), violence and rioting against the state are founded on the ideas of *walāʾ* and *barāʾ*. This issue is the origin for many fanatic writings and measures taken

by adducing it. In Ibn Qayyim's view, *muwālāt* (being friend to God's friends) is not right except along with *mu'ādāt* (being enemy to God's enemy). *Mu'ādat* means absolute hostility to what an infidel does. In Ibn Taymya's view, you must have *muwālāt* towards a believer*,* even if he has oppressed you; and you must be hostile to an infidel, even if he has granted you something or has been benevolent to you (Mohsen Ramadhan, 2009, pp. 255-256). But the Prophet himself would establish relations with infidels and would contract treaties with them; thus, we may not use the appearances to set aside jurisprudential reasoning and issue the decree to murder any individual or group in the name of polytheist or infidel.

The fanatic *Salafi*s, since they regard themselves flawless, concentrate more on *barā'* to remove strangers. Ayman al-Zawahiri, based on the appearance of the Quranic verses and Ibn Taymiya's sayings, calls *walā'* and *barā'* the lost truths, enumerates pillars for them and encourages [his followers] to fight with the Islamic rulers and those who assist them as infidels and hypocrites (al-Zawahiri, 1423 AH, p. 23). Looking at the appearance of the text, he encourages religious fanaticism and invites people to fight with the infidels. And since they lack the sufficient ability to fight, they turn to terror and bomb planting in embassies and civil centers, killing innocent people through fanatic and violent behaviors.

4-2. Tyrant

When it comes to the problem of excommunicating the ruler and his assistants, all Salafist extremist writings, with no exception, focus on 'tyranny' and 'judging on other than what God has revealed'. Thus, from their view, taking measures such as murder, bomb planting, and destruction becomes legitimate. Abdullah 'Azzam said, "We could not manage tyrants who claim divinity except through killing children, cutting trees, and destroying facilities; thus, we were obliged to do so,

while we had no intention to do that (Mohsen Ramadhan, 2009, pp. 257-276).

In Martyr Motahhari's words, first they turn their narrow-mindedness into a religious belief; then, they place God on the chair of wrath to pave the ground for fanatic behaviors. Therefore, violent approach finds a proper justification by resorting to religious appearances, and misuses people's beliefs in God's absolute power to strengthen its pillars (Salavati, 1379 SH). Murder of people is the result of the same approach.

4-3. Tatarrus

It means that a polytheist assaulting enemy makes use of captivated Muslim women and children inside the Islamic lands as the human shields. Many of their jurisprudential books justify harming those innocent persons (Mohsen Ramadhan, 2009, p. 325). They refer to the sayings of Ibn Taymiya as follows: "if the unbelievers' army is protected by Muslims' captives, and Muslims get harms if they do not fight, they must be fought then, even though this leads to the murder of Muslims who have been used as the human shields. Therefore, one of the most important human and moral obstacles against terrorist operations is legitimized in their view. Abdullah 'Azzam believed that everyone beneficial for polytheists must be killed, whether he is an old man, a monk, or a disabled person. Doing anything beneficial for the Muslims or harmful for unbelievers, in times of war or readiness for it, is permitted, whether it causes a person or animal to be killed, or a tree to be cut down or a building to be destroyed (Mohsen Ramadhan, 2009, pp. 294-326).

4-4. _Inghimās_ and suicide operations

In the process of religious fanaticism, after the discussion of _tatarrus_ and legitimizing murder of innocent people, the issue of

suicide bombing was considered, based on which, jurists has permitted infiltration of a Muslim into the lines of unbelievers' army (*yanghamis fīhim*) even though he may be killed. The fanatic position is originated from the idea that suicide operations is like entering among the enemies (Mohsen Ramadhan, 2009, pp. 329-330).

Sheikh ʿAbdul-Qader bin ʿAbdul-ʿAziz maintains that the legitimacy of such operations is based on the verse 151 of Surah al-Anʿām: '…and you shall not kill a soul [whose life] Allah has made inviolable, except with due cause…' In his view, much reflection on this verse shows the rightness of jihad and being killed in the path of truth. However, according to a consensus among commentators, the above verse refers to establishment of the punishment of murder (*ḥadd-i qatl*) by the ruler or his deputy. Here, however, suicide and murder is done by the person himself (Tartousi, 2005, p. 4).

Indeed, the superficial understanding of religious law (*Sharīʿa*) has allowed them to justify transgression and violation of human rights to pretend that their fanaticism is a divine order. However, such doctrinal biases are inconsistent with Quranic teachings and freedom in accepting religion. Thus, they forcefully impose their beliefs on others and express fanaticism (Mousavi ʿAqiqi, 1393 SH, p. 90). Among the aftermaths of formalism are having prejudice for one's opinion and not acknowledging others' opinions. They oblige people to what God has not obliged them – violent action where it is not necessary (Mowla, 2012, p. 811).

4-5. Jihad

Regardless of the fact that jihad is an order from God, with no limits and restrictions, Salafism considers it an initiative or axiomatic affair. They pretend there is no need to investigate the legal decree of

jihad in its instances and its various types. In his *Invitation of Islamic Resistance,*[1] Abu Musʿab Souri describes the international invitation of the Islamic resistance in the battlefield. In his view, jihad includes assumptions originated from the thoughts of owners of intellection and philosophy. By proposing the intellectual assumptions, reality is proved between the error and rightness. Theoretically, some opinions are produced in the opportunity of movement and in the battlefield. The permission of such opinions are issued by intellectuals and combatants in the battlefield; and these opinions are obtained after taking in the previous experiences (Abu Musʿab Souri, 2004, p. 877).

It seems that his ideas of 'jurisprudence of jihad' return to one of the orders of jihad from the viewpoint of *Salafi*s called *ittibāʿ*. Fabrication of the term *ittibāʿ* presented a method to the addressee that substituted *taqlīd*. Abu Musʿab's jurisprudence of jihad and movement, which we will deal with in the following section, includes such a superficial understanding of religion. He believes that:

1. The governments in the Islamic countries are today unbelievers and heretic, because they have turned *Sharīʿa* into something 'other than what God has revealed' as well as friendship towards unbelievers and disloyalty to God, His messenger and the believers.

2. Uprising against heretic or unbeliever rulers is, according to consensus, a definite obligation for Muslims.

3. In case of seizure of the Islamic lands by enemies, it is a definite obligation, according to a consensus, for Muslims to rise for jihad.

4. Cooperation with unbelievers leads to fighting and jihad.

5. Assisting Muslims in religion, if they are transgressed by unbelievers, is obligatory (Abu Musʿab Souri, 2004, p. 1132).

---

1. The most important work written by Abu Musʿab, whose place of publication is not known, probably for security reasons.

Using the appearances of texts and considering apparently right propositions together, without paying attention to the Legislator's purpose, paves the ground for excommunication of opponents. The result of this formalist and fanatic understanding of religion is directing combatants towards suicide operations and terrors. According to the idea of 'one's fighting when other people are sitting', one can proceed to jihad if others refrain from it, because the jurists have allowed such a sacrifice (Abu Mus'ab Souri, 2004, p. 1145). This is while it is wrong to attribute such a decree to all jurists. Even some of other *Salafi*s do not accept this opinion completely, because through it, terrorism is legitimized under the title of 'admired horrifying' (*irhāb maḥmūd*) (Abu Mus'ab Souri, 2004, p. 1375).

What about the victims, including women and children as well as innocent ordinary people, in terrorist attacks? Nothing said. Abu Mus'ab Souri considers some bases as important in the framework of imitative rules that are indeed causing solidarity and reinforcement of the fanatic spirit of the combatants, without being based on precise understanding and legal reasoning from the Quran and Sunnah; rather, they form a plan and strategy for achieving one's goals and acquiring desired results. His jurisprudence of jihad reduces the level of religious concepts. It presents a conformation that leads to fanaticism, a conformation that creates an exaggerative image of evil and oppression from the religious propositions in people's minds. It assimilates jihad as a religious affair ordered by God to an oppressive and non-human affair (al-Azhari, 2015, pp. 102-104). In Allameh Tabataba'i's words, group interests and sensual passions cause the formalists to ignore divine purposes and rely on the appearance of texts based on false excuses to transgress people's lives and properties, leaning to fanaticism to achieve their goals (Tabataba'i, 1378 SH, p. 519).

4-6. Excommunication

From the Salafist viewpoint, *takfīr* (excommunication) is a ritual affair like prayer and fasting. It is politically and socially unique religious rite, because *takfīr* identifies the enemies. Turki Bin Ali considers excommunication of unbelievers and fighting with them (*jihad*) as an obligation, and names *takfīr* as one of the forms of *barāʾat* (declaration of repudiation) towards unbelievers (al-Dairy, 2015, pp. 7-18). Some describe this reading of *takfīr* – that creates a right and necessitates enmity and warfare – as savagery and fanaticism, because savagery is specified to the animal instinct and leaves no room for intellect, leading to religious violence and fanaticism (al-Dairy, 2015, p. 20). *Takfīr* can be a resort for politics. By relying on an extremist interpretation of religion and misreading of other religions as a ritual practice, they lead it from a ritual task into a level of politics. Such a policy can be called the policy of *takfīr* and fanaticism based on formalism.

Tartousi has specified a framework for excommunicating the opponents. Thus, anyone who is out of the framework of extremist policies is excommunicated and the ground is prepared for killing him. All fanatic behaviors of al-Qaeda, Taliban, ISIS, al-Nusra, and the like are based on those frameworks. For instance, since someone is a Shiite, he must be declared as polytheist or unbeliever. This framework specifies low and high limits for infidelity, polytheism, oppression, hypocrisy, passion and the like (al-Tartousi, 2003).

In *Qawāʿid fī Takfīr,* he strengthens the doctrinal foundations of *takfiri* fanaticism by resorting to the appearance of these arguments. Besides, they use these rules – whose limits are not quite clear – to pretend to be the symbol of truth and excommunicate other denominations and opponents, using it as a means to achieve their goals. Similarly, using a different and fanatic interpretation, they consider the ultimate level of infidelity, polytheism, debauchery,

passion, oppression and hypocrisy and the like for their opponents, considering them out of the realm of Islam and issuing the decree for fighting with them.

5. Practical fanaticism

Formalist thoughts have fanatic results in practice as well. ISIS, under the influence of Ibn Taymiya's thoughts in a treatise entitled "*Dowlat al-Baghdādī; al-Wāqiʿ wal-Ḥukm al-Sharʿī*", would excommunicate other denominations and even their friends such as al-Nusra font in Syria. In killing them, they did not observe ethics of war and attacked the captives, women, children and the like even with sucide operations (Fatemi-nejad, 1393 SH, p. 76).

In addition to Iraq and Syria, they kept on killing innocent people elsewhere. Assaults in Europe by groups inspired by al-Qaeda, Baga 2015 massacre by Boko Haram; terrorist attack in Tunes Museum; suicide attack against civilians in Jalal Abad in Afghanistan; beheading of 21 Coptic Christians in Libya; terrible massacre of 147 students in Kenia; execution, rape, obligatory change of religion, persecuting and enslaving women promoted by ISIS in social networks are examples of practical fanaticism (Gholami et al., 1396 SH, p. 289). ISIS believed in elimination of [the followers of] all religions and denominations other than Wahhabism, like Christians and Shiites, including Iranian Shiites; and it was a serious threat for the Shiite regime in Iraq (Jamshidi and Davand, 1398 SH, p. 66).

However, the religious texts have forbidden issuing fatwas unknowingly, admonishing about excommunicating Muslims unjustly. One must not attribute infidelity and polytheism to those who say *shahādatayn* (articles of faith), believe in doctrinal principles and do not deny the essentials of religion. Indeed, these excommunications and fanatic behaviors originate from their ignorance. In the Wise Saying no. 70 of *Nahj al-Balagha,* Imam Ali says, "You do not see an

ignorant person except in extremism or negligence" (Ahmad Yousuf, 2015, p. 31).

Doctrinal bias must not lead to religious fanaticism. As Imam Shafe'i says, "Verily, our opinion is a right one with probability of error; and the others' opinions are an error with probability of rightness" (*taṭarruf*). Thus, probability of error opens the way for interaction. But the other opinion is acting according to a wrong opinion out of the framework of law and *Shari'a.* And such a *tatarrf* and bias lead to fanaticism (Afandi, Hanafi and others, 2002, pp. 94-96). As Hannah Arendt says, "Violence can be justifiable, but it will never be legitimate" (Hatami, 1394 SH, p. 8).

Some believe that the *Takfiri* fanatic groups did not initially consider the fighting jihad as the basic method, but in the pass of time and the change of conditions of time and place (Egypt), and being imprisoned, they neglected legal reasoning and right understanding of religion. In facing with rulers, they turned to assassination of personages in the society. The assassination of "Raf'at Mahjoub" in 1990, "Faraj Fouda" in 1992, and before that, the assassination of the Egyptian President "Anwar Sadat" in 1981, and further away the kidnapping of Sheikh Mohammad Hossein Zahabi, the Minister of Endowments of Egypt and his murder by a group called Shokri Mustafa, known as Takfir and Hijra group or Jama'at al-Muslemin are examples of this sort. These groups, before facing with rulers and their dominance, took the path of extremism through formalist legal reasoning, and issued decrees on their disbelief (Obeyd, 2008, p. 38).

Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi declared a large group of intellectual movements as unbelievers who have gone out of Islam's domain, considering all of those participating in the political processes in Iraq, including both Shiites and Sunnites, as unbelievers; and with that description, it was possible to target them with bomb plantings by ISIS (Ibrahim, 2015, pp. 140-141).

The fanatic Salafism in Syria issued public fatwas that declared Shiites as unbelievers deviated from Islam. Then, they declared jihad against the Shiites. These fatwas extended the peaceful struggles of Syrian people, as an internal matter, to the rest of the Islamic lands. The issues in Iraq and terrorist activities in Sistan and Baluchestan province in Iran were considered as examples of war. In a fatwa, Yusuf al-Qaradawi called the arena of the Syrian civil war the field of struggles between the Shiites and the Sunnites. Other Sunnite scholars in Medina accompanied him, who then formed a block with an ideological approach in the Islamic world (ʿUthmani, 1393 SH, pp. 475-476).

Although the extremist approach takes actions against the regime from the religious angle, it does not confront the Shiite revolutions in other countries from the jihadi angle, while in Syria it considers the power equations regarding the resistance front as jihad with Shiite unbelievers (ʿUthmani, 1393 SH, p. 477). Abu Musʿab Zarqavi divides enemies into four groups including Americans, Kurds, Iraqi troops or police, and Shiites. He regards the danger of the Shiites for Sunnites as worse than the danger posed by Americans. Adducing Ibn Taymiya's sayings in calling the Shiites as evils and accusing them to be corrupt in their beliefs and cooperation with Mongols, he incites his followers to have jihad with the Shiites to eliminate them, declaring murder of the Shiites as more obligatory than killing Kharejites (Rafiʿi, 1393 AH, vol. 1, pp. 45-46).

Conclusion

The historical background of Salafism shows that they had a religious formalist view of themselves and an exaggerated view of the Prophet's companions, attributing themselves to the early Muslims. This attribution caused them to take self-righteousness position and excommunicate other denominations. This self-righteousness is based on their understanding of the appearances of religious texts. Due to

their ignorance of truth, they would ignore the demands of time and place and would not feel any need for interpreting the texts, believing that one may acquire the divine words through the appearance of the texts. Adducing to Ahmad bin Hanbal and Ibn Taymiya and following Mohammad bin Wahhab, they regarded rational and philosophical affairs as heretical and did not use other jurisprudential sources such as the intellect and consensus. This formalist understanding of religion, that leads to the priority of transmission over contextual study of hadiths, causes the emergence of fanatic and fundamental expressions for violent behaviors and murder of innocent people.

Besides, the Salafi movement questioned the closure of the way to legal reasoning. Accordingly, formalism opened the way for leaning towards individual legal reasoning by posing issues such as *ittibāʿ* and *tamadhhub.* Putting aside *taqlīd* (following an expert jurist's opinions) and using alternative methods led to a formalist and fanatic understanding of some religious concepts. This formalist understanding caused a legitimization of violent behaviors such as bomb planting, suicide operations and killing innocent people – although they are forbidden in the religious teachings and rules of fighting and jihad – in their view; and many fatwas pertaining to *takfīr* and fanaticism, rioting against the state, terror and suicide operations were founded on those concepts.

References

1. Ibrahim, F. (2015). *Dāʿish: Min al-Najdī ilā al-Baghdādī* (1ˢᵗ ed.). Beirut: Maktaba Quraysh.

2. Ahmad al-Yūsuf, ʿA. (2015). *Al-Takfīr wal-Takfīriyūn* (1ˢᵗ ed.). Beirut: al-Tabaf.

3. Al-Azhari, S. M. (2015). *Al-Ḥaqq al-Mubīn fil-Radd ʿAlā Man Talāʿaba bil-Dīn, al-Tiyārāt al-Muṭrifa (Min al-Akhwān ilā Dāʿish) fī Mīzān ʿIlm Mafāhīm al-Ḥākimiyya wal-Jāhiliyya wal-Jihād* (2ⁿᵈ ed.). Abu Dhabi: Dar al-Faqih.

4. Al-Afandi, ʿA; Hanaf, H. et al. (2002). *Al-Ḥarakāt al-Islāmiyya wa Atharuhā fil-Istiqrār al-Siyāsī fil-ʿĀlam al-ʿArabī* (1ˢᵗ ed.). Abu Dhabi (UAE): Emirate Center for Strategic Studies and Discussions.

5. Sobhani, J. (1364 SH). *Āʾīn Wahhābiyyat* (Vol. 1). Tehran: Mashʿar.

6. Jabbari, K; Sajjadi, S. M. (1388). "Tabʾīn Tarbiyat Dīnī Ẓāhirgirā wa Naqd Ān bar Asās Jariyān ʿAqlgirā" in *Periodical of Islamic Studies, Philosophy and Theology,* 2 (41), pp. 9-46.

7. Jamshidi, M. H.; Davand, M. (1398 SH). "Taḥlīl Āyanda Pazhūhāna az Qudrat wa Nufūdh Ifrāṭgirāʾī Islāmī dar Jahān Islām (Case Study: ISIS)" in *Politics Periodical, Magazine of Faculty of Political Law and Sciences,* 1 (49), pp. 57-74.

8. Hatami, B. (1394 SH.). "Khānish Islām az Tirur wa Tirurīsm" in *Khurdādnāma,* 7 (14), pp. 1-14.

9. Rafīʾī, M. T. (1393). "Taʾthīr Tafakur Jahādī ʿAbdullā Azzām dar Gustarish Khushūnathāyi al-Qāʿida" in the collection of articles in international congress of fanatic and takfiri movements from the viewpoint of Islamic scholars (vol. 1). Qom: Dar al-Islam li-Madresat Ahl al-Bayt.

10. Ramadan, B; Mohammad, S. (1379 SH). *Salafiya, Bidʿat yā Madhhab* (Trans. Saberi, H., 4ᵗʰ ed.). Mashhad: Foundation of Islamic Studies.

11. Sobhani, J. (1381 SH). *Dar Sāḥil Taqrīb* (vol. 1, 3ʳᵈ ed.). Tehran: Mashʿar.

12. Salavati, M. (1379 SH.). *Jumūd wa Khushūnat: Pazhūhishī Pīrāmūn Jaryān Khawārij dar Nahj al-Balāgha.* Tehran: Dhikr

13. Zabetpour, Gh. (1387 SH.). "Hirminutīk wa Siyāsat" in *Scientific Promotive Periodical of Political Sciences,* 11 (42), pp. 205-214.

14. Tabataba'i, S. M. H. (1378 SH.). *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* (Trans. Mousavi Hamadani, S. M. B., vol. 5). Qom: Office of Islamic Publications for Jame'at al-Modarresin.

15. Zawahiri, A. (1423 AH.). *al-Walā' wal-Barā', 'Aqīda Manqūla wal-Ḥaqīqa al-Mafqūda.* Accessible at http://www.tawhed.ws, 1401/08/25

16. Omar, 'A. (2004). *Da'wat al-Muqāwimat al-Islāmiyya al-'Ālamiyya* no place.

17. Abdul-Mon'im al-Tartousi, M. H. (1424 AH.). *Qawā'id fil-Takfīr.* Accessible at www.abubaseer.bizland.com, 1400/09/20.

18. Abdul-Mon'im al-Tartousi, M. H. (1426 AH.). *Munāqishat Adilla wa I'tirāḍāt al-Mukhālifīn Ḥawl al-'Amaliyyāt al-Intiḥāriyya.* Accessible at www.abubaseer.Bizland.com, 1400/09/20.

19. 'Obey, S. 'A. (2008). *Tanẓīm al-Qā'ida al-Nash'a al-Khalīfa al-Fikriyya al-Imtidād.* Cairo: Maktabat Madbouli.

20. 'Uthmani, M. (1393 SH.). "Barrasī Zamīnihāyi Ṣudūr Fatāwāyi Takfīrī wa Payāmadhāyi Ān bar Jahān Islām"_in the collection of articles in international congress of fanatic and takfiri movements from the viewpoint of Islamic scholars (vol. 1). Qom: Dar al-Islam li-Madresat Ahl al-Bayt.

21. Al-Dairy, 'A. A. (2015). *Nuṣūṣ Mutawaḥḥisha: al-Takfīr min Arthūdhaksiya al-Salājiqa ilā Salafiyya Ibn Taymiya* (1ˢᵗ ed.). Beirut: First Center for Study and Validation.

22. 'Imara, M. (1429 AH.). *al-Salaf wal-Salafiyya.* Cairo: Ministry of Endowments of Arabic Republic of Egypt.

23. Ghaffari, A. (1393 SH). "Uṣūl Rawish-shināsī Salafiyya" in the collection of articles in international congress of fanatic and takfiri movements from the viewpoint of Islamic scholars (vol. 1). Qom: Dar al-Islam li-Madresat Ahl al-Bayt.

24. Gholami, M.; Shafi'i Sarvestani, I.; Mohammadi, S. (1396 SH). "Tirurīsm wa Ifrāṭ-girā'ī dar Khāvarmiyāna: Ẓuhūr Dā'ish" in *Periodical of Political and International Researches*. 8 (33), pp. 269-295.

25. Faza'i, Y. (1393 SH). *Taḥqīq dar Tārīkh wa ʿAqāʾid Madhāhib Ahl Sunnat wa Firqayi Ismāʿīliyya* (3rd ed.). Tehran: Ashiyana Ketab.

26. Qaradawi, Y. (1388 SH). *Ijtihād dar Sharīʿat Islāmī Hamrāh bā Naẓarāt Taḥqīqī dar Ijtihād Muʿāṣir* (Trans. Ahmad Neʿmati, 2nd ed.). Tehran: Ihsan.

27. Kamali-zada, M. (1392 SH). "Mafhūm-shināsī Junbishhāyi Islāmī" in *Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif Junbishhāyi Islāmī* (ed. Hatami, M. and Bahrani, M., vol. 1, 1st ed.). Tehran: Research Center of Cultural and Social Studies.

28. Kepel, G . (1986). The Prophet and the Pharaoh: Muslim Extremism in Egypt (Trans. Ahmadi, H.). Tehran: Keyhan.

29. Fatemi-nejad, M. (1393 SH). "Taʾthīr Afkār bin Taymiya dar Gustarish Jināyathāyi Jaryānhāyi Takfīrī" in the collection of articles in international congress of fanatic and takfiri movements from the viewpoint of Islamic scholars (vol. 1). Qom: Dar al-Islam li-Madresat Ahl al-Bayt.

30. Mohsen Ramadan, H. (2009). *Tashrīḥ al-Fikr al-Salafī al-Mutaṭrif* (1st ed.). Damascus: Dar al-Hasad.

31. Mohiti, M. and Farmaniyan, M. (1400 SH). "Bāzkhānī Nigāh Salafiyān bi Ijtihād wa Taqlīd" in *Periodical of Jurisprudential Researches,* 17 (2). Pp. 461-483.

32. Motahhari, M. (1376 SH). *Barrasī Nihḍathāyi Islāmī dar Ṣad Sālih Akhīr* (22nd ed.). Qom: Sadra.

33. Movathaqi, S. A. (1389 SH). *Junbishhāyi Islāmī* (11th ed.). Tehran: SAMT.

34. Mousavi Aqiqi, S. M. (1393 SH). *Mabānī Tiʾurīk Dāʿish dar Fiqh Shīʿa.* Accessible at www.letoarafu.blog.ir. 1400/ 09/ 20.

35. Mowla, S. (2012). *Al-Jimāʿat al-Islāmiyya wal-ʿUnf Mowsūʿa al-Jihād wal-Jihādiyyīn* (1st ed.). Dubai: Mesbar Center for Studies and Discussion.

36. Mir-Ahmadi, M. (1373 SH). "Fahm Ijtihādī SharĪʿat wa Zindigī Siyāsī" in *Periodical of Political Sciences,* 7 (28), pp. 35-56.

37. Mir-Ahmadi, M. and Valad Beygi, A. (1393 SH). "JaryānhĀyi Salafī az Inqiyād tā Ifrāṭ-girāʾī" in *Periodical of Contemporary Political Inquiries,* 5 (2), pp. 111-132.

38. Bin Ali, Mohammad. (2015). *The Roots of Religious Extremism Understanding the Salafi Doctrine of al-Wala wal-Bara*, Imperial College Press (ICP) Insurgency& Terrorism Series.