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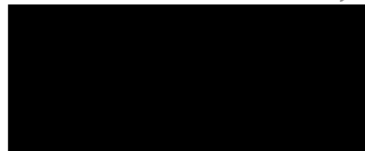
*The Islamist Groups in Tripoli:
Its Reality, Effects and Connections*

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MA Thesis, Fall 2008

Lebanese American University

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Abstract

For the past decade, especially after the 9/11 events, many scholars have related the terrorism phenomenon mainly to Islamic groups. After doing an extended research, I found that rarely scholars have researched the Sunni Islamist groups in Lebanon for the exceptions of the ones located in Palestinian camps. Due to lack of literature resources found on this topic, this thesis relies basically on the publications of the Islamist groups themselves and on interviews, with mainly authority and leaders of the Islamist groups, to get practical information.

Many studies have unfortunately linked the Islamic religion with terrorism. This is a misconceived notion since the Islamic religion is one of peace; and Islam and radical Islamists are entirely two different things. The purpose of this paper is to distinguish between these two concepts.

Although Islamist groups vary in their means and methods to achieve their goals, nevertheless, all Islamist groups share the same ideology which consists of aspiring to use Muslim law or the *Sharia* as the only law to follow. What makes it even more critical for scholars to study them further is that some of the Islamist groups are ending up being terrorists; those are mostly the jihadi Muslim who view terrorism as a part of their religious duty to save Islam from the aggressiveness of the non-Islamic world. However, do these Islamist groups interpret Islam as it is really is? Does Islam really protect terrorism? This thesis will confirm that Islam is against all Jihadist Islamist's violent acts.

Over the past few years, the number of Islamic fundamentalist groups has soared and some have become a significant force in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon. Both domestic and external causes have allowed those Islamists to play a major role in the politics of Lebanon where they are capable of acting with greater freedom than in any other country. This thesis attempts to focus more on those main causes.

Tripoli, Lebanon's second largest city, has always been a fertile ground for Islamist groups. For the past few years Tripoli has witnessed an increase in problems between Islamists and the Lebanese government, and this is affecting the entire country. To understand the situation further, it is currently more vital than ever to conduct this research about the Islamist groups in Tripoli, their reality, effects and connections.

Additionally, this thesis deals with the following currently existing main Sunni Islamist groups in Tripoli : Al Salafiyian, Harakat Al Tawhid al Islami, Majmouat al-Dinniyeh, Al Tahrir party, Al Jamaa Al Islamiya, Al Ahbash , Jabhat al Amal al islami , and Fatih al islam to the second. This study will focus on each of these group's background, ideology, goals and connections.

Moreover, as mentioned in the International Crisis Group report titled "Understanding Islamism", Sunni Islamist groups can be classified into three different types: political, missionary, and jihadi. To understand the Islamist groups of Tripoli better, this thesis tries to categorize these groups into these three types.

Furthermore, this thesis attempts to determine why Tripoli's inhabitants have increasingly participated recently in Islamist groups. What are the causes behind that? Also many Tripolitarians change memberships and shift their allegiance from one Islamic group to another. What is the rationale for that? Obviously, one cannot study such a phenomenon without reflecting on how terrorist acts can be prevented. By whom and by what means?

In short, this thesis seeks to complement the literature on Islamic political groups to fill the gap regarding those Sunni Islamists who are found in Lebanon and Tripoli in particular which embraces the majority of the Sunni Islamist groups of Lebanon .Also, it stresses that Islam is against the violent acts and that not all Sunni Islamist groups are Jihadist and fundamentalist.

Introduction

Over the past decade, the number of terrorist acts has increased tremendously throughout the world. For many scholars, especially after 9/11, the terrorism phenomenon, which is defined as any repulsive act of violence that is perceived as directed against society¹, is mainly linked to Islamic groups. Although this is not always the case, Islamist terrorism does create a threat for many nations.

Even though according to many scholars, spiritual Islam does not have any place for violence, yet political Islam is the one that gave birth to the terror ideology. According to Dr. Mustapha Adib, the fall of the Islamic caliphate in 1918 with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire was one of the main reasons that drove Muslims everywhere in the world to consider the establishment of Islamic groups hoping to regain the Islamic caliphate someday. Also later, the founding of the state of Israel in the middle of the Arab world motivated more Muslims to set up Islamic groups in order to regain Palestine.²

Besides, the concept of political Islam became more motivated after the Iranian revolution in 1979. In fact, the Islamic revolution in Iran has activated and encouraged the growth of Islamic groups in the Arab countries, one of which is Lebanon.³ The Shiite activists represented mainly by the Shiite religious men, “the ulama”, had by then played an important political role in which they were trying to defend the interests of the Shiite who are a minority in the Islamic world. Moreover, to have a better understanding of Islamic activism in general, it is vital to differentiate between the Sunni and the Shiite Islamic activism.

¹ Russell Howard and Reid Sawyer, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security environment* (USA: McGraw-Hill, 2003) 3

² Dr. Mustapha Adib, personal interview, 15 August 2008. Dr. Adib is the general director of The Center For Middle Eastern Strategic Studies and a Professor in Political Studies at the Lebanese University.

³ Boaz Ganor, “The Islamic Jihad: The Imperative of Holy War”, *The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, 15 February 1993: 2 <<http://www.jcpa.org/jl/saa31.htm>>.

Additionally, my choice for the topic “the Islamist Groups in Tripoli: Its Reality, Effect and Connections” came not by accident. It only happened after I perused an extended research. Most of the publications I perused recently in my research concerning Islamist groups in Lebanon were mainly about the Shiitte Islamist groups (mainly Hezbollah). With the exception of the ones specializing in Palestinian camps such as author Bernard Rougier, scholars have seemingly rarely researched Sunni Islamist groups in Lebanon. This has motivated me more to work on this specific topic. Besides, being a Tripolitarian citizen, I thought it will be a good opportunity for me to work in Tripoli which embraces the majority of the Sunni Islamist groups of Lebanon.

Moreover, many challenges have faced me during my work. First, it was the lack of resources found on this topic. As mentioned earlier, rarely scholars have researched this topic. In fact, I didn't find any book in English that talk about all the Sunni Islamist groups in Lebanon. Although I found articles but even those were only about some specific groups and not about all the Sunni Islamist groups in Lebanon. Even the Islamist groups themselves didn't all have publications, and if they do it was usually in Arabic language . This has led me to the second challenge which was the language. Most if not all the publications I found and all the interviews I did were in Arabic language. So the problem of translating from one language to another and using the correct language that expresses the Islamists words was a real challenge. The third challenge was the ability to make interviews with the leaders of the Islamist groups. Since I wanted my thesis to reflect as much as possible practical information from the groups themselves I thought the best mean to do so is by doing interviews. Nevertheless, many of the Islamist leaders didn't accept to do so. In fact, some even were afraid of my topic. Some of the Islamic groups think that my topic will benefit research centers that are the enemy of Islam rather than an academic research. The fourth challenge I faced in my work was of course the latest situation in Lebanon generally and in Tripoli

specifically. Due to the recent situation many of the meetings and interviews were postponed for many times. Some were at the end even cancelled. Recently, many Islamist leaders believe that they have more important things to do than to do a meeting or interview with an academic student. Nevertheless, all these challenges have given me more enthusiasm and motivation to continue working on this topic. This thesis will therefore attempt to complement the literature on Islamic political groups to fill the gap regarding those Sunni Islamists who are found in Lebanon and Tripoli in particular which holds the majority of the Sunni Islamist groups of Lebanon.

Furthermore, scholars are always partial to creating a link between Islam and terrorism. This is a monumental misconceived idea since Islam is a religion of peace; and Islam and radical Islamists are entirely different concepts. The purpose of this paper is to clearly distinguish the disparity between the two of them. Thus, this thesis will use the word *Islam* to indicate the religion and its theological aspects and the word *Islamists* (Islamist groups) to signify political movements and philosophies.

Islamist groups or Islamic activism are groups in Islam with ideologies that desire to use Muslim law or the *Sharia* as the sole law to follow, and ignore any existent state laws. In other words, the term "Islamist" could be used to mean someone who is aiming to increase Islam's role in society and politics with the goal of establishing an Islamic state.⁴ Moreover, not all Islamic activists 'swim in the same river', and in fact only a few are violent. However, this minority of unrestrained and impetuous Islamic activists were able to have an immense negative impact on the international community at large, since their terrorism not only affects their own countries but also numerous others. In other words, although most of these Islamist groups focus on domestic interests of their home countries, they nevertheless are

⁴ Randal James, "The Islamist Challenge in the Middle East and North Africa", *Air War College* [Alabama], April 1996 : 5.

increasingly concerning themselves with more transnational strategies. This is what we entitle nowadays “globalized Islamists”.

What makes it critical for scholars to study them further is that some of these Islamist groups are resorting to terrorism; these are mostly the jihadi Muslim groups. Without a doubt, most of these jihadi groups view terrorism as a part of their religious duty to salvage Islam from the aggressiveness of the non-Islamic world. However, are these Islamist groups authentically justified in their interpretation of Islam?

Moreover, over the past few years, the number of Islamic fundamentalist groups has soared and some have even become a significant force to be reckoned with in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon. There are two types of Islamist groups in Lebanon: the Shiites and the Sunnis .Those Islamists play a major role in the politics of Lebanon where they have so far been given leave to act with much greater freedom than in any other country. It is not a secret that domestic causes such as the unbalanced socioeconomic development, the gross mal-distribution of wealth, the disorienting impact of westernization and chronic security deficit; and external causes such as proxy battles fought by Arab states on Lebanese soil, the victory of Islamist forces in Iran, the ongoing strife between Israel and the Palestine and above all, the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, have aided to abet to a great extent the presence of the Islamist groups in Lebanon.

Tripoli, the second largest city in Lebanon, has always been a fertile ground for Islamist groups. It is well known that Tripoli contains a majority of conservative Sunni Muslim inhabitants. It is important to note that this thesis agrees with the International Crisis Group report that distinguishes between three types of Sunni Islamist groups: political, missionary, and jihadi. Each of the Islamist groups found in Tripoli will be categorized according to one of those three types.

Furthermore, this second largest city in Lebanon has a long history of radical Sunni groups. At times Tripoli was almost totally controlled by Islamist groups such as in the 80s when the "Tawhid" movement was predominant in that city. This influenced events not only in Lebanon but also in Syria at the time when the latter country had dominance in Lebanon. Neighboring Syria had viewed the Sunni Islamists as a threat to its own regime. As a result, heavy fighting between the Syrian and the Tawhid movement resulted in an abundance of casualties in Tripoli. Not to mention the fact that hundreds of Islamists were arrested and imprisoned by the Syrian government, some of who are claimed to be in Syrian jails until now.

In recent history, Tripoli has witnessed an increasing number of thorny problems between Islamists and the Lebanese government. For example, in the year 2000, a group of Islamists militants had fought against the Lebanese troops in the Dinneyh area, a mountainous region east of Tripoli. Not to mention the latest conflict that led to a critical conflict between the Lebanese army and the Fatih al Islam group in Nahir Al Barid. As a result of this conflict, Tripoli still experiences almost daily arrests of Fatih Al Islam members or citizens of Tripoli who are associated with this radical group.

Additionally, Tripoli is considered to be a city from which Islamists Jihadists are dispatched to other countries. Tripolitarians belonging to Islamist groups fight passionately for their beliefs not only in Lebanon but also outside its borders. In fact, dozens of young Tripolitarians have left their homes and traveled to wage war against the American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁵

The following is a listing of the main Sunni Islamist groups presently found in Tripoli: Al Salafiyian (Ulama & Jihadists), Harakat Al Tawhid al Islami, Majmouat al

⁵ Nicholas Branford, "In Lebanon's Camps, Rising Sympathy for Islamists", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 31 May 2007: 1 < <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0531/p01s03-wome.htm> >.

Dinneveh, Al Tahrir party, Al Jamaa Al Islamiya , Al Ahbash , Jabhat al Amal al islami , and Fatih al islam .

A close scrutiny of the various Islamist groups in Tripoli leads to questioning why some groups are exaggeratedly more violent or extremist than others. This will allow us to examine these groups from religious and political viewpoints. This thesis will focus on their ideological differences, goals, political alliances on the domestic and international levels, and their links with other sects like Shiite Islamic groups. We will venture to explain why these collaborations occur and for what reason, and whether some of these groups possess external agendas. The latter issue will enable us to clarify the existent relationship with outsiders and whether it is of an ideological, political, or even of a military nature.

In addition, this thesis will focus on the choices for the Islamists. Why has there recently been a swelling of Tripolitanian people participating in Islamist groups? What are the exact causes behind their affiliation to these groups? Are they domestic or external ones? Or both? Also many Tripolitanian people tend to shift allegiances from one Islamic group to another; why does this transference occur? Do they in reality truly change their ideological beliefs? Is the reason for this change due to financial, or “peer group” pressure?

One cannot investigate the Islamist phenomenon without reflecting on how it can be countered or fought against, by whom (believers or non-believers, the State, the civil society), with whose help (foreign countries such as US, France, Syria, Iran and others.), and it should also be kept in mind that some foreign countries support Islamist groups in Lebanon for their own purposes. Furthermore, I will point out the tentative steps required to attain a hopefully peaceful situation in Lebanon. I will additionally focus on the means to confront the terrorism of some of these Islamist groups in Lebanon, specifically in Tripoli.

Finally, this study will aim at answering the following questions: Which of the Islamist groups in Tripoli are currently on the ascendancy and which are on the decline? Do

these groups always have a fixed ideology? Or do the changes in political interests and different environments lead to a corresponding change in the understanding of their own ideologies? What is the appropriate policy to pursue in order to mitigate the extremism of some Islamists in Tripoli specifically and Lebanon in general?

Chapter I: Islam, Islamists and Terror

Since 9/11, there has been no subject matter more topical than the one of Islam and its presumed links to terrorism. The issue has generated a myriad books and articles. Some of these works were written to satisfy people's genuine curiosity concerning the Moslem religion, while others falsely concentrated on examining the relationship between the Muslim religion and terrorism. This latter notion linking two utterly disparate concepts leads us to providing our own definition of the term "terrorism". In fact, there has never been a commonly accepted definition of its significance until now. The word has a diversity of meanings to different people. There is currently no definition of terrorism under International Law.⁶ And that is why this thesis deems it important to supply an appropriate and specific meaning of the term. It agrees with a generally held belief that terrorism signifies "the use of violence or threat of violence against humanity in service of a political aim".⁷

Ironically, "Islam" is a religion which in itself carries the implication of "peace".⁸ So how is it possible for two concepts which have opposite connotations and interests to be actually related?

Many Western scholars are keen to portray Islam as an oppressive religion. But these analysts are only capable of associating Islam with Islamist groups and terrorist actions. If their linkage was correct then it would be a stupendous dilemma since adherents of Islam form one of the largest communities in the world. Fortunately there is no ground for these fears; Islam is a religion of peace. The people responsible for attempting to make this connection are scrutinizing Islam in a selective fashion. They shed light on one side of the picture but they certainly are not viewing the entire spectacle.

⁶ Gabriela Echeverria, "Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism and Torture: International Law in the Fight against Terrorism", *Redress*, July 2004: 3 <<http://ejp.icj.org/IMG/UKRedress4pdf>>.

⁷ Russell Howard and Reid Sawyer, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment* (USA: McGraw-Hill, 2003) 4.

⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam and the Question of Violence", *Al-Serat*, <<http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/IslamAndViolece.htm>>.

However, if Islam is a religion of peace, how could it have acquired the reputation of being a religion of terror? The answer lies with the Islamist groups that unfortunately provide a reprehensible impression and nefarious image of the Muslim religion. Their violent actions have contributed greatly to effectuate the hook-up between Islam and terrorism. Islam is a religion that calls for peace, justice, and respect for others. It is also against suicide and innocent killings. However most, if not all, of the Islamist militants misinterpret the Islamic religion. They claim that their terrorist actions are committed to protect Islam; the reality however is that they only protect their own narrow political interests.

There is presently an ongoing massive debate regarding the interpretation of jihad and its links to terror. After the Muslim world lost its unity at the end of Ottoman rule, many individuals claimed the right to reinterpret Islamic texts to provide legitimacy to their own ideas. One of these reinterpreted texts was about jihad and its real meaning. *Jihad* which is part of Islam is often wrongly depicted by many Islamists. To most Islamists it is synonymous with warfare. However, for many, the true meaning of the word jihad is “to exert” which is related to *Ijtihad*, a recognized source of the Sharia.⁹ *Ijtihad* refers to the practice of interpretation on matters of Islamic law and traditionally must be conducted only by Islamic jurists. Nevertheless, nowadays many Islamist leaders claim the right to *Ijtihad* for themselves.¹⁰ The *Sharia* is defined as the body of laws and rules without which Islam loses its purpose.¹¹ The literal meaning of *Jihad* in the Arabic language is striving, contention or struggle.¹²

⁹ A.G Noorani, *Islam & Jihad* (New York: Zed Books, 2002) 45.

¹⁰ Randal James, “The Islamist Challenge in the Middle East and North Africa”, *Air War College* [Alabama], April 1996: 8.

¹¹ Azzam Tamimi and John Esposito, *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000) 27.

¹² Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, *Against Islamic Extremism: The Writings of Muhammad Sa'id* (USA: University Press of Florida, 1998) 113.

In fact, the significance of Jihad in Islam is much broader than just waging war.¹³ Jihad in Islam is a positive thing. Additionally Majid Khadduri, an Iraqi jurist, states that according to Muslim jurists, a believer can fulfill his jihad obligation in four different manners: by his heart, his tongue, his hands and his swords.¹⁴ Based on this, there are two types of jihad, the “greater jihad” and the “lesser jihad”. The former is spiritual and it means engaging in a battle against sins in one’s life and one’s animal instincts, while the latter is exerted to signify righteous warfare on behalf of the community as a duty of a Muslim provided he is attacked. It is important to emphasize here that an extensively well known *Hadith* reports that the Prophet Mohammad primarily stressed the “greater Jihad”. According to this Hadith, on returning from a battle the Prophet Mohammad stated, “we return from the little jihad to the greater jihad, the more difficult and crucial effort to conquer the forces of evil in oneself and in one’s own society in all the details of daily life.”¹⁵ Also, on the same issue, there is another saying of the Prophet Mohammad which is that “the best jihad one performs is that of helping oneself gain more knowledge of Almighty God”.¹⁶

Moreover, the Holy Quran instructs Muslims to be just, patient, and place major value on human rights and the sanctity of human life. A verse of the Quran states that unless someone kills another person in retaliation for the slaying of another human being or for causing corruption on earth, it is as if he had murdered the whole of mankind.¹⁷

Additionally, according to Sheikh Dr. Fathi Yakan, a famous figure among Islamists in Tripoli, terrorism is defined as any psychological or physical act which aims at frightening an individual, group or country. Dr. Yakan believes there are two different types of terrorism in Islam. The first one targets innocent people by assaulting them cruelly without a reason.

¹³ Richard Clarke, et al., *Defeating the Jihadists: A Blueprint for Action* (New York: The Century Foundation Press, 2004) 9.

¹⁴ A.G Noorani, *Islam & Jihad* (New York: Zed Books, 2002) 45.

¹⁵ John K. Cooley, *Unholy Wars* (United States: Pluto Press, 2000) 120.

¹⁶ John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 33-34.

¹⁷ Harun Yahya, *Islam Denounces Terrorism* (London: Amal Press, 2002) 9.

The second type is possibly used as a response to prevent aggression and to protect the innocents. Islam in the first type does not allow terrorist acts even against non Muslims.¹⁸ This is clearly shown in the Quran verse "*Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion nor drove you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity*" {Surah Al Momtahana: 8}.¹⁹ However, in the second type, Islam exceptionally allows a few terrorist actions solely to protect the innocent and defend their rights.²⁰ This is clearly shown in the Quran verse "*And make ready against them all you can of power, including steeds of war (tanks, planes, missiles, artillery) to threaten the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others besides whom, you may not know but whom Allah does know. And whatever you shall spend in the Cause of Allah shall be repaid unto you, and you shall not be treated unjustly*" {Surah Al Anfal: 60}.²¹

In other words, the Quran affirms that the injustice of others does not excuse one's own inequity.²² But unfortunately, Islamists who employ terrorist methods never associate their actions to Islamic principles. They grossly misinterpret jihad and link it to terrorism alleging they are salvaging Islam from the aggression of the non-Islamic world. Jihad nowadays does not reflect its religious essence but is instead increasingly identified with political issues.

Are these Islamist groups interpreting Islam's message correctly? Does Islam truly justify violent acts as some of the Islamists groups' claim? To answer these questions let us refer again to the Quran, the holy book of Islam. The verses 190, 191, 192 and 193 of Surah Baqarah in the Quran discuss the concept of fighting or violent engagement and clarify that it must only occur in self-defense.

¹⁸ د. فتحي يكن، الأولويات الحركية في أعقاب 11 أيلول: 39.

¹⁹ Muhamad Taqiudin Al Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Interpretation of the Meaning of The Noble Quran in the English Language* (Saudi Arabia: Darussalam)700.

²⁰ د. فتحي يكن، الأولويات الحركية في أعقاب 11 أيلول: 39.

²¹ Muhamad Taqiudin Al Hilali, and Muhammad Muhsin Khan 235.

²² Thomas Arnold, *The Spread of Islam in the World, a History of Peaceful Preaching* (India: Goodword Books, 2001) 71-72.

Verse 190: "And fight in the way of Allah those who fight against you, but transgress not the limits. Truly, Allah likes not the transgressors.

Verse 191: and kill them whenever you find them, and turn them from where they have turned you out. And Al- Fitnah is worse than killing. And fight not with them at Al- Masjid –Al Haram(the sanctuary at Makkah), unless they (first) fight you there. But if they attack you, then kill them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers.

Verse 192: But if they cease, then Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Verse 193: And fight them until there is no more Fitnah (disbelief and worshipping of others along with Allah) and (all and every kind of) worship is for Allah (Alone). But if they cease, let there be no transgression except against the polytheists and wrong-doers. ”²³

In short, the problem with Islamist jihadists is that they selectively concentrate on certain verses of the Quran. They choose the sections or parts of the verses which suit their interests. They do not read the entirety of the verses. They misquote Quranic verses to interpret jihad for example and its acceptance of unfair assaults even if it is not in a defensive situation. However, according to the above Quranic verses, jihad is only defined as warfare if it has a specific cause, rigorous conditions, and a well-defined enemy. The most essential rule in this definition is that Muslims must not be aggressors or initiate hostilities.²⁴

Moreover, the problem also is in defining the “defense situation”. Many of the Islamist groups nowadays in Lebanon and abroad relate *defense* to political situations. Those groups use jihad to legitimize their own interests and not the veritable religion of Islam, as it is really represented in the Quran. Also, jihad has recently acquired a non geographical nature. Similar to other global movements after the Cold War, it adopts the most disparate locations as temporary bases for its actions.²⁵ And this is making it therefore even more arduous to fight the Islamist Jihadists groups.

²³ Muhamad Taqiudin Al Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan 47-48.

²⁴ Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, *Against Islamic Extremism: The Writings of Muhammad Sa'id* (USA: University Press of Florida, 1998) 114.

²⁵ Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005) 137.

In other words, as Karen Armstrong wrote in Time magazine, if the evil bloodshed we witnessed on September 11 were typical of Muslim faith, and if Islam truly inspired and justified such violence, then its growth and the increasing presence of Muslims in both Europe and the U.S. would be a terrifying prospect. Fortunately, this is not the case.²⁶

Indubitably, Islam embraces the whole of life and is rightfully the religion of peace. Islamic laws protect human rights and human beings not only of the Muslims but also people of other religions who are approvingly considered as being "people of the Book". In fact, the Muslim religion is opposed to causing any injury on women and children even at a time of war. In a battlefield, only belligerents must be confronted with force. Islam strictly limits the use of violence and aims at the establishment of peace. In Islam, the exertion of force and jihad begins with the disciplining of ourselves.²⁷

It is therefore crucial to differentiate between modernist and fundamentalist Islamic activism. Some Western countries commit the grievous error of equating all Islamist activism with terrorism. However, not differentiating between the modernist and fundamentalist ones will only make the current global situation worse, and might even cause the non-violent and modernist Muslims to be disregarded in favor of the radical Jihadis.

²⁶ Karen Armstrong, "The True Peaceful Face of Islam", *TIME Magazine*, 1 October 2001
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1000907,00.html>>.

²⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam and the Question of Violence", *Al-Serat* <<http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/IslamAndViolece.htm>>.

Chapter II: The Situation in Lebanon and Tripoli

A. Lebanon and its present situation

Lebanon is a country located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea with a territorial area of approximately 10, 452 sq km. It borders with Syria from the north and east, and Israel in the south. This gives Lebanon a strategic importance and an accompanying crucial political role to play in the Middle East. In fact, all regional conflicts, and primarily the Israeli-Arab, Syrian and Iranian (also involving America) ones, have affected Lebanon in one way or another.

Lebanon's exclusive characteristic is its sectarian diversity. As a result, it has developed a unique political system, known as 'confessionalism' or what the Lebanese like to term 'confessional democracy', based on a religious, community-based and power-sharing mechanism .

In fact, Lebanon's political system and culture has been shaped by its unique features that gave priority to the rights of the diverse religious groups within the Lebanese society, which is collective rights, at the expense of individual rights. This eventually led to a fragmented society of separate communities living side by side, with a superficial attempt at integration and with each group displaying more allegiance to its religious feudal leaders than to the state.

Until the Lebanese Civil War that occurred from 1975 till 1990, the country enjoyed a relative period of calm and prosperity. At that time Lebanon's wealthy economy was driven mostly by tourism, agriculture, and banking sectors. The country was then considered the banking capital of the Arab world and was widely known as the "Switzerland of Western Asia" due to its financial power. Lebanon was considered a major tourist attraction for Arabs

and western people. As a result, Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, became widely referred to as the "Paris of Western Asia."

At the conclusion of its civil war, Lebanon faced and still confronts severe domestic problems; its political, social, and economic grievances have fueled the rise of Islamist groups in Lebanon. And it has still been unable to attain the required political stability for a balanced socio-economic development, and equitable distribution of its wealth and resources. The country additionally suffers from the disorienting impact of westernization and a chronic security shortage.

Besides its dismal domestic record, there are external factors which have augmented the presence and power of Islamist groups in Lebanon. The peripheral elements consist of the several proxy battles fought by Arab states on Lebanese soil, the victory of Islamist forces in Iran, the rise of the Al Qaeda, the U.S intervention in the region, the ongoing strife between Israel and the Palestine, and above all, the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. These conflicts have led to anti western sentiment and to the so-called "internationalization of jihad."

As a result, the Salafists jihadism movement in Lebanon nowadays is no longer solely limited to the Palestinian refugee camps located in that country; for the past few years, a large number of Lebanese, especially in the North, have affiliated themselves with radical Islamists.

Additionally, after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, the political situation has become increasingly complex in Lebanon; Syria's military withdrawal in 2005 has resulted in a conspicuous split of the Lebanese ruling class. We currently have mainly two parties or coalitions, "February 14" who are the supporters of the government and the "March 8" the so-called opposition party. This schism between the Lebanese has assumed dangerous sectarian dimensions, and exists not only between Muslims and Christians but also between Sunnis and Shiites.

Even though the pluralistic structure of Lebanese Governance and society has always been a source of disappointment and an obstacle to Islamists' objectives mainly because no confessional group has been sufficiently powerful to dominate or influence the country. In other words, it has proved to be an impossible task to impose Sharia (Islamic law) in Lebanon with such a system. Yet, this division and polarization of the Lebanese society is playing an immense role in increasing the power and number of Islamist groups in Lebanon, especially the radical ones.

B. Background, history and current situation of Tripoli

Tripoli ("Trablos" in Arabic), the second largest city in Lebanon, is located 85 kilometers north of Beirut. Described at times as the capital of the North, Tripoli has its own distinctive characteristics. There is archeological evidence of remnants which date back to 1400 BC, and numerous other historical places of interest. Forty-five buildings in the city have been registered as chronicled sites. In fact, Tripoli is considered to be the second Mamluk city after Cairo. According to Sheikh Bilal Baroudi it is not surprising that Tripoli attracts more and more Islamic groups, especially since it is known in history to be the city of "education and educational people"; it is also considered to be more conservative than other Lebanese cities.²⁸

Tripoli's population consists mostly of Muslim Sunni in religion. Besides, Tripoli is still in a way considered to be a traditionalist city in many ways. The Tripolitarians still follow some own traditions and are more conservative and religious and less open and outgoing if compared to the citizens of Beirut. In Tripoli, for examples, there isn't much of a night life like night clubs, bars, and pubs for people to attend and if there is one it is not visibly in public. Furthermore, its bordering northern location to Syria has provided it with a

²⁸ Sheikh Bilal Baroudi, personal interview, 17 July 2008. Sheikh Baroadi is a famous sheikh in Tripoli who is known to have a close relation with many Islamists groups in Tripoli.

pivotal political and regional role. It is not surprising therefore that Syria had at one time control and influence over Tripoli.

Tripoli was the first city which introduced the Salafist ideology to Lebanon. The number of Salafists in Tripoli has increased at a rapid pace as a result of the dreadful living conditions in certain parts of that city.²⁹ Although Tripoli is the second largest city in Lebanon, it still has horrendous economical, medical, educational, environmental and social situations. Most if not all the economical developed efforts in Lebanon were concentrated in the capital Beirut while the peripheral cities like Tripoli were neglected. As an example, according to a UNDP report the area of "Bab al Tibaneh" in Tripoli is considered to be one of the most economically depressed areas in Lebanon. In fact, within the last few decades Tripoli has become a city that faces substantial unemployment, a lack of development projects, an increase in its poverty ratio, a decline in industrial and commercial activities, and most importantly, an escalation in perception among its citizens that they are politically and economically marginalized by the government. These factors are exploited by Islamist groups in Tripoli and have helped to enlarge and substantiate their recruitment base. The consequences of these changes in Tripoli and its society are not to be underestimated.

One example that illustrates this change is the Bab al Tibaneh incident which occurred in December 1986. After the growing influence of Islamist groups in Tripoli, the Tawhid movement eventually had a considerable amount of control over the city in the early eighties. Syria, which had a tangible military presence in Lebanon at that time, considered this movement as a threat to the security of its own regime. As a result, and after receiving the direct order from the Damascus based regime, Lebanese leftist militiamen allied with Syria killed most of the Bab al Tibaneh's men, and numerous citizens who were part of or allied to the Tawhid group were arrested and incarcerated in Syria.

²⁹ تمام البرازي، " الخريطة السياسية لسنة طرابلس (1)". *الوطن العربي*. 27 شباط 2008 : 18.

The changes and outcome of the increased Tripolitarian participation in Islamic groups are quite noticeable in Tripoli these days, especially in neighborhoods such as Abu Samra. The shifts in Tripolitarian society are also evident. For example, an augmented number of women are entirely dressed or covered up in black, there is an equal increase in the wearing of veils, more men affect lengthy beards, and the establishments of further religious schools contain larger numbers of students. Classes at these schools are usually taught by Islamist sheikhs that belong to an Islamic group in Tripoli. In fact, legislative and political life in Tripoli is minimum and limited to the residences or offices of parliamentarians and ministers; it is the mosques instead that are playing a more active political role in the city.

These factors have broadly encouraged the spread of Islamist groups and the Salafi ideology in particular among the people of Tripoli. And with the presence of extreme and fundamentalist Islamist groups, this has resulted in having terrorist and violent acts in Tripoli. This issue was reflected in the year 2000 when a group of Islamist youth fought against the Lebanese army in the Dinneyeh area located in northern Lebanon. Besides, of course, the latest confrontation between the militant Fatah al Islam group and the Lebanese army in Tripoli and mainly Nahir al Bared refuge camp; it was described as being the bloodiest conflict in Lebanon since the end of the Lebanese civil war. However, it is important to mention that Fateh al Islam is not the first group to adopt the Salafist jihadist ideology in Tripoli. Neither is it the initial one Tripolitarians have deemed sufficiently attractive to join, but maybe it was one of the key groups that employed violent means in Tripoli.

According to Dr. Abdul Ghani Imad, a sociology and Islamic Affairs professor, the established presence of the Salafi movements in Tripoli is related to the conservative identity and nature of the city. These movements were promoted by people who had traveled and

studied in Saudi Arabia, and later on attached themselves to the Muslim Brotherhood. According to Dr. Imad, Tripoli has always been a conservative city; it was a pre-existing strong Islamic sentiment which eventually led to the ascendancy of Salafism. Additionally, Dr Imad believes that the main reason for the Salafi Wahhabi culture's popularity was not only because it did not complicate matters and had no overtly political agenda, but also because it had no particular chief or place. Thus, every community has at most its own sheikh, and the Salafism that exists in one location or country is not necessarily similar to the one that prevails in another. Dr Imad stresses that recent events in Tripoli have exhibited how the moderate Salafism in Lebanon is now concealed behind its militant offspring.³⁰

Furthermore, Dr Ahmad Moussalli , a political science and Islamic studies professor at the American University of Beirut, affirms that Salafists in Lebanon, and specifically Tripoli, believed in the attainment of their objectives through peaceful means, and that their recent employment of violence is mainly due to the influence of Al Qaeda.³¹

In short, because of the above mentioned situation, the Islamist groups in Tripoli are attempting to fill the void left by the Lebanese state over the years. It is not a secret that Tripoli nowadays is facing severe social, economical, educational, and environmental problems. The Islamist groups are therefore assaying to play a substitute role for the Lebanese government by providing employment opportunities and social services to the city's predominantly Sunni community. In this beneficial process, they are managing to attract an increasing number of Sunnis to their cause. Meanwhile, the Tripoli situation is becoming more critical in Lebanon since most of the moderate Islamist groups have been replaced or are hiding behind radical, violent Islamic groups. It is crucial to realize that the influence of the violent fundamentalist formations in Tripoli should be limited or controlled, and the moderate Islamic voices must be encouraged once more. If this does not happen we

³⁰ Sanaa al Jack, "Tripoli: The Salafi Gateway", *Alsharaq Al Awsat Newspaper*, 27 May 2007: <http://aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=3&id=9090>.

³¹ Sanaa, al Jack.

will witness more Tripolitarians joining terrorist and jihadi Islamist groups; it should therefore not surprise us if more violent acts are committed in Lebanon, and especially in Tripoli.

Chapter III: Islamist Groups in Tripoli

Over the last few decades, Tripoli has attracted an increasing number of Islamist groups. In this chapter, I will attempt to list the majority of these groups and describe each of them while stressing their background, ideology, goals and connections.

A. Al Salafiyan (Ulama & Jihadists)

Many Western and Arab academics and researchers mistakenly associate Salafism with outright terrorism. Salafism is primarily a Sunni Islamic school of thought that follows the ideology and actions of the Prophet Mohammad's closest and early companions, the so called Salaf. Salafism adheres to the Salaf in its exact understanding or interpretation of the Quran text.³² The sect principally bases their belief on the Quran words: "that whoever does not rule according to what God said such are non-Muslim or Kafirun" {Al Maidah 44}³³.

It is vital to distinguish between the two types of Al Salafiyan: *the Ulama* (traditional & reformist) and *the Jihadists*. One should note that as Dr, Ahmad Moussalli states, there is no such thing as Shia Salafists, since the *Salaf* is only part of Sunni thought.³⁴

The Ulama Al Salafiyan group, as mentioned earlier, bases its tenets on those of the Salaf. To these Salafists, the Salaf represents the purest form of Islam since they learned about Islam directly from the Prophet Mohammad or those who knew him. Thus, according to the movement, the Salaf must form the basis of any social order.³⁵

Furthermore, the Ulama Al Salafiyan group rejects violence and military actions as a mean to reach their goals. On the contrary, they advocate the usage of Da'wa to achieve

³² عبد الغني عماد. الحركات الإسلامية في لبنان: إشكالية الدين والسياسة في مجتمع متنوع . ص: 264

³³ Muhamad Taqiudin Al Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan 153.

³⁴ "Salafist movement in Lebanon", *Carnegie Middle East Center*, 24 July 2007. Discussion with Dr. Ahmad Moussali and Qasim Qasir moderated by Dr. Paul Salem, <<http://www.carnegie-mec.org/print.aspx?ID=524&MID=332&PID=321>>.

³⁵ Bilal Saab and Magnus Ranstorp, "Securing Lebanon from the Threat of Salafist Jihadism", *The Saban Center for Middle East Policy*, 01 October 2007: 826.

balanced social conditions for the establishment of an Islamic state. Those Salafists support to a great extent the development of education as a way of attaining personal and social transformation.³⁶

Additionally, the Salafists' movements were amongst the initial Islamic ones to settle in Lebanon and specifically, Tripoli. There are two categories of Ulama Salafists, the *traditional* and the *reformist*. The Ulama traditional Salafists movement or "Al Haraka al Salafiya al Taklidiya" was founded by Sheikh Salem al Shahhal in 1946. This faction existed throughout Lebanon but was more prevalent in Tripoli. As part of its Salafist agenda, this movement had established many charitable organizations and religious schools. Kept as the spiritual icon for this movement, Shahhal was succeeded by his two sons, Daii al Islam and Radi al Islam.³⁷

Dai al Islam, Shahhal's elder son, studied and graduated from the Islamic University in Madine al Monawara city in Saudi Arabia in 1984.³⁸ Moreover, he was a student of well-known Saudi Sheikhs such as Sheikh Abo Baker al Jazairi, and Sheikh Abdelah Al Ghinayman. During the Syrian presence in Lebanon, Sheikh Daii al Islam was considered to be a dangerous man who threatened the civic peace. In the year 1986, Sheikh Daii al Islam was forced to leave Tripoli, however, he returned a few years later to launch and work within the Jamiyyat al-Hidaya wal-Ihsan association which is a traditional Salafist association inspired by the Wahhabi as all the other Salafist associations.³⁹ Jamiyyat al-Hidaya wal-Ihsan however was disbanded in 1996 after it was accused by the Lebanese government of provoking sectarian hatred. It is important to mention that this association was reactivated after the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005. According to Sheikh Omar Bakri, one of

³⁶ Bilal Saab and Magnus Ranstorp.

³⁷ Omayma Abdel Latif, "Lebanese Sunni Islamists: A Growing Force", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 2008: 11-12.

³⁸ ، فداء عيتاني ، "التاريخ المكتوم للجهاديين كما يرونه"، جريدة الأخبار، حلقة 14/3 ، الجمعة 14 أيلول 2007.

³⁹ محمد مصطفى علوش. " حوار مع الشيخ داعي الشهال حول الوجود السلفي في لبنان". شبكة الاسلام اليوم. 27 شباط 2007

<[http:// www.Alloushas.maktoobblog.com/226781](http://www.Alloushas.maktoobblog.com/226781)>

the famous figures in the Islamists Sunnis in Tripoli, Syria was responsible for closing Jamiyyat al-Hidaya wal-Ihsan association mainly because it belongs to Sunni salafists group.⁴⁰

Then later in the same year, Dai al Islam, who was leading the traditional Salafists movement at that time, established another association called Zad al Akira Institute in which the Lebanese Salafists tried to implement their agenda.⁴¹ Moreover, in early 90th "Daawat al Iman w Al Adil w Al Ihsan al Islamiya" was established by Dr. Hasan Shahhal, the husband of Sheikh Salem's daughter. This association also popular in Tripoli and it represented the traditional Salafist movement in Lebanon. Its main goal is to teach the Islamic Shariaa in Tripoli and the surrounding area.⁴²

According to Sheikh Daii Al Islam, the Sunnis played an important role in the late 70s and early 80s in fighting the Israeli invasion occupation in Lebanon especially with the establishment of an "Islamic army unit". Sheikh Daii states that this force was not a militia but only an organized group formed to protect a missionary Islamic project.⁴³ However, the Salafi Sunni's work eventually transformed itself and played a limited role because of the Syrian presence in Lebanon.⁴⁴ In fact, after the 1985 conflict which occurred in Tripoli between the Syrian and the Tripolitarian political parties at that time, the "Islamic army unit" was disbanded. Besides, Sheikh Daii contends that throughout the previous regime's term which was virtually controlled by Syria, most if not all of the attacks were concentrated against the Sunnis in Lebanon. In fact, the Salafists in Tripoli are still currently under attack by the Lebanese government. When Sheikh Daii was asked why whenever a Sunni group

⁴⁰ تمام البرازي، " الخريطة السياسية لسنة طرابلس (1)". الوطن العربي، 27 شباط 2008 : 20.

⁴¹ Omayma Abdel Latif.

⁴² عبد الغني عماد، الحركات الإسلامية في لبنان: إشكالية الدين والسياسة في مجتمع متنوع : 310

⁴³ تمام البرازي "الخريطة السياسية لسنة الشمال اللبناني (3). الوطن العربي. مقابلة مع داعي الاسلام الشهال. 2008/3/12 :24.

⁴⁴ محمد مصطفى علوش، " حوار مع الشيخ داعي الشهال حول الوجود السلفي في لبنان". شبكة الاسلام اليوم. 27 شباط 2007:

<<http://www.Alloushas.maktoobblog.com/226781>>

possesses weapons it is considered a terrorist organization by the Lebanese government, he stated that this is normal since it is always the weak party that has to pay the price.⁴⁵

According to Sheikh Omar Bakri, there are around 1600 Sunni youths incarcerated in Lebanese jails without serious charges held against them. They were arrested either for supporting the Iraqi resistance or for purchasing weapons.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the traditional Salafists like the Shahhal' movement have rejected the calls for Islamic reformation; they deem it unnecessary. They view those Islamic reformation appeals leading to a distortion of Islam's path and divisions within the Muslim community.

Moreover, it is mentioned in the Ulama Salafists agenda that they should not participate in politics and should focus on spreading the Da'wa in the Lebanese society. However, their participation in politics became more prominent after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005.

The Salafist Islamic movement is now increasingly involved in Lebanese politics in an either implied or direct manner. In fact, a sense of victimization after Hariri's death and a profound antagonism towards the Syrians were the motivational force for the Salafist followers in the north to vote for the Hariri list in the last parliamentary elections.⁴⁷ Sheikh Omar Bakri is a notable example of those Salafists who consider that Syria was primarily responsible for the killing of many members of Sunni Islamist groups and Sunni leaders, especially Prime Minister Rafic Al Hariri. Ironically, the Syrians accuse the Salafists of having committed those same crimes.⁴⁸

When Dr. Hasan al Shahhal was queried about these matters, he said that each religious community in Lebanon is in search of a leader...so why should we not expect the Sunni sect to behave in the same way? He continued by stating, "We don't see any other

⁴⁵ تمام البرازي "الخريطة السياسية لسنة الشمال اللبناني (3). *الوطن العربي*. . مقابلة مع داعي الاسلام الشهال. 2008/3/12 ص: 26-25

⁴⁶ تمام البرازي. "القيادات السنية: الوطن العربي تسأل: ماذا حدث في طرابلس؟". *الوطن العربي*. 2008/7/2: 25.

⁴⁷ Omayma Abdel Latif 13.

⁴⁸ تمام البرازي، " الخريطة السياسية لسنة طرابلس (1)". *الوطن العربي*. 27 شباط 2008: 20.

advantageous move but to stand with Saad Al Hariri and support him." ⁴⁹ As a result, Saad Al Hariri's list of candidates in the elections of Parliament in the North won all twenty-eight seats and this has given the Mustaqbal Movement a great boost in Lebanon; at the same time it provided the Salafists with more influence in Lebanon and specifically in the North. ⁵⁰

Nevertheless, it is important to note that Saad Al Hariri does not have the unanimous support of Salafists; many of them have serious reservations concerning his policies vis-à-vis the Americans. Moreover, Lebanese army intelligence has recently captured numerous Sunni Salafists in Tripoli, especially after the war with Fateh al Islam, and is retaining them in prison without a fair trial. This issue has angered the Salafists of Tripoli and Lebanon, and they have demanded that their Sunni leaders, especially Saad al Hariri, take urgent measures as a way of demonstrating their good intentions toward the Salafist groups. ⁵¹

The second category in the Ulama salafists is the *Salafist Reformists*. Similar to the Sunni Islamic groups in Lebanon, the Salafist movement in the North is not monolithic; they consist of many groups. Although the traditional Salafist figures like Shahhal do not acknowledge the present Salafist reformists as being participants of the Salafist movement, this movement does exist. The Salafist reformist followers are mainly preachers and professionals who are distinctly opposed to two issues pertaining to the traditional Salafist movement: their support for the Mustaqbal movement and their antagonism towards the Shiite community mainly represented by Hezbollah.

According to Sheikh Muhammad al-Khodr, a prominent reformist Salafist figure in Lebanon, the Islamist movements are currently employed as tools in the hands of secular forces. Also, Sheikh Khodr accused the traditional Salafists of having an unrealistic agenda. Reformist Salafists view their movement as one that functions on the principle of accepting 'the other' and persuades young people to avoid extremism. The reformists believe that

⁴⁹ عبد الغني عماد، الحركات الإسلامية في لبنان: إشكالية الدين والسياسة في مجتمع متنوع : 318
⁵⁰ Omayma Abdel Latif 13.
⁵¹ تمام البرازي، " الخريطة السياسية لسنة طرابلس (1)". الوطن العربي. 27 شباط 2008: 22.

Salafism must adapt itself to the multi-confessional society of Lebanon. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the Salafist reformist group in Lebanon's northern area, including Tripoli of course, is still in its early stages and is less widespread as compared to the traditional Salafist movement.⁵²

The second type of Salafist movement, besides the Ulama, is called the *Salafist Jihadists* or what some call neo-salafists. This type forms only a small minority of the Salafists. The Salafist Jihadists are militant Sunni Muslims. They maintain that the establishment of an Islamist state is only achievable through offensive jihad, violent and belligerent means. They reject any other manner of attaining the Muslim "Khilafa" or ruling system; they dismiss the Da'wa and political reforms, and insist that peaceful strategies are not practicable. Not much is known about this movement since most of the Salafist Jihadists groups maneuver underground most of the time. These groups are however acquiring pressing significance because of their growing impact in Lebanon and the world at large.

The Salafist Jihadists are influenced by Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), although they misinterpreted many of his writings. Ibn Taymiyya lived in one of the most troublesome periods of Muslim history, at a time when Mongols were occupying Muslim lands. Ibn Taymiyya's concept of Jihad contends that any failure to uphold Islamic laws, even in a Muslim regime, is subject to resistance. However, Ibn Taymiyya himself did not support the overthrow of Muslim rulers or the use of violence as a mean to uphold Islam. Nevertheless, and many would agree with this, it is still Ibn Taymiyya's beliefs which upholds the notion of resistance against non-Muslim influence for most of the Salafist jihadists.⁵³

The Salafist Jihadists are against any kind of participation in the democratic process. To them, accepting democracy is tantamount to accepting the leadership of non-Muslims,

⁵² Omayma Abdel Latif 13-14.

⁵³ Bilal Saab and Magnus Ranstorp, "Securing Lebanon from the Threat of Salafist Jihadism", *The Saban Center for Middle East Policy*, 01 October 2007: 826-827.

and thus accepting their thoughts.⁵⁴ They attempt their utmost to make people dislike and confront the democratic system. Also, Salafist Jihadists consider the Shiites as a non-Islamic sect. Additionally, the Salafist Jihadists most venerable leader or ideal is Osama Bin Laden. They are immensely influenced by Bin Laden's visions and views. He seeks to establish a pan-Islamic Caliphate and most importantly to expel Westerners and non-Muslims from Muslim countries. Furthermore, Bin Laden has extended his previous conception of jihad from a defensive stance to an offensive one.⁵⁵ Now the Salafist Jihadists include in their jihad the notion of warfare against Muslim rulers who do not rule according their notion of God's will.

According to Dr Abid Al Kader Abid Al Aziz, a famous Salafist Jihadist leader, rulers who do not govern according to Islamic rule in many Muslim countries are considered non-Muslims and non believers.⁵⁶ In Lebanon, there are groups considered to be Salafists Jihadist mostly present inside Palestinian camps located in various parts of the country. The Jihadi groups are characterized as having a transnational strategy. There are now “globalized Islamists” fighting for these groups; the group no longer restricts itself to just domestic fighters or local issues and concerns.

Many scholars believe that Tripoli was the first city to introduce the Ulama and Jihadist Salafists ideology to Lebanon. Tripoli's various problems that accumulated over the years, particularly the detrimental economic and social conditions that its citizens have been distressingly undergoing, have lent support and encouragement to Jihadist Salafists. Due to the conspicuous absence of government services, the citizens of Tripoli gradually discovered, whether wrongly or correctly, that the vision of these Salafist Islamist groups appeared to be the sole solution to their problems. As a result, and particularly in some of the most dismally

⁵⁴ عبد الغني عماد, الحركات الإسلامية في لبنان: إشكالية الدين والسياسة في مجتمع متنوع : 275

⁵⁵ Bilal Saab and Magnus Ranstorp 826-827.

⁵⁶ عبد الغني عماد, الحركات الإسلامية في لبنان: إشكالية الدين والسياسة في مجتمع متنوع : 287-288.

deprived neighborhoods of Tripoli, such as Bab Al Tabbaneh for instance, you discover the largest Salafists Jihadi stronghold or presence the city.⁵⁷

In short, the emphatic focus has been on the Salafist movement in Lebanon, both the traditional and jihadi, especially after the death of the Ahabash leader Sheikh Nizar Al Halabi in 1995 who was alleged to be associated to the Salafists. This attention on Salafist movements increased in the year 2000 after the Dinneyeh incident which led to the Lebanese army arresting Salafist citizens regardless of whether they were Ulama or Jihadist Salafists. When Sheikh Daii al Islam was asked about this matter he said that the traditional Salafists that he represents are not linked to the fighters who were involved in Dinneyeh. It was not in their interest to commit acts of aggression against the Lebanese army whom they consider to be the protectors of the country.⁵⁸ The truth of the matter is that many Salafists in Tripoli were arrested solely on the basis of belonging to a Salafist movement, even though they claimed not to believe in violence and had never participated in any terrorist actions.

There are now many centers in Lebanon, especially in the North, administered by Salafi groups under the name of salafi associations such as: "Daawa al iman w maahad ,Kuliya al Daawah ,al Irshad " in Tripoli, "Wakif w Maahad al Imam al Bokhari " in Akkar, " Wakif al Abrar w Maahad Trablous lil Alom al Sharayah " in Tripoli, " Wakif Abad al Rahman" in Tripoli, " Wakif Aanit al Fokarah" in Tripoli, " Wakif al Khir al Islami w Masjid w Markaz al Aksa" in Dinneyeh, "Wakif Iaanat al Marda" in Tripoli, Wakif al Balagh al Islami" in Tripoli, etc.⁵⁹. It is important to mention that the Salafist movements that initially started in Tripoli were mainly of the Ulama type. It is only at a later date that the Jihadist Salafist movements were introduced to Lebanon, specifically Tripoli, through the existence of some groups that have adopted this view and concept such as Fateh Al Islam. I will discuss the latter group in more detail later on in my thesis.

⁵⁷ Bilal Saab and Magnus Ranstorp 830.

⁵⁸ عبد الغني عماد, الحركات الإسلامية في لبنان: إشكالية الدين والسياسة في مجتمع متنوع : 312-313

⁵⁹ Ibid 311

B. Harakat Al Tawhid al Islami (the Islamic Unity Movement)

Harakat Al Tawhid al Islami, also known as the Islamic Unity Movement (IUM), is one of the most notable Islamist groups that has had a great impact on Tripoli. This Islamist group was established in 1980 and activated in Tripoli in 1982 by a charismatic man named Sheikh Saaid Shaaban who was formerly one of the leaders of the Al Jamaa Al Islamiya. At that time the goal of IUM was to plan operations against the Israeli army and against the assumption of power of Bashir Al Jimayil in the Lebanese government. According to Sheikh Ibrahim Al Salih, IUM was founded as a reaction to the Israeli invasion, and the planning of some of Tripoli leaders to surrender the city to the Israeli army without a struggle.⁶⁰

Moreover, in 1983-1984, the IUM was able to dominate Tripoli. This happened after this movement's fighters were able to defeat a number of its rivals. The IUM made the city of Tripoli an Islamic emirate and divided the city into districts each of which was ruled by what they called an "emir". What helped and supported the movement to have control over the city were Shabaan's strong relations with Iran, and the financial and military support he received from the PLO. At that time, the IUM had obliged Tripoli the city to close its nightclubs, shops selling liquor, and swimming resorts. It imposed restrictions on various forms of entertainment and basically banned anything they considered contradictory to the Islamic religion as they perceived it.⁶¹ Moreover, it is thought that the IUM's military power at that time is comparable to the military one of Hezbollah today. However, this movement was unable to use its full military might because it lacked the technical ability and knowledge.⁶²

The IUM reached the peak of its power towards the beginning of 1985. It considerably weakened when two of its leaders, Khalil Akkawi and Kanaan Naji left the movement to organize their own organizations. Besides, the Syrian army entered Tripoli

⁶⁰ فداء عيتاني, "التاريخ المكتوم للجهاديين كما يرونه". جريدة الأخبار. الحلقة 14/7. الأربعاء 19 أيلول 2007.

⁶¹ Sanaa al Jack, "Tripoli: The Salafi Gateway", *Alsharaq Al Awsat Newspaper*, 27 May 2007
<<http://aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=3&id=9090>>.

⁶² فداء عيتاني, "التاريخ المكتوم للجهاديين كما يرونه". جريدة الأخبار. الحلقة 14/8. الخميس 20 أيلول 2007.

later on that year and crushed the IUM militia but allowed Shaaban to maintain leadership position of his movement after it was disarmed.

The Syrian restrictions on the IUM in Tripoli did not prevent its militia from emerging in other cities. This movement's militia endured in Beirut, Sidon, and south Lebanon. In fact, in 1988, the IUM military joined the Islamic Resistance in fighting the South Lebanese Army and the Israeli forces in Israel's "security zone."⁶³

Saaïd Shaaban's ideology is extensively influenced by that of the Muslim Brothers. After the Iranian Revolution, he has highly publicized Khomeini's path as the one which should be pursued by Muslims. However, Shaaban does not call for or expect an Iranian-style order in Lebanon, especially since he realizes that this would distance his Sunni supporters.

Shaaban had frequently sought to employ the Quran and the Prophets' biography to unite the Shiite and Sunni sects. He did not concern himself with the sectarian representations in the Lebanese parliament. Instead, he recommended that all Muslims call for Islamic rule based on the Shari'a (Islamic sacred law). To Shaaban, the Islamic rule is the best one because it dissolves social differences, and as a result, unifies them. Shaaban opposed nationalism, sectarianism and democratic pluralism.⁶⁴

Today, the IUM has split into two factions one of which is headed by Sheikh Bilal Shaaban who is endeavoring to maintain his father's (Saaïd Shaaban) legacy, and the other is led by Shiekh Hashim Minkara. When Bilal Shaban was queried about Islam's capability of reaching its goals these days, he answered that it was simply because it expressed peoples' negative feelings towards America's foreign policy.⁶⁵ Ironically, both these two leaders, Shaaban and Minkara, were imprisoned in the past by the Syrians. However, in spite of their

⁶³ Nizar Hamzeh, "Islamism in Lebanon: A Guide", *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)*, September 1997: 3.

⁶⁴ Nizar Hamzeh.

⁶⁵ "Islamic Unity Movement (IUM) " <<http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/groupProfile.asp?grpId=6943>>.

differences, they both presently have alliances with Hezbollah and Syria's political accomplices in Lebanon.⁶⁶

According to Sheikh Hashem Minkara, the IUM is against American and Israeli policy whose primary aim consists of stealing the rights of Islamic nations. This scheme began from the time Israel was founded in 1940 and has lasted until today. In addition, the Tawhid movement is opposed to the new Middle East project which aims at extending the Middle East so that besides the Arab world, it includes Israel, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia and the Caucasus. For this reason, Sheikh Minkara states that Harakat al Tawhid Al Islami is in concurrence with Hezbollah's objectives and has formed an alliance with that organization.⁶⁷ In short, although the Tawhid movement still maintains its presence in Lebanon, specifically in Tripoli, its membership is considerably less than what it used to be in the early eighties.

C. Majmouat al-Dinniyeh

The Majmouat al Dinniyeh group, formerly called the Takfir wa al-Hijra, is a group formed by Bassam Kanj. Bassam Kanj, also known as Abu Aisha, established this group after his return from the war in Afghanistan. The formation of his group was mainly the outcome of Al Qaeda's influence. Kanj has launched this group in the al Dinniyeh area, a mountainous region near Tripoli.

Bassam Kanj is a Northern Lebanese citizen born in the al Dinneyeh area in 1964. He is a high school graduate from the Kobbah School, situated in one of Tripoli's poorest areas. He obtained a scholarship from the Hariri Foundation in 1985 and traveled to Boston in the United States to continue his studies. In Boston, he met Islamists that were involved in the Afgani Islamic cause. He was profoundly impressed with the concept of Jihad at the time. Additionally, he had the chance to encounter Lebanese expatriates such as Khalil Akkawi

⁶⁶ تمام البرازي، " الخريطة السياسية لسنة طرابلس (1)". *الوطن العربي*، 27 شباط 2008: 16-17.

⁶⁷ تمام البرازي، " خريطة الحركات السنية في طرابلس (6)". *الوطن العربي*، 2008/4/2 : 36.

who were also studying in America. After he married, and with the logistical support of the Services Bureau of Arab Volunteers, Kanj departed with his family from America in 1989 and traveled to Pakistan where he received military training and developed close relations with a number of Islamic persons. He later fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan, and it was during this period that he met Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri and was profoundly influenced by their ideology.⁶⁸

Kanj decided to return to Lebanon in 1996 to spread the message he had been taught. In his recruitment efforts, he knew how to exploit the anger that was deep-seated at that time among many of the Salafists as a result of the numerous accusations and arrests of their members. Kanj concentrated his recruitment on two regions consisting mainly of the deprived neighborhoods of Tripoli and the Palestinian refugee camp of Ein el Helweh. In early 1998, besides his religious doctrine sessions, Kanj set up training in an army camps in the region of al Dinniyeh, North Lebanon. Persons who joined the Al Dinniyeh group from Tripoli were fugitives fleeing from the Lebanese police. Others were members of former Islamic movements such as Harakat Al Tawhid al Islami.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, both the Russian and the American embassies had informed the Lebanese authorities about the presence of military Islamic groups in North Lebanon who had connections with foreign Jihadists. This made the Lebanese government decidedly cautious.⁷⁰ A clash occurred a short while later between Majmouat al Dinniyeh and the Lebanese army in December 1999. As a result, members of this group were killed, including Kanj himself, and the rest were captured. Although the name of this group was known as the Dinniyeh group, most of its members were from Tripoli. This was one of the first times that Lebanese people were cognizant of a belligerent incident committed by an Islamic group.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Bilal Saab and Magnus Ranstorp 832.

⁶⁹ Bilal Saab and Magnus Ranstorp 832.

⁷⁰ فداء عيتاني، " التاريخ المكتوم للجهاديين كما يرونه". جريدة الأخبار. الحلقة 14/10. السبت 22 أيلول 2007.

⁷¹ Omayma Abdel Latif 17.

Undoubtedly, the occurrence left a protracted impact on the residents of Tripoli. They had been explicitly made aware of the presence of a Jihadi group in their midst.

D. Al Tahrir party

The Al Tahrir party was established by a Palestinian religious person named Taqieddin al Nabahani who had graduated from Al -Azhar in 1953. The party he set up was purely Islamic without any regional or national identification. In other words, its field of action involves the entire Islamic world. Its ideology is a political one whose sole objective concerns the religion of Islam and the establishment of a Caliphate in Lebanon. In other words, the members of this party consider it a political party based on Islam and not an Islamic party working in politics.⁷²

The Al Tahrir party was first founded in Jerusalem before spreading to the surrounding Arab areas, including Turkey. During the nineties, it extended widely in the East Islamic world especially in Middle Asia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Malisya. Quite recently, the party has even spread to Black Africa and a number of European countries such as Holland, United Kingdom, and others. Today, the Al Tahrir party has an international renown, and extended widely seemingly without limitations. It established itself simultaneously in Lebanon and Jerusalem.

Actually, Taqieddin al Nabahani had faced many hardships from the part of the Jordanian authorities when he commenced his party. As a result he traveled frequently among neighboring countries until he finally decided to reside in Lebanon in 1953.⁷³ Since then, the party has never had a large presence in Lebanon. In fact, it was only licensed recently by the Siniora government in 2006 and officially registered as a Lebanese party. It has lately acquired more recognition in this country, especially in Tripoli where its headquarters is located.

⁷² عبد الغني عماد، الحركات الإسلامية في لبنان: إشكالية الدين والسياسة في مجتمع متنوع : 236

⁷³ Dr. Ahmad Kassas, personal interview, 20 May 2008.

According to Dr. Ahmad Kassas, the Media representative and Director of the Political Office of Al Tahrir party in Lebanon, the Islamic nation has not been living an authentic Islamic existence. This is mainly because of Western control over Islamic countries. Moslem nations have unquestioningly adopted western ideologies and systems. Our societies have lost their genuine Islamic identity. This had thus made Al Tahrir Party's main objective to concentrate on regaining true Islamic life to the Islamic nation. In other words, working on re-establishing Islamic rule through the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate that would start in one country but eventually spread throughout the Islamic world. The Al Tahrir party believes that the process to attain this objective is slow and gradual, but the establishment of its party has been a definitive and determined first step.⁷⁴

The party objective was clearly discussed in the party's second convention in August 2007 where it restated its wish to establish the Caliphate (Dawlat al Khilafa) in Lebanon. Furthermore, the Al Tahrir party is opposed to democracy; it is convinced that democracy is incompatible with Islam. The Al Tahrir party asserts that Lebanon's dilemma is only resolvable if it unites with its Syrian neighbor. In fact, the party maintains that Lebanon is not entirely suitable for the establishment of a Caliphate (Dawlat al Khilafa). The party is currently in the process of laying the groundwork for Lebanon to join Syria so that the establishment of a Caliphate is made feasible.⁷⁵

The Al Tahrir party has a clear definition for jihad consisting of fighting the nonbelievers who do not accept Islam. If this struggle occurs for the sake of self-defense, as in the case of a non-Islamic country attacking a Muslim one (viz. Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq), then this kind of jihad is obligatory for all Muslim people. Another type of jihad is entitled "al talab". This involves an attack by Muslims on political non-Islamic groups hoping to demolish them and spread Islam's message to the whole world. This would provide

⁷⁴ Dr. Ahmad Kassas, personal interview, 20 May 2008.

⁷⁵ عبد الغني عماد، الحركات الإسلامية في لبنان: إشكالية الدين والسياسة في مجتمع متنوع : 256

a choice consisting of either accepting or rejecting the Islamic religion. However, this kind of Jihad is not possible nowadays since it requires a country that is truly capable of implementing Islamic rule and exhibiting Islam as a message to the world. Unfortunately, this country is currently non-existent.⁷⁶

The Al Tahrir party believes that it is impossible to unite all the Islamic Sunni groups in Lebanon because of their different agendas. In fact, there are some Islamic Sunni groups who have designed their programs within the framework of Lebanon and their internal role in the country. Others designed their plans in the schema of the entire Islamic nation, in which its role in Lebanon complements a bigger one; and to this group Al Tahrir party belongs.⁷⁷

Additionally, according to Dr. Kassas, one cannot make a comparison between the Islamic Sunni groups and Islamic Shiaa groups in Lebanon. This is mainly because the Islamic Sunni groups are disunited. It is possible to find differences between two Islamic Sunni groups as wide as differences between Islamic Sunni and Islamic Shiaa groups. Also, the Al Tahrir party communicates with the entire Lebanese public, not only the Sunni one. There are even members in Al Tahrir party who are Shiaa. This party is against the sectarian division that is occurring in Lebanon between Shiaa and Sunni. They believe that all Muslims should belong to a unified Islamic nation.⁷⁸

Moreover, it is not made clear where the Al Tahrir party stands politically in Lebanon in the current conflict, with the government or the opposition. The Al Tahrir party seems to adopt an ambiguous position. For example, it was against the opposition protest camps in downtown, Beirut, but nevertheless opposes the Mostaqbal movement's insistence on setting up an international tribunal for Hariri's assassination (this is also supported by the government).⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Dr. Ahmad Kassas.

⁷⁷ Dr. Ahmad Kassas.

⁷⁸ Dr. Ahmad Kassas.

⁷⁹ Omayma Abdel Latif 10-11.

According to Dr. Kassas the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri was not aimed at fighting the Sunnis in Lebanon, but occurred instead as a result of an ongoing international struggle. Additionally, the Al Tahrir party deems that Hezbollah initially started as an Islamic party, and then eventually joined the Lebanese sectarian political fray. Hezbollah envisages itself strong because of the support it obtains from Iran, and thus considers it can lead the Shiaa community in Lebanon. Similar to the other political parties in Lebanon, Hezbollah locates and makes allies according to its interest. A good example of this is its relation with General Aoun. Additionally, the Al Tahrir party is far removed from all these allies.⁸⁰ This party has requested Hezbollah not to limit the resistance in south Lebanon to the Shiaa and Hezbollah alone since all Lebanese must participate in the defense against Israel.⁸¹

Interestingly enough, although the Al Tahrir movement considers itself a political party, yet it is one of the few Islamist groups in Lebanon that has decided not to participate in elections. However, it is involved in Lebanon's maelstrom and imparts opinions on political issues. Also, this party decided not to participate in any military maneuvers during the Lebanese war; it believes that it is not justified to use weapons as a means to spread ideas and tenets. According to Dr. Kassas, Al Tahrir party does not depend on materialistic tactics; it only depends on its ideology and politics.⁸² Similar to some of the other Islamic groups in Tripoli and Lebanon, this party is also determined not to use violence to achieve its goals or agendas.⁸³

Furthermore, according to Dr Kassas, the Tahrir party has not coordinated its ideas with either the Lebanese government or with any other party or political group. This is mainly because the Tahrir party has its own program and agenda independent of

⁸⁰ Dr. Ahmad Kassas.

⁸¹ تمام البرازي، " الخريطة السياسية لسنة الشمال (4). الوطن العربي. مقابلة مع د. احمد القصص. 27:2008/3/19.

⁸² Dr. Ahmad Kassas, personal interview, 20 May 2008.

⁸³ Omayma Abdel Latif 10-11.

governmental or other political groups in Lebanon. This party values its independence highly, and does not believe in forging alliances with other groups, especially if the latter have an agenda that includes the use of violence. Its principle objective is to educate the Lebanese public about Islam and Islamic thought. Also, the party claims that it does not aim at gaining any benefits for itself whenever it expresses opinions about events in Lebanon. The Al Tahrir party nevertheless communicates with all the Lebanese and meets with all the Islamic groups and influential leaders, both Muslims and Christians.⁸⁴

E. Al Jamaa Al Islamiya (the Islamic Association)

Al Jamaa Al Islamiya, also known as the Islamic Association (IA), is one of the oldest registered Islamist groups not only in Tripoli but also in Lebanon. Its origins trace back to 1955 when a group of Tripolitarian youth met and agreed on spreading the Islamic Da'awa. They joined together in Beirut an NGO called 'Ibad al-Rahman' (or the Worshipers of the Merciful)⁸⁵. At that time the president of 'Ibad al-Rahman' was Al Daii Shiekh Mohamad Al-Daaouk who popularized his views in various parts of Lebanon, including Tripoli where the Tripolitarian youth met him. The main objective of 'Ibad al-Rahman' was to spread and educate the youth on the real Islamic religion. This NGO did not participate in political issues or in sectarian fighting in Lebanon. However, as a result of local and regional issues such as the Suez Cannel war in 1956, the revolution in Iraq led by Abid al Salam Aarif, the insurrection against Kamil Shamaoun in Lebanon in 1958, the creation of the Arab United republic, President Gamal Abdel Nasser's efforts to unite the Arabs, and other events. These occurrences convinced the Tripolitarian youth who were members of 'Ibad al-Rahman' to establish Al Jamaa Al Islamiya (the Islamic Association) which was officially

⁸⁴ Dr. Ahmad Kassar.

⁸⁵ 'Ibad al-Rahman', is a Islamic group established by Mohamad al Daaouk who believe that the Palestine is an Islamic ground for all the coming generations no matter what and that only by coming back to the real Islam religion ,life style and values we can prepare the new generation for liberating it. In 1952 'Ibad al-Rahman' was officially registered in Lebanon and took its location in Beirut whose main goal is educational and Missionary movement; 32-31 : *عبد الغني عماد، الحركات الإسلامية في لبنان: إشكالية الدين والسياسة في مجتمع متنوع* : 32-31

registered on 18, June 1964.⁸⁶ According to the Lebanese laws 224/AD ,the founders of the NGO are Fathi Yakan, Faysal Mawlawi, Zahir Al Abied, and Ibrahim Al Masri. With the spread of Abdel Nasser's nationalist fever, IA's work and similar Islamic groups became more focused and limited, and as such were influenced by the struggle between Abdel Nasser and the Muslim Brothers.⁸⁷ However, with Nasser's Arab defeat in the year 1967 war, the IA, similar to other Islamist groups in the Arab world, gradually strengthened.

The IA with the assistance of local and Arab independent Islamic people established in 1967 an NGO under the name of "Islamic Educational Association". This NGO launched many schools, educational and medical centers in Tripoli and later on in other areas in Lebanon. The main aim of this NGO was to establish a more suitable and healthier environment for new Islamic generations.⁸⁸

The IA believes that Islamic movements found in Lebanon are influenced by foreign countries. This is evidenced more clearly among the Shiaa than the Sunni groups. In fact, after the Khomeini revolution in Iran, the close relationship of Hezbollah's doctrines to the Iranian revolution became notably clear. However, this is not the case among Sunni Islamic groups due to the large varieties of Sunni groups which are unable to agree on a common program either inside or outside Lebanon.⁸⁹

The idea of establishing a military section for the IA under the name of "Mujhideen" or "Al Fajir" was recognized in the seventies. Yet, the work of this military organization was discarded after the Syrian entry into Lebanon.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to indicate that the IA had participated in the Lebanese civil war. In fact, some of its militias fought with the Lebanese National Movement against Christian Maronite forces in this armed conflict. Also in 1982-1983, the "Mujhideen" had joined in the resistance during the Israeli invasion of

⁸⁶ Dr. Abdullah Babiti, personal interview, 21 May 2008.

⁸⁷ عبد الغني عماد، الحركات الإسلامية في لبنان: إشكالية الدين والسياسة في مجتمع متنوع : 34.

⁸⁸ Ibid 36.

⁸⁹ Dr. Abdullah Babiti.

⁹⁰ فداء عيتاني، " التاريخ المكتوم للجهاديين كما يرونه" جريدة الأخبار. الحلقة 14/4. السبت 15 أيلول 2007.

Lebanon in 1982 and in the July war of 2006. Moreover, according to Shiekh Azzam Al Ayoubi, the spokesman of IA in Tripoli, there is no serious threat at present that would necessitate the Jamaa to have a military organizational group in Tripoli.⁹¹

The IA in its policy follows the doctrines of the Muslim Brothers of Egypt and Syria. Fathi Yakan, one of the establishers of this group in Tripoli, is a follower of Sayyid Qutb's ideology (Muslim Brother of Egypt), and that of Sa'id Hawwa (Muslim Brother of Syria). In 1967 he cooperated with the Syrian's Muslim Brothers in advocating a holy war against the Israelis and the west.⁹² However, in 1992 and due to doctrinal differences, Fathi Yakan broke away from the IA's leadership.

The IA believes that changes will gradually occur with proper educational methods, and encouraging Islamic ideals through the individual first, then the family and then the community; this is the way to attain a meaningful reform in the Islamic world. The IA totally rejects the use of violence. According to this movement, if there is no coerciveness in religion, then there should be no necessity for it in social matters. Convincing is what is required among Muslims; this is what the Quran says.⁹³

Concerning the Palestine issues, the IA is opposed to any peaceful settlement with Israel. The IA differentiates between international violent acts and those aimed against the Israeli enemy, and approves of the struggle for Islamic and Arab rights. Islam rejects terrorist acts against individuals, people and even animals. However, when an injustice has been committed against individuals or their rights or religion or country, then it is justifiable to

⁹¹ تمام البرازي، " لا تهديد يواجه السنة ولا حاجة لسلاحهم". *الوطن العربي*. مقابلة مع الناطق باسم الجماعة الإسلامية عزام الأيوبي. 2008/4/9. ص: 35.

⁹² Nizar, Hamzeh, "Islamism in Lebanon: A Guide", *MERIA Middle East Review of International Affairs* 1.3 (1997): 2-3.

⁹³ Dr. Abdullah Babiti.

fight the enemy by using the same violent or terrorist means.⁹⁴ As a matter of fact, members of IA in 1976 participated in military training with the Palestinians *Fateh* organization.⁹⁵

As far as Lebanon is concerned, the IA believes that the civil war was a conspiracy against all the Lebanese. At the beginning of the war, this party decided to side with the Palestinian parties. It established a military wing under the name of the "al- Mojahidon" with offices in Tripoli, Dinneyah, Beirut, and other locations.

Throughout its history, the IA had engaged itself in several disputes with Lebanese parties because it regarded them as instruments of foreign interests. Actually, not only did it have confrontations with the Ahabash , the Tawhid groups, as well as with the traditional Sunni religious establishment mainly the Juridical Office (Dar al-Ifta') , but also with traditional Sunni leaders and families such as the Karamis of Tripoli, the Salams of Beirut, and the Hariris of Sidon.

The IA had initially aimed at cooperating and coordinating its plans with Hezbollah, however, it later on rejected that organization's policy and model for the Islamic state. According to IA, Islamic order can only be based on the Shari'a (Islamic sacred law). It believes that this order can only be attained through the "jihad of the heart" that is by a spiritual struggle, and the "jihad by word" that is by education and propaganda, and the "jihad by hand" that is by economic, political and military action.⁹⁶ Also according to Dr. Abdullah Babiti, a senior leader in the Jamaa, Hezbollah and al- Shiaa in general are trying to dominate Lebanon due to their acquisition of sophisticated weapons and the fact that they were able to defeat Israel and liberate the south.⁹⁷

As for the latest Hezbollah incursion into Beirut on 7 May, 2008, the IA has openly expressed its opposition to this action. It considers that Hezbollah has lost its reason for

⁹⁴ عبد الغني عماد، الحركات الإسلامية في لبنان: إشكالية الدين والسياسة في مجتمع متنوع : 50-57,104

⁹⁵ فداء عيتاني، " التاريخ المكتوم للجهاديين كما يرونه " ، جريدة الأخبار ، الحلقة 14/6 ، الثلاثاء 18 أيلول 2007.

⁹⁶ Nizar, Hamzeh, "Islamism in Lebanon: A Guide", *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)*, September 1997: 3.

⁹⁷ Dr. Abdullah Babiti.

carrying weapons especially after it had initially promised not to employ them internally. Additionally, according to Dr Babiti, agreements are only attainable by dialogue and peace, and not force. The Sunnis must unite not only to protect their sect but more crucially to insure fairness for all the Lebanese, and ascertain that Lebanon enjoys stability and regains its successful role in the Arab world and beyond.⁹⁸

The IA is one of the few Islamists groups that participated in Lebanese politics. It managed to win three seats in the 1992 parliamentary elections and one seat in 1996.⁹⁹ However, it lost its seats in the 2000 parliamentary elections.

After the death of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, and the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, the IA decided not to participate in the 2005 parliamentary elections. Moreover, Sheikh Abraham Al Masri on behalf of the IA stood against the Damascus administration in the assassination of the Hariri's case. Furthermore, according to Dr. Babiti, the accomplishments of the Prime Minister Rafic Hariri as a Sunni leader permitted many people to benefit from his death, especially the ones who were used to enforcing their demands on Lebanon.¹⁰⁰

The IA participated also in the municipality elections. In 1998, it won 8 seats out of 24 in Tripoli. Moreover, it did not only engage in Tripoli's elections, but also in Mina, Kalamon, Dinneyah, Akkar, Sidon, Beirut, Shouf and Bekaa area. Also in 2004, the Jamaa candidates ran in the municipality election in Tripoli by joining the list of Omar Karami, a former Prime Minister from Tripoli. This list won with 6 seats from 24; however none was from the Jamaa members.¹⁰¹ In short, the IA had unsettled positions in the political issues in Lebanon throughout the years. It has always forged alliances in accordance to its own interests. For example, it once formed an alliance with Omar Karami who is considered to be

⁹⁸ Dr. Abdullah Babiti.

⁹⁹ Nizar Hamzeh, "Islamism in Lebanon: A Guide", *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)*, September 1997: 2-3.

¹⁰⁰ Dr. Abdullah Babiti.

¹⁰¹ عبد الغني عماد، الحركات الإسلامية في لبنان: إشكالية الدين والسياسة في مجتمع متنوع : 88-92

part of the opposition, and another time with the Hariri movement which is on the government side. This puzzling political posturing has ultimately weakened the IA and confused its followers about its real stance.

F. Al Ahabash

The Al Ahabash group, known also as The Association of Islamic Charitable Projects (AICP) or Jami'at al-Mashari' al-Khayriya al-Islamiya, is one of the most controversial Islamic groups in Tripoli. This is mainly because of its origin, its theological ideology and distinctive teachings.¹⁰² It is considered to be more than a charitable or educational NGO or missionary movement and less than a political party.¹⁰³ The AICP has a Sufi origin. It follows the teachings of Sheikh Abdallah ibn Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Hirari ash-Shiabi al-Abdari, also known as al-Habashi, a religious thinker that is considered to be a spiritual Islamist but not a politically minded one.¹⁰⁴ Sheikh al Habashi had always sought to avoid discussing politics until the Israeli assault on Beirut occurred in 1982. From only a few hundred members, the AICP has increased enormously its membership in the late eighties. They had almost reached the 8000 figure and hence become one of the largest Islamic movements in Tripoli and Lebanon in general.¹⁰⁵

The Ahabash has played an important role in Lebanese politics. The movement had offered a moderate alternative to Islamism, thus attracting a lot of Sunni urban middle class people mainly by supporting pluralism and tolerance. The AICP had no militia nor had it engaged in fighting Israel or joined sectarian violence. This group's focus has been on recruiting new members to their movement.

¹⁰² Nizar Hamzeh and Hrair Dekmejian, "A Sufi Response to Political Islamism: Al –Ahabash of Lebanon", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 217 < <http://www.ddc.aub.edu.lb/projects/pspa/al-ahbash.html> >.

¹⁰³ عبد الغني عماد، الحركات الإسلامية في لبنان: إشكالية الدين والسياسة في مجتمع متنوع: 109

¹⁰⁴ Nizar Hamzeh, "Islamism in Lebanon: A Guide", *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)*, September 1997: 3-4.

¹⁰⁵ Nizar Hamzeh 4.

The AICP ideology had caused them to have many disagreements with other Islamic movements. Although the Ahabash pays commitment to pious ancestors (salaf) and the Shari'a, but it is known to place more emphasis on the "science of hadith". This had led many to accuse them of being followers of the Mu'tazilla who stress the superiority of reason over revelation. The Ahabash, unlike other Islamist groups in Tripoli, rejects Ibn Taymiya, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, and Sayyid Qutb as being Islamist authorities.¹⁰⁶

Moreover, the AICP opposed the establishment of an Islamic state in Lebanon because it would divide Muslims. It accepts Lebanon's confessional system; it even participated in the Lebanese parliamentary elections of 1992 and won one seat in Beirut then lost it in 1996. In fact, the AICP always had a formidable relation with the Lebanese government and army members. In almost all AICP occasions it was possible to find official representatives from the government and the army.

The AICP movement makes no reference to Jihad and does not harbor any animosity toward the West. On the contrary, it recommends that its members study Western notions as a mean to attain a civilized Islamic society. The AICP is not only limited to Lebanon; it has branches in Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Sweden, Switzerland, the Ukraine, and the United States. It also enjoys outstanding relations with some Arab States like Syria for instance.¹⁰⁷ The AICP has established educational and social associations not only in Lebanon but in many other countries as well.

The AICP is explicitly reputed for its good relation with Syria. This movement was known for its support of the Syrian President, Hafiz al Asaad, and then his son Bashar. One of the examples of this support is the famous demonstration on 11 April, 2001. In this demonstration AICP supporters protested in front of the NGO's offices and mosques in Birj Abi Haydar, Basta, Barbir and other areas in Beirut while brandishing knives and other

¹⁰⁶ Nizar Hamzeh 4.

¹⁰⁷ Nizar Hamzeh 3-4.

blades against student protesters calling for Lebanon freedom and demanding a prompt Syrian withdrawal.

The AICP role and power has decreased and lost much of its prestige after the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon. This was clearly displayed clearly in the parliamentary elections of 2005 after its implication in the death of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in the same year. Some members of AICP were suspected by the international investigation report of October 2005 of the international committee investigating the crime and arrested by the Lebanese government because of their involvement in the crime.¹⁰⁸

G. Jabhat al Amal al Islami

In 2006, the Jabhat al Amal al Islami's group (JAI) was established by Fathi Yakan, one of the former Islamists who founded Al Jamaa Al Islamiya. It was authorized on October 9 under the number 487/AD. Its board members include the following: Sheikh Dr. Fathi Yakan, Sheikh Abid al Nasir Al Jabri, Sheikh Hashem Minkaraa, Skeikh Bilal Shaaban, Sheikh Ghazi Hanineh, Sheikh Ramzi Dishom, Sheikh Zohir Jaaid, Sheikh Sharif Totir, Sheikh Mohmod Al Bodin and Sheikh Abidallah Al- Tiryaki. The president of this party is Dr. Fathi Yakan.¹⁰⁹

The alliance between Al Jamaa Al Islamiya and the al- Mustaqbal Movement was the major factor behind the formation of JAI under Fathi Yakan. According to Yakan, the al- Mustaqbal Movement, under Saad al Hariri's leadership, serves the interests of the West mainly the U.S.A, and neglects the real interests of the Lebanese. Yakan views al-Mustaqbal Movement as detaching the Sunnis in Lebanon from their genuine principles that consist of contesting Western hegemony in order to salvage the Islamic Arab identity. Yakan is a strong supporter of Syria, Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas. According to him, they form the only

¹⁰⁸ عبد الغني عماد، الحركات الإسلامية في لبنان: إشكالية الدين والسياسة في مجتمع متنوع: 152
¹⁰⁹ " جبهة العمل الإسلامي: بدأت بثلاثين شخصية في طرابلس.. وتوسعت"، موقع الإلكتروني الدعوة، 2008/3/31:

<<http://www.daawa.net/marsad.htm>>

resistant camp against nefarious Western hegemony under US leadership and Israeli atrocities.

JAI now operates as an umbrella organization which serves the purpose of uniting major Lebanese Sunni groups and organizations in Lebanon hoping to "fill an existing gap".¹¹⁰ The main objective of JAI, in this regard according to Yakan is to work on national and Islamic unity. It works mainly to impede the domination of one party, the al-Mostaqbal Movement from representing the Sunni street in Lebanon.¹¹¹ JAI supports the Resistance that stands against U.S –Zionist attacks in the Islamic nation. Lately, Dr. Yakan had stated that JAI includes now the Al Tawhid movement, some Salafist movements, and some NGO's (non governmental organizations) and organizations, beside the "Fajir" military force which was established in 1982 by the Al Jamaha Islamiya.¹¹² According to its members, the JAI's ideology is attempting to fill the void between two extremities in Lebanon, namely the chaos created by the U.S. and Al Qaeda. The JAI endeavors to captivate the attention of the Sunnis in Lebanon who identify with neither one of those uncompromising antagonists.

Yakan has criticized Islamic movements who undermine the role of Hezbollah as a resistant movement or those who issue fatwas against the Shia. Additionally, he is for creating an "Islamic resistance" uniting both Sunni and Shia. According to him, the resistance is not a Lebanese choice only, nor a Sunni or Shiite choice, is it in fact an Islamic choice made mandatory by the Israeli occupation of Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian territory. Therefore, according to Yakan, "we in the Jabhat al Amal al Islami stress that the resistance issue relates to us as Sunni as it is related to Hezbollah and Amal movement and all the other resistance movements in Lebanon."¹¹³ Yakan has additionally stated that JAI has

¹¹⁰ Bilal Saab and Magnus Ranstorp 831.

¹¹¹ عبد الكافي الصمد، " التأسيس الثاني لجبهة العمل الإسلامي: تمتد في اتجاه المناطق والتحاقات منتظرة"، جريدة الأخبار، 5 أيار 2008.

¹¹² تمام البرازي، الخريطة السياسية لسنة الشمال اللبناني(2)، الوطن العربي. مقابلة مع الشيخ فتحي يكن، 2008/3/5: 19.

¹¹³ " المقاومة خيار السنة والشبيعة وكل الوطنيين الأحرار"، موقع الإلكتروني الدعوة 2008/5/31:

<<http://www.daawa.net/marsad.htm>>

currently acquired the "Fajir" military force which is designed to fight the Israelis in the South of Lebanon, mainly in *Al Sabih* villages and other Sunni villages of the South.¹¹⁴

According to Dr. Fathi Yakan, what has been happening in Lebanon recently, and the emergence of Islamic Sunni groups such as Fateh Al Islam, is a result of the abdication of Sunni Lebanese of their traditional role as combatants of the Israeli enemy.¹¹⁵ Dr. Yakan believes that there is a plan to nullify security in Lebanon and dispose of Palestinians weapons in order to ultimately abolish the resistance against Israel.¹¹⁶

As for the divisions and disagreements that occurred within the Islamic Sunni groups in Lebanon, Dr Yakan calls on all Sunni religious and political leaders, and all the Islamic movements and groups to have an honest composure in front of God; then to evaluate their past experiences in order to emerge from this weak and divided status.¹¹⁷

Although JAI is a newly formed organization, yet under its umbrella many Islamic groups have gathered such as former members of Harakat Al Tawhid al Islami, Jamaah al Islamiyah, the Muslim Associations in Lebanon Forum, the Islamic Action Forces, Etc.¹¹⁸

The JAI main branch is in Tripoli and the North, but it has maintained offices in Sidon, Bikaa, South, and Beirut.¹¹⁹ More recently, the party has been requested by some its members to make certain adjustments, such as for instance ceasing the abuse of young Muslims, having a straightforward vision about Lebanese issues, and questioning its support for Iran and Syria. As a result, some of its members have forsaken the party as in the case of Sheikh Sayif al Din Al –Husami and 160 others. Those who split from JAI joined together to

¹¹⁴ تمام البرازي، الخريطة السياسية لسنة الشمال اللبناني(2)، الوطن العربي. مقابلة مع الشيخ فتحي يكن، 2008/3/5: 19.
¹¹⁵ "يكن استقالة سنة لبنان من دورهم الجهادي المقاوم أدى إلى سقوط معادلة توازن القوى"، موقع الإلكتروني الدعوة، 2008/6/11: <<http://www.daawa.net/marsad.htm>>
¹¹⁶ "حوار مع قيادات إسلامية حول مسببات وتداعيات الأحد الدامي في طرابلس"، مأخوذ عن ملحق جريدة اللواء، موقع الإلكتروني الدعوة 2007/5/30: <<http://www.daawa.net/marsad.htm>>
¹¹⁷ "يكن، أدعو سنة المعارضة والموالاة إلى مراجعة صادقة للمرحلة السابقة وإعادة وحدة ودور وفاعلية الطائفة السنية"، موقع الإلكتروني الدعوة. 2008/6/3: <<http://www.daawa.net/marsad.htm>>

¹¹⁸ Omayma Abdel Latif 9-10.

¹¹⁹ عبد الكافي الصمد. "التأسيس الثاني لجبهة العمل الإسلامي: تمدد في اتجاه المناطق والتحاقات منتظرة". جريدة الأخبار. 5 أيار 2008

form what is called the "Emergency Group".¹²⁰ Nevertheless, according to Dr. Yakan this issue is only the result of JAI spreading and not a weakness.¹²¹

H. Fatih al Islam

Fatih al Islam, signifying in English the Conquest of Islam, is a group established by a Palestinian Jordanian man named Shakir al-Absi. The history of this person is replete with puzzling and irregular matters; he escaped a death sentence in Jordan, was charged with smuggling weapon to the Golan Heights, and imprisoned in Syria. After spending three years in Syrian jails he was freed and appeared in Lebanon. At the time he had good relations with Fateh al Intifada, a Palestinian splinter group allied with Syria. In 2006, Absi left the Fateh al Intifada group and established his own organization, Fateh al Islam. Within the space of a short while the financial situation of the members of Fateh al Islam suddenly improved. Additionally, in November 2006, Fateh al Islam occupied the Fateh al Intifada offices in Nahir al Bared, a Palestinian refugee camp in north Lebanon.¹²² There are many who believe that the Syrian government played an important role in supporting Fateh al Islam, allowing it to have Fateh al Intifada's offices without any confrontations occurring. Moreover, it is believed that the Syrian government not only supported Fateh al Islam militarily and financially, but also played a crucial role by permitting its members to surreptitiously cross the Syrian-Lebanese border.¹²³

Fateh al Islam's main objective was to assume the role of being the Sunni military force in Lebanon. It is claimed that it wanted to declare the entire North of Lebanon, which

¹²⁰ احمد الايوبي. "تداعيات الانقسام داخل العمل الاسلامي": انكشاف نشاط الحرس الثوري وتدريب "حزب الله" لـ 8 آذار". جريدة المستقبل، العدد 2910، الخميس 20 آذار 2008.
¹²¹ "جبهة العمل الإسلامي: بدأت بثلاثين شخصية في طرابلس.. وتوسعت". موقع الالكتروني الدعوة. 2008/3/31. مأخوذ من الموقع الالكتروني: <http://www.daawa.net/marsad.htm>

¹²² طوني طراد، تنظيم فتح الإسلام مشروع هزم في لبنان. ص: 19.

¹²³ Gary Gambill, "Islamist Groups In Lebanon", *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)*: 14 <<http://www.meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2007/issue4/jv11no4a3.asp>>.

has a rich history of Salafists, as their emirate.¹²⁴ Recently, this group involved itself in one of the most arduous confrontations that has ever occurred between an Islamic group and the Lebanese army. It began on May 2007 when a few members of Fateh al Islam group robbed a bank near Tripoli. As a result, a clash between them and security forces took place in the streets of Tripoli and two of the Fateh al Islam members died. In revenge, Fateh al Islam members attacked the Lebanese army near the Al Bared refugee camp and slaughtered approximately fifteen Lebanese soldiers (pictures 1 & 2).

This deed triggered military hostilities between Fateh al Islam and the Lebanese army. Bloody encounters ensued in different parts of Tripoli until finally confining themselves to the Nahir al Bared camp where the Fateh al Islam group was well prepared and its members willing to die for their cause. The operation continued for around three months. Accordingly, 227 people were arrested and accused of being related to the Fateh al Islam group; 69 of them were alleged to be Lebanese. It should be noted that many of the Fateh al Islam fighters were from different Arab nationalities such as Yemeni, Saudi Arabian, Syrian, and others. They were referred to earlier on in my work as "globalized Islamists". It is also claimed that many of Fateh al Islam members were trained in military camps inside and outside Lebanon and acquired experience as fighters mainly in Iraq. Moreover, although many members of Fateh al Islam died or were arrested at the end of the Nahir al Bared confrontation, their leader Shakir al-Absi managed to escape.

According to Dr. Fathi Yakan, Fateh al Islam adheres to the extreme ideology of Al Qaeda in terms of their beliefs, culture and organizational principles. This outlook firmly establishes that the shortest way to heaven is by "istshhad" or death for the God. The aim of the majority of its members is to fight the Israelis and Americans. Surprisingly, when one of the Fateh Al Islam fighters with Yamani nationality in Nahir al Bared war was asked "why

¹²⁴ Nir Rosen, "Al Qaeda in Lebanon", *Boston Review*, January/February 2008: 10
<http://www.bostonreview.net/BR33.1/rosen.php>.

are you here?", he replied that he came to Nahir Al Bared to fight Israel and America. This Yamani fighter apparently was ignorant of the fact that Israel lies on Lebanon's southern boarder, not its northern one. He also thought that Lebanon shares its border with Iraq.¹²⁵

Dr Yakan believes that this group miscalculated the location and time in order to fulfill its goals. Fateh Al Islam is not a Palestinian, Saudi, Iraqi, Afghanistan, Syrian or Lebanese group, it is in fact a mixture of all these since it has members from all these countries. It is a global and national group.¹²⁶

Dr. Azzam Al Ayoubi, a representative of the Jamaah al Islamiyah indicates that what happened in Nahir al Bared is related to the political turmoil in Lebanon especially since the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri. Al Jamaah al Islamiyah believes that Fateh al Islam is a group that was not launched by accident. In fact, there is an "actor" who planned, and prepared for its presence in this specific place and equipped it with weapons and money. Moreover, this same actor facilitated it for Islamic members from different nationalities to enter and join Fateh al Islam. As a result, Jamaah al Islamiyah from the initial start of the Fateh al Islam assault against the Lebanese army positioned itself against these violent occurrences, and tried its best to unite the Lebanese, especially the Muslims, to enable them to confront this aggressive event. Dr Azzam Al Ayoubi ended up by saying that supporting the Lebanese government and its institutions is the only guarantee to protect and unite this country.¹²⁷

The Salafist sheikh Daii Islam Al- Shahal, the president of the Jamiyyat al-Hidaya wal-Ihsan association, believes that the biggest loser in recent events and in Nahir al Bared war is Lebanon in general and the Sunni specifically. Finally, Sheikh Bilal Shaaban, "Amir" of Harakat Al Tawhid al Islami, stated that what happened in Tripoli, Nahir al Bared camp

¹²⁵ طوني طراد، تنظيم فتح الإسلام مشروع هزم في لبنان . ص: 23.
¹²⁶ " حوار مع قيادات إسلامية حول مسببات وتداعيات الأحد الدامي في طرابلس ". مأخوذ عن ملحق جريدة اللواء ، موقع الإلكتروني الدعوة . في 2007/5/30. مأخوذ من الموقع الإلكتروني: <http://www.daawa.net/marsad.htm>
¹²⁷ " إسلاميو طرابلس: هذه قصة فتح الإسلام ". مأخوذ عن استطلاع رأي في جريدة التمدن. 2007/7/2. مأخوذ من الموقع الإلكتروني: <http://www.leilamagazine2blogspot.com/2007/06/blog-post5233htl>

and the North in general was truly a catastrophe that affected the entire country. He added that he believes that this event will have numerous repercussions on Lebanese internal relations and on Lebanese-Palestinian relations. Sheikh Shaaban stressed the importance of the Lebanese army as the only remaining stable institute in Lebanon and the spinal cord of Lebanon.¹²⁸

When Absi was asked during the confrontation about his group's objective he said it was to defend Islam and Muslims. He denied his alleged connections with Al Qaeda. Also, he declared that he had not intention of attacking the UNIFIL army¹²⁹. Nevertheless, the statements of Fateh al Islam that are placed on various web sites oppose or contradict what Shakir Al Absi stated. Most of these statements, if not all, assume the doctrines of Al Qaeda. After investigating this terrorist organization, the head of the Lebanon's army has declared Fateh al Islam to be a branch of al Qaeda.¹³⁰

Whether Absi is believed or not is immaterial. What is more important is to fathom how his group was funded and the method it employed to acquire its weapons. How did its members suddenly materialize in Lebanon? Did Syria facilitate their entry into this country? And if that is the case, why did the Syrian regime pursue such an action? Perhaps when the investigations effectuated by the Lebanese authorities are completed the brazen story of Fateh al Islam will finally be uncovered.

¹²⁸ Ibid

¹²⁹ Omayma Abdel Latif 18-19.

¹³⁰ Tom Perry, "Analysis – Lebanon crushes militant group, but threat remains", *Reuters*, 3 September 2007
<<http://www.reuters.com/articlePrint?articleId=USL03238970>>.

Chapter IV: A Typology of the Sunni Islamist groups in Tripoli

Unlike the Shiite Islamic groups, the Sunni Islamic groups are not unified; they are fragmented into conflicting forms. To understand Sunni Islamist groups in Tripoli and their different branches, characteristics and worldviews it is essential to conveniently separate them, as proposed in the International Crisis Group report titled “Understanding Islamism”, into the following three categories: political, missionary and jihadi movements (globalized Islam). All the Sunni Islamists share the common goal of attempting to reconcile traditional modes with modern ones. However, they differ in recognizing the principal dilemmas facing Muslims and the ways in which to solve these quandaries. As a result, Islamic movements have varied in their approaches to promulgate the message of Islam.¹³¹

A. Political movements

The main purpose of Islamic political movements is to acquire power or influence in governmental matters. Islamic groups defined in this manner are considered reformists rather than revolutionaries. They usually accept the nation state and work from within the constitution structure to reform the country according to their Muslim beliefs. Islamic political movements tend to on the whole avoid violence. These movements are concerned about government mismanagement and social prejudice and attempt to find the best means to cope with these issues. Examples of such reformist methods are participating in democratic elections, and advocating innovative governmental policies. One good illustration of these political Islamic movements in the Arab world is the Muslim Brothers.

As mentioned earlier, these groups are generally against the use of violent or aggressive behavior. However, there are some exceptions to the rule of nonviolence among

¹³¹ Barry Rubin, *Revolutionaries and Reformers: Contemporary Islamist Movements in the Middle East* (USA: State University of New York Press, 2003) 156.

these movements. For instance, a political Islamic organization situated in a country suffering from foreign occupation will justifiably engage itself in resistance; this is the case with Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic movement.¹³²

As far as the Sunni Islamist groups in Tripoli are concerned, there are a few that fall in this reformist category. The Jamaa al Islamiya is considered to be a political movement since it played an important role in Lebanese political life and has participated in parliamentary elections since 1992. Al-Jamaa also took part in municipal elections in various parts of Lebanon. It should be mentioned in this context that the Jamaa al Islamiya formed alliances with other political groups in villages and cities; this occurred for instance in the municipal elections of 1998. In some cases, the Jamaa had participated in the elections with an independent list, in other cases with mixed lists or even with a coalition list in order to win seats in various districts (table 1).¹³³

Politically speaking, al Jamaa Al Islamiya adopts the principle of maximizing its gains and minimizing its losses.¹³⁴ Al- Jamaa's participation in the political life in Lebanon was not limited to a single area such as Tripoli and the north, but also spread to other Lebanese locations including Sidon, Beirut, Zahle, Bekaa, and others. Additionally, according to Dr Babiti, al Jamaa al Islamiya has approximately 400,000 voters in Lebanon, and this factor encourages it to explicitly express its views concerning the Lebanese political situation.¹³⁵

The Al Tahrir Party considers itself to be a political party which has Islam as its guiding principle. For this group, the term "political" does not only signify participating and offering opinions about political issues in Lebanon. The Al Tahrir Party views Islam as being

¹³² The International Crisis Group, "Understanding Islamism." *Middle East/North Africa Report*, 2 March 2005: 3-4.

¹³³ Nizar Hamzeh, "Lebanon's Islamists and Local Politics: A New Reality", *Third World Quarterly*, October 2000: 748-749.

¹³⁴ Nizar Hamzeh 745.

¹³⁵ Dr. Abdullah Babiti.

essentially political in the large scope of the word. This is because "politics" means protecting people's interests. And taking care of these privileges is based on the authority or government that is responsible for doing so. Islam has established the rules for defending people's rights, and it expects the Islamic nation or leadership to set up a political framework that assures a faithful interpretation of its principles.¹³⁶

In other words, the Al Tahrir Party is not only responsible for spreading the Islamic political point of view among people, it also ascertains whether or not people's rights are respected and maintained according to Islamic rule.¹³⁷ It is important to mention in this context that Al Tahrir Party does not believe in democratic systems and in participating in parliamentary elections in order to eventually establish an Islamic caliphate. The Al Tahrir party expects that its political role is only initiated after a revolution is achieved which allows it to influence or control the government.¹³⁸ Although this party shares the similar goal as the jihadist of establishing an Islamic caliphate, it distances itself from the jihadists' movements when it concerns the use of violence to attain objectives.

Jabhat al Amal al Islami is another Islamic group in Tripoli which is perceived as a political movement. Its president, Dr Yakan, left his previous membership with Jamaa al Islamiyah and established Jabhat al Amal al Islami mainly due to a political conflict over relations with the Mustaqbal movement. Jabhat al Amal al Islami participates a great deal in Lebanese politics. Fathi Yakan has made an alliance with Hezbollah against the Mustaqbal movement headed by Hariri. Moreover, Jabhat al Amal al Islami believes that it represents all the Sunnis in Lebanon who are related neither to the US nor to the Al Qaeda organization. It views itself as a reformist movement which attempts to establish reforms in a legitimate, constitutional manner. It believes that the employment of violent means is only justifiable if

¹³⁶ Dr. Ahmad Kassas, personal interview, 20 May 2008.

¹³⁷ ¹³⁷ Dr. Ahmad Kassas.

¹³⁸ فداء عيتاني، "التاريخ المكتوم للجهاديين كما يرونه". جريدة الأخبار. الحلقة 14/3. الجمعة 14 أيلول 2007.

it is conducted for defensive purposes. According to Dr. Yakan, the "Fajir" military force which is under the party control has as its mission to resist the occupational Israelis troops in the South in order to defend Islamic rights and the Sunni populated villages located there.

The Ahabash group is another example of an Islamic Political Movement in Lebanon. Since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 Al Ahabash played a crucial part in Lebanese politics. In 1992 it won a parliamentary seat in Beirut, and then lost it in 1996. This group view itself as a moderate alternative to Islamism. It has no militia nor has it engaged in any military actions against Israel. Though this movement claims that it rejects violence as a mean to reach its goals, on 11 April, 2001 members of the Jami'at al-Mashari' al-Khayriya al-Islamiya were brandishing knives and other blades in a demonstration against students' protesters calling for freedom and the Syrian troop withdrawal from Lebanon.

Harakat Al Tawhid al Islami is one of the groups influenced by the Muslim Brothers organization. It is considered to be one of the first Sunni Islamic Political movements; it is not a missionary group.¹³⁹ This group played a critical role in the political scene, especially in Tripoli, between 1983 and 1984. Its leader, Sheikh Shaaban, displayed indifference concerning the Lebanese parliament sectarian representation, and called upon Muslims to establish Islamic rule based on the Shari'a (Islamic sacred law). In 1988, Harakat Al Tawhid al Islami members joined the Islamic Resistance to fight the Israeli forces in Israel's "security zone", even though the group does not essentially believe in violence as a means to attain its goal. It is generally recognized that Harakat Al Tawhidi is not as strong as it once was in the eighties. However, it still exhibits political influence by publicizing its views against the US and Israel and by joining the opposition in Lebanon in its support of Hezbollah.

B. Missionary movements

¹³⁹ فداء عيتاني، "التاريخ المكتوم للجهاديين كما يرونه". جريدة الأخبار. الحلقة 7 / 14. الأربعاء 19 أيلول 2007.

Contrary to the Islamic political movements, the missionary movements or “Ahil Al Dawaa” do not encompass political power as their main objective. Their main aim is the preservation of Muslim identity and the Islamic faith against non believers. The missionary movements usually concentrate on tackling the corruption of Islamic values and the weakening of faith among Muslim people. These groups believe that individual virtue is a basic condition to form a good government and thus reach collective salvation. These missionary movements are both revivalists and fundamentalists. Moreover, missionary activists do not perceive themselves as parties; they only focus on their role as preaching “Al Dawaa” among the Muslims.¹⁴⁰

The main participants of this type of organizations are the missionaries and the “ulama”. A good example of this is the Salafiyya movement.¹⁴¹ According to Daii al Islam Al Shahal, one of the main leaders in Salafist groups in Tripoli, there is no political scheme to the Salafist movement in Lebanon; its only goal is to spread Islam and return to the basics of this religion. He stressed that the Salafist movement is the “real face of Islam”.¹⁴² As mentioned before, although Daii al Islam has established the “Islamic army unit”, according to him this force is only organized to protect the Salafist missionary Islamic project. Additionally, Daii al Islam believes that as long as there is a government and structures in Lebanon, Salafists believe that there is no necessity to establish a military force. In fact, they believe it would be emphatically wrong to establish one.¹⁴³ Moreover, according to Sheikh Hasan Al Shahal, the Salafists are not militant, they only orient and educate the people about Islam with their speeches.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ The International Crisis Group, “Understanding Islamism.” *Middle East/North Africa Report*, 2 March 2005: 3-4.

¹⁴¹ The International Crisis Group 4.

¹⁴² اميمة عبد اللطيف. " الاسلاميون في لبنان والقوة الصاعدة". جريدة الاخبار. 2008/01/25. هذه المقالة نسخة مختصرة عن دراسة صدرت عن مؤسسة كارنيغي للسلام الدولي ومركز كارنيغي للشرق. مأخوذة عن الموقع الالكتروني: <http://www.carnegie-mec.org/arabic/newsdetailsar.aspx?ID=692&MID=332&PID=321>

¹⁴³ تمام البرازي. " الخريطة السياسية لسنة الشمال اللبناني(3). *الوطن العربي*. 2008/3/12 ص: 24.

¹⁴⁴ تمام البرازي. " القيادات السنية: الوطن العربي تسأل: ماذا حدث في طرابلس؟". *الوطن العربي*. 2008 /7/2. ص: 27.

The Salafi groups in Lebanon do not have any intentions or project to change the system as stated by Shiekh Omar Bakri. Their only proposal is an educational, intelligent and cultural one. The Salafists aim at returning the people to the origin of the religion and to the indisputable understanding of the Quran and the Sunna. That is why the Salafists were among the first to oppose the violent actions committed by Fateh al Islam against the Lebanese army¹⁴⁵. Yet Sheikh Bakri added that the Salafists could employ violence and jihad if prevented from spreading their views and beliefs or for defensive purposes.¹⁴⁶

There are several Salafist movements in Tripoli and north Lebanon. Quite recently, Ulama Salafist groups in Tripoli and Lebanon have increasingly involved themselves in politics in an indirect manner. To be more specific, some have established undeclared alliances with the al-Mustaqbal Movement and Hezbollah. This author believes that the Salafists will eventually play a more active part in Lebanese politics.

It is important to note in this context that the Al Ahabash group which was classified above as a current political movement was originally a missionary organization. It has a Sufi origin and adheres to the views of a religious thinker that is considered a spiritual Islamist. In fact, this party changed its ideology and only participated in politics after the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982. Before 1982 Sheikh al Habashi, the founder of this group had always avoided discussing politics. The main focus of this party was a determination to preach "al dawaa" among the Muslims.

Contrary to this belief, Dr. Fathi Yakan points out that the missionary movement's mode of operating is not sufficient to establish a genuine form of Muslim society and institute the Muslim "Khilafa ". Preaching and lecturing is usually limited to the participants of the mosques and meetings, and does not make contact with people of the Islamic faith in other locations. Dr. Yakan believes that the method urged by the missionary movements is

¹⁴⁵ تمام البرازي، " الخريطة السياسية لسنة طرابلس (1)". *الوطن العربي*. 27 شباط 2008. ص:21.
¹⁴⁶ جهاد نافع، " حديث شامل وموسع مع الشيخ عمر البكري فستق ناشط في الحركات السلفية". *جريدة الديار*. الاربعاء 08/13/2008. مأخوذة عن الموقع الإلكتروني: <http://www.journaladdiyar.com/categorysearch.asp?ID=34&date=08/13/2008>

incapable of confronting the challenges and materialistic philosophy utilized by anti Islamic forces.¹⁴⁷

C. Jihadi movement

The Jihadi movement is considered as being one of the radical branches of the Sunni Salafists groups. Although this group is an extension of the Salafist movement, it differs by stressing the political and practical aspects of its ideology over theoretical ones. In other word, it shifts from solely being a religious group to a practical level.¹⁴⁸

The Islamic armed struggle (al- jihad) has many alternatives. First, it could primarily involve itself in internal affairs and only combat Muslim regimes. Secondly, it could be irredentist, i.e. this signifies fighting in a location ruled by non Muslims or that is under occupation. Thirdly, it may choose to define itself as part of a global movement and fight against the West. The Jihadi movements concentrate on oppressing the non Muslim powers in the Muslim world whether political or military, and in return give priority to armed resistance.

The Jihadi groups are committed to violence because they claim to be engaged in military defense of Dar al Islam (the house of Islam). The main participant of the Jihadi movement is a fighter or the "al mujahid".¹⁴⁹ Accordingly, the significance of "jihad" for this group is limited to violent behavior or military struggle, disregarding the authentic meaning of jihad as described in the Quran which forbids innocent killings and protects human rights.

Under this Jihadi category two main currents are distinguishable: the "Jihadi Salafiyya" and the "Qutbists". The first is composed of people with a Salafi approach who have abandoned the non violent activism of the Dawaa for one reason or another, and have joined

¹⁴⁷ د. فتحي يكن، نحو حركة إسلامية عالمية واحدة . ص: 10-11.

¹⁴⁸ هلا رشيد أمون، "المنظومة الفكرية والقيمية للسلفية الجهادية التكفيرية". جريدة النهار. الأحد 10 حزيران 2007. ص: 17.

¹⁴⁹ The International Crisis Group 14-17.

the militant, armed jihad. Also, the second current is composed of activists who are influenced by the Egyptian Sayyid Qutib who resorted to violence against the local regimes accused of being sinful or “kufar”. Recently, an alliance of the “Jihadi Salafiyya” and “Qutbists” has been established. The most notorious example of this novel trend is the Qaeda represented by Osama bin Laden.

As for the existing Sunni Islamist groups in Tripoli, the Majmouat al Dinniyyeh group is considered to be a Jihadi movement. The founder of this group Bassam Kanj, who met Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri in Afghanistan, was influenced by Al Qaeda ideology. The story is that he arrived in Lebanon to spread the Al Qaeda ideology. He attempted this aim by establishing a military group, the Majmouat al Dinneyeh, in which men were trained to become “mujahidon”. As mentioned earlier, this group was involved in a conflict against the Lebanese army which it subsequently lost. Similar to other Jihadi groups, it contends that the use of violence is the sole means of attaining its goals. In fact, the Dinniyyeh group has in reality misinterpreted the genuine meaning of jihad.

Fateh Al Islam is another group which could be classified as being part of the Jihadi movement. During the Nahir al Bared and Tripoli war last year, this group actively participated in military fighting and committed numerous violent acts. By resorting to aggressive or brutal methods, this group shares the ideology of other Jihadist groups which claim that their acts are committed for the sake of Islam in order to provide meaningful freedom to all Muslims. Ironically, the majority of Lebanese soldiers killed by Fateh al Islam at Nahir al Bared were Sunnis. Fateh al Islam members chose to fight that war to the end in the belief that they would win a ‘one-way ticket’ to heaven. Like other Jihadist groups, Fateh Al Islam members believe that violence is the only resource to achieve their goals. Many of these “globalized Islamists” who fought at Nahir al Bared were not Lebanese; they were recruited instead from a variety of Islamic countries.

Several of these Jihadist Islamist groups operate across national borders and have formed foreign alliances which provide them with support and funding. In fact, the Jihadists in Lebanon have widened their agendas so as to not limit themselves to internal politics. They believe they belong to the ever lasting paradise and earth is only a way through which to reach that eternal life.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, according to Dr. Ahmad Mousalli, the Al Qaeda organization has opted to support many Islamist Jihadist groups in this area aiming to transfer the jihad to the closest border with Israel. And Lebanon might possibly be the border which Al Qaeda is referring to. Hisham Jaber, a terrorist expert and retired colonel, believes that since 2000, a number of Al Qaeda inspired groups such as Fateh al Islam and some Salafist ones have rapidly increased in Lebanon, especially in the north.¹⁵¹

It has proved hard to negotiate with these extremist groups especially since there is no state to confer with or to acquire revenge from. Many of these Jihadist groups are not concerned about limiting human casualties whenever they carry out their violent operations. On the contrary, they apparently desire casualties.¹⁵² The Jihadist groups reject peaceful means to accomplish their goals such as participating in the government or parliament, educational and missionary activities. These groups perceive that participation in the democratic system would be considered as cooperating with the "kufur" and the enemies. The Islamist Jihadist groups are convinced that true Muslims share their thoughts and views; those who do not are "kafirs" and their killing is permitted if not obligatory.¹⁵³ However, as earlier mentioned in this thesis, all the basic tenets of Islam are against the violent tactics

¹⁵⁰ فداء عيتاني، "التاريخ المكتوم للجهاديين كما يرونه"، جريدة الأخبار، حلقة 14/1 . الأربعاء 12 أيلول 2007 العدد 326، ص:9.

¹⁵¹ Weedah Hamzah, "Lebanon's security, future at stake after attack on UN", <http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/middleeast/features/article_1322078.php>.

¹⁵² Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press. 1998) 205.

¹⁵³ هلا رشيد أمون، "المنظومة الفكرية والقيمية للسلفية الجهادية التكفيرية". جريدة النهار. الأحد 10 حزيران 2007. ص:17.

employed by these Jihadi movements. In fact, the Quran establishes exceptionally firm rules against suicide and killing women, children and old people even in battle.¹⁵⁴

The Sunni Islamist groups in Lebanon, and specifically Tripoli, differ in size, objectives and methods. It is impossible to classify them in one and the same category. It serves our purpose best to categorize these movements in the following three manners: the political, missionary and jihadists. Some Islamic groups have changed their means to attain their objectives. Some are motivated to increasingly participate in the political life in Lebanon. Others are inspired to employ more violent behavior to achieve their desires. After analyzing these three currents of Sunni Islamists it is crucial to wonder which one of them will prevail in the long term in Lebanon. It is currently immensely difficult to make any predictions. Much will depend on the efforts and means employed to deal with these Islamist groups. It is evident however that the manner in which these movements are handled will have imperative implications and repercussions on relations between the Muslim community and the rest of the world.

¹⁵⁴ "The Rise of Islamist Terrorist Groups", *Constitutional Rights Foundation*, 2 <http://www.crf-usa.org/bria/bria20_1c.htm>.

Chapter V: The choices of Islamisms

A. Why do we find Tripolitarian people participating more in Islamist groups?

There are a number of internal and external reasons prompting Tripolitarian people to participate in Islamist groups. In fact, the social environment of Tripoli (and the north in general) plays an essential role in encouraging its citizens to involve themselves with Islamist groups. Historically, Tripoli is well-known as the city of “science and scientists”. Demographically speaking, Tripoli’s population currently consists of approximately 350,000 inhabitants. Most of them are Muslim Sunni in religion. The others consist mainly of small communities of Christians and Alawites. Islamic organizations have thus more easily extended their views through educational and religious institutions and the various social centers they direct.

Besides, its geographical location has attracted people from adjacent regions. Situated as it is in the Mediterranean basin, Tripoli has assumed a vital commercial role and is a conveniently accessible harbor-city. In fact, it is claimed that many Islamists enter Tripoli by means of the sea. This has helped a lot the Islamist groups to recruit more and more people.

Additionally, Tripoli has two Palestinian camps adjacent to it, the “Nahir al Barid” camp and the “Badawi” camp. The Lebanese government does not administer or have jurisdiction over the Palestinian camps. The majority of legally sought criminals eventually take refuge in these camps. Also many Islamist groups use these camps to spread their views and attract more people to participate in their movements. This has resulted in complicating security matters in Lebanon, and, of course, Tripoli.

The absence of governmental services and prevalence instead of corrupt elected officials and their lack of accountability, have also contributed to the increasing influence of the Islamist movements in the area. Moreover, a high birth rate, unemployment and dire social, economical, and medical conditions have also aided the ascendancy of these

movements. In fact, poverty in Tripoli is so endemic that cemeteries are used as homes in some neighborhoods. Horrendous conditions provoke the poor and the neglected to long for change.

Since these deprived people do not witness the Lebanese government enact programs to notably improve their life conditions, they follow any group that promises improved circumstances. The Islamist groups in Tripoli exploit this awful state of affairs under the cover of religion, and successfully convince people that they are the ones to induce the required change. As a result, the destitute individuals join an Islamist group without realizing (or caring perhaps) about the ensuing results. It is obvious that an underprivileged person will pursue anyone (or any group) that promises him/her enhanced conditions and better opportunities.

In addition, the educated youth joins Islamic groups because they perceive that despite their efforts and education they are incapable of acquiring the jobs they deserve. They observe key jobs snatched by people with high connections and fewer qualifications. This iniquitous situation is another reason for joining a movement which provides them with the hope of realizing their ambitions.

The recent political situation in Lebanon has played an important role in increasing the number of Islamist groups. Previous to 2005 during the Syrian presence in Lebanon, the Salafist groups in Lebanon and in the North were restricted and their activities controlled. With the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 the Islamist groups could freely increase, and were not held accountable for their behavior. Many of them launched new schools, mosques and NGO's; some even went ahead and developed a militant agenda.¹⁵⁵ Accordingly, more youth in Tripoli were tempted to join and participate in these Islamic groups.

¹⁵⁵ "Salafist movement in Lebanon", *Carnegie Middle East Center*, 24 July 2007, Discussion with Dr. Ahmad Moussali and Qasim Qasir moderated by Dr. Paul Salem <<http://www.carnegie-mec.org/print.aspx?ID=524&MID=332&PID=321>>.

At present, the Islamist control of Tripoli's mosques has had a crucial impact on Tripolitarians. These mosques play an exceedingly active role in encouraging Tripolitarians to join Islamist groups. The Sheikhs' preaching and moral lessons are an immensely persuasive means to attract people. Islamists sheikhs concentrate in their speeches on the "golden age" of the Arabs under Islamic rule when people enjoyed a good life; thus they endeavor to convince their audiences that it is only by way of Islam that people are capable of resolving their problems and regaining a good life.

The current political tension in Islam between the Shiites and Sunnis in the Middle East represents an additional dimension for the ascendancy of Islamist groups in Tripoli. Although the Sunnis form 90 % of the Muslims of the world, the Shiites are concentrated in oil rich regions. This has provoked the Sunnis' concern and some Sunni Islamist groups even view Shiites as apostates. The 1979 Iran revolution has increased the Sunni Muslims fear of the Shiite expansion in the Muslim world. In Lebanon, the Shiites are said to be the largest group.¹⁵⁶ Iranian support for the Shiites through Hezbollah in Lebanon has provided additional reasons for Lebanon's Sunni community to defend itself by joining Islamist groups.

With the absence of the Lebanese government, Hezbollah was able to control parts of Southern Lebanon. As a result, the Sunnis felt more susceptible. Although they themselves were also neglected by the government, their conditions however did not permit them to control independent areas as the Shiites did.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, after the death of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, the Sunnis of Lebanon have felt even more apprehensive without a leader. This has been another major reason for their participation in Islamist Sunni groups, especially in Tripoli which has the majority of Sunnis in Lebanon.

¹⁵⁶ Seymour Hersh, "The Redirection", *The New Yorkers*, 5 March 2007, <http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/03/05/070305fa_fact_hersh>.

¹⁵⁷ Nir Rosen, "Al Qaeda in Lebanon", *Boston Review*, January/February 2008:1 <<http://www.bostonreview.net/BR33.1/rosen.php>>.

Furthermore, it is noted that some Sunni politicians have not hesitated to use this Shiite-Sunni issue to further their interests. They have mobilized a steadily increasing number of Sunnis by persuading them that the Shiites of Lebanon are aiming to dominate the whole of Lebanon. This notion has increased the level of vulnerability and danger among the Sunnis, and is employed or exploited by some Islamist groups to attract Sunnis youth to their movements.

Besides the internal reasons that have led to the spread of Islamic groups in Lebanon, there are regional and international factors which have affected Muslims throughout the Middle Eastern area. During the period of the Egyptian leader Abed al Nasser, the work of the Islamist groups was limited and almost entirely ceased. Yet with the downfall of Arab nationalism in the early 1970s, an alternative unifying aspect was found in Islam which consisted of the presence of Islamist groups. The abundance of petroleum in the Arab Gulf has increased the power of countries in that region, especially that of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). In fact, the KSA with its conservative Muslim Wahabi rule has attracted many Salafists. Most of the Tripolitarian sheikhs, who had previously travelled to Azhar in Egypt for their religious studies, now headed instead to Saudi Arabia where they were instructed by Saudi conservative sheikhs with their Salafist ideology. This affected Tripoli inordinately since the majority of the sheikh scholars returned to Lebanon and created Islamist associations which were in agreement with their Salafist principles.¹⁵⁸ An increasing number of Tripolitarian youth joined the organizations founded by the sheikhs. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, the Iranian revolution also encouraged the Sunni community in Lebanon to participate in Islamic groups as a counter effort to prevent the Shiite expansion in the Muslim world.

¹⁵⁸ Dr. Mustapha Adib, personal interview, 15 August 2008.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was an opportunity for Tripolitarians to join Islamist groups aspiring to free Palestine. In fact, the sense that an injustice had been committed in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and other places, motivated the Tripolitarian youth, including other Muslims, to involve themselves in groups which believe in the right of Islamic rule and ideology. Specifically, for example, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Muslims from around the world had rallied for a holy war, and had volunteered to be sanctified warriors in defense of Islam in order to liberate the Islamic country.¹⁵⁹

Many of the volunteers came from Lebanon and specifically from its northern part. In fact, the injustice against the Muslims in various parts of the world had radicalized many Tripolitarians. According to Abu Anas, one of the participants of the Dinneyeh group and a friend of Kanj, the latter had returned to Lebanon and worked on establishing an Islamic militia in the North believing that there was no Islamic Sunni group in Lebanon prepared to fight Israeli. This feeling was shared by many Tripolitarians who decided to join the Dinneyeh group.¹⁶⁰

Finally, globalization and the information revolution play an important role in attracting an increasing number of people to join Islamist groups. In fact, more people than ever are currently knowledgeable about Islamist groups through the internet. When captured fighters in Fateh al Islam were asked how they had known about their organization previous to joining it, they said that Fateh Al Islam members had contacted them through web sites and informed them of the formidable opportunity to train in Nahir Al Bared, and that this chance was available to all the Arab Jihadists who wished to fight against Americans in Iraq and

¹⁵⁹ "The Rise of Islamist Terrorist Groups", *Constitutional Rights Foundation*, 4 <http://www.crf-usa.org/bria/bria20_1c.htm>.

¹⁶⁰ Nir Rosen, "Al Qaeda in Lebanon", *Boston Review*, January/February 2008: 4 <<http://www.bostonreview.net/BR33.1/rosen.php>>.

Israelis in Palestine.¹⁶¹ It is in fact common for many of Tripoli's youth to learn about opportunities to participate in jihadi groups inside and outside Lebanon through the internet.

B. Why do Tripolitarian people move from one Islamist group to another?

Tripolitarian people have a tendency to shift from one Islamic group to another. The main reason for this, according to Dr. Ahmad Kassas, is that some of the Islamic groups do not have a permanent and stable program. Those groups only adhere to short-lived slogans and focus on temporary objectives; they thus maneuver in a flexible manner and their objectives are also fluid depending on their interests at the time. As a result, Muslim youth modify their Islamic group allegiances frequently depending on their reactions to public events.¹⁶²

Essentially, Muslim youth are affected a great deal by their environment. For example, as soon as Muslim youth sense that their religious sector is threatened, they promptly participate in Islamic movements that offer protection to this area. Also, when these young people desire to understand more about politics, they increasingly involve themselves with Islamic groups that are concerned with political issues. Nevertheless, Dr Kassas stresses that this phenomenon is rarely found within the Al Tahrir party. The members of this party seldom shift to other Islamic group mainly because they are well-informed about a specified culture which has unchanging goals.¹⁶³

According to Sheikh Bilal Baroudi, the main reason that Tripolitarian youth have indistinct ideas and transfer from one Islamic movement to another is a lack of unified positions, clear vision and common projects among these Lebanese Sunni Islamists concerning their survival and efficiency in Lebanon.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ طوني طراد، تنظيم فتح الإسلام مشروع هزم في لبنان، ص: 24.

¹⁶² Dr. Ahmad Kassas.

¹⁶³ Dr. Ahmad Kassas.

¹⁶⁴ Sheikh Bilal Baroudi, personal interview, 17 July 2008.

Peer factors also play an important role in encouraging Tripolitarian people to transfer their commitment from one Islamist group to another. After asking about the reason for their participation in a certain Islamic group in Tripoli, some of them said a friend who had joined the movement had convinced them to also join. This has certainly been the case for a number of people who have joined one Islamic group or another in Tripoli.

Another factor cited for the shift from one movement to another is the financial aspect or the need for services. The Tripolitarian people take part in associations that offer them more services. In fact, many Islamist groups in Tripoli exploit government neglect to recruit people to their side through offering basic medical, educational and social services. It is evident that fluctuations occur not solely because of ideological principles or beliefs but also according to practical considerations and interests.

In short, the ultimate goal for most if not all the Islamic movements in Lebanon is to gain popular support. Given the above mentioned rationale for Tripolitarian people, whether to increase their participation in Islamist groups or to switch from one group to another, one fact which is deduced or clearly emerges is that the north of Lebanon is currently an exceptionally fertile militant recruiting ground that could be dangerously and easily employed by others (or the Lebanese themselves) to demolish the country and its stability.

Chapter VI: Can the terrorism of the Islamist groups in Tripoli/Lebanon

be confronted? And if so, by what means?

Is it possible to confront the terror of the Islamist groups in Tripoli and Lebanon? And if that is the case, what are the means at our disposal to achieve this aim? This thesis believes that to find answers to these questions it is necessary to examine the roots of terrorism. This process is comparable to dealing with an ill person; it is impossible to treat him without first having a proper diagnosis. In a similar fashion, in order to find a permanent solution to terrorism its causes must first be taken into consideration, and they then should be linked to counter terrorist measures. Otherwise, the solution will solely be a temporary one. Concerning the counter measures to adopt, the following three should be emphasized: the moderate Islamist trend must be encouraged, the precise role of the Lebanese Government should be defined, and the part that supportive countries play has to be taken into account.

A. Encouraging the moderate Muslim stream

As already mentioned, the presence of Salafist jihadist's movements in Lebanon is increasing. These groups unfortunately presume that their goals are only attainable through the use of violence. This places additional responsibilities on moderate Lebanese Islamic movements that are knowledgeable of the danger of the jihadist's movement spread in an unstable political environment such as Lebanon's. Confronting the violent trends must not only be limited to the security issue. Experience has demonstrated how these groups become increasingly extreme when they are surrounded by a large number of security forces. This writer is of the opinion that the fight on the level of ideas is a paramount means to restore law and order in Lebanon and tackle these extreme terrorist groups.

“Moderate Islamists” are defined as groups who seek to create a society governed by principles of Islamic Law while taking into consideration the required balance between

political and social reforms.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, the groups who are affected mostly by violent trends are the moderate Islamic movements' who reject radical behavior and choose instead peaceful ways to achieve their means. These restrained Islamic movements are the most appropriate entities to identify with the jihadist movements and to understand their logic. In other words, the moderate Islamic movements are the ones most suitable to transact a serious dialogue with the members and youth of the jihadists' movements. Some counter-terrorism experts believe that the recognition and amalgamation of non violent Islamic groups into politics offers a positive outlet for Muslim activists and therefore minimizes the appeal of more radical groups.¹⁶⁶

The ongoing international and regional issues have had a far reaching effect on jihadists youth. The American support of Israeli, the corruption and ineptness of Islamic rulers, and the increasing attacks on the Islamic religion and the Islamic world, every single one these factors has left these youth with no other choice but to participate in wars they had not started but were obliged to deal with. Although many are opposed to the jihadists employment of violent means to arrive at their objectives, they however are in agreement with jihadists concerning the inevitability of dealing with the above mentioned causes and can understand the necessity of war, even though it is sometimes only an ideological and intellectual approval of war and not an actual military one. I believe this position is the most essential one on which the dialogue among jihadists and moderate Islamic movements can be based. Even though no one can guarantee the success of such a dialogue, I consider it indispensable that these moderate Islamic movements attempt it in any case.

Non-governmental organizations (NGO's) could play a significant role in encouraging the moderate Muslims in Lebanon. Through launching various programs and

¹⁶⁵ Jeremy Sharp, "U.S Democracy Promotion Policy in the Middle East: the Islamist Dilemma", *Congressional Research Service (CRS), the library of Congress*, 15 June 2006: 5
<<http://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33486.pdf>>.

¹⁶⁶ Jeremy Sharp 9.

activities these NGO's would work actively to portray the true image of Islam as a peaceful religion. The Lebanese NGO's, especially the Muslim ones, must be sufficiently appealing for ordinary Muslims to condemn fanaticism and terrorist violence acts in the name of Islam. One of the ways for the NGO's to engage in this venture is through planning conferences, lectures, educational programs for young people, and other learning activities.

Moreover, the media is an indispensable weapon in this issue. Presently, most of the Arab and Western media focus on exhibiting Islamists leaders who reflect a false and radical image of Islam. Ironically, the media is assisting the jihadists groups to a great extent by publicizing their views and outlook to the world. The media's actual role should instead be that of focusing on moderate Islamic voices that are able to reflect Islam's true image. The media must stress the notion of separating Islam as a religion from its employment as a political tool. It should also emphasize that violence is not an acceptable method for attaining a range of goals. Thus, terrorism is avoidable if terrorists were to fully comprehend that their extreme actions are not achieving positive results. The media plays a crucial role in convincing them of the futility of their violent activities.

B. The role of the Lebanese Government

Although a great number of responsibilities are placed on the moderate Islamic movement in facing the jihadist movement in Lebanon, this is not to say that the Lebanese government has no essential part to play. As this paper illustrates, one of the main reasons that drives Tripolitarians to participate in Islamist groups, specifically the jihadist groups, is the desperate conditions they are living under. Extremity does not exist in vacuum. And this is especially the case in Lebanon. Unemployment, poverty, the appalling (or non-existent) government services, economic, social and medical deprivation, and other negative factors, all contribute to form the ideal environment for immoderate and seditious organizations to flourish. To alter this situation, the government has to introduce a strategic plan in order to

resolve this predicament in Lebanon. The Lebanese government must acutely reflect of means at their disposal which could improve the social and economical conditions in the country especially in the north of Lebanon. Moreover, the Lebanese government should work on fulfilling the need for sustainable development in the country. This will reduce the feeling of neglect and abandonment that most Tripolitarians have.

It is also important to note that although jihadist leaders are at times wealthy and educated individuals, they nevertheless target the poor and deprived populations through their organizations. Studies have revealed that most people who are today labeled as being terrorists were in the past leading an underprivileged lifestyle and suffering from depressed life conditions.¹⁶⁷ At present, the situation in Lebanon and particularly Tripoli, offers a grandiose setting that allows extreme groups similar to the jihadists to thrive and possess further leverage over their districts.

The Lebanese government must labor at strengthening its military forces, security intelligence and official organizations. This will furnish the government with a more trustworthy image. However, past experience has demonstrated that employing military pressure to defeat terrorism is not always useful. In many cases, it resulted in the opposite predicament, i.e. it increased the violence and brought about more bloodshed.¹⁶⁸ Sheikh Bilal Baroud contends that it is essential to have cooperation between the Lebanese government and the Islamist groups mainly because the goal of the opponents and the Lebanese enemy is to create a conflict amongst them based on the claim of violence and terrorism.¹⁶⁹

Additionally, the clash is perpetuated by the support some foreign countries provide to Islamist groups in Tripoli; this point is clarified in more detail later in this thesis. As part of the attempt to encounter the terror of the Islamist groups in Tripoli specifically and in Lebanon generally, the Lebanese government must fully employ its capabilities and

¹⁶⁷ فداء عيتاني، "التاريخ المكتوم للجهاديين كما يرونه"، جريدة الأخبار، حلقة 14/1 . الأربعاء 12 أيلول 2007 العدد 326: 9.

¹⁶⁸ Harun Yahya , *Only Love Can Defeat Terrorism* (Turkey: Global Publishing, 2003) 13.

¹⁶⁹ Sheikh Bilal Baroudi.

connections to reduce the foreign support provided to those Islamic groups. It could perhaps start by imposing limits on bank accounts and money transfers. Also, it should supervise the Lebanese border so as to impede the flow of money, weapons or human resources deriving from foreign countries in order to sustain the radical groups. The Lebanese government must also find allies that will assist and encourage its efforts to confront the terrorist groups. In short, it is only by allowing the government to play an improved and more forceful role that we can hope for a reformed society, a moderate and peaceful one.

C. The role of the Supportive Foreign countries

Some foreign countries are affecting jihadi movements in Lebanon and Tripoli in mainly two ways: either by supporting them militarily, financially, and logistically, or by providing them with more pretexts for their excesses.

To begin with, it is not a secret that some foreign countries are supporting the Islamic groups in Lebanon. This issue concerns both the Islamic Sunni and Shiaa groups. It is explicitly clear that Iran supports Hezbollah in a variety of ways. Besides, there is also the fact that cooperation currently exists between Hezbollah and Syria. Moreover, some of the Salafist groups in Lebanon are related to and backed by Saudi Arabia and other gulf countries. When Sheikh Daii Al Islam was asked about the financial source of his Association, Al Hidayah wal Ihsan, he replied that it is financed partly by generous persons and associations from the Gulf mainly from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, and other countries from that region.¹⁷⁰

According to Sheikh Fathi Yakan, one can not separate in Lebanon between internal matters, no matter how small and insignificant they are, and the external regional and international events. Yakan stated that the Lebanese are requested to interpret every letter and sentence as part of the circle of a bigger map that has been designed by major or bigger

¹⁷⁰ محمد مصطفى علوش. " حوار مع الشيخ داعي الشهال حول الوجود السلفي في لبنان". شبكة الاسلام اليوم. 27 شباط 2007. مأخوذة من الكوقع الإلكتروني: <http://www.Alloushas.maktoobblog.com/226781>

countries or powers. The beneficiaries of Lebanon's instability are the enemies of Lebanon whether they exist in Lebanon or outside it. And ultimately all the Lebanese, no matter which party they belong to, are losers. The only manner in which to resolve the Lebanese crisis is by limiting external interference and to gradually formulate the necessary steps that will reunite the Lebanese.¹⁷¹

Dr. Kamal Naji, a Palestinian expert in strategic studies stresses that the jihadi movement, Fateh Al Islam, is not a Palestinian organization, although it appeared mainly inside the Palestinian camps. He considers this organization to be a foreign one which was not instigated from within the Palestinian camps. It arrived in Lebanon through that country's international borders.¹⁷²

Additionally, many Lebanese accuse Syria of supporting Fateh al Islam. In fact, according to minister Shiekh Said Al Hariri, "Fateh Al Islam is a terrorist organization that was expedited to Lebanon and the side that stands behind it is clear...and whoever protects this party is a direct partner in the corruption of Lebanon".¹⁷³ With these words he implicitly means that the "side that stands behind it" is of Syrian identity. Also, the Lebanese minister Mr. Musbah al Ahdab, states that it is clear that Syria has supported Fateh Al Islam. Not only it did it provide Fateh Al Intifadah with offices and weapons, but also allowed some of its members to enter Lebanon through its borders.¹⁷⁴ According to Lebanese minister Dr. Mustapha Alloush, "Fateh al Itifadah has a close link to Syria; this organization has given all its offices in Nahir al Bared peacefully to Fateh Al Islam, this is a very strange matter!" he said.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ " حوار مع قيادات إسلامية حول مسببات وتداعيات الأعداء الدامي في طرابلس". مأخوذ عن ملحق جريدة اللواء، موقع الإلكتروني الدعوة . في 2007/5/30. <http://www.daawa.net/marsad.htm>

¹⁷² طوني طراد، تنظيم فتح الإسلام مشروع هزم في لبنان . ص: 23.

¹⁷³ Ibid 28.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid 20.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

Minister Ahmad Fatfat states that the authority in Nahir Al Bared was in the hands of Fatih Al Intifadah that is known to have direct contacts with Damascus. Then there emerged Shakir Al Absi from a Syrian jail who came directly to Lebanon to take charge of what used to be known as Fatih Al Intifadah; he named it Fatih Al Islam. Absi was enabled to acquire military and financial support besides the military training.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, according to the scholar Bernard Rougier, the Syrians wanted to obstruct the Hariri strategy of controlling the Sunni Islamist coalition which could be used to fight Hezbollah. As a result, they inserted a Salafist Jihadi group like Fateh al Islam which aims at fighting the Israeli to divert Sunni support for Hariri.¹⁷⁷

Others hold different views. For example, the American journalist Seymour Hersh states in *The New Yorker* periodical that the United States and Saudi Arabia back the principle of financially and militarily supporting the Sunni Fateh Al Islam group as a means to prevent the growth of the Shiite Hezbollah party and its Iranian influence.¹⁷⁸

According to the journalist Qasim Qasir, the moderate salafist groups in Lebanon are probably funded by Saudi Arabia, other Gulf countries and wealthy Sunnis in Lebanon. Nevertheless, Qasir doubts that the militant and radical Sunni groups receive such funding. If these groups are sufficiently financed why do they resort to robbing banks then, as in the case of Fateh Al Islam?¹⁷⁹ In a word, all these foreign countries must rethink their positions. They must acknowledge that the increase and empowering of jihadist groups will not only harm Lebanon but also their own countries eventually.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid 25-26.

¹⁷⁷ Nir Rosen, "Al Qaeda in Lebanon", *Boston Review*, January/February 2008:11
<<http://www.bostonreview.net/BR33.1/rosen.php>>.

¹⁷⁸ "Seymour Hersh: U.S. Indirectly Backed Islamist Militants Fighting Lebanese Army", *Democracy Now*, 24 May 2007, Interview with Seymour Hersh
<http://www.democracynow.org/2007/5/24/seymour_hersh_u_s_indirectly_backed>.

¹⁷⁹ "Salafist Movement in Lebanon", *Carnegie Middle East Center*, 24 July 2007, Discussion with Dr. Ahmad Moussali and Qasim Qasir moderated by Dr. Paul Salem, <<http://www.carnegie-mec.org/print.aspx?ID=524&MID=332&PID=321>>.

Concerning the second way, the policies and actions of some foreign countries have prompted and motivated Muslims to support the jihadists. Radical Islamist groups first emerged at the time when the Afghan war occurred. These groups were encouraged and strengthened during the Bosnia and Chechnya events. In addition, the Americans and their biased support for Israel provide increased stimulus for numerous Islamist groups to become increasingly extreme. The Iraqi invasion has also aided jihadist Islamist groups in its bid to acquire more allies.

Besides, the western domination and interference in the domestic affairs of the Muslim countries has created immense hostility toward the West and the governments of these Muslim states by many Islamic groups.¹⁸⁰ The foreign countries must understand that unless they discontinue their unfair practices and modify their stances, Muslim youth, including those from Lebanon, will continue to join Islamic jihadi movements.

The above has displayed some of the evidence and reasons for external involvement in Lebanon's affairs, and the accompanying motivational force it supplies to Sunni Jihadi Islamist groups in Lebanon and especially in Tripoli. A lot of scholarly research has been conducted, proof offered and accusations leveled concerning the outside participation in Lebanon. The international community must be aware of the hazards radical organizations pose, especially from the jihadists who attempt to suppress individual freedoms and liberties in different parts of the world. The jihadists are eager to replace the democratic regimes which they view as obstacles with a global caliphate. Additionally, these groups will exert their utmost efforts on obliging non-Muslims to convert to Islam according to their own concept and understanding of that religion. Perhaps one of the most significant ways to reduce terrorism in Tripoli, Lebanon and other parts of our planet by urging foreign countries to cease interfering in Lebanon's internal affairs and bring to a close their support for

¹⁸⁰ Barry Rubin, *Revolutionaries and Reformers: Contemporary Islamist Movements in the Middle East* (USA: State University of New York Press, 2003) 166.

Islamist radical organizations. Moreover, the international community ought to modify its unfair policies toward the Muslims of the world.

Conclusion

Islam is a religion of peace; it denounces terrorism and appeals for human right safeguards. The verse in the Quran which states that "God calls to the Home of Peace and He guides whom He wills to a straight path" ¹⁸¹{Surah Yunus: 25} clearly expounds this issue. Islam forbids the killing of innocents and it commands people to behave justly. This is lucidly exposed in the Quran verses {Surah Al Ma'idah: 32} which maintains that "...if anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or (and) to spread mischief in the land- it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind.." ¹⁸² Another Quran verse {Surah Al Ma'idah:8} asserts that "You who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah as just witnesses; and let not the enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just: that is nearer to piety; and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is Well-Acquainted with what you do." ¹⁸³

Although the Quran is shared by Islamist groups and is considered their sole religious book, the speeches of Islamic movements exhibit different interpretations of the Quran texts. Additionally, each Islamist leader (some are not even Islamic clerics) deems he has the prerogative to proclaim the right to *ijtihad* for himself. Fortunately however the Muslims in the world number over 1 billion, and only 1 percent of them are entitled to be named jihadists. ¹⁸⁴

It is crucial to note that while some countries view a certain group as consisting of a terrorist organization; others perceive it as pertaining to the notion of freedom fighters. Thus, it is difficult to define what a terrorist act is, or whether an organization is a terrorist one or

¹⁸¹ Muhamad Taqiudin Al Hilali, and Muhammad Muhsin Khan 267.

¹⁸² Muhamad Taqiudin Al Hilali, and Muhammad Muhsin Khan 150.

¹⁸³ Muhamad Taqiudin Al Hilali, and Muhammad Muhsin Khan 146.

¹⁸⁴ Richard Clarke, et al., *Defeating the Jihadists: A Blueprint for Action* (New York: The Century Foundation Press, 2004) 17.

not. According to Brian Jenkins what is called terrorism depends on one's point of view.¹⁸⁵ In order to possess a criterion we shall define terrorism in a manner that indicates two of its main characteristics: targeting civilians and destroying peace. In other words, assaults or actions that threaten peace or that are targeted at civilians, even in a state of war, are considered terrorism.¹⁸⁶ It should be pointed out that numerous people are attempting to define the term 'terrorism' in an objective way. For example, Alex Schmid has examined more than a hundred definitions of the word. (Table 2).¹⁸⁷ Lately, the meaning of terrorism has altered; it no longer occurs between states but involves a non-state conflict instead.

Many observers regard Islamism in the Arab world to be a fashionable or trendy role model. According to Quintan Wiktorowicz, Islamic activism has boomed with an increasing number of people who sense that they are politically disregarded and economically deprived; and this is besides the powerlessness they experience at the expense of outside powers. As a result, Islamists, both radical and non violent groups, emphasize that Islam is the solution to social economical problems, and are establishing their own institutions that serve as alternatives to state structures to attract the lower and middle classes.¹⁸⁸

Nowadays, the Islamic movement is not just limited to the religious scope; it is an increasingly active political component in Middle Eastern countries. Some Islamic organizations even envisage themselves as an alternative authority in certain states. This syndrome especially manifests itself in Lebanon. Several of these Islamic movements seek to accomplish their goals by peaceful means, while others unhesitatingly employ violence to attain their objectives.

¹⁸⁵ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 15.

¹⁸⁶ Harun Yahya, *Only Love Can Defeat Terrorism* (Turkey: Global Publishing, 2003) 8.

¹⁸⁷ Alex Schmid, Albert Jongman, et al., *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1988) 5.

¹⁸⁸ Jeremy Sharp, "U.S Democracy Promotion Policy in the Middle East: The Islamist Dilemma", *Congressional Research Service (CRS), the Library of Congress*, 15 June 2006: 6
<<http://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33486.pdf>>.

It is normal that Islamic movements in Tripoli desire to participate in political life and achieve power; nevertheless, these organizations must accept the concept of dialogue with others. The problem occurs when some of these Islamist groups do not agree with the ideas of others, and end up rejecting them as non believers and non Muslims; accordingly, they determine that their religion expects them to declare war against the 'unfaithful'. In other words, those Islamic movements and groups exploit the Islamic religion to satisfy and reward their own agendas.

The experience of the Islamist groups, especially the Sunni ones in Lebanon and specifically in Tripoli, is a unique one indeed. Considering the complex nature and composition of Lebanon's society, one wonders whether it is possible for any religious or political movement to predominate. How could a religious or political party, no matter how strong or large in number it is, enforce its agenda or ideology on other religious parties and sectors in Lebanon without expecting the others to become increasingly extreme or eventually request assistance from foreign parties?

As demonstrated in this thesis, there are a number of Sunni Islamist groups in Lebanon and Tripoli specifically. Each differs in size, goals, methods, ideology, and so on. It is not feasible to classify them in a sole category. As a means to understand these groups better, this thesis therefore systematized them according to three categories: the political, the missionary and the jihadists. Interestingly enough, each of these Islamist groups perceives itself as the most legitimate group to guide Islam to victory. These groups however do not realize the absurdity of attempting to determine which one of them is unfailingly correct, or what nature of Islam they are proposing is totally warranted.

There are both domestic and external reasons which incite the Tripolitanian youth to join Islamist groups. In fact, local motives such as the appalling political situation and the neglect and failings of the Lebanese government to provide people with their minimum needs

and rights, are the principle reasons which stimulate people to seek relief. Besides, the history, demography and geography of Tripoli, its adjacent of two Palestinian camps, the withdrawal of the Syrians, the Hariri association, the Hezbollah increased powers, the Islamists sheikhs influence and moral lessons in mosques, the globalization and the website invitations, and other factors, play a critical role in encouraging the Tripolitarians to participate in Islamist groups.

In addition, the international and regional situation of Muslims, consisting mainly of the Israeli- Palestinian conflict, the Iraq situation, and other political quandaries, serve as grounds for Islamist groups in Lebanon to mobilize people. In other word, the Sunni youths have been compelled to unquestioningly accept that Islamism is the only solution, and have consequently joined Islamist groups that satisfy their requirements and convictions. However, Tripolitarians are currently switching from one Islamist group; this is due to the obscure or vague objectives of some of these Islamist groups, or because of financial reasons, peer pressure, and other motives that were discussed earlier in this thesis.

Additionally, a number of jihadist groups justify the employment of violence as a means to protect the Islamic community from secular and modernist forces;¹⁸⁹ but the question that poses itself is who has taken the decision that brutal behavior is acceptable in Islam?

This thesis demonstrated that there are many ways of confronting the terror of extreme Islamist groups in Lebanon. This phenomenon cannot be diminished or eliminated without addressing its root causes. Consequently, it is enormously necessary to encourage the moderate Islam stream, provide practical governmental services, and reduce the interference and support of foreign countries for radical Islamist groups while simultaneously attempting to modify the policies of those same countries towards Muslims. Also, as noted earlier, the

¹⁸⁹ Magnus Ranstorp, "Terrorism in the name of Religion", *Journal of International Affairs*, Summer 1996: 124.

use of military force as the only means to defeat terrorism has proved to be counter productive, i.e. more needless violence and bloodshed occurs.

According to Jamaa al Islamiya represented by Dr. Babiti, terrorism can only be fought by uniting the Muslims under the Quran and the Prophet Mohammad's words. The Jamaa al Islamiya calls for establishing a fair and humanitarian government that should concern itself with the interests and needs of its citizens. This is the reason why this movement participates in the Lebanese parliament, the municipalities, and unions.¹⁹⁰

We are informed by Dr. Ahmad Kassas that there has recently been an agreement among many of the Islamist groups to end atrocities, and the accompanying violent sectarian war in Lebanon. Nevertheless, there still exist people who work under the pretext of Islam and are used by politicians to provoke and perpetuate sectarian warfare. And since the Islamist groups do not possess the required genuine power to enforce decisions in Lebanon, it is difficult for them to prevent conflicts from occurring. Dr. Kassas calls on the Sunni and non-Sunni people to cease following the secular political movements because it will lead to their disintegration. Islam significantly opposes secular thought. Dr. Ahmad Kassas adds that the only hope of attaining again an Islamic nation is through Islam, and by following Islamic rules and its lifestyle; the Al Tahrir party acknowledges that this goal requires a lot of patience and effort.¹⁹¹

According to Dr. Yakan, the president of Jabhat al Amal al Islami, the first step to rebuild Lebanese unity is by uniting every sectarian group in Lebanon. Sunnis are responsible for ameliorating their situation according to the following Arabic proverb: a person can not offer something that he does not own.¹⁹² The practice of Islamist groups will reflect on their sustainability. Only the ones that perform well in every domain can expect a

¹⁹⁰ Dr. Abdullah Babiti.

¹⁹¹ Dr. Ahmad Kassas.

¹⁹² "يكن: أذعو سنة المعارضة والموالة إلى مراجعة صادقة للمرحلة السابقة وإعادة وحدة ودور وفاعلية الطائفة السنية"، موقع الإلكتروني الدعوة. 2008/6/3. مأخوذ من الموقع الإلكتروني <http://daawa.net/marsad.htm>

promising future. Yakan added that there are many social, economic and security problems in our Arab and Islamic countries; the Islamist groups that desire to succeed must be well-prepared to find solutions to these problems. This is the only way that would make people wish to support this Islamist party.¹⁹³

Ironically, there is a slogan at Tripoli's entrance that describes the city as being the "castle of Muslims". It is difficult to envision a city which has suffered from so much neglect and dreadful conditions as being a positive symbol for Muslims! If one seeks a transformation of current circumstances, it must be made to occur from a personal basis. Lebanon and especially Tripoli, is like a time-bomb which is expected to explode at any minute. If we do not act now I am afraid it will be too late. As noted earlier, an increasing number of jihadist Sunni groups are emerging in Lebanon, especially in Tripoli and the North. Many violent acts recently committed in Lebanon were blamed on these jihadist groups. Even some of the missionary groups are changing their methods and increasingly involving themselves in politics, however it is currently difficult to predict to what extent their policies will alter. Furthermore, what has made the situation in Tripoli and Lebanon more critical lately is that jihad has become globalized. The Islamist groups are not only recruiting from the local population but are also attracting "globalized fighters".

The Lebanese government must comprehend that if it does not exert serious efforts to improve the situation and life conditions for the Lebanese people especially in deprived areas like Tripoli, radical organizations could exploit this situation under Islam's name in order to serve their own interests. The precarious situation in Tripoli will not only ravage Lebanon but also affect the entire world. This issue must be recognized too by foreign countries and the earlier the better. Only the exertion of both foreign and domestic labors can eliminate the

¹⁹³ " الحركات الإسلامية.. إلى أين؟" . حوار مع الدكتور فتحي يكن يديره ياسر محمود على موقع اسلام ان لاين ، موقع الالكتروني الدعوة. 2008/2/11. مأخوذ من الموقع الالكتروني <http://daawa.net/marsad.htm>

phenomena of terrorism and encourage the moderate Islamic stream which reflects the real image of Islam.

According to Dr Mustapha Adib, Tripoli has a history of being a moderate Sunni Muslim city. Tripolitarians are reputed for their tolerance and respect vis-à-vis others. He considers it shameful to overhear people referring to Tripolitarians as being extremists and jihadists. In fact, the percentage of the salafists people among the Tripolitarians is only around 5%. Why should this reputation therefore be generated among all the Tripolitarians?¹⁹⁴ In fact, similar to many Tripolitarians citizens I experience anger and annoyance when Tripolitarians are unanimously referred to as jihadists. Nevertheless, it is necessary to ascertain that the percentage of jihadists does not augment in the future especially in the light of the aforementioned dismal conditions currently prevailing in Tripoli. It is imperative to commence envisaging strategic solutions and preventive measures in order to avoid a calamity from occurring in the future.

Finally, it is shameful and infuriating for me as for any other Muslim person to take note of the words of a personality such as Muhammad Asad. Muhammad Asad, a native Jew named Leopold Weiss at birth who converted to the Moslem religion after being impressed by Islamic principles. Subsequent to touring the Islamic world he concluded, "If I knew Islam through the reality of the Muslim people, I wouldn't have become Muslim at all"... "How beautiful is Islam and how ugly are the Muslims..."¹⁹⁵ Hopefully, we shall soon be capable of amending this image and portraying to the world a truer picture of Islam consisting of a beautiful, merciful, protective and just religion.

¹⁹⁴ Dr. Mustapha Adib.

¹⁹⁵ د. فتحي يكن، نحو حركة إسلامية عالمية واحدة . ص: 139.

Glossary of Acronyms

AICP	Association of Islamic Charitable Projects/Al Ahbash
IA	The Islamic Association/ Al Jamaa al Islamiya
IUM	Islamic Unity Movement/ Harakat al Tawhid al Islami
JAI	Jabhat al Amal al Islmai
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
UNDP	United Nation Development Program
UNIFEL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
US/U.S.A	United States of America

Tables

LEBANON'S ISLAMISTS AND LOCAL POLITICS

TABLE 2
Types of al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah's electoral lists by municipal electoral district of some of Lebanon's provinces

Type of electoral list	Districts of the province of Mount Lebanon		Districts of the province of the north		Districts of the province of the south		Districts of the province of Beirut		Districts of the province of Bekaa	
	Ouda' al-Shouf (Iqlim al-Kharoub)	Tripoli	al-Qalamoun	al-Minyeh al-Dinyeh	Akkar	Sidon	City of Beirut	East Bekaa	Zahle	
1) Party lists (party members only)	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	
2) Mixed lists (alliance of party members with close friends and families)	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	
3) Coalition lists (alliance of party members with other political parties)	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	

Notes: + = the presence of the type of electoral lists

- = the absence of the type of electoral lists

Source: Author's data, compiled from various reports by Lebanese newspapers and magazines between May and June 1998.

749

Table -1-

Source: Nizar Hamzeh, "Lebanon's Islamists and Local Politics: A New Reality." *Third World Quarterly*, October 2000. P: 749

Frequencies of Definitional Elements in 109 Definitions of 'Terrorism'

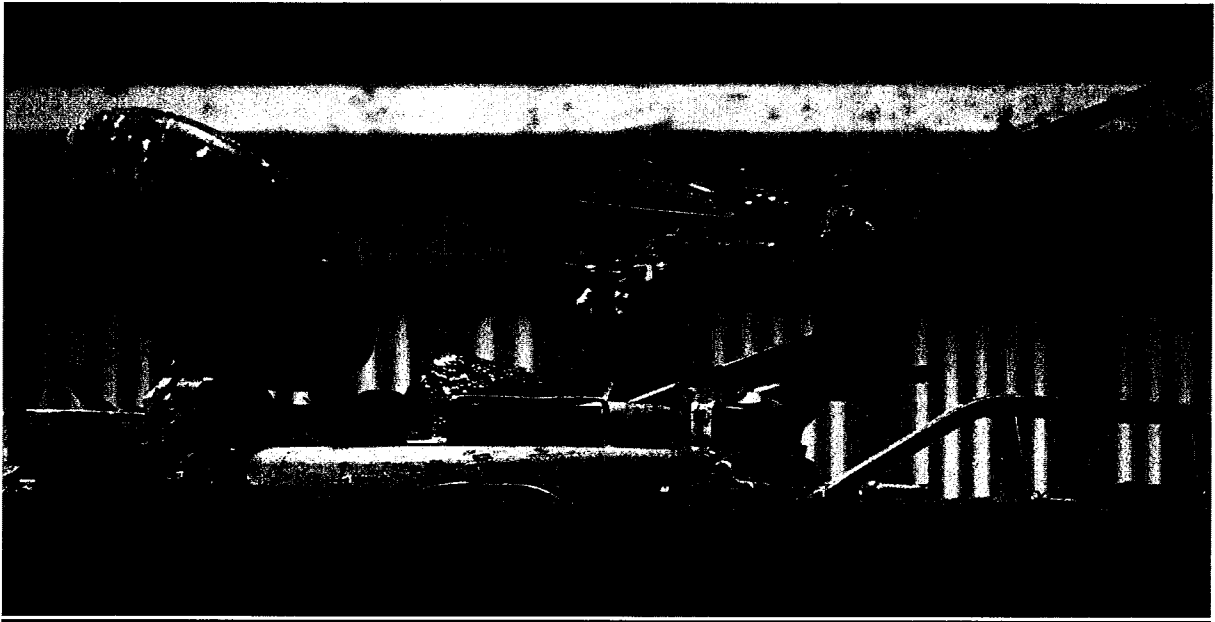
Element	Frequency (%)
1 Violence, force	83.5
2 Political	65
3 Fear, terror emphasized	51
4 Threat	47
5 (Psychological) effects and (anticipated) reactions	41.5
6 Victim-target differentiation	37.5
7 Purposive, planned, systematic, organized action	32
8 Method of combat, strategy, tactic	30.5
9 Extranormality, in breach of accepted rules, without humanitarian constraints	30
10 Coercion, extortion, induction of compliance	28
11 Publicity aspect	21.5
12 Arbitrariness; impersonal, random character; indiscrimination	21
13 Civilians, noncombatants, neutrals, outsiders as victims	17.5
14 Intimidation	17
15 Innocence of victims emphasized	15.5
16 Group, movement, organization as perpetrator	14
17 Symbolic aspect, demonstration to others	13.5
18 Incalculability, unpredictability, unexpectedness of occurrence of violence	9
19 Clandestine, covert nature	9
20 Repetitiveness; serial or campaign character of violence	7
21 Criminal	6
22 Demands made on third parties	4

Source: Alex P. Schmid, Albert J. Jongman et al., *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature*. New Brunswick, Transaction Books, 1988, pp. 5-6.

Table- 2-

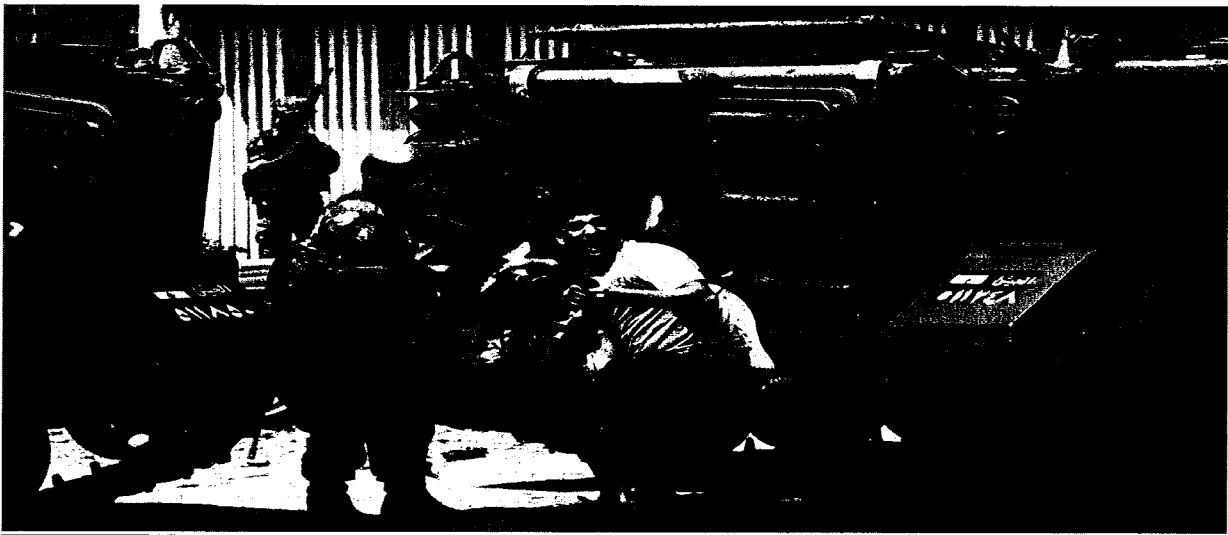
Source: Alex Schmid, Albert Jongman et al., *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature*.,p: 5.

Pictures



Picture -1-

Source: “Picture Archive of Fateh Al Islam”. *The Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (CESMO)*. May 2007. Tripoli, Lebanon. .Available at <http://www.cesmo.org>



Picture -2-

Source :“Picture Archive of Fateh Al Islam”. *The Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (CESMO)*. May 2007. Tripoli, Lebanon. .Available at <http://www.cesmo.org>

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