Whose Hearts and Minds? Narratives and Counter-Narratives of Salafi Jihadism

by Dina Al Raffie

1. Introduction

"...the real dynamic of terror lies in the telling of the story itself."[1]

"Perhaps the biggest mistake in the 'War on Terror' was the belief that the destruction of Al-Qaeda's training camps would lead to the demise of the group, its affiliated movements and the Salafi Jihadist ideology to which the organization is understood by many to belong. Few paused to consider if Osama bin Laden and his cohorts were perhaps only the tip of a substantially larger iceberg. Now, eleven years down the line, two wars and 1.283 trillion dollars later,[2] politicians and scholars alike are still devoting time into furthering our understanding of groups like Al-Qaeda and their associated Salafi Jihadist movement. More importantly, much focus has been given to the ideology that underlies the phenomenon of Salafi Jihadism in an effort to understand why it continues to inspire local initiatives and individuals to act on its behalf.

 The utility of military action against a threat that clearly draws its strength from an ideology has often been questioned. Instead, focus has increasingly been given to understanding the ideology's constituent narratives in an effort to explain the reasons behind its resonance with certain individuals. Documenting these narratives is a complicated process, as there cannot be said to be one narrative to which all elements of the movement adhere. An overview of geographically dispersed groups that allegedly adhere to Salafi Jihadist ideals shows that there are similarities and differences in narratives that may be attributed to differing geopolitical priorities on which the groups focus.[3] Instead, this paper argues that a more worthwhile endeavour may be to search for common elements in the varying Jihadist narratives that may form a master narrative that these groups share, and examine how such elements aid in promoting and spreading the ideology.

The role of narratives is relatively novel in the field of terrorism studies, as well as the approaches used to analyze them. Nevertheless, studies that have been carried out on the topic have been fruitful in helping us understand how narratives can contribute to the furtherance of ideology, not least that of Al-Qaeda's. An important contribution in this respect is that of Halverson et al. in their book 'Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism', which posits that despite there being differences in locally embedded narratives, master narratives exist that override these local narratives in importance.[4] This finding pertains fundamentally to Islam and Muslims, where the master narrative is found to constitute elements derived from 'sacred texts' and history.[5] More importantly, master narratives are by no means static and represent the embodiment of a constant re-interpretation of individual and collective perceptions.

Research on Salafi Jihadist narratives has traditionally focused on the message framing process of Salafi Jihadists and why it has been able to, on occasion, motivate individuals to commit acts of terror. Although this has contributed to understanding of Jihadist narratives, it sidetracks the importance of actors external to the Salafi Jihadist movement that help leverage the message of the

Salafi Jihadists. This is best captured by R. Korteweg et. al in their view that the EU, in their counter-terrorism policies, would benefit from shifting their focus from the 'causes' of terrorism to the 'background contributing factors…that lead to and catalyse the radicalization of EU citizens.'[6]

In a similar strand, this paper aims at examining the support structures, primarily within the US and the EU, that help extremist messages proliferate and potentially increase the recruitment pool for Salafi Jihadists. The paper starts by examining similarities in the narratives of Salafi Jihadist groups that are argued to be the main constituents of a Salafi Jihadist master narrative. Here, Al-Qaeda is used as an example of an adherent to the Salafi Jihadist movement, primarily due to the plentitude of literature available on it. The paper then searches for similarities in the narratives of non-violent actors outside the Salafi Jihadist movement and demonstrates how such narrated parallels aid in further cementing core Jihadist messages in the minds of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Neither the intentionality nor motivation of external actors is analyzed, however the interplay of the latter's narratives with that of the Salafi Jihadists is shown to play a significant role in supporting the proliferation of core extremist messages in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

The relationship between mainstream Islamic beliefs and the Salafi Jihadist master narrative is also examined. The success of a narrative can be attributed to the extent to which it resonates with its target audience. Narratives that stray too far from established traditional, cultural and religious perceptions are often unsuccessful. Instead, the development of narratives must have existing ones at its core. The success of the emergent narrative is the extent to which the narrator can gradually integrate alternate meanings into existing ones to eventually reconstruct perceptions. Beginning with the religion on which Al-Qaeda's ideology claims to be based, the paper first studies how Al-Qaeda embeds its messages in Islamic texts and scriptures as a source of legitimacy, before identifying the key external supporters of its ideology.

The paper's conclusions find that the foreign policies of the US and EU, whilst not direct contributors to terrorism have so far pursued strategies of appeasement and compromise that have only perpetuated the credibility of Salafi Jihadist claims. This has not only undermined the democratic, secular values of these societies but has increasingly tolerated obvious advocates of the Salafi Jihadist ideology at home. The result has been the radicalization of Muslims and non-Muslims alike as well as the steady proliferation of extremist messages and ideas in society. Any counter-narrative should thus be one that seeks to protect and promote individual liberties of human beings as opposed to being one that advances compromise; which is only damaging to the long-lasting peace and prosperity of democratic societies.

2. Defining Narratives

In the simplest terms, a narrative is defined as a "coherent system of interrelated and sequentially organized stories."[7] These stories are so deeply ingrained in cultures that they are an essential part of people's identities and "who they are" in any given cultural setting.[8] An alternative definition presents narratives as discourse that works to produce meaning through the construction of "social realities, particularly in terms of defining subjects and establishing their relational positions within a system of signification."[9] This definition stresses the nature of narratives as stories, which can be reshaped over time and are both products of and contributors to the nature of existent cultures. Therefore, the cultural contexts in which narratives are embedded are extremely important to the understanding of narratives.

Whereas narratives are frameworks of communication through which people are expected or taught to interact, master narratives override narratives in importance in that they are a crucial element or

reason for a certain culture's *existence*. In 'Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism', Muslim 'culture' is explained as having a master narrative that draws its stories from sacred texts and Muslim history.[10] Likewise, the master narrative of Salafi Jihadism can be argued to constitute alternative narratives according to cultural settings from which emerge common stories that transcend local borders.

An important aspect of narratives is the manner in which they are related to the cultures that they aim to influence or else are already embedded within. In the introduction, a point was made on the process of redefining existent cultural narratives in a gradual manner to reshape perceptions. A study on radicalization in the UK traces this reframing process and demonstrates how key ingredients of Salafi Jihadist narratives include the dominating political and sociological situation, the interweaving of religious sources with the latter and the reconceptualizing of identity as a result of the two.[11] This view is similarly demonstrated in Fiona Adam's 'Global Liberalism versus Political Islam' where narratives are framed in geopolitical and religious contexts. Here, 'norm entrepreneurs' seek to reshape and/or strengthen certain norms through building on master narratives of Muslim cultures.[12] By doing so, Salafi Jihadists aim at building bridges between mainstream Islam and their ideology in an effort to rewrite Muslim cultures' understandings of worldwide phenomena and religion. These 'norm entrepreneurs' understand the importance of solid master narratives in communicating their ideology and redefining the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours.

2.1 Religious Legitimization

Salafi-Jihadism is an outgrowth of the Salafiyya movement. The meaning of Salafism is derived from the Arabic word *salaf*, and is a movement or an understanding of Islam, which seeks to emulate the earliest forefathers of the religion.[13] Although it is often difficult to trace back Islamic reform movements to their precise moments of inception, key sources of inspiration for this movement are often attributed to 13/14th century Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyya.[14] Ibn Taymiyya was a scholar belonging to one of the four main schools of Sunni jurisprudence - *fiqh* - whose religious edicts weigh heavily in today's Salafi Jihadist narratives. For example, Ibn Taymiyya was an avid supporter of violent Jihad for Islamic world domination,[15] whose writings stressed the sovereignty of God's laws, and apostatized manmade laws. This is very similar to today's calls by Jihadist groups for the return to the Caliphate and the rejection of political participation in favour of imposing Islamic law or *Shar'ia*. Much of the more recent Jihadist propaganda that is often cited in literature can be traced back to Ibn Taymiyya's work, albeit having evolved to accommodate the 'contemporary period.'[16]

It would be inaccurate, however, to equate Salafism as it is practiced in Saudi Arabia for example with the form of Salafism that drives the violent Jihadist movement. Although both can be understood to draw from similar sources and espouse similar messages, there remains significant discord amongst Salafists as to the permissions for and justification of violence, the conditions for excommunicating fellow Muslims – *takfir* – and the relationship between society and state.[17] The third point is one of the most important, as the basis for recognizing Wahhabism (understood in this paper to be synonymous with Salafism) as the official state religion at the time of the founding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was the result of a compromise: the Wahabbis could dictate the religious practices of the Kingdom as long as they did not interfere with the holders of the throne, the Saud family.[18] In line with the Islamic understanding of *fitna*,[19] Salafism within countries respects the formal positions of authority and decries violence against the ruling elite that could sow

discord in society. With Salafi Jihadists, this is clearly not the case as is made public in their *fatwas* and declarations calling for the violent overthrow of the 'apostate' regimes.

The divides in Salafist thought are many and, of the most relevant, are the conditions and explanations provided for the justification of violence. These depart from the Salafist mainstream in that they progressively broaden the boundaries in which violent Jihad is permitted. Aptly documented by Quintan Wiktorowicz, ideologues and 'thinkers' in the Salafi Jihadist movement have merely 'adapted' the understandings of reformists like Abd al-Wahhab and Ibn Taymiyya, '… stretching them to their logical conclusion in a way that increased the permissible scope of violence.'[20] This broadening of boundaries is best exemplified by the difference in conditions or 'voiders' by which a Muslim can be made an apostate.[21] On the one hand, the Wahabbist doctrine, which can be argued to represent mainstream Salafism, takes into consideration both the beliefs and actions of Muslims as indicators of whether or not one they are apostates. The former embodies a Muslims' beliefs in Allah's sole supremacy – *tawhid* – and likewise accepts that Islam is God's supreme religion on Earth. And thus, Salafism preaches that a Muslim may not be made an apostate unless he/she openly proclaims that they do not hold the aforementioned beliefs to be true. [22] For Salafi Jihadists, belief plays a minimal role and it is the actions of Muslims that take priority. In this context, the apparent rejection of any one of such 'voiders' is immediate proof of apostasy.[23]

Secondly, religious interpretations often involve the redefining of religious terms and concepts to fit the contexts of Jihadist narratives. An example of this is seen in the Salafi Jihadist use of the term *jahiliyya,* which in Islamic theology refers to a 'specific historical period', but is re-contextualized to represent a 'state of affairs' that allegedly mirrors the deviation of Muslims from the 'Law of Allah' and their adherence to manmade laws.[24] In this version of Sayyid Qutb's 'apostasy', literally any Muslim can be made an apostate if he/she is not seen as obeying the strictest form of *Shari'a*. The view propagated by Qutb and other ideologues in the Salafi Jihadist movement is that the way to prove or ascertain that a Muslim is not an apostate is through actively 'struggling' against those that wish to impose manmade laws. Or, as put by Wiktorowicz: 'This dichotomous struggle for God's sovereignty on earth eliminates the middle ground and sets the stage for a millennial, eschatological battle between good and evil.'[25]

Having said this, the continued influence of such scholars' work on today's understandings of Islam begs the question of why medieval interpretations still hold sway in some Islamic societies today. This can perhaps best be explained by examining the evolution of the interpretation and application process of Islamic religious sources. Historically, interpretation was a task of a group of religious scholars that were well studied in the fundamentals of Islam and were called upon to provide religious rulings – *Shari'a*.[26] These religious rulings did not represent the work of only one scholar but reflected scholarly consensus – *ijma'*.[27] In stark contrast to the individual manner in which many 19th and 20th century reformers of Islam and scholars interpreted and applied their exegesis of Islamic sources, medieval interpretation was a much more complex, refined and social form of providing religious jurisprudence through community consensus. James Piscatori similarly finds that 'the meaning of scripture no longer needs to be interpreted by a religious establishment but, rather, lies in the eyes of the beholder.'[28] The degradation of authority of religious Islamic institutions may be attributed to their connections to repressive state regimes, where Jihadists have often stated the former as being the 'puppets' of the latter. Thus, with the 'doors of *ijtihad*' (interpretation)[29] closed, there has been a steady degeneration of *ijtihad* and much of the present day interpretations and understandings of Islam are based on the medieval interpretations of the schools – *madhabs* - of religious jurisprudence of old.

The lack of an authoritative body that regulates and oversees the process of *ijtihad*, and the availability of Islamic sources rife with violence provides a rich source for Salafi Jihadists to draw from for their narratives. Within Islamic texts, the concept of 'Jihad' is often portrayed as a two-fold struggle: the 'smaller jihad' and the 'greater jihad'.[30] The 'smaller jihad' or the 'Jihad of the sword' represents the violent struggle against non-Muslims in an attempt to proselytize them.[31] The 'greater jihad' represents an inner struggle to vanquish immoral and evil behaviours.[32] In the Qur'an as well as other Islamic sources, there exist a plethora of *Suras* (verses) that relate to Jihad in both forms, with the former often cited by Salafi Jihadist ideologues as religious justification. Although the degree and permissibility of the 'smaller Jihad' remains a contested debate in Salafism, Salafi Jihadists generally espouse the view that it is a religiously sanctioned duty of each and every Muslim – *fard 'ayn*.[33]

2.2 Assigning Blame and Crafting Conspiracies

Religious sources are not the only support for the Salafi Jihadist master narrative. In order to reach full effect, stories have to resonate with their target audience on several levels. On a cognitive level, this is achievable through ensuring that the underpinning messages of narratives do not stray too far from established cultural frames.[34] Narratives should thus aim to build on the current situation of the target audience through gradually attributing common perceptions to alternative themes/stories. [35] In other words, if Group A understands *phenomenon a* to be a function of *b,* a slight reframing process would perhaps attempt to explain *phenomenon a* through the introduction of *c* and *d*, in connection with *b*.

In the Saladi Jihadist context, the worldwide suffering, endless humiliation, poverty and oppression of many Muslims (phenomenon *a*) is not only the fault of the corrupt governments of these countries (*b*), but is also due to their deviation from Islam *(c)* that results primarily from the brutal colonization of many of these countries *(d)*. This is one example of many, where the Jihadists seek to group the grievances and disaffections of Muslims around the world and provide easy-to-grasp explanations for their misfortune; the appeal of their narratives a measure of the '…simplicity of message and linkages with real-world grievances'.[36] In his book, 'The Future of Political Islam', Graham Fuller adequately summarizes how the concept of humiliation is one of the key supporting elements of the master narrative:

"The deepest underlying source of Muslim anguish and frustration today lies in the dramatic decline of the Muslim World…from the leading civilization in the world for over one thousand years into a lagging, impotent and marginalized region of the world. This stunning reversal of fortune obsessively shapes the impulses underlying much contemporary Islamist rhetoric."[37]

This reversal is attributed to the oppression of colonial hegemons, as well as the supposed abandonment of Muslims of their 'true' religion.[38] [39]The regimes in power during Qutb's time, as well as those that remain in power today are viewed as corrupt US/Israeli puppet governments that are not true Muslims and should be replaced. This view is taken from many sources and finds expression in the Qur'an where it is stated that non-Muslims cannot govern Muslims.[40]

Before the establishment of Al-Qaeda 'Core', Jihadist efforts were focused on the 'near-enemy'. In other words, the shared view was that apostate governments in the Muslim world needed to be overthrown in order to establish strong Islamic states. Only then could such states attempt to challenge the West and the rest of the world. The 'near enemy' was the main target whereas for Al-Qaeda and groups inspired by its ideology, the real enemy is the 'far enemy', which helped support the 'near enemy' and keep them in power at the expense of its peoples. By eliminating these foreign

support structures for the apostate governments first, the 'near enemy' would then be easier to defeat.[41]

Placing this into context, the master narrative of Salafi Jihadists has increasingly shifted its focus to not only foreign governments but also foreign populations as pools for recruitment. The master narrative is aimed at radicalizing not only Muslims at 'home' but also those from Muslim diasporas in the US and Europe. The process is complicated yet models have been adopted that attempt to explain how core messages of the master narrative are developed for this purpose.

The first obvious element of the Salafi Jihadist master narrative is its consideration of the political situation, and its selective adoption of 'causes' for which it claims to represent. Literature has indicated that with regards to Al-Qaeda, the core political themes on which its ideology rests emerge and disappear depending on their relevance to the master narrative. The master narrative focuses on the sufferings and grievances of fellow Muslims in one of two theaters: 1. Countries where Muslims are the minority and, 2. Muslim-majority countries that are perceived to be suffering heavy losses due to foreign intervention. The grievances of Muslims in both cases are caused by non-Muslim regimes and are thus framed as a war against Islam.

The Palestinian issue is a cornerstone of discussion and politics in many Middle Eastern and North African countries, where societies are increasingly antipathetic to Israel's policies and, by extension, Jews. Capitalizing on these negative emotions that have become inherent to most Muslim cultures, Al-Qaeda ideologues have, from the onset, defined the enemy as 'Zionist' and 'Crusader'; terminology that is steeped in Islamic concepts and holds negative connotations for many Muslims. Although the Jewish people are occasionally referred to as the chosen ones in the Qur'an,[42] and even acknowledged as the rightful receivers of Palestine from Allah,[43] there remains a plethora of verses in the Qur'an that contradict this position.[44] As rightly stated by Piscatori, '…ideas concerning issues from popular participation to social injustice are far from stagnant, and Qur'anic meanings are nothing if not ambiguous.'[45]

Al-Qaeda ideologues advance an anti-Semitic worldview that frames current conflicts in a religious context in order to advance the rhetoric of a Jewish conspiracy aimed at the destruction of Islam and Muslims.[46] This rhetoric is also not lost on the mainstream Muslims outside the Jihadist realm, where anti-Semitic propaganda is plentiful in Muslim media and sanctioned by various authoritative figures and bodies, such as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and the Saudi ministry of education.[47][48]

Although few studies have been carried out on the extent to which Muslims believe such a conspiracy, various Pew Poll surveys have carefully documented the rising hostility and anti-Semitism in many Muslim countries.[49] A quotation from the translated works of al-Zawahiri states, "The one slogan that has been well understood by the nation and to which it has been responding for the past fifty years is the call for Jihad against Israel."[50]

According to a study of the content of conversations on Jihadist websites leading up to and following Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003, the focal point of the narrative shifted to place increased emphasis on the notion of regional domination by the 'Jewish-Crusader' alliance thereafter.[51] Thus, not only did the war provide a geopolitical opportunity for Al Qaeda ideologues in legitimizing Jihad in Iraq, but it also gave them an opportunity to reinforce other dimensions of the narrative:[52]

"America has attacked Iraq and soon will also attack Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan. You should be aware the infidels cannot bear the existence of Muslims and want to capture their resources and destroy them."[53]

These examples are a testament to the importance of political opportunities in the crafting of the Al-Qaeda/Salafi Jihadist ideology. The link between radicalization and mobilization is still fraught with uncertainty, however the role of socialization is extremely important. Finding little evidence pointing to a terrorist personality or profile that makes one more prone to radicalization, the socialization processes employed by Jihadists have been found various scholars to bear more fruitful results[54]; more specifically, the recreation of an identity through the gradual indoctrination of the would-be Jihadist to an alternate world and self-view. The worldview that is propagated builds on the political aspect of the master narrative that works at alienating the would-be Jihadist from the society in which he/she lives. The religious aspect of the master narrative appeals to the fissures in the belief system of the would-be Jihadist who is understood as attempting to reconcile between his/her Islamic beliefs and modernity; more specifically, the non-Islamic societies in which he/she lives.[55]

The master narrative has a strategic outlook in that it works to create both real and perceived hostilities between Muslims and non-Muslims; cementing a perception of a 'War on Islam'. The primary purpose of the master narrative is to drive a wedge between Muslims and non-Muslims, through funneling messages and ideas through a religious filter. On an analysis provided by the Jihadist group *al-Ghuraaba*, Mark Huband notes: '…At the heart of the al-Ghuraaba analysis is the intention of justifying – as well as promoting, and even celebrating – the intense feeling of alienation from non-Muslim Britain…This is done by stressing the primacy of the individual identity, and then explaining that identity purely as a product of belief – belief that is the result of the 'perfection' Islam has offered its adherents.'[56]

Offering itself up as a perfected, purified version of Islam, the Salafi Jihadist master narrative is the reflection of the broadest interpretations of Salafism in current geopolitics and acts as a platform for radicalization with the ultimate goal being the mobilization of action.

2.3 Islamism and the Salafi Jihadist Master Narrative

There is a danger of singling out Salafi Jihadist groups without taking into consideration the much broader and widespread phenomenon of Islamism. Here, a distinction must first be made between the two. Where Salafi Jihadism is defined as a transnational Jihad against the 'far enemy', Islamism is "A spectrum of movements committed to Islam as a total way of life and as a viable alternative to Western secular ideologies."[57] Within this spectrum, there are violent Islamist groups such as al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), and non-violent ones that either reject violence or else condone it only for specific circumstances.

Regardless of where these movements lie, they mostly accept Islam as a modern political ideology and seek to first 'Islamize' their own societies and states, with a long-term goal of Islamic world domination.[58] The categorization of Islamist groups is highly contested in academia. In discussing groups like the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) for example, many scholars have contrasting opinions. This may be due to the fact that many of today's Jihadist organizations, like Al-Qaeda, grew out of the MB. However, organizations that reject the use of violence have been given relative freedom to operate in the US and Europe.

A working definition for the purpose of this paper defines moderate Islamist organizations as organizations that have been willing to and have often participated in the political processes in their countries.[59] This is important as it stands in stark contrast to both Salafi Jihadist and radical Islamist groups who are usually not interested in political participation as they believe it to be a confrontation with Allah's divine rule or *hakimiyya*.[60] Islamist groups can thus be defined as

groups that a) have participated to some extent in political arenas; b) reject the notion of transnational Jihad and prefer to work within defined borders; and c) limit the use of violent Jihad to very specific circumstances and prefer a non-revolutionary means in spreading their ideology. [61]

Two points require reinforcement. First, whilst many Islamist organizations have adopted a different path in spreading their own ideologies or *da'wa*, the ideologies they spread share many similarities to Salafi Jihadism. Very often, the narratives draw from or else build on one another. If one were to observe the meanings and understandings of Jihad in the context of the MB narrative and that of Al-Qaeda's, many similarities can be identified. The main difference between the underlying ideologies of the various groups is not so much the goals and objectives but, rather, the *means* by which they achieve these goals and objectives.

Secondly, there are significant differences in the implementation of ideology. The two opposing approaches are a 'grassroots', bottom-up approach or else a 'top-down approach.'[62] The former seeks to Islamize a culture in a gradual manner that focuses on individuals, families and communities and preaches its propaganda and ideology accordingly. The latter seeks to enforce religion onto societies without much focus on individual religiosity. The MB is a prime example of the former where, instead of trying to overrun the government and impose its ideology, the group uses a combination of social services, sermons, and the distribution of religious material to persuade people that Islam is the only solution to their woes.[63] The MB also rides on the policy failures of local governments and populist sentiment in offering itself and 'Islam' as the only alternative. Indeed, the group's recent success in the presidential elections in Egypt may arguably be testament to their methodology.

The objectives of the MB are also not as clear as those of other organizations. Regardless of the violent acts that have been attributed to the group, the group itself does not openly espouse violence on its official website. The mission statement of the group is one of the few exceptions: "Allah is our objective; the Prophet is our leader; the Quran is our law; Jihad is our way; dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope."[64] The use of the word 'Jihad', followed by the last phrase in the statement, "…dying in the way of Allah", indicates that the 'Jihad' referred to here may be more than an internal struggle. Furthermore, in stating that the 'Quran is our law…' the group also makes clear its desire to have an Islamic state which is ruled under *Shari'a*.

The significance of the similarities in the mottos and proclamations of groups is that, irrespective of open calls for violent Jihad, having similar or identical core messages to those of the Salafi Jihadist master narrative lends a measure of credibility to the Salafi Jihadist master narrative. Having earlier demonstrated how narratives are a key part of cultures in framing communicative contexts, the more certain words or phrases circulate within society, the more they become fixed into such contexts. By embracing the concept of Jihad, promoting *Shari'a* and coupling positive connotations to dying for religion or religious purposes, Muslim populations begin to internalize and more readily accept the concepts of martyrdom and Jihad. What's more, even if the majority of a population does not resort to violence or openly endorse it, the strengthening of the Salafi Jihadist master narrative in some countries may increase the number of sympathizers to the imagined 'cause.'[65] Likewise, the lack of public endorsement for violence by many Islamist institutions by no means indicates that the latter reject its eventual or conditional use. It only means that they prioritize political and social involvement in the countries that they operate in an attempt to garner support for their ideology; which at the end pursues many of the same goals that many Jihadist organizations do.

A good example of an Islamist organization whose narratives bear striking resemblance to that of the Salafi Jihadist master narrative is Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT). On their British website, the group clearly outlines its goal of working towards the reestablishment of the Caliphate or *Khilafah* and how Islam calls the *Ummah* '…towards the Shar'i obligation of establishing the Khilafah in Pakistan as well as spreading it throughout the world.'[66] Likewise, in the proceedings of the group's first conference in Lebanon on the 1st of May, 2012, members of the group address the 'foreign agenda' that has been '…appointed to fight to fight Allah and His Messenger and the believers, and to realize the interests of the Zionists and disbelieving colonialists'.[67] This sentence alone captures some of the core messages that constitute the Salafi Jihadist master narrative. The 'foreign agenda' are the repressive regimes in the Middle East (in this case Syria), who are at a war with Islam and are products of the 'Zionists'. The remainder of the speech further emphasizes a disconnect between 'Allah' and his 'believers' and the unbelievers, thus deepening the wedge between Muslim and non-Muslims.

With the advent of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and then again in OIF, Islamist and Jihadist groups were fast to declare the wars as the next assault on Islam:

> *"The campaign against Iraq has aims that go beyond Iraq into the Arab Islamic world […].*
>
> *Its first aim is to destroy any effective military force in the proximity of Israel. Its second aim*
>
> *is to consolidate the supremacy of Israel…"[68]*

Here, the war is framed as not only being against Islam but one that seeks to further strengthen and protect the position of Israel in the region. Al-Zawahiri strategically makes the reference to Israel and the US, emphasizing their alliance as part of a larger conspiracy of encroachment upon the so-called 'Arab Islamic World.'

In light of narrated parallels, the existence of organizations like HT in the US and Europe are arguably potential inciters of violence. Whereas their messages may not directly call on Muslims to bear arms on behalf of the religion and their grieving brothers and sisters, they nevertheless add weight to the argument and 'model for reality' that the Salafi Jihadist master narrative propagates. [69] Regardless of whether or not these organizations promote the use of violence, the manner in which they share some of the more utopian goals commonly only associated with Al-Qaeda and cohorts (like the global establishment of *Shar'ia*) should have caused heads to turn by now.

2.4 Other Agents boosting the Salafi Jihadist Narrative

Although many Muslims tend to differentiate between Wahhabism and Salafism, it can be argued that there are very little differences between the two.[70] Elements within Saudi Arabia and the Saudi royal family have supported the Salafi Jihadist master narrative through allowing, for example, the Protocols to be taught in Saudi-run and supported schools around the world. A more important example is the role the Kingdom played in financially supporting the emergence of the Taliban. Although the aid from the CIA to the Arab-Afghan *mujahideen* stopped after the defeat of the Soviet Union in 1989, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan continued providing funds and backing to the Taliban's fight to take control of the country.

The role of *madrassas* in Central Asia is yet another incubator of the radical ideology that underpins Salafi Jihadism. Although the *madrassas* in Pakistan were originally based on the reformist ideology of Deobandism,[71] Saudi Arabia has more recently been exporting Wahabbism as an alternative. Both Deobandism and Wahabbism share many narratives with prominent Islamist and

Salafi Jihadist groups in the sense that they both heavily reject Western influence and ideas and seek to return to "classical, conservative Islam."[72] The Taliban, whose militants were increasingly provided for by the Deobandi *madrassas,* are a prime example of the manifestation of this ideology at a state level.

After the killing of bin Laden, many Islamist organizations including Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), expressed their condolences and disseminated leaflets in support of bin Laden's ideology.[73] This is extremely significant as organizations like HT are considered to be "moderate" Islamist organizations and often have headquarters in European cities. This being said, the master narratives of Salafi Jihadism are not solitary manifestations but also the products of the support of likeminded organizations.

The popular support of leaders is often a good source for providing insight with regards to narratives within specific countries and cultures. Just because the US or Western countries do not find solace in the explanations of life provided by the likes of the Egyptian Islamic theologian Yusuf al-Qaradawi does not mean that many Egyptians and Arabs do not. In fact, so popular is this individual's work that Foreign Policy magazine placed him on the 'top 20 public intellectuals of the World' list.[74] So what are al-Qaradawi's views?

> *"…throughout history, Allah has imposed upon the [Jews] people who would punish them for their corruption. The last punishment was carried out by [Adolf] Hitler…Allah willing, the next time it will be at the hand of the believers."[75]*

In an interview with the BBC[76] he said: "I consider this type of martyrdom operation as an evidence of God's justice".

In providing a counter-narrative for Salafi Jihadism, countries must first seek to eliminate the support structures of its master narrative. Namely, Islamist groups and organizations that hide under a cloak of supposed non-violence whilst simultaneously indoctrinating Muslims with radical ideas. This is not an easy task and calls into question whether or not it is actually possible. Is it worthwhile to attempt to reverse years of indoctrination of Muslim countries? Is it possible for the US and the West to bring to bear pressure on Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in dealing with and reversing the years of support it has provided to Jihadists? Would doing so not be simply reprimanding these countries for the sincere religious beliefs to which they adhere?

3. Positioning the Narratives

There are linkages between understandings of Islam in not only the Islamist and Salafi Jihadist master narratives, but also mainstream narratives of Islam. Mainstream Islamic narratives indirectly support the master narratives of Salafi Jihadists because in some instances there exists considerable overlap between the two. The most obvious linkage between the two is the religion. Because the Salafi Jihadist master narrative draws credence from its usage of Islamic sources, it can be said to stigmatize the open rejection of Muslim communities to violent practices insofar as religion is implicated.

It is oft repeated in the media, official statements and scholarly work that the majority of Muslims reject the extreme interpretation of Islam practiced and propagated by the Salafi Jihadist movement. Nevertheless, a cursory glance at the slogans and posters hoisted by 'mainstream' Muslim populations in and following the recent revolutions of the so-called 'Arab Spring' and in similar demonstrations implies a more intimate connection between core Salafi Jihdist messages and

Islamic cultural ones. Although not a claim to Muslim endorsement of violence, the sentiments conveyed, as Christina Hellmich puts it, '..could have been taken right from an al-Qaeda propaganda video.'[77] Thus, a question of how Jihadist narratives are formulated has much to benefit from examining mainstream values and beliefs in Muslim communities, as well as how the Salafi Jihadist master narrative builds on and simultaneously aims at radicalizing these very same values and beliefs.

Sookhdeo[78] provides an inverted pyramid (see below) that breaks down Muslim populations into categories. The basis of his argument is that, although Muslims on different levels of the pyramid share the identity of being 'Muslim', the level to which the core messages of the lower, more extreme levels will resonate with or else be internalized by other levels depends on the extent to which they practice the religion.[79] The correlation of Muslim piety to radicalization readiness is something that has not been sufficiently addressed in the literature, but the reverberations of messages up the pyramid and into the heart of mainstream Islam can nevertheless be argued to constitute the main thrust of the Salafi Jihadist master narrative. Thus, it is perhaps not only the extent to which Islam is practiced, but also the extent to which the master narrative reshapes mainstream concepts and interpretations of Islam so that they infiltrate up to the upper, non-radical levels.

Graham Fuller breaks down Muslim communities and reaches a similar conclusion where Muslims can be charted along a spectrum, from the fundamentalists to the liberal (terms differ).[80] Fuller also quotes John Voll[81] on the position of the 'traditionalists':

> *"...the traditionalists (or conservatives) seek to hold the lid down on too rapid change; they represent a force of conservation and preservation, a critical factor of cultural and community coherence and continuity in times of turmoil. But this school will also adapt to new conditions when necessary to keep Islam alive."*[82]
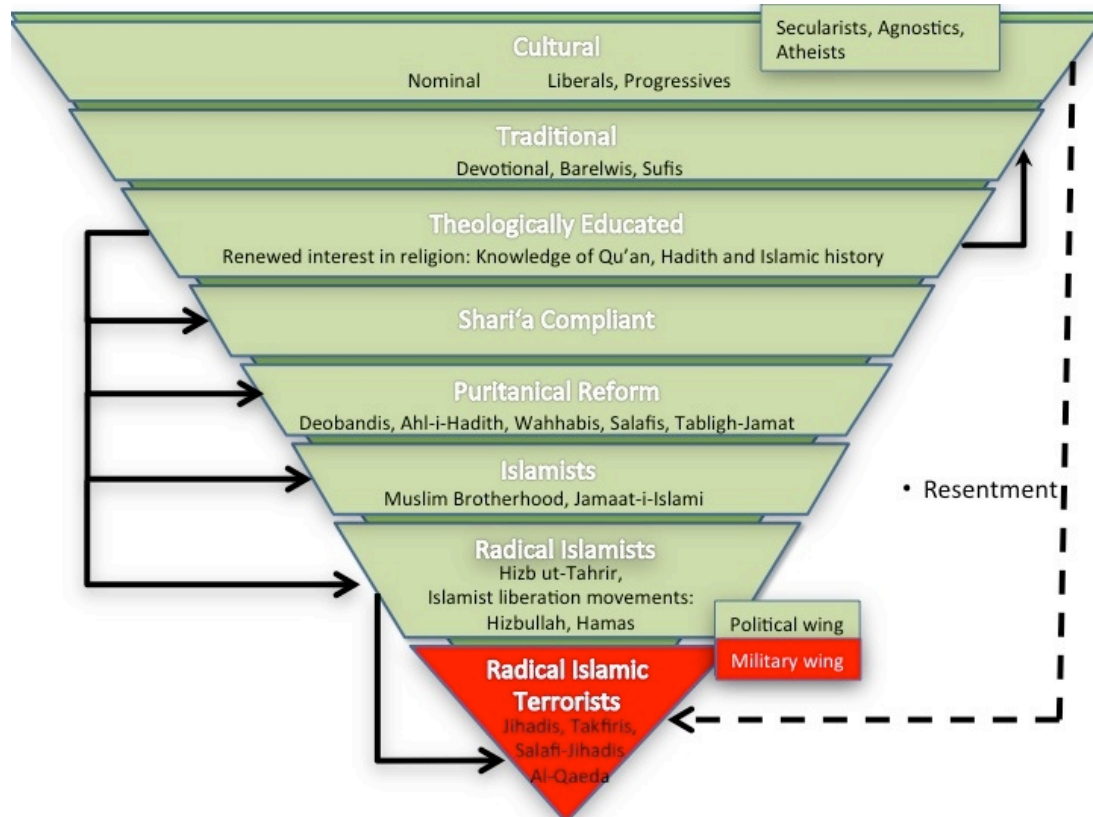
Source: Figure excerpted from Patrick Sookhdeo, *Ideas Matter; How to Undermine the Extremist Ideology Behind al Qaeda*, (New York: Mcgraw-Hill, 2011), p.244.

Being rather passive in their steadfast adherence to societal and cultural norms, traditionalists do not contribute to change but are recipients of change. With the existence of Islamist groups like the MB and HT that have worked for years in reshaping cultural norms in Muslim societies, the traditionalists' views of cultural and societal norms are in danger of becoming radicalized.

The more the ideologies of the lower levels infiltrate to the higher levels of the pyramid, the more endangered the Muslims in the higher levels are. This is because exposure to mainstream elements of Islam, which have been perverted by the radical factions, increasingly challenge the less radical Muslim identities that cultured and traditional Muslims have built for themselves. It is this stage, where uncertainty takes hold, which many radicals attempt to seize upon. Thus, the battle for the hearts and minds of Muslims should not attempt to start with the radicalized elements but should focus on maintaining and protecting the comfort zones of Muslims who are comfortable with their Islamic identity and do not necessarily adhere to mainstream concepts.

4. Western Narratives, or the Lack Thereof

The main issue nowadays seems to be the obsession of Western governments with finding a politically correct name for the phenomenon of Islamic terrorism. The war has been framed from its inception as being one against 'terror', an emotion. Governments have been increasingly mindful of reminding the public that this is not a war against Islam, but rather one against a fringe

movement that "…perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam",[83] whose ideology was "incubated in Afghanistan when it became a failed state,[84] and is overall "…rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim scholars."[85]

The problem with such statements is that they are only partly true and do not reflect the bigger picture in an accurate manner. The idea of exploiting Islam to serve political ends is incorrect when one takes into account that the religion is believed by many of its adherents to provide answers and solutions in most spheres of public and private life; *din wa dawla* - religion and state. Thus, even in countries where *Shari'a* is not implemented, legislation in some areas is still dictated by Islamic norms.

The terming of Salafi Jihadism as a 'fringe movement' belies the fact that it is not only Al-Qaeda or fringe groups that support the movement, but various other actors, organizations and states. The incubation of radical beliefs in Afghanistan also only partially contributed to radicalism, as the roots of radicalism we see today precede the war in Afghanistan. Islamist ideologies are the product of a long line of reformist versions of Islam, which go back centuries, and Salafi Jihadism is arguably the tip of these ideologies' spears.

Renunciation of violence is often welcomed by Western societies. Islamist organizations that condemn violence are left to operate so long as they condemn violent acts. The problem with this is the West's dismissal of non-violent elements of Islamist narratives that do, in the long run, contribute to acts of violence. The mainstream messages of Islamist narratives are ones that promote, glorify, and seek to achieve Jihad in the way of Allah. The only difference between them and Salafi Jihadist narratives is that they are more strategic in communicating their desired end effects and seemingly reject violent tactics. The steady proliferation of core Islamist messages into Muslim populations fly directly in the face of Western efforts of curtailing the spread of extremism. Therefore, it is meaningless if scholars and clerics are renouncing violence if they are, simultaneously, encouraging acts of violence under a holy pretext.

A conference held in July 2011 titled the "Founding Conference of the Arab-Islamic Gathering to Support the Option of Resistance', saw the gathering of groups and organizations ranging from Hamas and the MB to the supposed religious authority of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, to discuss the options of 'resistance' in occupied Muslim territories.[86] Although the focus was mainly the Palestinian territories, it also included Muslim countries that have more recently experienced brutal government crackdowns in response to their protests (i.e. Syria) as well as Kashmir and Chechnya. Authoritative figures in religious bodies like Al Azhar in Egypt continue to religiously sanction the use of violence against the 'Crusader Invasion' by issuing *fatwas*.[87] In communities where the collective nature of the predominant religion imposes itself on the behaviours and norms of societies, those capable of shaping and influencing it the most are the ones that (sadly) have the final say.

The master narrative of Salafi Jihadism has heavily influenced the terms, the understanding and the context in which the battle of ideas and discourse is fought. The post 9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have increasingly been framed in a religious context in Islamist and Salafi Jihadist narratives. Moreover, several officials in Western countries have tended to respond to such accusations in an apologetic manner, thus affirming that the narratives may indeed be sound. In focusing on and giving bin Laden and al-Zawahiri's narratives more credit than deserved, governments have began to expand freedoms which are enabling a further strengthening of Islamist positions in Western countries.

An excellent example of the lengths some countries have gone to in ensuring that their Muslim communities do not feel 'discriminated' against is the introduction of *Shari'a* courts. Disputes are

settled in line with *Shari'a* law, and the rulings are then passed to the country courts or the High Court for enforcement. These courts have the right to enforce but not to amend the decisions passed down to them and, in doing so, undermine the country's entire judicial system. By allowing *Shari'a* courts to operate in the country, the UK has succeeded in not only succumbing to the desires of the Islamists but has also reinforced their agenda of the eventual world domination of Islam and an eventual return to the Caliphate.

Finally, Western governments seem to believe that by strengthening the Islamists, they prevent Muslims from becoming Jihadists. Whilst attempting to play Islamists off against the Salafi Jihadists, the West has failed in providing a coherent counter narrative that is based on Western values. In part, this reticence is caused by the concerns of governments that they are infringing on Muslims' religious freedom. Yet the failure of finding a middle ground has lead to the advancement of Islamist and Jihadist narratives in Western societies.

5. Conclusion

In providing a counter-narrative, the Western world should do more in the way of understanding the elements that Islamist and Jihadist master narratives share. They should also be wary of inadvertently advancing the cause of such groups. Western societies have a much better opportunity in providing a counter-narrative to their own Muslim populations that can more effectively undermine the predominant Islamist and Jihadist narratives. Given the highly unfavourable views held of Christianity, Judaism and the West in general, it is futile to attempt to reverse years of fermenting hostility fostered by Islamist and Jihadist indoctrination. Instead, it is probably more likely that efforts to roll back and contain the radical narratives in Western countries will provide the most effective counter narrative yet.

When providing such a counter-narrative, governments have to first recognize the importance of agents and 'norm entrepreneurs', which reside within their own borders and act as effective support structures for Jihadist and Islamist narratives. By diminishing the strength of agents and structures within the confines of the existing laws, the effect of such narratives are likely to decline in strength. It is also important to understand that there are millions of Muslims in the Western world who enjoy the sanctity of democratic freedoms and understand their value for further personal, spiritual, and material progression. They are Muslims who have formed their own understandings of religion that are often rejected by the majority of Muslims living in Muslim-majority countries due to their divergence from the mainstream tenets of Islam.

The tolerance of groups and individuals who propagate Islamist and Jihadist agendas and narratives in the West not only infringes on and alienates such Muslims, but also promotes the spread of Islamism. An alternative approach for Western countries may be to focus more on integrated, 'cultural' Muslims and provide them with the protection and solidarity that they need in a time when they are increasingly being pressured into passively accepting Islamist beliefs.

The fight against the phenomenon of Islamic terrorism is one that will have to be fought from within. The underlying ideologies of both Islamism and Salafi Jihadism are not ideologies that are utterly disconnected from the religion. Nor are they ones that hold minimal sway in Muslim countries. On the contrary, the Islamist forces embodied in grassroots movements like the MB have spread dramatically over the past century, attracting a large number of followers as a unifying alternative to Nasser's attempt at Pan-Arabism. It has seen avid supporters in Saudi Arabia, whose Wahabbi doctrine has heavily cross-fertilized with that of the MB's, as well as large backing of *madrassas* in Asia.

Narratives are not simply stories but are the primers of action because they shape populations' perceptions of the world. An effective counter-narrative needs to start today and needs to openly confront the Muslim populations and radical revolutionary movements that attempt to overrun societies and drastically alter them. Radical organizations cannot be tolerated and must be held accountable for both their action and hateful speech; especially those that attempt to use their religion as a pretext for violent acts.

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