

Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement

Roel Meijer, ed.

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Roel Meijer's edited *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, one of the first collected works to broadly analyze contemporary Salafism as a global religious movement for English-speaking audiences, presents this movement as a string of methods for approaching Islam's canonical sources. Its many methodological ambiguities and tactical classifications enable it to incorporate a variety of local and international religious groups: those that reject political participation (e.g., "Scholastic Salafis"), embrace their society's established political rules (e.g., "Sahwah Movement"), and seek radical transformation often through violent means (e.g., "al-Qaeda"). In part, Salafism symbolizes a varied scholarly attempt to disentangle long-simmering questions about conservative forms of Muslim activism, most of which concern the ethics of how Muslims are to conduct their lives, perceive their individual and group identities, and understand the pious order of political and social arrangements.

The volume has two primary goals: (1) to reveal the diversity among the movement's various groups and streams and (2) to reclaim the study of Salafism from the field of security studies, which has, since 2001, influenced much of our overall understanding of this rather new religious phenomenon. The contributors challenge the widespread notion of Salafism as an exclusively violent and intransigent Islamic movement by addressing the tensions between basic Salafi doctrines (e.g., scriptural literalism, a sharp distinction between in- and outsiders, and an active program for individual and communal reform), its supposed attraction to growing numbers of Muslims, and its intrinsic links to politics as well as to violence. The contributors argue that these tensions have produced a whole range of consequences for primarily Muslim communities, such as the increase of identity-powered debates among Salafi groups in the Arabian Peninsula, the wider Middle East and North Africa, and elsewhere. Unsurprisingly, such debates have engendered political disputes. After all, Salafism's central idea of "commanding right and forbidding wrong" offers a range of interpretations and conflicting readings of the sources both by laypeople and religious scholars.

The first part discusses the doctrinal tension between Salafi groups and offers a convincing effort to define the term. For instance Bernard Haykel,

Stéphane Lacroix, and Joas Wagemakers deconstruct Salafism's meanings and deduce that both its uniting features and causes of tensions among groups rest on three main cornerstones: assorted readings of *theology*, the Salafi clergy's approach to and conception of *law*, and its varied understanding of *political authority*. Guido Steinberg and Mariam Abou Zahab give some examples of how these tensions play out locally.

The second part focuses more directly on Salafism's political impact in four Muslim-majority Muslim countries, namely, Sudan, Indonesia, Egypt, and the Palestinian territories. Noah Salomon's chapter on Sudan discusses the country's most influential Salafi scholars and their impact on the overall perception of pious politics in Islam by directly confronting "traditional" Islamist groups. Here, we can apply the argument that the virtue of a state is as good as the virtue of the society upon which that state is built. Salafi activists, in this case, add another layer of complexity to domestic politics by propagating a narrowly confined type of virtuous society. Noorhaidi Hasan's chapter on Indonesia investigates some of the major splits among Indonesian Salafis, a practice imported via a large number of Indonesian graduates from Saudi universities. The main differences concern the tactical application of *da'wah* and its implication in a Muslim-majority society. Different understandings of political legitimacy and mobilization strategies are primary topics of division among Saudi Salafis and therefore, unsurprisingly, also in Indonesia.

Meijer's chapter on Egypt discusses a practical experiment of "commanding right and forbidding wrong" under the direction of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya during its violent rebellion of the 1980s and 1990s and subsequent denunciation of violence as a mobilization tactic. Khaled Hroub's chapter on Palestine explains the Salafi dynamic in a setting where it has to compete with other religious (Hamas) and secular (Fatah) groups. Here, as both an intellectual and an activist movement, Salafism remains marginal and weakened by internal fragmentation between those who promote violent resistance (against rival Palestinian groups and the Israeli occupation) and those who propagate quietist forms of social mobilization.

The third part addresses the issues already debated within security studies: the link between Salafism and violence, the various nuances among violent Salafi groups, the overarching tensions, and the use of the concept of jihad. The chapters debate *jihadism*, *takfirism*, and *Salafism* as interconnected but nevertheless different and full of tension that hinges, much like other points of intra-Salafi contention, on conflicting interpretations of mobilization strategies and doctrinal differences between the leading figures of violent Salafi

groups. The level of fragmentation within the violent stream seems to be far greater than it is among the non-violent groups and organizations. Thomas Hegghammer, who demonstrates the complexity of terminology surrounding Salafism, argues that the scholars of Islam and Salafism should not overemphasize the movement's theological dimension, as this approach has failed to explain the political behavior of such groups.

Reuven Paz discusses the vibrant online debate among Salafi-jihadi figures. Perhaps inadvertently, maybe even surprisingly, his analysis reveals the debate's rather democratic nature, wherein the zealous audiences in these online forums seem to adopt the most convincing and ardent argument. Brynjar Lia analyzes another element of the intra-Salafi dispute: the works of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, a well-known theoretician of jihad, particularly his critique of the jihadis' exclusivist and confrontational tactics vis-à-vis their Muslim audiences on often such "trivial" issues as sectarianism. These tactics, al-Suri claims, have alienated and antagonized many previous supporters and sympathizers. These internal tensions and subsequent debates could be compared to the persistent fragmentation of the radical Left movement in Europe during the 1970s.

The volume's fourth part is rather inconsistent in terms of its geographical focus, as it discusses Saudi (Madawi al-Rasheed), Yemeni (Laurent Bonnefoy), and Ethiopian (Terje Østebø) Salafism through a lens of the global diffusion of its ideas and practices. Herein one can find a fruitful debate on the tensions between local and global Salafism. The amplified effects of globalization, as well as the increased awareness of local idiosyncrasies, makes it possible for a variety of Salafi groups and their spiritual leaders to spread their articulations on a whole range of standpoints from spiritual advice to political opinions to the growing – and now global – community of followers. Al-Rasheed shows some of the difficulties that Salafi (i.e., Wahhabi) scholars in Saudi Arabia have to face when confronted with issues of legitimacy related to the jihad at home and abroad. She identifies some of the analytical tensions between studying local and transnational expressions of Salafism.

Bonnefoy, on the other hand, criticizes the overuse of the term *transnational* by exploring the Yemeni context within which the Salafi discourse is concerned primarily with local issues. Østebø identifies Salafism and nationalism in Ethiopia as two (locally based) mobilizing forces that often compete for the same youth cohort, a reality that produces significant tension and disunity. It seems, nevertheless, that the process of globalization (e.g., the introduction of international media outlets) has dampened these tensions by drawing the youth's interests toward more profane activities (i.e., sports, online

games, nightlife, and so on). The authoritarian regimes in these countries worried about these local dynamics, for they are keenly aware that any form of mass mobilization threatens their political control, which, in turn, causes further tension between the political power holders and this socio-religious movement for change.

The book's last part explores Salafism's particular expressions in France (Mohamed-Ali Adraoui), Britain (Sadek Hamid), and the Netherlands (Martijn de Koning). The main theme here is to demonstrate various forms of religious, social, and cultural identification with the majority society within which Salafism thrives. For instance, there are clear differences between the identification of Salafi activists in France and Britain. Salafis in France mobilize in a far more hostile environment, wherein the idea(s) of *laïcité* dominates the public's negative view of Islam in general and of Salafism in particular. In Britain, however, Salafism has developed to the point where it has lost much of its supposed unity. The organic shape of the movement there offers third- and fourth-generation Muslims, as well as many converts, a form of religious identity very different from "traditional Islam" and its adherents. De Koning presents an interesting ethnographic account of two female Salafis who apparently have used their affiliation to reconstitute their personal sense of individual identity through the continuous process of authenticating their beliefs and practices.

The book has no specific concluding chapter, primarily because Meijer's introduction seems to have summarized the major conclusions. Instead, the concluding section presents brief biographies of fourteen important authorities of modern Salafism. For non-specialists in the field of contemporary Islamic studies, this is a valuable information source. For the general public, the volume offers a far-reaching insight into one of the most widespread Muslim religious movements today.

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