

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

From Ibn Muljam to Ibn Laden: Tracing the Steps to Radicalization: Part 1

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Introduction

Innovations begin small, resembling the truth. This point was noted by the scholar of Islām Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-Barbahārī (رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ) in his monumental work *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* (*The Explanation of the Creed*). Few reports better exemplify Imām Barbahārī’s point than that of a group of individuals who were sitting in circles in the *masjid*; at the head of each circle was a person instructing the assemblage to repeat *Allāhu Akbar*, *Subḥanallah* and *Lā Ilāha Illa Allāh*, one-hundred times. The Prophet’s Companion Abū Musa al-‘Ash‘arī (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) witnessed this and went directly to the house of the elder Companion ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ud (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ). When Ibn Mas‘ud exited his home, Abū Musa informed him that he had witnessed something in the *masjid*, and if Ibn Mas‘ud lived, he, too, would see it. Upon arrival, Ibn Mas‘ud found them in their circles supplicating in this innovated fashion and questioned them. They claimed they were only doing this with the best of intentions. “How many people intend good but never achieve it?” he replied. He went on to relate that the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said there would arise a people who would recite the Qur‘ān, but its recitation would not go below their collar bones.¹ Ibn Mas‘ud then stated: “Allāh knows best, perhaps many of them will be from among you.” Alas, the narrator of this report, ‘Amr b. Salamah, stated that on the day of Nahrawān—the fight with the renegade Kharijites—many of those who were in those *Dhikr* circles were on the battlefield waging war against ‘Alī (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) and his companions.²

The aforesaid incident of Ibn Mas‘ud clearly illustrates how innovations evolve, or, more correctly, devolve. This helps us understand the path to radicalization, how the Jihādist combatant arrives at this evil destination only after taking his first steps. Imām Muḥammad b. Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn (رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ) addressed this point, stating that rebellion and revolution do not occur out of sudden impulse. The groundwork must first be laid. He establishes this with the statement of the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ): “All of the children of Ādam have their portion of fornication written for them.” He says:

¹ In the well-known narration the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) also mentioned: “They will exit the Religion faster than the arrow exits game. If I met them, I would kill them with the killing of ‘Ād.” This is collected by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* on the authority of Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ).

² See the *Sunan* of al-Dārimī (no. 210)

And as for what is present in some of the books of *Ahl al-Sunnah* stating that rebellion against the ruler is that which is accomplished by the sword, then what they intend by this is the final act of revolution, as the Prophet (ﷺ) mentioned that fornication occurs with the eye, ear, hand and leg; however, the true act of fornication is performed by the private parts; thus, he stated: “The private parts either affirm or negate this.”³ So this is what is intended by some of the scholars with this statement. And we know with certainty that it is not possible to rebel with the sword except that it is preceded by the rebellion of speech; the people would not be able to take up arms and rebel against the leader except that there was first some kind of incitement, and this is [accomplished] through speech...⁴

The *Shaykh* cites this example to demonstrate that just as there are things that entice and attract a person to commit the final carnal act, so it is with the taking up the sword—or Kalashnikov as it were—to commit such atrocities. The hearts and minds of these youth are first filled with innovations before their fingers pull any switches or triggers. It is for this very reason that some of the *Salaf* said that branch of the Kharajites, known as the *Qa’adiyyah*, are the most wicked from among them.⁵ Considering that the Prophet (ﷺ) described the Kharajites in general as “dogs of the Hellfire,”⁶ the *Qa’adiyyah*, then, are the most rabid of the pack. They are those who themselves do not carry rifles or fire rockets in the theater of war, but instead coax and convince the ignorant layperson to take up arms—or strap on bombs. They create websites with images of mutilated children, burned out villages, pictures of prisoners in *Abū Ghurayb* or Guantanamo, playing on the pathos of a wayward, oftentimes oversentimental youth. They circulate the *fatāwa* of their unknown, unlearned “scholars” who misquote and misinterpret the Book and *Sunnah*, with the promise of Paradise awaiting them in the flash of a suicide vest. They are callers away from the Straight Path, to the paths of deviance and extremism, those who employ myriad methods to entice an impassioned yet ignorant people, fishing *masājid*, universities as well as jailhouses in their quest.

³ Here he is alluding to the Ḥadīth collected by al-Bukhārī and Muslim in their *Ṣaḥīḥayn* on the authority of Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه): “The eye fornicates, and its fornication is the look. The mouth fornicates, and its fornication is the kiss. The hand fornicates, and its fornication is the touch. The leg fornicates, and its fornication is the step. The private parts either affirm or negate this.”

⁴ Refer to *Raf’ al-Asāṭīn* of *Shaykh* al-‘Uthaymīn

⁵ In *Hadyu al-Sārī* (p. 483), al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajr said: “The *Qa’adiyyah* are those who beautify rebellion against the rulers, but do not themselves participate.”

⁶ See *Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī* (no. 3000)

Every group merely inherits what is bequeathed them. Over the course of the last fourteen years, much has been said and written regarding sleeper cells: a band of co-conspirators who enter cities and townships harboring plans to kidnap, bomb or assassinate, often secret even to their closest kith and kin. During a phone conversation with French journalist Igor Sahiri, while held up in a building north of Paris, the Charlie Hebdo assailant, Charif Kouachi, stated that his actions were ordered and financed by the Jihadist, Kharijite Anwar al-‘Awlakī. When questioned concerning the timeframe and the delay in carrying out the plan, he responded to the effect that the “mission” was only undertaken after a time of secrecy. The secrecy of sleeper cells has historically been a part of the Kharijite methodology. One recalls the 9/11 hijackers quietly blending into the American scenery: schools, workplaces—bars even. There have been centuries of such blending. During the Caliphate of ‘Alī b. Abū Tālib (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ), a small band of Kharijites met in secrecy to devise a plan to assassinate three of the Prophet’s disciples: ‘Alī, Mu‘āwiyah b. Abū Sufyan and ‘Amr b. ‘Āṣ (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ), in a coordinated attack. After the battle of Nahrawān, this gathering took place to discuss retribution for the killing of their brothers, to avenge their deaths by executing who they called the “leaders of misguidance.” ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muljam vowed to kill ‘Alī; al-Ḥajjāj al-Tamīmī pledged to kill Mu‘āwiyah; and ‘Amr b. Bakr al-Tamīmī promised to kill ‘Amr b. ‘Āṣ. What is noteworthy here is that after they took this oath, they agreed to keep the plan secret as they entered the cities of their targets. So Ibn Muljam entered Kūfa and did not divulge his mission, even to his brothers from the Kharijites. Then, on the 27th of the month of Ramaḍān, after the Morning Prayer had commenced, Ibn Muljam fell upon ‘Alī, striking him with a sword he had soaked in poison. Wounded by a blow to the head, the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law succumbed to his injuries not long after—Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ) be pleased with him.

The person of reason, the one who learns from history, can examine this incident and find many answers to contemporary issues. First and foremost, the ability to distinguish between groups and their ideologies. The media and its pundits should know that the Salafi (Salafist) is one who adheres to the teachings of the Qur’ān, the traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and the way of his Companions. When ‘Alī and those with him fought against the Kharijites, it was based upon the aforementioned statements of the Messenger of Allah (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), “If I met them (i.e. the Kharijites), I would kill them the killing of ‘Ād.” The Kharijites, on the other hand, reject the traditions of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and give their own corrupt interpretation to the Qur’ān. Hence, they gathered together in a secret counsel of murder to avenge fallen renegades. Thus it is clear that Prophet’s disciples were the targets of the sleeper cell, not participants, and the followers of the Companion’s today, the Salafis, did not inherit these covert actions; rather, they inherited the Prophet’s command to combat the Kharijites.

So from then until now—from Ibn Muljam to Ibn Laden—the Kharijites have been on a perpetual mission to rid the earth of what they call “the leaders of misguidance.” And if one

were to place the statements and actions of Ibn Muljam and his co-conspirators beside the statements and actions of Ibn Laden, al-‘Awlaki, et al, he would clearly see the continuum of this corrupt creed, one the Salafī rejects wholesale. The way of the Companions, the Salafī way, earns only the wrath and retribution of the Kharijites. Did not Bin Laden and his ilk *rule* the Saudi government apostate? Labeled scholars like Ibn Baz and ‘Uthaymīn as agents? Did not an ISIS fighter, or at least sympathizer, tweet that upon “conquering” the land of the two Holy Precincts, he wished to sacrifice and crucify *Shaykh* Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān? Did not ISIS—contemporaneous with the Paris attack—assault the city of Arar on the Kingdom’s northern border? How, then, can any journalist or so-called expert claim that both ISIS and the rulers they label apostate and the scholars they vow to slaughter all be upon the same methodology?⁷ It is incompetence at best; a sinister and nefarious plot to confound the masses at worst. If only they would begin by studying the stark differences in the two methodologies: the Salafis upon the methodology of ‘Alī and the Companions; the Takfiris and Jihadists, upon the way of Ibn Muljam and the Kharijites. This, however, requires that a person be more concerned with accuracy than agenda, truth more than talking points, that the expert actually possess something of expertise. We, therefore, present this essay in an attempt trace the true path to radicalization and to clarify the disinformation set forth by these fabulists, knowing that their fictions will not endure. When truth comes, falsehood vanishes, and falsehood is ever a vanishing thing.



⁷ Similar to Reza Aslan going on the talk news circuit claiming that the “Wahhabis” of Saudi Arabia are responsible for the tide of terrorism that we have witnessed from the likes of the Taliban, al-Qaidah, ISIS, Boko Haram, etc. Is he not aware that the Taliban were responsible for the shuttering of Salafī schools in Afghanistan, labelling them *Ghayr al-Muqallidīn* (those who do not blind-follow)? This is because the Taliban are Deobandī blind followers of the Ḥanafī School of jurisprudence and are not Salafī, or, as Aslan put it, “Wahhabis.” As for al-Qaidah, it is enough to mention their declaring the rulers of Saudi puppets of the West and apostate; this along with the fact that the scholars of the Kingdom have warned against this evil group from its inception. From the scholars who refuted them, their leaders and their methodology: Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Baz, Muḥammad b. Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn, Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān, ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-‘Abbād, Aḥmad al-Najmī, Zayd al-Madkhalī, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Al-Shaykh, Muḥammad b. Hādī al-Madkhalī, Rabī b. Hādī al-Madkhalī, et al. These Saudi scholars have declared Bin Laden and his followers as innovators, Kharijites, brothers of the devil, etc. Similar refutations can be found against the likes of ISIS and Boko Haram. Whatever the name or acronym of the group, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been at the forefront of the fight against the methodology of the Kharijites, as they have also been targets of their wrath. The esteemed scholar Shaykh Zayd al-Madkhalī cites numerous examples of Kharijite assaults on the Kingdom in his monumental work *Al-Irhāb wa Ātharuhā al-Sayī’ah ala al-Afrād wa al-Umam* (*Terrorism and its Evil Effects on Individuals and Nations*). So let the seeker of truth take lesson from such Salafī writings.