



The Position of the Salafī Scholars towards the Conflict in Syria and Groups Such as ISIS and al-Nuṣrah

Introduction

As concerns continue to arise about the situation in Syria and Iraq where the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) has announced the alleged Caliphate, a number of so-called experts and academics have attempted to describe who ISIS is and what their aims are. However, unfortunately we keep hearing unsubstantiated claims, hysteria and misinformation. At a time when people need accurate answers and credible solutions to highlight the problem and prevent the influx of foreign fighters to this region. I have compiled a number of edicts from a group of senior Salafī scholars, which are intended to accurately clarify the Salafist position on these issues.

Edicts

1. Are Muslims advised to travel to Syria and participate in the conflict there?

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān, a member of the Permanent Committee of Scholars in Saudi Arabia, was asked,

“How can one assist his brothers in Syria and Shām, and is Jihād compulsory at times like this or not?”

The Shaykh responded,

“Jihād¹ is compulsory if the leader of the Muslims [in a Muslim land] calls for it. If he was to raise an army for Jihad, then it would be compulsory in this situation for the able person who the Muslim leader calls upon to answer this call.

¹ The word Jihād comes from a root word whose original meaning is “hardship” but was later used to refer to “effort”. In its broad sense, it refers to “striving” of some sort and includes striving with one's soul, with one's heart, with one's body and one's wealth; and is applied to all arenas of life.

One of the special manifestations of “Jihād” is a just, conventional war which is waged in order to repel aggression or to combat and remove injustice. All nations assume the right to wage war for these reasons, and “Jihād” in this sense, is instituted Islamically for that purpose. However, this “Jihād” is regulated and has strict conditions and cannot be announced and waged haphazardly by individuals, vigilantes or groups.

“If you are called upon [by the Muslim leader] to perform Jihad, then answer this call.”

﴿يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مَا لَكُمْ إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ أَنْفِرُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَنْتُمْ إِلَى
الْأَرْضِ أَرْضَيْتُمْ بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا مِنَ الْآخِرَةِ فَمَا مَتَّعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا فِي
الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ﴾

“O you who have believed, what is [the matter] with you that, when you are told to go forth in the cause of Allāh, you adhere heavily to the earth? Are you satisfied with the life of this world rather than the Hereafter? But what is the enjoyment of worldly life compared to the Hereafter except a [very] little.” [Tawbah: 38]

It is incumbent for Jihād to be established under the banner of the Muslim leader, as for individuals and everyone picking up swords and weapons, then this brings no benefit whatsoever. This only results in the spilling of blood.”¹

From its main conditions is that it is waged under a ruler, in the presence of clear military leadership (and not with chaos and disarray) except in the case of a sudden attack by an enemy where self-defense is sanctioned immediately without recourse to the ruler of the state; and this scenario also has guidelines and rulings with affairs ultimately being referred back to the ruler.

During the 20th century, this orthodox, classical understanding of “Jihād” was distorted through the ideas of numerous thinkers who wished to restore the Islamic Caliphate, wrongly treating it to be the ultimate goal of Islam. These thinkers include Sayyid Qutb, Abu A'laa Mawdudi, Taqi al-Din al-Nabahani and Hassan al-Banna. They all operated on the premise that all Muslims states are apostate regimes, and will remain so until they establish a Caliphate.

From here arose the doctrines of Takfir (excommunication) of Muslim nations, governments and the masses of Muslims, and "Jihād" was distorted to refer to a struggle against "apostate" rulers and governments and to the killing of innocent people with the overall aim being to establish a " Caliphate" through this alleged “Jihād”.

Those who make up the organization known as ISIS are from this orientation, and this is why their activity is focused primarily on Muslim lands – as is clear from many of their statements. They wish to conquer Iraq, then the Gulf-countries in the peninsula. All of this is not Jihād according to the Islamic legislation, but is corruption and tribulation.

It is in this light that we understand the clarification of Salafi Scholars that are presented in this article.

¹ www.troid.ca/media/SF_fawzaanrulingonjihaadinsyria.mp3

On another occasion the Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān was asked,

“What is the ruling on travelling to Syria and is this Jihād?”

He responded,

“This is turmoil and chaos; a person should not partake in this. Rather, he should stay far away from it, but he should supplicate for the Muslims. He should supplicate regularly for [Allāh to grant] the Muslims success and relief.

As for him travelling there, then this is not permissible because firstly he has a family and parents and secondly he has to have the consent of the Muslim leader. These two [conditions] have to be met: the consent of the Muslim leader and parental consent.

This is turmoil and chaos and a person should stay far away from this.”¹

2. Why are young people travelling to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS?

The Muftī of Saudi Arabia, Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Āl al-Shaykh stated on the 26th of May 2014,

“Those who persist to direct the youth to [to travel to Syria for Jihād] are not qualified for this role and it is upon them to refrain from encouraging our youth to travel to these places.”²

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Suḥaymī, a former professor of the Islamic University and a teacher at the Prophet’s Mosque in Madinah, said,

“They have been deceived by the verdicts that have been issued by some of these imbeciles... [Those who issue these edicts] are one of two types. The first are those individuals who pass these edicts and they are with them; they take them as scholars and attach themselves to them. Thus, they do not return to the judgment of Allāh and they do not return to the true scholars. There are also those who pass edicts and do not participate in the fighting. They may issue these verdicts -and they are

¹ www.troid.ca/media/SF_fawzaanfatwaaongoingtosyriaforjihaad.mp3

² <http://www.alriyadh.com/938726>

in our land- to support these people and to travel to this bloodbath, which has shed the blood of the Muslim youth.”¹

3. What is the correct position towards groups such as ISIS and al-Nuṣrah?

The Muftī of Saudi Arabia, Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Āl al-Shaykh stated,

“Groups such as al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Qaeda in Yemen, al-Qaeda in Iraq, ISIS, Hezbollah in the Kingdom, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Houthis are all groups that have no good with them.”²

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Suḥaymī, a former professor of the Islamic University and a teacher at the Prophet’s Mosque in Madinah, was asked,

“What is the correct stance concerning this group (ISIS)?”

He responded,

“The correct stance towards this group is that they are Takfīrīs [an extreme group of individuals who excommunicate other Muslims] and they are Kharijites [a deviant sect of renegades]...Both of these groups are upon the wrong path-al-Nuṣrah and ISIS- but the latter is more evil.”³

4. Is the Caliphate of ISIS valid and is Abu Bakr al-Baghdādī the Caliph of all the Muslims?

Shaykh Abdul Muḥsin ‘Abād, former head of the Islamic University in Madinah, Saudi Arabia, and a teacher at the Prophet’s Mosque recently said about those who pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdādī,

“They have pledged allegiance to the Devil.”⁴

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Suḥaymī, a former professor of the Islamic University and a teacher at the Prophet’s Mosque in Madinah stated,

¹ This is an accurate description of those who send young Muslims from Western Countries to their destruction in far-off lands.

² <http://www.alriyadh.com/938726>

³ <http://www.islamagainstextremism.com/articles/nycmqzd-shaykh-salih-al-suhaymee-on-isis-daish-and-the-alleged-khalifah.cfm>

⁴ <http://www.takfiris.com/takfir/articles/avc wd-shaykh-abdul-muhsin-those-who-have-given-bayah-to-al-baghdadi-isis.cfm>

“This alleged Caliph is an impostor, a liar. He is from the callers to misguidance. He slaughtered the Muslims in Shām and now he is slaughtering them in Iraq...”

5. Is it compulsory for the Muslims to focus their efforts on establishing the Caliphate?

Shaykh Aḥmad al-Najmī was asked in 1998,

“What is the opinion of your eminence regarding the one who says that it is now compulsory for us to strive and dedicate our efforts to establishing a rightly guided Caliphate? Is this course correct or is it erroneous??”

This orientation is erroneous, one hundred percent, as what did Allāh (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى) say to His Prophets?

﴿وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ حَقَّتْ عَلَيْهِ الضَّلَالَةُ فَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُكْذِبِينَ﴾

“And verily, We have sent among every nation (Ummah) a Messenger proclaiming, “Worship Allāh Alone, and avoid all false deities (Ṭāghūt).” Then of them were some whom Allāh guided and of them were some upon whom the straying was justified. So travel through the land and see what was the end of those who denied the truth.” [Sūrah al-Naḥl 16:36]

He commanded them to call the people to worship Allāh, alone without any partners. Similarly, the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and his companions (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ), and all of his followers in every time and place, called to Tawḥīd (Islamic Monotheism) and to the foundation the religion is built upon.

When the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) sent Mu‘ādh Ibn Jabal to Yemen what did he say to him? He said,

“Call to them to the testification that none has the right to be worshipped (in truth) except Allāh and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh. If they obey you in that, then inform them that Allāh has made it compulsory for them to pray five times in a day and night...”

Allāh ordered that the call be to worship Allāh alone without any partners (Tawḥīd) and to the foundations of the religion. And the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ)

ordered that the call be to worship Allāh alone without any partners and to the foundations of the religion.

Therefore, if we were to say that we call to the Caliphate, then we have actually abandoned the foundation that Allāh and His Messenger commanded with, and we have invented another foundation [for our call].

The Caliphate ceased to exist a long time ago, and it will be re-established towards the end of time when Allāh decrees and establishes it. We have not been tasked to call to the Caliphate but rather we have been tasked with calling to Tawḥīd.

Whoever calls to the Caliphate has abandoned that which Allāh commanded him with and has come with that which his party has tasked him with. Allāh (تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى) said,

﴿ أَمْ لَهُمْ شُرَكَاءُ شَرَعُوا لَهُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا لَمْ يَأْذَنْ بِهِ اللَّهُ ﴾

“Or have they partners with Allāh, who have instituted for them from the religion that which Allāh has not allowed.” [Sūrah al-Shūrā 42:21]

The Caliphate is for Allāh (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى); He is the one who decrees for it to be established and this will occur when a member of the family of the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) appears, and he is the Mahdī, who will prepare the way for the descension of Jesus (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام). Yes, this is the Caliphate that will exist.

So it will exist when Allāh wills and not when we wish for it to happen. As for them saying that they are working for the establishment of the Caliphate, then this action is flawed and rejected, and it is a corrupt intention. It is impermissible for them to call to Allāh based on this intention.”¹

Summary

- Salafī scholars have been at the forefront in combatting al-Qaeda and their offshoots for the last decade. So to accuse Salafīs and Saudi Arabia of being responsible for young Muslims in the UK travelling to Syria is inaccurate and reckless.
- Salafīs consider what is occurring in Syria at the moment to be turmoil and bloodshed and not Jihād.

¹ Precise Verdicts, q. 18.

- Salafis do not recognize the Caliphate of ISIS and they deem its leader to be astray and misguided.
- Sympathizers to al-Qaeda, ISIS and their likes promote their ideology and encourage young people to join these extreme groups, whether in person or via the internet.
- Labelling extremists as Salafists, as done by some journalists and academics, is erroneous and actually counterproductive. It plays into the hands of the terrorists, as describing them in this way provides them with the credibility that they covet, because Salafism equates to orthodoxy.¹
- Salafis focus on propagating Islamic Monotheism, which is to worship God alone without any partners, and not the Caliphate.
- Non-Muslims should read the book “The Rise of Jihadist Extremism In The West” for a comprehensive discussion on this topic.

¹ This is akin to describing the IRA, which traces its roots to Catholic Irish nationalism, considered by many to be a terrorist organization, as orthodox Catholics. To surrender legitimate Islamic terms to the extremists such as Jihad, Salafism and the like is a dangerous concession, which assists these fanatics to win the hearts and minds of vulnerable people.