Roots of Daesh's Violence:
Concepts and Beliefs

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1. Introduction

ISIL or ISIS is a Sunni extremist group. It follows an extreme interpretation of Islam, promotes religious violence, and regards those who do not agree with its interpretations as infidels or apostates.

ISIL's ideology originates in the branch of modern Islam that aims to return to the early days of Islam, rejecting later "innovations" in the religion which it believes corrupt its original spirit. It condemns later caliphates and the Ottoman Empire for deviating from what it calls pure Islam and hence has been attempting to establish its own caliphate

According to some observers, ISIL emerged from the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, the first post-Ottoman Islamist group dating back to the late 1920s in Egypt. It adheres to global jihadist principles and follows the hard-line ideology of al-Qaeda and many other modern-day jihadist groups However, other sources trace the group's roots not to the Islamism of the Muslim Brotherhood and the more mainstream jihadism of al-Qaeda, but to Wahhabism

As the major question, I try to analyze the Ideological roots of the violent activities by the Daesh. What religious principles do justify these violent behaviors? Based on a general view, if these violent activities are authorized by the Muslim elite in the world? Are the interpretations offered by these groups are skeptical?

Keywords: Islam. Daesh. Salafism. Wahabism.

2. An Overview on its Rise and its Growth

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL; Arabic: الدولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام), also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS) or Daesh is an Islamic extremist rebel group controlling territory in Iraq and Syria, with operations in Lebanon, Libya, the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt, and other areas of the Middle East, North Africa, West Africa South Asia, and Southeast Asia (Zavadski.2014).

On 29 June 2014, the group proclaimed itself to be a worldwide caliphate with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi being named its caliph (Withnall, 2014) and also renamed itself **Islamic State** (الدولة الإسلامية, *ad-Dawlat al-Islāmiyah*).

As caliphate, it claims religious, political and military authority over all Muslims worldwide and that "the legality of all emirates, groups, states, and organizations, becomes null by the expansion of the khilāfah's (caliphate's) authority and arrival of its troops to their areas" (The Week.2014)

ISIS began as a branch of Al-Qaeda, founded in Iraq in 2004 after the American invasion and headed by Ayman al-Zawahiri. It filled the security and governmental void created by the disintegration of the Iraqi army and Saddam Hussein's regime, accompanied by the increasing alienation of the Sunni Muslims from the central, Shi'ite-affiliated government in Baghdad sponsored by the United States. The branch of Al-Qaeda gradually established itself in Iraq during the fighting against the United States and its allies, adopted the name the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) (Portrait of a Jihadi Terrorist, 2014: 2).

This branch of Al-Qaeda in Iraq entered the security vacuum and took advantage of the increasing political-societal Sunni alienation: It became an important actor in the insurgent organizations fighting the American army, became stronger after the withdrawal of the American troops, and spread to Syria after the civil war began in March 2011. The establishment of Al-Qaeda and ISIS in Iraq and Syria occurred in four stages:

1) **Stage One (2004-2006) – The establishment of the branch of Al-Qaeda in Iraq led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and called "Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia:"** It waged a terrorist-guerilla war against the American and coalition forces and against the Shi'ite population. The first stage ended when Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed in an American targeted attack in June 2006.

2) **Stage Two (2006-2011) – Establishment of the Daesh in Iraq (ISI):** ISI served as an umbrella network for several terrorist organizations that continued waging a terrorist-guerilla campaign against the United States, its coalition allies and the Shi'ite population. ISI was weakened towards the end of the American presence in Iraq following successful American military moves and a wise foreign policy that supported the Sunni population and knew how to win their hearts and minds.

3) **Stage Three (2012-June 2014) – The strengthening of ISI and the founding of ISIS:** After the American army withdrew from Iraq, ISI became stronger. Following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war ISI established a branch in Syria

called the **Al-Nusra Front** ("support front"). Dissension broke out between ISI and its Syrian branch, leading to a rift between ISI and Al-Qaeda and **the establishment of the Daesh in Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS)**.

4) **Stage Four (as of June 2014) – Dramatic ISIS military achievements:** The most prominent was the takeover of Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq. At the same time ISIS established its control in eastern Syria where it set up a governmental center (its "capital city") in Al-Raqqah. In the wake of its success, ISIS declared the establishment of an "Daesh" (IS) (or "Islamic

Caliphate") headed by an ISIS leader named Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In September 2014 the United States declared a comprehensive campaign against ISIS, which is currently waging a fierce struggle against its many enemies both at home and abroad.

Map No.1: Actual situation of ISIS

The ISIS self-declared (June 2014) Caliphate State ISIS in large areas of western Iraq and eastern and northern Syria. The map was posted on jihadi forums on August 18, 2014 (Alplatformmedia.com; Hanein.info).

Map No.2: The Future Declared Borders of ISIS

Left: Map of the Islamic Caliphate in English with a picture of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi at the right (Hanein.info). Right: The Islamic Caliphate State with its extensive borders. Only Islamic names appear on the map, not the names of the modern nation states (Hanein.info).

3. Beliefs and Ideology

ISIS is an Islamic Salafist-jihadi organization. Salafism is an extremist Sunni political religious movement within Islam that seeks to restore the golden era of the dawn of Islam (the time of the prophet Muhammad and the early Caliphs who followed him). That is to be done, according to Salafist ideology, by jihad (a holy war) against both internal and external enemies. Jihad, according to Salafism, is the personal duty of every Muslim. Al-Qaeda and the global jihadi organizations (of which ISIS is one) sprang from Salafist jihadism.

According to the ISIS concept, Islam's golden era will be restored through the establishment of a supranational Islamic Caliphate modeled after the regimes of the first Caliphs after the death of Muhammad. It will be ruled by Islamic religious law (the sharia), according to its most extreme interpretation. The Caliphate will arise on the ruins of the nation states established in the Middle East after the First World War. Some of them, including Syria and Iraq, where ISIS operates, are in the process of disintegrating in the wake of the upheaval in the Middle East, creating favorable conditions for the vision of an Islamic Caliphate.

3.1. Triangle of beliefs and its role for encouraging the violence

3.1.1. Salafism: the Salafist movement perceives the time of the Prophet Muhammad as ideal and the first Caliphs who succeeded him as role models (the Arabic word **Salaf** means ancestor or first generation). The modern Salafist movement began in Egypt, a result of the desire to purify Islam of its flaws and return to what was perceived as the Golden Age of Islam.

Initially, the Salafist movement focused on religious studies and the winning of hearts and minds (*da'wah*) as a way of creating an Islamic society and a state ruled by Islamic law. However, within the Salafi movement an extremist faction called *Salafiyya Jihadiyya* (i.e., jihadi Salafism) developed, from which Al-Qaeda and the global jihad organizations, including ISIS, have emerged. An ideologically important contribution to the development of the movement was made by Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), an Egyptian ideologue whose ideas inspired the establishment of Islamic organizations that supported violent struggle (including the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, led by Ayman al-Zawahiri, Bin Laden's successor as leader of Al-Qaeda).

From a Salafist-jihadi perspective, Muslims must strive to disseminate and implement Islam in all areas of life by liberating the lands of Islam from other cultures (especially Western culture) through jihad (holy war), which is perceived as the personal duty (*fard 'ayn*) of every Muslim. Thus Muslim must fight the enemies of Islam through violent and uncompromising military struggle. Moreover, according to the Salafist-jihadi perception, the enemies of Islam are not only external (mainly the US and the West), but also Arab regimes that cooperate with the West or secular Arab regimes that are considered "infidel." Therefore, according to Salafist jihadists, Islamic religious law justifies overthrowing them (Portrait of a Jihadi Terrorist.2014 : 36).

3.1.2. Qutbism. Qutbism (also called Kotebism, Qutbiyya, or Qutbiyyah) is an Islamist ideology developed by late Sayyid Qutb, a Muslim, and figurehead of the Muslim Brotherhood (he was executed in 1966) It has been described as advancing the extremist jihadist ideology of propagating "offensive jihad," - waging jihad in conquest- or "armed jihad in the advance of Islam" (Douglas,2007).

Qutbism has gained widespread attention due to its perceived influence on Islamic extremists, and terrorists such as Osama bin-Laden.

Sayyid Qutb's mature political views always centered on Islam — Islam as a complete system of morality, justice and governance, whose Sharia laws and principles should be the sole basis of governance and everything else in life - though his interpretation of it varied. Qutb's political philosophy has been described as an attempt to instantiate a complex and multilayer eschatological vision, partly grounded in the counter-hegemonic re-articulation of the traditional ideal of Islamic universalism (Mura.2014).

On the issue of Islamic governance, Qutb differed with many modernist and reformist Muslims who claimed that democracy was Islamic because the Quranic institution of *Shura* supported elections and democracy. Qutb pointed out that the Shura chapter of the Qur'an was revealed during the Mekkan period, and therefore, it does not deal with the problem of government. It makes no reference to elections and calls only for the ruler to consult some of the ruled, as a particular case of the general rule of *Shura (Sivan. 1985: 73).*

- Jahiliyyah versus freedom
This exposure to abuse of power undoubtedly contributed to the ideas in his famous prison-written Islamic manifesto*Ma'alim fi-l-Tariq* (Milestones), where he advocated a political system that is the opposite of dictatorship—i.e. one with no government. There Qutb argued:

Much of the Muslim world approaches the Qur'an as a means to simply acquire culture and information, to participate in academic discussions and enjoyment. This evades the real purpose, for rather, it should be approached as a means to change society, to remove man from the enslavement of other men to the servitude of God (Qutb.1957 :7).

Rather than support rule by a pious few, (whether a dictator(s) or democratically elected), Muslims should resist *any* system where men are in "servitude to other men"—i.e. obey other men—as un-Islamic and a violation of God's sovereignty (*Hakamiyya*) over all of creation. A truly Islamic polity would have no rulers—not even have theocratic ones—since Muslims would need neither judges nor police to obey divine law (Qutb, *Milestones*, pp. 85, 32). It was what one observer has called "a kind of anarcho-Islam."

The way to bring about this freedom was for a revolutionary vanguard. to fight *jahiliyyah* with a twofold approach: preaching, and abolishing the organizations and authorities of the *Jahili* system by "physical power and Jihad."

The vanguard movement would grow with preaching and jihad until it formed a truly Islamic community, then spread throughout the Islamic homeland and finally

throughout the entire world, attaining leadership of humanity. While those who had been "defeated by the attacks of the treacherous Orientalists!" might define jihad "narrowly" as defensive, Islamically correct Jihad (according to Qutb) was in fact offensive, not defensive (Qutb, *Milestones,* 2003: 63;69).

Qutb's message was spread through his writing, his followers and especially through his brother, Muhammad Qutb, who moved to Saudi Arabia following his release from prison in Egypt and became a professor of Islamic Studies and edited, published and promoted his brother Sayyid's work (Kepel, 2000: 51).

3.1.3. Wahhabism

Wahhabism (Arabic: وهابية, *Wahhābiya(h)*) or Wahhabi mission is a religious movement or offshoot branch of Sunni Islam (Wahhbi, 2005).

It has been variously described as "orthodox", "ultraconservative" "austere", "fundamentalist",

"puritanical (or "puritan") as an Islamic "reform movement" to restore "pure monotheistic worship" (tawhid), by scholars and advocates[11] and as an "extremist pseudo-Sunni movement" by opponents Adherents often object to the term Wahhabi or Wahhabism as derogatory, and prefer to be called *Salafi* or *muwahhid* (Commins, 2009: ix).

Wahhabism is named after an eighteenth century preacher and scholar, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792). He started a revivalist movement in the remote, sparsely populated region of Najd, advocating a purging of practices such as the popular "cult of saints", and shrine and tomb visitation, widespread among Muslims, but which he considered idolatry, impurities and innovations in Islam. Eventually he formed a pact with a local leader Muhammad bin Saud offering political obedience and promising that protection and propagation of the Wahhabi movement, would mean "power and glory" and rule of "lands and men (Lacey, 2009:10-11).

The movement is centered on the principle of tawhid or the "uniqueness" and "unity" of God.

The alliance between followers of ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad bin Saud's successors (the House of Saud) proved to be a rather durable alliance. The house of bin Saud continued to maintain its politico-religious alliance with the Wahhabi sect through the waxing and waning of its own political fortunes over the next 150 years, through to its eventual proclamation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932, and then afterwards, on into modern times

Adherents to the Wahhabi movement are self-described Sunni Muslims (Qamar. sunnah.org).

The primary Wahhabi doctrine is the uniqueness and unity of God (*Tawhid*), and opposition to *shirk* (polytheism), "the one unforgivable sin" (according to Wahhabism).

They call for a return to the Islamic practices of the first generations of Muslims and an adherence to original texts, believing that Islamic practice has since drifted away from its roots through various interpretations. They generally take a literalist approach to Islamic religious writings and are often called fundamentalists. They also oppose doctrines held by other sects particularly Sufis, Shiites and non-Wahhabi

Sunni Islam.

They place a strong emphasis on absolute monotheism and reject practices such as worshiping Allah at the graves of Muslim prophets and leaders. They also reject debate on and new interpretations of Islamic theology and practice (The Christian Science Monitor.2011).

According to Wahhabis, they aspire to "assimilate with the beliefs of the early Sunni Muslims", specifically the first three generations known as the Salaf.

Wahhabis reject Islamic "theology" (*kalam*) in favor of strict textualism in interpreting the Quran, and are sometimes described as being in the Athari school (Halverson, 2010: 36).

For their guiding principles, the leaders of the Daesh, , are open and clear about their almost exclusive commitment to the Wahhabi movement of Sunni Islam. The group circulates images of Wahhabi religious textbooks from Saudi Arabia in the schools it controls. Videos from the group's territory have shown Wahhabi texts plastered on the sides of an official missionary van (Kirkpatrick, 2014).

ISIL seeks to revive the original Wahhabi project of the restoration of the caliphate governed by strict Salafist doctrine, and following Wahhabi tradition, it condemns the followers of secular law as disbelievers, putting the current Saudi regime in that category (al-Ibrahimi, 2014).

One scholar (David Commins) describes the "pivotal idea" in Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teaching as being that "Muslims who disagreed with his definition of monotheism were not ... misguided Muslims, but outside the pale of Islam altogether." This put Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teaching at odds with that of most Muslims through history who believed that the "shahada" profession of faith ("There is no god but God, Muhammad is his messenger") made one a Muslim, and that shortcomings in that person's behavior and performance of other obligatory rituals rendered them "a sinner", but "not an unbeliever."

- False interpretation for the Quran Verses.

With emphasis on Quran verses that speak of jihad and providing a fraudulent and extremist interpretation of them, they try to justify their violent activities. Emphasis on verses like:

1. Quran chapter 8 says,

"(Remember) when your Lord inspired the angels, "Verily, I am with you, so keep firm those who have believed. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who have disbelieved, so strike them over the necks, and smite over all their fingers and toes" This is because they defied and disobeyed Allah and His Messenger. And whoever defies and disobeys Allah and His Messenger, then verily, Allah is Severe in punishment]"

—Muhsin khan translated Quran, *verse 8:12-13*

2. "Say to those who have disbelieved, if they cease (from disbelief) their past will be forgiven. But if they return (thereto), then the examples of those (punished) before them have already preceded (as a warning).

And fight them until there is no more Fitnah (disbelief and polytheism: i.e. worshipping others besides Allah) and the religion (worship) will all be for Allah Alone [in the whole of the world]. But if they cease (worshipping others besides Allah), then certainly, Allah is All-Seer of what they do.

—Muhsin khan translated Quran, *verse 8:38-39.*

In his tafsir, Ibn Kathir, one of the renowned Islamic scholars, explains the verses further:

"Allah then commanded fighting the disbelievers when He said:

(...until there is no more Fitnah) meaning, sedition or Shirk.

Allah's statement: (...and the religion (all and every kind of worship) is for Allah 'Alone') means, `So that the religion of Allah becomes dominant above all other religions.

Wahhabi support for suicide bombings has wider repercussions. Other militant Islamic movements cite Saudi Wahhabi clerics to justify their activities - from the Chechen groups battling the Russians to Iraqi mujahidin fighting the U.S. in western Iraq. Coincidentally, the ubiquitous IIRO was lauded by the Saudi press for its support activities in the Sunni districts of post-Saddam Iraq, as well. Its presence was usually indicative in other regions of Saudi identification with local militant causes. In order to evaluate the significance of these religious rulings, it is necessary to focus on the stature of these various Saudi clerical figures that jihadi movements worldwide were citing.

For example, just after the September 11 attacks, it is true that many Saudi government officials condemned them. But there were other voices as well. Shortly thereafter a Wahhabi book appeared on the Internet justifying the murder of thousands of Americans, entitled" The Foundations of the Legality of the Destruction that Befell America". The Introduction to the book was written by a prominent Saudi religious leader, Sheikh Hamud bin Uqla al-Shuaibi. He wrote on November 16, 2001, that he hoped Allah would bring further destruction upon the United States. Al-Shuaibi's name appears in a book entitled the Great Book of Fatwas, found in a Taliban office in Kabul. Sheikh al-Shuaibi appears on the Hamas website, noted earlier, as a religious source for suicide attacks. Attacks on U.S. soldiers in western Iraq by a Wahhabi group called al-Jama'a al-Salafiya were dedicated to his name and to the names of other Saudi clerics. Al-Shuaibi's ideas, in short, had global reach (Dore. 2003).

4. Critical Discussion

ISIL has received severe criticism from other Muslims, especially religious scholars and theologians. In late August 2014, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Abdul-Aziz ibn Abdullah Al ash-Sheikh, condemned the Daesh and al-Qaeda saying, "Extremist and militant ideas and terrorism which spread decay on Earth, destroying human civilization, are not in any way part of Islam, but are enemy number one of Islam, and Muslims are their first victims" (Reuters. 2014).

In late September 2014, 126 Sunni imams and Islamic scholars — primarily Sufi

– (Amad Shaikh, 2014) from around the Muslim world signed an open letter to the Daesh's leader al-Baghdadi, explicitly rejecting and refuting his group's interpretations of Islamic scriptures, the Qur'an and hadith, used by it to justify its actions (Markoe, 2013).

"[You] have misinterpreted Islam into a religion of harshness, brutality, torture and murder ... this is a great wrong and an offence to Islam, to Muslims and to the entire world", the letter states (Open letter, 2014).

It rebukes the Daesh for its killing of prisoners, describing the killings as "heinous war crimes" and its persecution of the Yazidis of Iraq as "abominable". Referring to the "self-described 'Daesh'", the letter censures the group for carrying out killings and acts of brutality under the guise of jihad—holy struggle—saying that its "sacrifice" without legitimate cause, goals and intention "is not jihad at all, but rather, warmongering and criminality".It also accuses the group of instigating fitna—sedition—by instituting slavery under its rule in contravention of the anti-slavery consensus of the Islamic scholarly community.[1]

Other scholars have described the group as not Sunnis, but Khawarij (The Globe 2014).

The group's declaration of a caliphate has been criticized and its legitimacy disputed by Middle Eastern governments, other jihadist groups, (CBS News, 2014) and Sunni Muslim theologians and historians. Qatar-based TV broadcaster and theologian Yusuf al-Qaradawi stated: "[The] declaration issued by the Daesh is void under sharia and has dangerous consequences for the Sunnis in Iraq and for the revolt in Syria", adding that the title of caliph can "only be given by the entire Muslim nation", not by a single group (Strange. 2014).

5. The Iranian analysis: Conspiracy of Superpowers

Based on the Iranian discourse, the ISIS does not have a real ideological root, it is only an ominous and fictitious creation of the enemies of Islam.

High-ranking officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran have always talked about the importance of Shiite-Sunni unity and to prevent the religious violence.

In his Eid sermon, Ayatollah Khamenei **Supreme Leader of Islamic Republic of Iran.** said, "Shiites and Sunnis should not help the enemy by insulting each

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1. Through the open letter 24 important points have been emphasized. Based on these points, it is forbidden in Islam to kill the innocent. It is forbidden in Islam to kill emissaries, ambassadors, and diplomats; hence it is forbidden to kill journalists and aid workers. Jihad in Islam is defensive war. It is not permissible without the right cause, the right purpose and without the right rules of conduct. It is forbidden in Islam to declare people non-Muslim unless he (or she) openly declares disbelief. It is forbidden in Islam to harm or mistreat—in any way—Christians or any 'People of the Scripture'. It is obligatory to consider Yazidis as People of the Scripture. The re-introduction of slavery is forbidden in Islam. It was abolished by universal consensus. It is forbidden in Islam to force people to convert. It is forbidden in Islam to deny women their rights. It is forbidden in Islam to deny children their rights. It is forbidden in Islam to enact legal punishments (hudud) without following the correct procedures that ensure justice and mercy. It is forbidden in Islam to torture people. It is forbidden in Islam to disfigure the dead. Open Letter to Al-Baghdadi, http://www.lettertobaghdadi.com.

other's sanctities. Anyone who fuels the Shiite-Sunni conflict is helping the United States, the Zionist regime and the evil United Kingdom, which are responsible for creating IS and al-Qaeda in the first place (http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/10/iran).

There is an undeniable point which is the fact that the takfiri (ISIS) orientation and the governments which support and advocate it move completely in the direction of the goals of arrogance and Zionism. Their work is in line with the goals of America, the colonialist governments in Europe and the government of the usurping Zionist regime (http://www.leader.ihttp://www.leader.ir.2014).

"The Takfiri movements and their sponsoring states are utterly serving the arrogant powers' objectives, namely (the objectives of) the US and the European colonialist governments as well as the Zionist regime (of Israel). They are practically serving them under an Islamic guise," Ayatollah Khamenei said, addressing a gathering of Muslim scholars and clerics who have come to Iran to attend an international conference on dangers of Takfirism (extremism) held in Iran's holy city of Qom (http://sayyidali.com/home-page-slider/ayatollah-khamenei-takfiri.2014).

Pointing to the international conference on threats posed by extremist and Takfiri groups which was held in the Iranian city of Qom, Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi said holding such events undermines hostilities and boosts Muslims' unity against the illwishers such as US and the Zionist regime of Israel.

The senior Iranian cleric also described the ISIL terrorist group as a "political, military and ideological sedition," and said the Muslim clerics taking part in the international conference emphasized that the ideological roots of the terrorist movement should be traced and eradicated (Top Iranian cleric, 2015).

6. Conclusion:

ISIL is a Sunni extremist group. It follows an extreme interpretation of Islam, promotes religious violence, and regards those who do not agree with its interpretations as infidels or apostates.

ISIL's ideology originates in the branch of modern Islam that aims to return to the early days of Islam, rejecting later "innovations" in the religion which it believes corrupt its original spirit.

ISIS began as a branch of Al-Qaeda, founded in Iraq in 2004 after the American invasion and headed by Ayman al-Zawahiri. It filled the security and governmental void created by the disintegration of the Iraqi army and Saddam Hussein's regime, accompanied by the increasing alienation of the Sunni Muslims from the central, Shi'ite-affiliated government in Baghdad.

ISIS is an Islamic Salafist-jihadi organization. Salafism is an extremist Sunni political religious movement within Islam that seeks to restore the golden era of the dawn of Islam.

We could observe triangle of beliefs and its role for encouraging the violence: Salafism, Qutbism and Wahhbism.

Salafism: the Salafist movement perceives the time of the Prophet Muhammad as ideal and the first Caliphs who succeeded him as role models (the Arabic word Salaf

means ancestor or first generation).

Qutbism has gained widespread attention due to its perceived influence on Islamic extremists, and terrorists such as Osama bin-Laden.

Wahhbism has been variously described as "orthodox", ultraconservative" "austere", "fundamentalist", "puritanical (or "puritan") as an Islamic "reform movement" to restore "pure monotheistic worship" (tawhid), by scholars and advocates[11] and as an "extremist pseudo-Sunni movement" by opponents Adherents often object to the term Wahhabi or Wahhabism as derogatory, and prefer to be called *Salafi* or *muwahhid*

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