Special Issue of the Seminar

Towards a Methodological Approach to Confronting

Extremist Discourse

in the Syrian Context

Through the Learned Lessons and Experiences

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with the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva

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Summary

The Syrian crisis has played a central role in the rise of extremism on the regional and global level with the rapidly-changing events after the popular Syrian revolution, which the Syrian regime has since day one considered to be "extremist Islamic organizations." With the intensification of armed conflict, different extremist currents manifested with great force, the most prominent of which was ISIS, which was able to control up to 50% of Syrian territory at one point. It was able to benefit from Syrian oil and agricultural wealth, in addition to its development of other extremist groups which were less important than itself. With it being confronted on a number of fronts, including the Syrian opposition forces, Daesh soon receded from the areas previously under its control, which led to a number of different and diverse consequences.

At that time, some of the Syrian armed forces who were influenced by the transnational idea of "Global Jihad" relatively and gradually transformed to moderate national views. Northern Syria and the Idlib Governorate remained as the last opposition stronghold, which also holds a number of extremist groups and organizations. It is important to rescue Northern Syria, where all the energies and previous experiences have been gathered in one place, from the destructive effect of extremist groups (whether that be internally or as an excuse for military intervention) in the urgent immediate term. It is therefore important to research ways to benefit from previous experiences and arrive to the best practical strategies for a political and religious discourse against extremism.

In this context, the Syrian Dialogue Center, in cooperation with the Cordoba Foundation in Geneva, held a seminar which incorporated a number of Syrian Sharia and political actors, among whom were some of most important Syrian opposition factions and bodies, to share their experiences in intellectual discourse against extremist thought. This was done with the aim of benefiting from those experiences and drawing a road-map to arrive to a methodological approach to confront this discourse. Through understanding extremism's life-cycle, its development and the factors which participate in forming environments which foster it, the seminar aimed to arrive to recommendations that would give a comprehensive approach to confront extremist discourse. Specifically, the seminar focused on displaying the role of Shari discourse; the effect of forming a unified Sharia authority on the development of terrorism and the possible recommendations to strengthen it; and analyzing the factors which led to the transformation of Salafi Jihadist groups to relative moderation.

During the conference, three papers were presented. The first paper "Role of Sharia Authorities in Fighting Extremism" presented the meaning of extremism in terms of the Sharia and the role of Syrian scholarly and sharia authorities who unite different authorities (The Syrian Islamic Council), the extent of their positive influence in local environments capable of fostering extremism, and their capability of fighting the phenomenon early on.

The paper also covered the previous role of the formal religious establishment in indirectly supporting extremism's development through granting legitimacy to the Syrian regime and its practices, despite its many horrors and evils. This pushed a number of youths into the embrace of extremist networks which the Syrian regime used for its own goals in Iraq and so on. As a result, that led to the youth not trusting the Sharia authorities or seeing them as a symbol. We hope through this paper to benefit from previous mistakes by learning the lessons in order to arrive to a clear vision that can empower the unified Sharia authority and multiply its discourse's effect.

The second paper "Criteria for Decision-Makers to Distinguish between Extremist and Moderate Armed Syrian Groups" was written in the context of needing clear and fair criteria to distinguish the moderate Syrian opposition forces from extremist groups given how commonly decision-makers generalize all the various Syrian opposition groups as all being extremists. This is perhaps influenced by the Syrian regime's propaganda which categorizes all of the opposition as being extremists. Furthermore, there is a need to place clear measurable criteria which decision-makers can use to distinguish between extremist and moderate groups. The paper was able to place several initial criteria to measure religious extremism as well as political extremism. It also shed light on the transformation of some groups towards either extremism or moderation through a case study of Ahrar Al-Sham's transformation towards a national and relatively moderate dialogue and the consequences of that transformation. On the other hand, the paper pointed to the existence of characteristics of developing extremism among other "non-Islamic" currents, more specifically, the indications of the behavior of groups who depend on the aspirations of foreign powers who enforce their agenda and vision on Syrians which stamp all the "Islamic groups" with extremism and terrorism with no discrimination. These groups show readiness to present discourse that incorporates those states' aspirations to completely reduce religion from the public sphere in Syria's future. That has affected the birth of counter-reactions that feed into extremism.

The third paper "Reading Some of the Experiences of the Syrian Opposition Forces with Extremist Forces" shed light on several of the experiences of opposition forces according to every region and force. While the opposition forces were able to

eradicate Daesh in Eastern Ghouta and a number of other areas, it wavered in its dealings with "Jabhat An-Nusra" which was aligned with Al-Qaeda and other extremist forces. It also presented the transformations of some "Salafi Jihadi" groups towards a national and relatively moderate discourse and presented the different discourses and practices of a number of groups who intellectually and militarily confronted extremist organizations. The paper concluded with a number of recommendations with the aim of achieving the best practices by which we can intellectually and politically confront extremism and summarized the most important mistakes which pushed youth into the influence of extremist groups' discourse in order to avoid a repeat in the future.

First Paper: Role of Sharia Authorities in Fighting Extremism

Dr. Imad adDin Khayti[1]

Foreword:

All Praises to Allah, and Peace and Blessings upon his Messenger,

The Almighty has ordained for his believers to reference to the people of knowledge in order to know the affairs of his religion and if they had any question: "And when there comes to them information about [public] security or fear, they spread it around. But if they had referred it back to the Messenger or to those of authority among them, then the ones who [can] draw correct conclusions from it would have known about it. And if not for the favor of Allah upon you and His mercy, you would have followed Satan, except for a few." (An-Nisa 83) and said "And We sent not before you except men to whom We revealed [Our message]. So, ask the people of knowledge if you do not know." (An-Nahl 43)

Taking the trusted religious authorities with witnessed knowledge, sincerity and piety is one of the most important preventives to protect society from extremism. The Ulema are the protectors or religion and guardians of the Sharia. They are its impregnable fortress, who, per the prophetic narration, (negate the distortions of those who go to extremes, the lies of the falsifiers, and the interpretations of the ignorant)and knowledge cannot be gained except through them.[2]

Deviations only happen by refusing their methodology and what they say in favor of the sayings of those who have not solidified themselves in knowledge and know neither fiqh nor any knowledge. The prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) warned against taking the ignorant as religious authorities, as they will become a reason for society's decline and collapse, for they are a lost people thinking themselves guided, and make others also lost and trick them with their speech and fatwas. "Verily, Allah does not take away knowledge by snatching it from the people, but He takes it away by taking away (the lives of) the religious scholars till none of the scholars stays alive. Then the people will take ignorant ones as their leaders, who, when asked to deliver religious verdicts, will issue them without knowledge, the result being that they will go astray and will lead others astray."[3]

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1 Member of the Syrian Islamic Council and a researcher and specialist in Modern Islamic Issues and Extremist Groups

2 It was reported by Al-Bazzar in his Musnid (16/247), Al-Tahawi in Sharh Mushkil Al-Athar (10/17). There is debate over its authenticity.

3 Reported by Al-Bukhari (1/31), and Muslim (4/2058)

In times of turmoil and hardship, the people and especially the youth's need for the ulema only increases, as they can clear of any doubts of misconceptions they might have and instruct them on the necessity of sticking to the majority opinion and keeping away from divisions: "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best [way] and best in result." (An-Nisa 59)

And the saying of a number of companions was reported "If this fitna is accepted, then it will be known by every scholar, and if it is overturned, it will be known by every ignorant"

Position of the Extremists towards the Ulema[4]:

Extremists target their thought towards all segments of society, but they especially focus on the people of knowledge and their students. This is only because the ulema stood against the intellectual and creedal deviations that the extremists brought and responded to them with knowledge and exposed their mistakes. The ulema, like a hard rock, crushed their doubts, and protected generations of youth against them, which brought the extremists' anger against them and made them consider them the most dangerous obstacle in the way of their project and ideas.

They put in every effort to discourage the youth from the path of knowledge and moral edification, and described it as a betrayal of Allah's religion with its cowardice and waste of effort.[5] They put ignoramuses as their leaders to decide their important affairs, and give them fatwas to spill blood and spread harm. Because of this, the youths' trust of the ulema decreased, leaving them with no guard against any thought or deviation.

The Ulema's Importance in Fighting Extremism:

Fighting extremism is an affair which the whole of society, both individuals and institutions, takes part in, but a greater responsibility falls on the shoulders of those who know the Sharia from the ulema and their students due to:

1- The deviation of extremists is in their excess in understanding the Sharia and its application, as they also use Sharia terms and slogans which Muslims use, and spread their fatwas and ideas in society, which results in its spread among the people and a split between them and the true people of knowledge with their specialty in this field.

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4 See also: "Extremists Conceptualization of the Concept of State in Islam" by the same author

5 See الاستطاعة (Power), by Sheikh Muhammad Sarour, pg.11.

2- It is the people of knowledge specialized in Sharia who rush to answer the doubts of religious extremists, respond to their mistakes and hold dialogues with them.

3- Extremism, rebellion, deviating from Ahl us-Sunna, as well as the permissibility of fighting and spilling blood and consuming wealth, are very dangerous details of Sharia that must be dealt with by the specialists of knowledge and no one else.

4- Determining how extremists should be dealt with[6], whether releasing Sharia rulings or categorization the groups and organizations and rules of combat, and likewise in two manners:

   A: Not responding to extremism with extremism in terms of their ideas or permitting the taking of their lives or wealth, or committing any of the brutality they practice towards detainees or their families.

   B: Attempting to distort Islamic groups as being khawarij, for what this contemporary age has witnessed of deviations of the Sharia, fighting many of governments and organizations calling to establish Islam in society describing them as being khawarij, and using "court ulema" to issue fatwas along those lines, thereby allowing their blood to be spilled in order to fight the Islamic project in society.

5- Determining the effects of confronting extremism, because of their false application of Islam and committing a number of crimes in its name, which pushes people to flee from Islam and mock the rulings and slogans the extremists use. This requires the ulema and duaat to conduct themselves with justice and the truth, determine how to fight extremism and address the people fleeing from religion and expound the correct meaning of moderation.

Why Institutions of Religious Knowledge:

   There have many developments in our contemporary age which need examination and analysis, solutions to deal with them, and an expansion of knowledge not limited to one individual. This is especially true given the general weakness in knowledge of the Sharia compared to our predecessors.

One of the things needed in order to comprehend these developments is to resort to institutions of knowledge which gather specialists in Sharia to study these developments. No doubt that the "answers issued by research institutions which harmonize the efforts of a group of researchers, according to a comprehensive and balanced scientific methodology, which depends on evidence and scientific consolidation are wiser and more correct than those issued by individual muftis."[7]

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6 See الاحتساب على الغلو المعاصر تأصيلاً وتنزيلًا (A Reckoning of Modern Extremism: Revelation and Roots), by Dr. Muhammad Sarour.

7 From the introduction to "Fatwas of the Syrian Revolution" by the Sham Islamic Body.

This practice finds support from the companions, as the righteously-guided caliphs all consulted with the people of knowledge from the companions in the developments they faced whether political, judicial or jurisprudential, and would consult with them until they reached a solution that all were content with.

Furthermore, a work produced by an institution is more likely to be accepted; as those who receive it have contentment that this Shari ruling was not produced from a personal opinion, some abnormality or in opposition to the ulema.

The role of Sharia institutions in fighting extremism:

The role of Sharia institutions in fighting extremism could be as follows:

1. Rooting society in knowledge:
   That would be accomplished by spreading the correct knowledge of Sharia derived from the texts of the Quran and Sunna, as understood by our righteous predecessors from the companions and the generation after them, in all areas of the religion, whether that be in fiqh, thought or creed. They would especially have to focus on those fields which have been absent from teaching and learning in the past decades. This absence is something which the extremists have taken advantage to spread their ignorance and deviance, such as the subjects of jihad, kufr and apostasy, and political issues related to the Sharia, especially with regards to choosing the ruler and revolting against him. Extremists were only able to enter into these subjects because of the ignorance attached to them.

2. Being interested in raising awareness on the reality of jihad, its rulings, conditions and aims in the Sharia and correcting the wrong understandings of it as well as other Islamic concepts.

3. Discovering the reality of extremists' leaders, demonstrating their ignorance and how far they are from the path of the ulema in order for them to no longer be seen as role models.
   This would also defend the ulema and show how false the extremists' claims against them are and the falsehood of attaching, and that there is no precedence for doing so.

4. Becoming closer to the youth and being open to their discussions, questions and struggles and solving the problems they face, in order to foster a healthy way of thinking and respond to their doubts.

   Setting aside time to sit with them, for being far and isolated from them is one of the reasons for the extremists' ability to mix among them and coax them into their ideology.

5. Meeting the challenge of political and Sharia developments through an aware fiqh that would combine the Sharia texts and the changing realities and give

answers and solutions appropriate for this age and its language and would call the youth and convince them.

6. Publishing fatwas and research papers to respond to extremists' doubts in the detailed issues they discuss, not sufficing themselves with general answers or just warning them, but rather deeply analyzing the reasons people fall into extremism. Issues related to thought and its intellectual standards, especially with regard to ruling with other than Allah's revelation and declaring governments and their employees apostates, the concept of Walaa and Baraa, and etc. must be discussed in detail.[8]

7. Engaging extremists in discussion and dialogue and not feeling it sufficient to simply publish fatwas against them. Many of them who have joined this trend have been deceived and are ignorant of the Sharia, and as long as there is agreement on the importance of the Sharia then these discussions may bring back many of those deceived, similar to what happened with Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, in his discussions with the Khawarij, many of whom returned back from their previous notions.[9] This would also have a preventive effect in keeping many from being deceived by extremists' doubts.

8. Not being complacent in confronting extremism and taking the initiative to make clear what the Sharia's ruling is in their ideas and deeds.
At the same time, we cannot allow hypocrites and the enemies of Islam to take advantage of the issue of extremism. There are some ulema who abstain from extremists with the argument that they are our brothers in Islam and we are all targeted. In this line of argument, it is impossible to stand against them as to do so would put us with the enemies of Muslims. There are also some who strive-intentionally or naively- for the benefit of the enemies of Islam, and make excuses to themselves that as long as they confront extremists, then they should fight them even if that means relying on tyrants.

9. Taking on the challenge of all intellectual deviations-other than extremism- that exist in society, whether from regimes or intellectuals, and not being silent against them. One of the reasons for the embrace of extremists' ideas and joining their

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8 See: Religious Doubts of ISIS by Imad Ad-Din Khayti "شبهات تنظيم الدولة – عماد الدين خيتي", Uncovering the Doubts of Extremists by Hamoud Al-Omri "كشف شبهات الغلاة – حمود العمري", and Modern Deviations in the Issues of Jihad by Dr. Rashid Al-Zahrani "الانحرافات المعاصرة في مسائل الجهاد - د. راشد الزهراني"

9 See:

- Ibn Abbas's Discussion with the Khawaij: Lessons and Parables, Dr. Mouin Abdul Qadi
مقال: مناقشة ابن عباس للخوارج.. دروس وعبر، د. معن عبد القادر

- Benefits from Ibn Abbas's Debate with the Khawarij, Hasan Abd Al-Hay
مقال: فوائد من مناظرة ابن عباس للخوارج، حسن عبد الحي

groups is in reaction to the spread of creedal and intellectual deviations in society, and the inability to remove or prevent them[10]

Examples of Ulema Institutions Confronting Extremism:[11]

Ulema institutions have organized to challenge extremist thought and protect Muslim societies from its effects and differentiate between it and the correct rulings of Islam after a number of global organizations have deliberately jumbled extremist ideas and Islamic rulings. These institutions have worked to classify a number of the groups and organizations that have worked in calling, educating and resisting against terrorism. The efforts of these conferences and resolutions are represented on the official international level and it has sway over the segment of society that listens to the discourse of semi-official institutions. Of the most prominent of these efforts:

First: The Resolutions of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy affiliated with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation

1- Resolution No. 128 (2/14) with regards to human rights and state violence
2- Resolution No. 154 (3/17) with regards to Islam's position on extremism and terrorism.
3- Resolution No. 163 (1/18) with regards to guidelines to a return to a civilizational approach in Islam.
4- Resolution No.166 (4/18) with regards to the phenomenon of frightening people away from Islam.

Second: Resolutions and Statements of the Islamic Fiqh Council affiliated with the Muslim World League and its conferences

1- The Holy Makkah statement published by the Council in its Sixteenth Gathering which was held between 21-27/10/1422 AH/ 5-10/1/2002 AD.
2- The Concluding Statement of the Muslim World League "Islam and Fighting Terrorism" in Makkah in the period from 3-6/5/1436 AH/ 22-25/2/2015 AD.

Three: The Muslim World League's efforts

1- Holding meetings with specialized Muslim entities to coordinate practical plans to address deviated thought.

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10 One of the biggest obstacles to fighting extremism are those responses to extremism that carry some degree of retreating from Sharia rulings, or emptying them of their content, due to the pressure of modern realities, or resulting from Westernized thought. What must be done is to challenge these types of responses and protect the youth from any effect they might have in falling into extremism.

11 See: The Role of Cultural and Ilmi Groups in Challenging Extremism... An Analytic Fiqh Study, Dr. Ali Qura Daghi "دور المجامع العلمية والثقافية في التصدي للتطرف.. دراسة فقهية تحليلية، أ.د علي قرة داغي"

2- Forming delegations of ulema and specialists to visit countries harmed by terrorism and meet with their authorities and explain the Islamic view to treat this phenomenon.

3- Cooperating with Islamic universities and research centers to determine the meaning of ambiguous concepts, and spread serious academic materials to sermon-givers, daees and interested youth.

4- Establishing a global body affiliated with the Muslim World League to confront terrorism by analyzing its motivations and causes and publishing research papers on it, suggesting practical programs to prevent it, and coordinating with specialized institutions in that regard.

5- The League published "The Makkah Declaration" which included five messages addressed to the leaders of the Ummah, its ulema, media and youth, and finally to the whole world, to fulfill its responsibility of advising the ummah and humanity, and in hope of changing the world's bitter reality.

Ulema institutes in the Syrian Revolution:

A number of ulema institutions took up the challenge of clarifying Sharia rulings in the face of the developments of the Syrian revolution. Their fatwas and declarations had an effect and trust, given their independence, moderation and embrace of the revolution and work to guide it. There then emerged between them an organization to conduct shared work which culminated in a council of coordination, The Islamic Body of Sham, the Union of Syrian Ulema, the Union of Ulema of ash-Sham, the General Body of Muslim Ulema in Syria, the Ulema of Aleppo Front, the Syrian Islamic Forum, and the Ash-Sham Union of Preachers

One of the first of their fatwas was: "Is the current conflict between the factions and ISIS fitna?" At the time it was unique in its dealing with extremist groups in terms of intellectually differentiating from them, uncovering the danger of their project and clarifying the Sharia rulings in dealing with them

Emergence of the Syrian Islamic Council and its Role in Fighting Extremism:

The Syrian Islamic Council was established with the concerted efforts of most Sharia institutions in Syria, and from different intellectual schools. One of this council's most important features was its independence to make decisions and the lack of its subjugation to a political or international institution. Of the most important of what the Council has done in confronting extremism:

1- Complete awareness of extremists' thought and projects and its danger for Syrian society in particular and Muslim societies in general. They made their vision in standing against them clear. For example, the seminar held by the council's Center for Studies with the title "Fighting Extremism," which concluded with

several recommendations on how to confront extremist thought, and represented the awareness of the council of its danger and necessity of fighting it.

2- Complete separation from these projects, and dealing with them wisely.

3- Releasing fatwas and statements in how to deal with these groups and the developments they produce.

4- Conducting academic seminars and meetings with different forces of the revolution to raise awareness of the danger of these groups.

The collection of fatwas on issues related to extremism have reached a total of 7 fatwas out of 41, which included the rules of dealing with these groups and their effects, as there has also been 30 statements out of 170 in commenting on the behavior of extremists related to the events of the revolution.

These fatwas and statements have met acceptance from the different forces of the revolution, as they represented the different Syrian sheikhs and ulema institutions, entrusted to be the Sharia representative of the revolution. Some examples of these fatwas:

1- One of the first of the council's fatwas was the (Fatwa on the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria Organization) and the statement (On the Falsehood of Declaring a Caliphate by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) which denied legitimacy to the organization, and it had a great effect in both the national and international media.

2- As was the (Fatwa on the Rulings of Marrying from Someone whose Name and Genealogy is Unidentified) which warned against marrying someone with an unknown name and genealogy, as are most of the extremists, and the risk it poses to the social fabric.

3- In order to determine the direction of dealing with extremists and ensure it does not lead to forbidden transgressions, the council released the fatwas (On the Inviolability of the Lives and Wealth of the Families of ISIS Fighters) and (Fatwa on Dealing with those Who Flee from the Battlefield) and (Ruling on the Fighting between the ISIS Organization and Kurdish Militias)

4- They also published the fatwa (Fatwa on the Ruling on Coordinating with the Turkish Government to Eliminate Daesh) and the statement (On Fighting with Turkish Forces in the Euphrates Shield Operation).

5- With the rise in the thought of Al-Qaeda and the different actions taken in its name, the council progressively released several fatwas stating the rulings related to its action, such as the fatwa (Domination between the Armed Factions) and the statement (On the Practices of some Factions after the Riyad Conference), and the statement (Statement on the Extremists' Crimes and Aggressiveness against the

Mujahideen), and recently the statement (Statement on the Necessity of Fighting the Extremists of Jolani and the Call to Return to the Authentic Revolution)

6- To Support the Moderate and Revolutionary Projects, it released the statements (Statement on the Covenant of Honor Among the Armed Factions) and (Statement to Celebrate and Support the Declaration of the "Syrian Revolutionary Command Council" Charter)

The union of Sharia institutions in the council resulted in no trusted scholar disputing the council in its stance against extremism, which led to the extremists lacking any sharia support from any well-known reference of knowledge. Note that in the Syrian case, the effect of religious institutions taking a unified stance against extremists and their not being able to take advantage of some of their supports or those silent against them meant they could not split the institution nor were their stances weak as is the case in many other places in the Islamic world.

The Opposite Effect of Institutions Affiliated with Regimes on Extremism and Extremists

The modern state seized the independence of many social institutions in general and especially religious institutions, as it worked to include them under its wing and install its supporters in positions in those institutions. For their part, these official institutions did not spare any effort in supporting the regime and standing beside them.

That the stance of official religious institutions helped in spreading extremism can be seen in even a cursory glance at extremist literature, a great deal of which is dedicated against these same institutions.[12] Extremist groups declared anyone who worked with these regimes as apostates and traitors. So too did the regimes spread these same claims against anyone who did not support them, and were as such a reason for extremism's spread

The stance of many of the official religious institutions aided in provoking extremism, such as:

1. Standing beside despotic regimes, and granting legitimacy to them, and giving a degree of holiness to the rulers and their decisions, making whoever disagrees with them to be disobedient Muslims who have "exited" from that of majority of Muslims. They further allowed for their blood and wealth to be trampled over merely for their opposition to these regimes. So too did the Syrian regime's official religious institution stand with it in categorizing the different groups and

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12 See: "Extremists' Conception of the State in Islam" "تصور الغلاة للدولة في الإسلام" for the their position towards the ulema in general.

trends of the Islamic opposition as being terrorists and "khawarij" and excusing their murder.[13]

2. A number of those institutions baptized the regimes' actions which were clear violations of and in opposition to the Sharia and essentially volunteered the rulings of religion to their desire. And so did they also deny the majority of issues affecting Muslims and looked at these issues from the eyes of the rulers and not their Muslim brothers.

3. Being silent about the extremist project to attract religious youth, such as what happened with the official Syrian religious establishment in their silence on Abu al-Qaqaa during the war on Iraq, when thousands of youth joined these groups at his incitement, and pretended to be unaware of these groups and their projects. It has also been established that the regimes in Egypt, Algeria and Iraq have involved themselves with these affairs before as well.

4. Standing beside foreign occupiers and excusing their interventions, as was the case with the religious institutions affiliated with the Syrian regime in their stance on Shia militias and Russian forces

These behaviors led many youths to:

1- Become far away from and ignorant of the correct rulings of religion, which made them vulnerable to the doubts of extremists when they manifested and spread.

2- The reactions of some of the youth resenting those sheikhs led them to embrace extremist ideas.

A vision to empower Sharia authorities in confronting extremism:

Based on the above, we can make several recommendations to strengthen and empower the role of Sharia authorities in confronting extremism:

1- Independence in their authority to issue decisions and not issuing them for political effects or benefits.

2- Their inclusion of all the schools of Islam to guarantee acceptance from all segments of society.

3- Being keen to display the right examples from the people of knowledge to advise and clarify the rulings of religion.

4- Taking the initiative to respond to extremists' doubts without hesitation or delay.

5- The ulema and seekers of knowledge being keen on being present on the ground and becoming closer to the youth.

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13 See: Jihad in Islam by Albouti "الجهاد في الإسلام - البوطي ", which attacked Islamic groups in general, which was welcomed by the regime and which it worked to publish and spread, in addition to Bouti's well-known stance on the revolution.

Second Paper: Criteria for Decision-Makers to Distinguish between Extremist and Moderate Armed Syrian Groups

Dr. Mohamed Salim[14]

Introduction:

The way extremism and terrorism are defined and described are often highly fluid and ambiguous, something which is sometimes intended and sometimes not. These descriptions are often generalized without a reference that would measure extremism's extent and its different degrees as based on clear standards. This situation is especially clear in Arab and Islamic countries, especially in light of the continuing absence of freedoms and sovereignty of law. This is because some dictatorial powers rely on this broadening of the concept of extremism and terrorism and keeping it open to multiple interpretations in order to use it against the different opposition groups.

In the Syrian case, since the first days of the peaceful protests, the regime's claims centered around fighting terrorism and extremism. The regime then continued with its Russian and Iranian allies to market propaganda through media outlets which classified different opposition groups as radical terrorist Islamic groups.

This paper tries to clarify the meanings of extremism in the Syrian context. It does so without cutting it off from the general regional and international context and tries to place clear and defined standards in order to differentiate the extremist groups among the ranks of the Syrian opposition[15] from the moderate ones through classifying them according to those standards. It will then try to shed light upon the transformation of some groups towards moderation and introduce the factors which aided in those transformations, as well as the degree of moderation they have reached. This is in addition to trying to discover the characteristics of extremist actions of non-religious groups, which can aid in making the role of the surrounding society's environment upon extremist life more clear.

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14 A researcher and Director of Relations and Business Development in the Syrian Dialogue Center. He has written several papers related to the subject for the center as well as other Syrian centers. He also participated with a paper related to the subject in the International Conference on Salafism that was held by the Forum for Arab and International Relations.

15 Our method of how we determined the criteria will soon be presented. However, it must here be pointed out, that though these criteria are only with regards to the Syrian opposition, that does not mean that it suffers from a great deal of extremism, rather the more violent and criminal extremism are in groups that support the regime, whether that be the cross-border militias, such as the different Iraqi and Lebanese Shia militias, or even the local militias which participated in murder and forced displacement of the local residents of areas supporting the Syrian opposition.

First: On the Concepts and Meanings related to Extremism

The meanings of extremism in general, without falling into a prolonged discussion on the details of the terms and their linguistic and political origins, are understood as being the opposite of moderation and moderateness. We find a clear use of the term "*al-ghaloo,*" the Arabic term for extremism, in the Sharia[16], although there is no use of the word "*al-tataruf,*" the other term used in Arabic to mean extremism, which is a modern concept and differs depending on the political context, and it is the one that relates to the concepts of moderation and being in the middle of the way, unlike that of "al-ghaloo" which is not for the most part related to religious issues in Islam.[17]

A number of ulema have defined "al-ghaloo" is "being excessive in and exaggerating something and crossing all boundaries in it" or "to cross the boundaries and go over them in something in praising or punishing more than what is deserved or something of the like."what we are something related to -It relates very clearly to [18] writing on here- the famous historical situation in Islam of the khawarij, who were extreme in their thought. The term in the current context has been conjoined with that of the political concept of "extremism," given the transformation of some extreme groups towards "global jihad," especially after the 9/11 attacks in 2011. The discourse has turned to center around that of "Islamic extremism," or "violent Islamic extremism" which overlaps with the meaning of terrorism, which is to

16 The term was used in Quran several times, such as in Surat An-Nisa "O People of the Book, do not go to extremes in your faith and do not say of Allah except the truth," and in the ahadeeth such as "Beware of extremes in religion for those before you perished only because of extremes in religion.," as narrated by Ibn Maja

17 Azmi Bishara in a research paper of his dwells on the dominant meanings of extremism at the current time through narrating the historical dimension of the term. He writes "the categorization has lost much of its legitimacy at several historical junctures due to not categorizing states with extremism and terrorism, and limiting the term to groups and organizations. A state does not become extreme even if killed civilians in Vietnam, Iraq, Ghaza or Lebanon. The state is in reality able to bomb from the air the other it deems to be a "terrorist and extremist"- and furthermore exist from being signified as being extremist (and its manufacturing terrorism), armies which cause mass destruction and mass murder of civilians with the argument that it does not target civilians, but rather its opponent who lives amongst them and takes them as civilian shields." Here it must be pointed out that defining in this matter and focusing on criminalizing organizations without states is one of the causes of extremism, as "jihadis" propaganda relies to a large degree on this. This can be seen clearly in Bin Laden's speeches after 9/11 and the alliance's military operation against Afghanistan. Bishara then gives a concluding definition of political extremism as "The extremist is the one who refuses settlements which can make co-existence possible and knows that this refusal could lead to civil war." This definition no doubt clearly applies to the Assad regime, whereas the international community, even with its knowledge of the unprecedented level of Assad's crimes, do not describe it as extremist, by considering it – as it seems- to be part of a state. It also does not seem to consider the border-crossing militias which support the Syrian regime as extremists either. See: Azmi Bishara, On So-Called Extremism, Siyasat Arabiya, Issue 14/ May 2015.

18 These are two definitions by Ibn Hajr Al-Asqalani and Ibn Taymiyya, respectively. See: Religious Extremism in the Life of Contemporary Muslims: A Study on the Manifestations and Concepts of Extremism and Fundamentalism by Sheikh Abdulrahman Al-Liwahyiq.

conduct violent tangible material operations as based on extremist beliefs. [19] These beliefs are issues of dispute and have great flexibility, and are the subject of great debate in general because of their politicization by regimes and governments, as many well-known Islamic authorities have lost their independence, influence and legitimacy among many different segments due to the success of many regimes in intervening in their work to raise the legitimacy of their own power. [20]

Second: The Framework and Context of the Criteria:

The essential aim of this paper is to attempt to place criteria to distinguish between the moderate armed groups and the extremist ones, through an induction of the Syrian experience from the beginning of the revolution until today.This discourse [21] is aimed at decision-makers[22] in general on the local, regional and international levels. Furthermore, it is necessary to aim to build a shared context with those with interests in general, [23] and depending on principles and criteria appropriate for decision makers. Given the difference among decision-makers themselves on these principles and criteria on the regional and international levels, the affiliation of a number of armed opposition groups to the Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, which has gained a relative political legitimacy in international forums as a negotiating party with an important voice in determining the destiny of Syria, has been taken into consideration. However, the standards and principles of decision-

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19 "On So-Called Extremism," Azmi Bishra, Ibid.

20 While the establishment of the modern state has meant the takeover of many societal institutions, it has especially affected the religious institution, as the Sharia "gradually lost some of the autonomy it had preserved under the classical system in which scholars were effectively independent unless they assumed judicial office." (The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State, Noah Feldman, pg.52) The worsening of this in light of dictatorial regimes, such as Gamal Abdul-Naser, who nationalized most of the resources, including the waqfs affiliated with Al-Azhar, which lessened its independence and strength as a reference in Egypt. This was accompanied by torture in prisons which led to the creation of the first cases of extremism and its spread to other countries. The books of ulema are filled with warning from getting close to Sultans in fear of losing their independence and dependency as a source in the eyes of the people. To see more on the establishment of Al-Azhar see: Al-Azhar: beyond the politics of state patronage, Rashied Omar, University of Notre Dame.

21 The criteria have been chosen based on observing, analyzing and studying the different factions affiliated with the opposition forces over the past few years.

22 What is meant is anyone who relies on information to take specific decisions based on that, whether governmental or non-governmental, those with interest in different regions, such as people in humanitarian organizations or local or international civil society organizations, politicians or military men in the Syrian opposition entities, or anyone who has interests in international and regional institutions.

23 What is meant is the differ people who evaluate or are interested in mentioned criteria and their application, such as decision-makers all the way to the different active national Syrian entities, which could use those criteria to evaluate the different opposition groups. It is worth mentioned that this principle was one confirmed as well by the Syrian Islamic Council.

makers who generalize terrorism to include all of the revolutionary forces have not been taken into consideration.

The determinants of the criteria of extremism in our cases can be summarized as follows:

1) Considering the meanings of religious extremism as according to Islam, according to what is agreed upon by independent religious references. Given that we are speaking on Syria, and in order to not branch off in our scope, we will rely here on the Syrian Islamic Council given its role as representing the unified religious reference in the Syrian context.

2) Treaties of consensus of the Syrian revolutionary and opposition forces, which includes the constitutional principles which Syrians in general have no difference with, such as the unity and independence of Syria, the principle of citizenship and their equal rights in front of the law.[24]

3) What Syrians and their religious references in general agree upon in terms of laws and international conventions, and the international institutions and bodies which the Syrian state is a signatory to before its take-over by the Baath regime, such as the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (previously Conference of Islamic Cooperation), and United Nations.

Third: Criteria to Measure Extremism to Distinguish between the Moderate and Extremist Opposition Groups

In security and policy circles close to decision-makers it is common to find widespread generalizations used to determine the extremism of factions, such as using Islamic symbols, such as: shouting Allahu Akbar during battle, covering one's face, long beards, using place-names (and especially Islamic ones) for last names, or using historically Islamic names for the names of factions, and so on of criteria that can be considered false and inaccurate[25] criteria in determining extremist groups.

Here, we should be clear that extremism is something relative and can raise or lower in its degree of the attributed property of extremism it possesses. We can summarize the criteria of extremism in our scenario into two main groups, the criteria of religious ghaloo (which most likely leads to violent extremism or terrorist operations or supporting them), and criteria of political extremism, which measures the extent of the degree to which their political positions are far away from the relative

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25 For example, representatives of the Free Syrian Army in Deir Ez-Zor were questioned by some foreign journalists on the extent of their difference from ISIS after the latter had seen some video clips of their fighters with long beards, shouting Allahu Akbar while fighting.

moderateness of the Syrian revolutionary forces and general Syrian population, compared to what is widespread and palatable politically on the local, regional and international levels.[26] We will also attempt to analyze the motivations of extremism in political positions, which could be due to intellectual reasons, if it was not intellectually connected to religious extremism, extremist groups' political or pragmatic goals, or creedal belief.

Based on that, we will assign the degree of severity for every criterion, so the faction will take a certain degree based on its adopted vision, statements of leaders, or practices. The total amount of points will be 100. Here, we must point out that this model in guided and preliminary weighting is very much capable of changing of developing with the ever-changing Syrian context.[27]

Naturally, most of those who are extreme in their beliefs or religion are also politically extremists, and most likely violent and connected to terrorist act. However, this does not apply to the political extremism of the Syrian armed opposition groups, which is not connected to the residue of religious extremism of some of them, but rather a lack of political awareness of most of them, a lack of understanding the regional and international context due to the weakness of their experience of…. , or giving too much due to the interests of military field interests in the near-future to the expense of long-term strategic interests.

Criteria of Religious Extremism:

They are, in turned, divided into criteria to intellectual reasons, and reasons related to practices.

First: Criteria of Extremism related to thought:

1) Extremism in Thought:

These criterions are decided by specialists in Sharia studies in universal independent Sharia bodies and institutions, such as the case of the Syrian Islamic Council and the affiliated bodies under it. Those who make takfir only on the basis of doubts also fall into this category: such as making takfir of all who work in the political process, exaggerating the concepts of Walaa and Baraa, raising small differences of opinion to

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26 During the conference, an expert in Sharia commented that taking the international and political criteria of categorization lightly is not only a political mistake, but also one in Sharia which forbade it as it would consider such a move as not avoiding these factors and pressures which affect groups and their people. Even if there are not specific textual evidence as such, such a conclusion can be reached through the fiqh of maqasid and mafasid.

27 It is very normal in research to present criteria and defend them first, then later measure upon them. As such, these criteria should be considered something like a recommendation capable of changing in the future.

the level of major theological differences. The takfir includes the different rulers of Islamic countries and their military and security services, and with the takfir-differing based on the degree of extremism- towards Sharia institutions and authorities, such as the takfir of Jabhat An-Nusra of the ranks and coalition of Syrians affiliated with the opposition,[28] and their takfir of the Turkish government,[29] not to mention Daesh's takfir of all the different Syrian political and military forces and factions whose they consider fighting to be "wars against apostasy."[30]

In general, extremism in thought seems connected with the spread of the ideology named "Salafi Jihadism," [31] with the necessity of pointing to the varying degree of Salafism over the vast range of Salafi groups.

It is also important to point here to the great breadth of thought and the pace of development within this school itself,[32] as it is one of the schools most prone to change and divisions within itself, which manifested clearly in the acceleration of events in Syria and Iraq after the birth of ISIS, its subsequent declaration of a caliphate, the separation of Jabhat An-Nusra from them. And extremist groups vary in their degrees of takfir and expressing it, as Daesh makes takfir of anyone who opposes it, including that of Jabhat An-Nusra which split off from it. And Jund Al-Aqsa, for example, comes close to Daesh in its level of takfir, but expresses it less often (it intersects with Daesh to a great degree)[33], whereas Jabhat An-Nusra and its leaders vary in extremism in kafir and expressing according to the opinions of their

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28 The leader of An-Nusra, Al-Jolani said "We do not deny that there are groups which you are fighting which have fallen into apostasy and kufr such as the army staff, the coalition and whoever participates in the project of a national army through which they aim to establish a secular government and eliminate the rightly-guided Islamic project. See: " أبو محمد الجولاني يرثي أبو خالد السوري ويكفر الائتلاف وهيئة الأركان، ويمهل " داعش" " خمسة أيام لتوقف تجاوزاتها وتحتكم إلى الشرع"، **عكس السير**.

29 See the International Crisis Group report "Tentative Jihad: Syria's Fundamentalist Opposition."

30 This is something well known from the media and intellectual campaign that Daesh would wage in its battles with different factions. You can see the clear statement of the organization's Sharia body clarifying the "apostasy" of the leader of Al-Jabha Al-Islamiyya: https://www.slideshare.net/greenbird7072/ss-38894201

31 See the section "Extremists' Excuses for Violence" which discusses intellectual extremism among all different sides, in "Extremists' Conception of the State in Islam: A Demonstration and Critique, Imad Ad-Din Khayti, al-bayan.ae

" مبررات العنف عند الغلاة"، تصور الغلاة لمفهوم الدولة في الإسلام: عرض ونقد.

32 A researcher specialized in Sharia studies who was reviewing the paper remarked that this in itself could be one of the criteria as it is particular to extremists, besides other particularities all of which come from the creedal side of extremists, such as monopolizing the truth and trying to force it on others by force.

33 It is the organization that grew out of the break out of a dispute between Al-Baghdadi and Al-Jolani and the split of their organizations into Daesh and Jabhat An-Nusra. Some fighters from both sides split off considering fighting between them to be a "seditious conflict," and established the "Jund Al-Aqsa", see "Organization of Jund Al-Aqsa... the Full Story" Ala Baseera website. "تنظيم جند الأقصى.. القصة الكاملة"، **موقع على بصيرة**.

leaders and their interests and position in the field, as based on positioning, it changed its name first to Jabhat Fath Al-Sham, and then Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham.[34]

The practical effect of extremism in thought is the permissibility of killing any who oppose you, according to a Sharia ruling whose meaning they distort "fighting apostates takes precedence over fighting the original disbelievers."[35]

We suggest considering this point as one of the most important criteria considering its danger, so that it takes 20 points out of the 100 in the general measure, which will be explained in detail soon.

2) Not Giving Consideration to Sharia References Other than Their Own:

The extremist forces consider the recognized Sharia authorities to all be court ulema and bad ulema and give their opinions no heed, not to mention some of the extremist organizations that declare them outside the fold of Islam entirely[36], something which is quite clear among "Jihadi Salafis" in Syria.[37] On the other hand, they consider their ulema from the Jihadi Salafism to be "independent" and those factions especially lean towards those who write on the site "Minbar at-Tawheed wa Al-Jihad" and similar sites, and as such given its importance, takes 8 out of 100 point.

3) Not accepting the Principles of Gradation and Forgiveness and Expanding the Meaning of the "Verse of Sword"

Extremists refuse to use the example of Islam and the prophet's tolerance with those he differed with for lengthy periods of time with the evidence of the "abrogation of the verse of the Sword", despite the recorded difference in interpreting it practically and do not benefit from the important sides and long periods of time of the prophet's life, peace and blessings be upon him, because of this one pretext,[38] leading them to consider conflict the only way to reform,[39] and it takes 4 points.

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34 To see the transformations in An-Nusra's discourse in detail see, "Transformations of Al-Qaeda's Discourse in Syria," Omran Center for Studies

"تحولات خطاب تنظيم القاعدة في سورية"، **مركز عمران للدراسات**
35 Cutting off a specific incident or Sharia ruling from its context to use it to build their specific interpretation of texts is a general practice of extremists.
36 See the chapter "Accusing All Ulema of Kufr and Treason and the Permissibility of Spilling their Blood," in "Extremists' Concept of the State in Islam: A Demonstration and Critique," Imad Ad-Din Khayti, Al-Bayan website; the chapter "Most Important Quotes of ISIS's Leaders through their Official Statements," in "Doubts of ISIS and Its Supporters: A Response" Imad Ad-Din Khayti, Ala Baseera website.

37 As an example of Salafi Jihadism's intervention in detailed Syrian political affairs, see Eyad Qunaibi calling the establishment of the Syrian National Council as a step towards fighting the Islamic project in Syria. His video clip caused great controversy at the time with statements and responses from Syrian Ulema.

38 A number of contemporary ulema have written on the issue, such as Yusuf Al-Qardawi and Shaykh Muhammad Sarour, see "Jihadi Concepts... On the need to correct the debate around the Verse of the Sword"

4) Refusing the Reality of Nation-States and Insisting Upon a Global Discourse

Through refusing the reality of the existence of the Syrian state, related to the refusal of reality and of stages and gradation, and refusing what the different Syrian sides agreed upon towards the establishment of a Syrian state of the "Founding Fathers," among whom were a large number of ulema and representatives of the Islamic current. We can also consider under this speaking of a direct effort for Islamic "emirates" in Syria or a Caliphate, and making takfir of all who adopt a national discourse considering an adoption of the "Sykes-Picot" system.[40] The index suggests for this four degrees. We can note here though the relative difference in this category, for example, stating the refusal of the reality of the Syrian state and the disbelief of Sykes-Picot will take four points (such as Daesh and such organizations), whereas pointing to both the international dimensions in addition to the national dimensions can take one or two points.

5) The Issue of Walaa and Baraa

It branches off from extremism in thought, and in the literature of those groups it reaches to the point of necessary open aggression or violence against states and global forces, and considering being aggressive against them as baraa, or hating for the sake of Allah, and a proof of being on the right path, and accusing any other group that any relation with a state as being "apostates and kuffar for their allegiance to the kuffar,"[41] as those groups mix between the beliefs of walaa and baraa, and political practices, as it requires them to manifest outward aggression to prove the correctness of their belief.[42] It is given 6 points.

IslamOnline Archives; "Power" by Muhammad Surur. You can see the Salafi Jihadists' published response "Stages of Legislation of Jihad," Minbar At-Tawheed Wa Al-Jihad.

39 They use as evidence the ahadith which mentioned "the victorious fighting group," and confirm that they are a "fighting group," such as the prophetic narration "there will remain a group from my nation who fight for Allah's command," especially as this hadeeth has many reports, some of which state they are in Syria and Jerasulem. Extremists often make fun of methods of peaceful or gradual resistance, see the statement by official spokesperson of ISIS Al-Adnani "Whose Religion is Peaceful Resistance?"

40 This was clear in Daesh's announcement first of a state and later a caliphate in Iraq and the Levant and Jahbat An-Nusra and similar organization's consistently using "Sham" rather than specifying Syria. Even Al-Jabha Al-Islamiyya which hinted in its document at a universal dimension was criticized by Eyad Qunaibi as being a "national project." This is considered excessiveness in religion in that it goes over the fiqh of what is possible and able. See "Al-Qunyabi and Searching for the Difficult Middle," Zaman Al-Wasl

41 Al-Adnani, ISIS's official spokesperson, "And let us hasten to fight, let us fight all of the armies of Earth, until religion is only for Allah in only of Allah's earth, and for all of the nations of the earth to gather against us." See the book "Doubts of ISIS and its Supporters: A Response," Imad Ad-Din Khayti, Ala Baseera.

42 Daesh fought with the "Northern Storm Brigade" early on using the pretext that the faction had met with the American Senator, John McCain. Then, Jabhat An-Nusra fought most of the Free Syrian Army Factions (approximately 35 factions) with the same pretext, whether the leaders of the two factions really believed

6) Applying the texts on the End of Times to their Reality

Extremist groups, and mostly the supporters of Daesh, readily use the prophetic narrations related to the end of times and to Syria's role in it in particular, especially those related to the North of Syria and Dabiq. Therefore, their control over the town had a special strategic importance for their supporters, causing a great disappointment for them after easily losing it to the Syrian revolutionary forces and the supporting Turkish army. Obsessing over prophecies of the end of time is considered in general to be an indicator of extremism in all religions. Many analysts and researchers have written on the effects of believing in Torah prophecies in the war on Iraq, and many extremist groups, whether Islamic, Jewish or Christian use the prophecies of the end of times for their political purposes.[43] It takes four points.

Second: Criteria for Extremism Related to Practice

It is only natural that extremist beliefs reflect themselves in behavior. Therefore, it is necessary to glance at the repetition of behavior and at systematic policy, and also comes from extremist convictions. Despite that, the index considers it as an indication of extremism (47) without being enough to determine it (here comes in the evaluation of placing points in the index), and perhaps most important of them:

1) Refusing to Enter into Alliances on the National Level
Extremist groups refuse entirely to enter into political coalitions with the other national bodies and entities to achieve their general shared goal,[44] and they vary in their degree of refusing non-political coalitions, such as temporary military alliances (operations room). Daesh, for example, refuses to enter into any alliance, and does not accept the existence of any other entity, whereas Jabhat An-Nusra accepts entering limited military alliances (operations room) with other Islamic factions without accepting entering into political coalitions under a comprehensive national umbrella, and most likely aims to hegemonize any alliance and benefit from it. The index also suggests for this one 4 points.
2) Refusing Different Political Initiatives and International Conventions on Principle:

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these ideas, or were using them to push their fighters to combat, the result is the same. Observers of the events, such as Hudhaifa Abullah Azzam, witnessed An-Nusra telling its fighters to considering the rest of the factions as apostates despite An-Nusra's denial of that. See "The Reality of Jabhat An-Nusra or Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham," Ala Baseera.

43 See for example in: "Jihadist Illusions: How the Dreams of Neo-Conservatives and ISIS Met" Wael Ali Nasruddin, and "The End of Times" Prophecies Driving Events," Mariam Tulic, ida2at website.
44 We considered it as religious extremism because in the Syrian case it is a refusal on principle of extremist creed, and because it also, practically speaking, when scrutinized is limited in Syria only to religious extremist groups.

This is a sign of extremism as this is a place for national consensus or near-consensus,[45] and extremist organizations vary in their degree of refusing it and expressing that refusal, as some refuse it with takfir of anyone who accepts it, and some refuse it with an indirect appeal to those who accept it. Extremist factions differ in their refusal of these initiatives on principle in line with their creedal extremism, and this does not include the other factions who struggle and become political extremists and refuse such initiatives due to motivations other than intellectual extremism, such as evaluating interests, such as holding on to some articles of humanitarian international law or not.[46] This takes 5 points in the index. Extremists groups take the highest points of 5, as they refuse these conventions on principle.

3) Using Special "Islamic" Banners

Most extremist groups are distinguished in their refusal of the independence flag (the unified flag of Syrian revolution), by pointing out that it is a flag brought by colonization and instead use flags containing religious words or phrases. Other groups have also adopted this same practice without that being accompanied by intellectual reasons. This also takes four points in the index.

4) Large Numbers of Foreign "Muhajireen" and taking up Positions of Responsibility in Organizations:

In accordance with the refusing the reality of nation-states and national borders, extremist groups consider the mujahireen to have put in a big effort and left their countries for "jihad and raising the word of God," it is often accompanied by using a place-name from his place of origin. It takes 6 points.

5) Committing Terrorist Operations and Assassinations against Other Factions:

It is a practice resulting from extremism in thought or fatwas on killing (based on interest)[47], and much of their literature encourages fighting other factions with the argument that fighting apostates is more important than fighting original disbelievers, that is to say that they consider all other competitors from other factions and bodies as apostates. It takes 6 points in the index.

6) Rushing to Declare a State or Emirate and Claiming to Apply Sharia:

Such as Daesh with its declaration of an Islamic State in Iraq, and then to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and then as a caliphate, as well as what other factions did in terms of oppressive practices again the local residents under Sharia pretexts. It takes 4 points from the index.

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45 We considered it as religious extremism for reasons similar to the previous criterion.

46 During the conference, a researcher specialized in international law pointed out that some moderate Syrian opposition groups had violated some rules of International humanitarian law, despite those groups accepting for their ranks to be trained in practices of respecting international humanitarian law.

47 Some extremist groups have excused fighting other factions not just with apostasy, but also with the pretext of "killing for interest." See "Hudhaifa Azzam accuses Al-Jolani of killing and lying," Arabi 21. " حذيفة عزام يتهم الجولاني بالقتل والكذب ويدعوه للمباهلة"

7) Using Suicide Operations and Expanding the Rule of "Human Shields"

Despite that there is a ruling on "human shields" in fiqh, it came in specific contexts with a narrow application, however extremist groups use it in whatever way they can to achieve their goals even if that led them to kill innocent civilians. (they claim they can kill civilians as they are all human shields)[48] Therefore, many extremist groups use suicide operations[49] -which they call martyr operations- in public places and markets.[50] It takes five points in the index.

Third: Criteria on Political Extremism:

By political extremism in this specific context, we mean adopting political stances in opposition to the general political consensus among Syrians, without that meaning anything in relation to truth in the religious sense.[51]

No doubt that the criteria for political extremism are achieved among a number of different factions which adopt extremism, however, other factions could be extremist and not adopt religious extremism as a policy, for example through adopting certain ideas or practicing specific practices for reasons that could be related to thought (partial influence of extremist thought) or for pragmatic interests,[52] such as effort of some extremist faction to strengthen military coordination on the field, or to prevent aggression from those other groups. They could also do it to prevent influence from extremist groups, who use ideological extremities to influence the youth who tend

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48 See the chapter "Killing Muslims under the pretext of them being Human Shields" in "Extremists' Conception of the State in Islam: Demonstration and Critique," Imad Ad-Din Khayti, Al-bayan.

49 During the conference, a member of the political office of the Syrian factions, as well as the executive director of a research center criticized this criterion as there is a political and fiqhi difference of opinion in it. The author of the paper responded that he only speaking on the specific Syrian case, which in his opinion shows a real link between extremism and using humans in suicide operations. Despite that there is a fiqhi difference on the legitimacy of suicide or martyr operations, the metric is speaking of exaggerating in these operations and taking them as a general method even when there is no clear need for them, and without taking into consideration the conditions that ulema have placed for them to be legitimate.

50 The explosions that targeted a security building in the Christian Qusaa neighborhood in Damascus were among the first explosions which Jabhat An-Nusra used in 2012, and a number of innocent civilians were among the victims. Jabhat An-Nusra informed the Christians, with no apologies, that they were not the ones targeted, and warned Syrian that they must be cautious of living besides security branches or the regime's offices. See: Tentative Jihad: The Fundamentalist Opposition in Syria, International Crisis Group.

51 Despite its difference with truth in the religious sense, it could also be considered religiously as the better option, in that it is not practically compatible with the vast majority (in the case that it differs from the truth relative to some people), therefore it would less worse than the corruption of disunion due to some scholarly stubbornness on what should be the truth, according to one of the Sharia scholars who attended the conference and discussed the paper.

52 During the conference, a specialist in Sharia pointed out that he had witnessed a case of one of the biggest Syrian factions changing their flag in 2013 from the revolution's flag to a new "Islamic" one, based on the leadership's desire to prevent splitting up of the factions' ranks and their being influenced by extremist groups.

towards black-and-white approaches (ultimate good vs. ultimate evil- Islam and kufr, etc.)[53]

Here it is beneficial to mention that we are placing criteria for political extremism as one criterion for extremism because we are speaking of military factions, and not political parties. They furthermore have the ability and potential to oppose what they refuse politically with weapons.[54] Perhaps the most important:

1) Not Accepting the Principle of Citizenship:

This could be due to a lack of political maturity,[55] or holding on to fiqhi vocabulary that return to centuries before the modern state, thinking they must still be applied in the current age. This could also be due to partial influence by some extremist thinkers and Salafi Jihadism, as some of the factions were influenced in their conception of the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim Syrians, and they gave a vague or ambiguous answer to the question of the adoption of the concept of citizenship, something which was agreed upon by the "founding fathers" or the Syrian state, made up of different classes of the Syrian people, Islamist and non-Islamist.[56] The caution of those factions and other on this concept could be way because of this concept's use by other parties, such as attacking the agreed-upon essentials of Islam in the name of citizenship, or the courtship of minorities with special privileges more than their rights as citizens. It takes 6 points in the index.

2) Negative Stances towards Minorities:
Naturally, the global discourse and lack of recognizing the reality of the nation would reflect in extremists' views towards minorities, as some express the need to

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53 Extremist groups rely upon this discourse in their methods, and they use some prophetic narrations, such as one speaking of at the end of times two groups, one with "belief with no hypocrisy in it, and a group of hypocrisy with no belief in it."
54 During the conference an Arab researcher commented that the Arab context is similar to "radical" parties in Switzerland and other European countries, which is not in itself a problem in extremism motivating to violence, but rather the problem is that extremism which does push to violence even in legitimate resistance.

55 Despite the presence of religious motivations for a position against citizenship, those religious motivations are not among religious extremism, as the difference of opinion in the subject of citizenship is one of real disagreement between the ulema of Sharia. However, the taken opinion in preferred politically given the general Syrian consensus on it since the establishment of the Syrian state.

56 During the conference, a Sharia specialist was of the opinion that it should be presumed that the Syrian society has progressed beyond these issues since the fifties after the different representatives of the Syrian society, including some from the different Islamic movement, settled upon citizenship. Another Sharia researcher suggested to be a bit more detailed in the subject, as to refuse citizenship on principle is a clear sign of extremism. However, whoever is more detailed and see a lack of equality for Muslims with non-Muslims in some rights and duties, then it's a fiqh issues still open to discussion.

deal with the "people of the book" according to rulings of jizya,[57] or rulings of fighting and killing other minorities (such as the Alawi sect), whereas others do not have a clear stance for the same previous reasons which cause them to oppose the concept of citizenship.[58] It takes 4 points.

3) Not Giving National Consensus Importance:

It is something almost axiomatic for some religious extremist factions, indeed on the contrary, there may be groups less extremist in thought, but which are far from the general national consensus under the influence of various motivations, such as turning a blind eye to some of the extremist groups in order to coordinate with them to achieve administrative or military field aims. It takes three points in the index.

4) Working and Coordinating with Extremist Factions:

The lowest level of which is military participation in shared operation rooms against the Assad regime, such as the case of Jabhat An-Nusra's coordination with different factions. This is also to varying degrees, as it is sometimes a necessity in some cases (such as previously in Deraa), and sometimes is a higher administrative degree, such as the operations rooms of Jaysh al-Fath, as civilian bodies ruling over areas in the name of Jaysh al-Fath and the factions affiliated underneath it sprouted out of the operations room, which includes that of Jabhat An-Nusra. Lately, many problems have arose between the factions in the operations rooms of Jaysh al-Fath due to the lack of shared ideology, differing over interests, which finally led to the end of this alliance.

It should be taken into consideration that Jabhat An-Nusra forced itself militarily on different factions, especially in Northern Syria. Naturally, decision makers cannot be completely comfortable with a faction which has coordinated with an extremist faction. Despite that, it is important to distinguish between factions, which depending on the context, are forced to military coordinate with Jabhat An-Nusra, given the priority of fighting the regime, and avoiding clashing with extremist factions in conflict.

One of the apparent way of coordinating and cooperating with extremist factions is to sign political statements with them, and it is the highest ranking in giving those

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57 A Sharia-studies researcher commented "If extremist groups made takfir of Muslims and permitted the take of their blood and wealth, and killed them and drove them from their homes based on their own desires, then their targeting of non-Muslims is a continuation of this policy of considering Muslim governments and states as apostates. They left the way of the ulema in dealing with non-Muslim minorities, as the jizya is not the problem, rather in the way of forcing it and the conditions of doing so."

58 During the conference, a Sharia-studies researcher pointed to the necessity of not exaggerating in our approach to the issues or constitutions and citizenship according to Western demands, rather national demands are what should first and foremost be taken into consideration.

factions legitimacy, compared to simple military coordination ,[59] some of which had specific contextual motivations, such as the feeling of the weakness of the political oppositions, or the weakness of their awareness of the nature of extremist factions (especially in the first stages) and the consequences of coordinating with them, and the highest level or coordination were alliance with extremists due to systematic advocacy, which was clear in the sympathizing and advocacy of the Jund al-Aqsa faction, for example, of Daesh. It takes 7 points in the index.

Standards of Extremism	Standards of Religious Extremism	Related to Thought	Excessiveness in Thought and Issues of Faith	20
			Not Giving Consideration to Sharia Authorities other than their Particular Reference	8
			Not Accepting the Principle of Islam's Expansion and Gradation and Excessiveness in Abrogation in "Verse of the Sword"	4
			Refusing the Reality of Nation-states and insisting on a global discourse	4
			Excessiveness in Issues of Walaa and Baraa	6
			Applying the texts on the End of Times on their reality and their interpretation	4
		Related to Practice	Refusing to Enter Alliances on the National Level	4
			Refusing the political initiatives and international agreements on the principle (of it being international human rights law and international conventions)	5
			Using Special "Islamic" Flags and Banners	4
			The Participation of a Great Number of "Muhajireen" or Foreign Nationals and Giving them Responsibilities in Organizations	6
			Participating in Operations of Assassination and Terrorizing other Groups	6
			Rushing to Declare States and Emirates over	4

59 Here the importance of the context of place and time should be mentioned, as in the beginning of the revolution, Jabhat An-Nusra had not yet manifested its true face. A member in the political branch of one of the factions pointed to during the conference that in the beginning An-Nusra was praised by many of the figures in the Syrian opposition, including even secular ones such as Michel Kilo.

			People and Claiming to Apply Sharia on Them	
			Executing suicide bombings and expanding the rules of using Muslims as human shields in war	5
	Standards of Political Extremism		Not Adopting the Principle of Citizenship	6
			A Stance Against Minorities	4
			Working and Organizing with Extremist Groups	7
			Not Giving Any Importance to National Consensus	3
Total Points				

Classification:
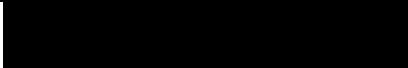
100 - 80	⬛	Highly Extremist
80 - 50	🟥	Extremist
50 - 35	🟧	Medial Extremist
35 - 10	🟨	Slightly Extremist
10 and below	🟩	Moderate or Close to Moderation

Fourth: Partial Transformation towards Moderation (A Case Study):

The "Ahrar Al-Sham Islamic Movement' is the most prominent faction whose leadership is partially influenced by the Salafi Jihadist current, to gradually transform into a local faction more moderate and pragmatic, something which in the previous years has also witnesses internal conflicts within wings of the party.

For from the beginning of the establishment of the " Ahrar Al-Sham Battalions" (it later changed to Ahrar Al-Sham movement) its differentiation from the faction of the Free Syrian Army was clear, its raising of special banners in its headquarters, as well as its attempt to enter into other similar factions who had a methodological affiliation with the "Islamic Liberation of Syria," the most prominent of reasons was Jihadi

Salafi influence, and its saw many changes in the document of its new formation and its components.[60]

Later, and following Baghadi's announcement of his state, the movement was at first quiet about the announcement, it then released a relatively late statement, and it carried a light blame for the announcement considering it an improper interpretation. And until that time, the movement was maintaining its Salafi jihadist affiliation with a local dimension, and this influence by Salafi jihadist thought can be noticed through the discussions of the movement's leadership with them through social media, and attempting to placate them since they were an influence upon their ranks, to the point of accepting intervention into administrative affairs related to alliances and consensus with other factions.[61]

After Baghdadi's state increased in its different violations against the general factions, and even the movement itself especially, in addition to regional advice and pressure,[62] led to moving some of prominent intellectual references, the most prominent pioneer of which was Abu Yazan Al-Shami, one of the leaders in the

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60 The preparatory period for the establishment of "The Islamic Syrian Liberation Front" saw long ideological discussions, such as the Islamic state, the meanings of kufr and iman, the permissibility of entering parliaments, and making takfir of those calling for democracy (especially from the Dawn movement which was more extreme than the other battalions at the time), then the issue of "Firas Al-Abassi," the leader of the Mujahideen's Shura Council (whose connection to ISIS later appeared) who was shot by a revolutionary. And the battalions of Ahrar Al-Sham and its allied factions adopted Jabhat An-Nusra's demand of turning over those responsible, and demanded the exit of Al-Farooq battalions from the front for future consensus despite the many mediations, however the rest of the factions (liwa al-Islam- Liwa At-Tawheed- Saqour Al-Sham remained with Al-Jabha's project against the Al-Farooq battalions which were allied with the Free Army and were one of the biggest battalions at that time.

61 As Ahrar Al-Sham entered into the "Islamic Front" coalition with other factions, such as Jaysh Al-Islam and Saqor Al-Sham, and the leaders of both factions were members in the Free Syrian Army-affiliated Council of Thirty. Eyad Qunaibi, the Jordanian Salafi militant ideologue said "If it were left to us, we would have decided to only form the front after its leadership had left the council (affiliated with Free Syrian Army). However, it was established. We ask these leaders, whom we judge to truly love Allah and be sincere in the desire to establish his religion, to abide by it itself bound itself to in the founding document of not being affiliated or holding external loyalties, and therefore, its discontinuing being a member in a council headed by this man who had declared his affiliation to the international system (the Chief of Staff at that time, Salim Idris). We ask Allah to see their speedy secession from this council." After that, both Zahran Alloush (leader of Jaysh Al-Islam) and Issa Al-Sheikh (leader of Saqoor Al-Sham) left the council with explanations, which made clear their methodological and ideological differences and Qunaibi's critiques. This statement came only two days after Qunaibi's statement. See: Announcement of Jaysh Al-Islam and Saqoor Al-Sham's Secession from the Body of Staff" "Support of Guiding and Directing the Revolution in the face of the Syrian Baath Regime" and ""Al-Hamawi... The Islamic Front's Covenant is not a Constitution," Zaman Al-Wasl. And for Qunaibi's statement see: "With Regards to the Islamic Front, Dr. Eyad Qunaibi, Official Channel.
"إعلان تأكيد انسحاب جيش الإسلام وصقور الشام من تحت مظلة هيئة الأركان"، **دعم ترشيد وتوجيه الثورة في وجه نظام العبث السوري**، و "الحموي..
ميثاق الجبهة الإسلامية ليس دستوراً"، **زمان الوصل**، وكلمة القنيبي: "بخصوص الجبهة الإسلامية"، **د. إياد قنيبي، القناة الرسمية**.

62 Especially before the Announcement of the Charter of Revolutionary Honor, as both Turkey and Qatar warned the movement of the possibility of being categorized on terrorist watch lists.

movement who was one of the bravest in critiquing Salafi Jihadist thought, to the point that he apologized to the people of Syria and their fighting for entering them into whimsical battles, and differentiating due to Salafi jihadist affiliation.[63] Ahrar Al-Sham also signed onto the "Charter of Revolutionary Honor"[64] which focused on "depending on Syrian ranks" and limited any military action to within Syria, without any references to the Muhajireen, with emphasis on "establishing a just and free state" without pointing to an Islamic state whose sovereignty would lie in God's law.[65] In addition, it pointed to the necessity of the Syrian revolution to respect human rights. This declaration led to an angry reaction from Jabhat An-Nusra" through its own counter-declaration.[66]

After the death of Abu Yazan and Hassan Aboud as well as others from the founders and leadership, the movement remained captive of the consensus between the reformist trend and the extremist trend,[67] and the political wing (influenced by reformists) put in effort to re-position the movement as a national one through declarations and discourse, and writing in foreign newspapers, except it found itself in confrontation with the Sharia office influenced by extremists. The dispute between the two flared following the Riyad conference, which the movement pulled out of due to the decision of the leadership, and without the contentment of the political wing. Furthermore, following the movement's participation in the "Euphrates Shield" operation with the support of the Turkish army, which led many of the

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63 See "Abu Yazan's Apology to the People and Mujahideen of Syrian and a Message to Al-Maqdisi and Al-Muhaysani," Abu Yazan Al-Shami Encyclopedia "**موسوعة أبو يزن الشامي**"

64 Hassan Aboud read the charter on the air beside one of the leaders of the Free Syrian Army (Al-Muqdim Abu Bakr) clearly symbolizing the new transformations in the movement's way of thinking. See: Announcement of the Revolutionary Honor Document to the Combat Battalions in all Corners of the Nation." Al-Jazeera.

65 The Islamic Front's founding convention which the movement published pointed to "building an independent state in which sovereignty belongs to Allah's haneef law," and "The Islamic Front does not participate in any political process in which sovereignty does not belong to the Sharia." The convention also possessed stances on the Muhajireen, democracy, secularism and the civil state. It described the muhajireen as being "brothers who supported us in Jihad, and their efforts are appreciated and thanked. It is upon us to uphold their honor and Jihad," which radically differs in discourse from the Convention of Revolutionary Honor, and the latter was the most prominent transformation in the discourse of Ahrar Al-Sham. See: The Full Text of the Islamic Front's Charter," Zaman Al-Wasl. "النص الكامل لميثاق الجبهة الإسلامية"، **زمان الوصل.**

66 "An-Nusra's statement on the Charter of Revolutionary Honor… We do not want a state except it is established upon the Sharia's sovereignty." Zaman Al-Wasl "النصرة تتحفظ على ميثاق الشرف الثوري.. لا نريد إلا دولة تقوم على حاكمية الشريعة"، **زمان الوصل.**

67 The researcher Ahmed Abu Zayd is of the opinion that the references of the late leadership had a great influence in allowing for the usual political taboos of the extremist trend, which is true relatively, however the movement, as we have said, remained practically speaking a hostage to extremists in general, and its attempts to adopts a nationalist discourse remained futile. See: Ahmed Abu Zayd, "Ahrar Al-Sham After a Long Year," Omran Center for Studies, 20.

Sharia authorities in the movement to go independent.[68] The previous examples (especially the withdrawal of the movement from the Riyad conference) as an example of the movement's political extremism with its withdrawal from the conference spite the general consensus on it among the different revolutionary and opposition forces, including the military factions for the first time. It appears that this did not happen for ideological reasons, but rather the movement's care of the extremist trend within it, which was afraid of clashing with Jabhat An-Nusra, with whom it had some methodological closeness to. Despite the reformist trends in the movement taking care of the extremist trends with the goal of preventing splitting up to the degree of sacrificing national consensus, the extremist ranks later split into what they called "Jaysh Al-Ahrar," which was later incorporated under Jabhat An-Nusra under the new name of "Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham," which later split away from.[69]

We can conclude, then, that the killing of the leadership of the movement's first rank (more than fifty people) in an obscure explosion played a role in preventing the promised complete transformation towards moderation.

Fifth: Features of Extremism among Other Trends:

Disagreements between Islamists and secularists began early after the beginning of the Syrian revolution in 2012, as certain figures affiliated to the Syrian opposition released the "Cairo Documents," which several institutions and figures of the Syrian revolution criticized, such as the president of the Syrian National Council at that time, Mutaz Al-Khatib, considering it a plot against the Muslim majority and the religion of Islam, such as other civilian[70] and military[71] institutions force the

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68 Based on interviews and discussions conducted by a researcher with activists. See: Mazen Ezzy, Global
مازن عزي، "حروب الاندماج: الانقسام على صدع أحرار الشام"، **معهد العالم للدراسات**. Centre for Studies

69 See "Mutual Consensus on Jaysh Al-Ahrar… Division or Protest?," in Enab Baladi ."جيش الأحرار".. آراء متباينة حول "
انشقاق أم اعتصام؟"، **صحيفة عنب بلدي**.

70 The Political Bureau of the Islamic Body of Al-Sham was of the opinion that the Document of National Convention was decided against the people's will the secularization of the state and the Disqualification of the Sharia, as made clear through the following:

1-The absence of any article in the document presented of any reference to the Syrian state's Islamic identity, despite that the vast majority of Syrians are Muslims. It is of great irony that the constitution of the present regime does hold an article on the state' Islamic reference in its third article.

2-The weakness of the Syrian state's connection to the Muslim world except through historical roots and human values, while also confirming its Arab and global affiliation, and the articles on that are as follows:

On Arab affiliation, it says "Syria is a part of the Arab nation, its people is connected by the ? of culture, history, and greater interests and aims and a shared destiny."

secularization of the state through the absence of any reference to an Islamic identity.[72]

Some books which generalized in their accusation of extremism and accusing different Islamic movements of being similar to Daesh also manifested, even accusing Arab secular figures of being similar to Daesh.[73] There also manifested some books that exaggerate in making Islamic groups carry all of the responsibility for the tragedies that have befallen the Syrian people,[74] and it could be understood that some of them come as reactions to religious extremism or an attempt to benefit from the "Post-Arab Spring" international pressure on the Islamic movement. Nonetheless, there should be a balance and moderation with the effort to confront extremism, considering that it only gives birth to more counter-reactions which could lead to only feeding extremism among different sides.

On global affiliation it says, "Syria is a part of the global system and is a founding member of the United Nations and its affiliated institutions."

Whereas on the Muslim world, the phrased used was "the Syrian people are connected to the all of the other Muslim people through shared historical roots and human values adopted from the revealed religions." See: الموقف (3) "وثيقة العهد الوطني"، Stance (3), "Document of National Convention," The Islamic Body of Al-Sham. هيئة الشام الإسلامية.

71 The Political Bureau of the Syrian Liberation Front (a coalition of the largest Syrian armed groups) criticized the Cairo Conventions, and published an announcement it published on its official website. It appears to no longer be available at the current time.

72 During the conference, a Sharia researcher and qadi, pointed out that at the beginning of the Syrian revolution, some of the secular elites began to present their ideas in a "Daesh-like" manner by announcing their "refusal of the Quran's rule which was revealed 1400 years ago," and that that led to reaction from the Syrian popular base, which is religious at its core.

73 See the article "As to not be "secular" Syria: A word of truth from which a long war is wanted," Orient.net "كي لا تكون "علمانية" سوريا كلمة حق يراد بها حربا طويلة"، أورينت نت.

74 See the article "The Muslim Brotherhood's Role in Making the Syrian Revolution Fail," Al-Souri Al-Jadeed. "دور الإخوان المسلمين في إفشال الثورة السورية"، السوري الجديد.

Sixth: Appendices:

الجبهة الإسلامية السورية

حركة أحرار الشام الإسلامية

المكتب السياسي   بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله والصلاة والسلام على رسول الله وبعد فقد فوجئنا كما فوجئ الكثير بما صدر عن أبي بكر البغدادي أمير دولة العراق الإسلامية من إعلان الدولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام ثم ما تلاه من رد لأبي محمد الجولاني المسؤول العام لجبهة النصرة المتضمن إعلان البيعة للدكتور أيمن الظواهري أمير تنظيم قاعدة الجهاد .

ونحن إذ نرقب باهتمام تداعيات الحدث لما له من أثر بالغ على الساحة الداخلية والإقليمية فإننا نسجل نقاطاً هامة تبين موقفنا تجاه ما صدر طارقين في ذلك باب النصح والتذكير :

1- إننا في حركة أحرار الشام الإسلامية نحرص على صب الجهود وتوحيدها في معركة دفع العدو الأسدي الصائل إذ لا شيء بعد الإيمان أوجب منه ولا شيء يقدّم عليه.

2- إن لله سنناً شرعية وقوانين كونية لإقامة الدول الراشدة من أخلّ بما حرم من عاقبتها كما أن الإمامة على المسلمين لابد لها من قدرة وسلطان تحصل بهما مصالح الإمامة وهذا ما لايتوفر في أي من الفصائل والكتائب العاملة على الأرض.

3- إن الإمارة وسيلة وضعت في الشرع لجمع الكلمة ووحدة الصف وليست مقصداً بعينه وما جرى من إعلان البغدادي لم يجمع المتفرقين ولا ألّف بين المتنازعين وهذا ما يسمى فساد الوضع عند علماء الأصول وهو اقتضاء الوضع الذي رُتّب عليه الحكم نقيض ما عُلّق عليه.

4- إن إعلان الدولة هذا لم يُشاوَر فيه أحد من أهل الحلّ والعقد في هذا البلد من علماء ربانيين وفصائل مخلصة عاملة على الأرض من الإسلاميين وكتائب الجيش الحر وهذا يفتح سبيل التفرد في إطلاق المشروعات المصيرية في البلد كلّ بحسب ما يراه.

5- كذلك فإن كلا الإعلانين سيجر إلى الميدان أطرافاً جديدة ولايخدم – فيما نرى – ثورة شعبنا وجهاده , والأصل عدم توسيع دائرة الصراع والتركيز على محاربة نظام الأسد وإيقاف عدوانه وتقويض أركانه .

6- نرى في كل من الإعلانين تقديماً لمصلحة اجماعة على مصلحة الأمة، وهو ما كان ينتظره النظام ليبرر عدوانه وبغيه على شعبنا الجريح. وإننا لما رأينا تفاني وبسالة جبهة النصرة في المعارك وإحسانها وحسن تعاملها مع الناس كان الظن فيهم استمرار الغيرية والإيثار وتقديم مصلحة الأمة.

وبناءً على ما سبق فإننا نتوجه لكل من الطرفين أن يستشعروا عِظَم الحدث وخطورة أقلمة الصراع بهذه الطريقة وإشراك أطراف أخرى وهذا ليس احتكاماً لحدود مصطنعة بين أبناء الأمة ولكنه قراءة موضوعية لمعطيات الواقع وتقديم لما نراه مصلحة المسلمين وجهادهم ضد طاغية الشام.

أخيرا إننا في حركة أحرار الشام الإسلامية إذ نقرر ما سبق فإننا نعلن أن قيام دولة إسلامية راشدة تقيم العدل والقسط بين رعاياها هو هدف نسعى إليه بوسائل مشروعة ونراعي في ذلك مقتضيات الوضع وحالة الأمة المُغيبة عن دينها في هذا البلد طيلة نصف قرن من الزمان. نسأل الله تعالى أن يلهمنا الرشد و السداد في القول و العمل وأن يبرم لأمتنا أمراً يرضاه إنه ولي ذلك و القادر عليه و الحمد لله رب العالمين.

يوم السبت الواقع في 1434/06/24 الموافق 2013/05/04

بيان حول إعلان دولة العراق والشام وردود الفعل عليه

تعلن جبهة تحرير سورية الإسلامية عن استغرابها واستهجانها للخطاب الذي نشر على مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي، وما ورد فيه من إعلان إقامة دولة العراق والشام ، وكأن إعلان إنشاء الدول يكون عبر وسائل الاعلام، ومن مجاهيل لا يعرفون .

وليس عبر تحرير البلاد من نظام فاجر كافر دمر البلاد والعباد ..

كما نبدي استغرابنا، لهذا النهج الحزبي الضيق، لأناس بعيدين عن ساحات جهادنا، ولا يدركون واقعنا، ومصالح ثورتنا المباركة، فيقيمون علينا دولة ونظاما من دون استشارتنا وأميرا لم نؤمره، ولا نعرفه، ولم نسمع عنه إلا في وسائل الاعلام ..

ونحن في سورية عندما خرجنا وأعلنا جهادنا ضد النظام الطائفي خرجنا لإعلاء كلمة الله ، وليس لأن نبايع رجلا هنا أو رجلا هناك، ونفتئت على بقية إخواننا المجاهدين، وشعبنا المنكل به الصابر الصامد المحتسب، أو أن نفرض عليه شيئا فوق إرادته، أو نستبق النتائج قبل أوان حدوثها، وكأننا في مضمار خيل، أو محفل انتهاب! يجب أن لا يكون من أهدافنا السعي الحثيث وراء السلطة، أو انتهاب المراكز والكراسي،

إنه لن يخدم شعبنا وأمتنا مبايعة من لا يعرفون شيئا عن واقعنا، بينما لا تزال معظم مدننا محتلة، وعصابة الإجرام قائمة تعيث في طول البلاد وعرضها فسادا، ودماء شعبنا تنزف! ، فليس هذا هو الوقت المناسب لإعلان دول، أو توحدها مع أخرى، دون ان تكون حقيقية مرهوبة معترفا بها على أرض الواقع ..، وسبحان الله الذي قال: (خلق الإنسان من عجل)..

أيها المجاهدون الصادقون انصروا الله ينصركم، اصدقوه في فعالكم يصدقكم في وعده لكم، ولا يكن جهادكم للدنيا وسعيا وراء المناصب، ولا تتعجلوا المراحل، ولا تطلبوا من أمتكم ما لا طاقة لها به، ولنأخذ العبرة من تجارب كثيرة في بلادنا الاسلامية، انتهت الى غير ما نحب بسبب التعجل، و قلة الحكمة والروية، أو بسبب النزاع المفضي إلى الفشل كما قال تعالى (ولا تنازعوا فتفشلوا وتذهب ريحكم) ..

وإننا نرى فيما ذكر ما يكفي لبث النزاع والشقاق في صفوف المجاهدين في وقت عصيب، ومحاولة لدمج الصراعات في المنطقة، بما يخدم ما يريد المجرم بشار الاسد من محاولات اشعال المنطقة، والاستقواء علينا بالقوى العالمية بحجة الحرب على الإرهاب ..

أيها المجاهدون: إن جبهة تحرير سورية الإسلامية تدعوكم إلى كلمة سواء، أن تكون كلمتكم واحدة، وصفكم واحد ورايتكم واحدة، وهي راية إسلامية، تمثل ما عهد عن بلاد الشام في تاريخها الطويل الذي يشهد به علماؤها، الذين أخرجتهم للأمة، وهم من رسم لها الوسطية والاعتدال منهجا سليما وطريقا قويما ..

كما ندعوكم اليوم إلى ميثاق واحد يحفظ على البلاد أمنها وعلى المجاهدين جهادهم، ويحقق ما حلم به الشهداء وقدموا أرواحهم زكية لأجله، ويحفظ الدم السوري، وينشر العدل بين جميع السوريين.

ولسنا بحاجة إلى مناهج مستوردة، أو فهم جديد لدين الأمة، فالرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول: (تركتكم على المحجة البيضاء ليلها كنهارها لا يزيغ عنها إلا هالك) .. ولا نريد مزايدة لأحد على أحد!..

الله الله في دماء المسلمين المعصومة، الله الله في حرمة الاقتتال، الله الله في السوريين وفي بلادهم المباركة.

ألا هل بلغنا ... اللهم فاشهد ...

جبهة تحرير سورية الاسلامية

وقد نمق أبو عيسى كلامه في "تغريداته" مرة بوعي المراحل، ومرة بحمله على السياسة الشرعية.

ومن جهة أخرى، فإن أبا عيسى أنزل "تغريداته" بعد أن افتضح أمره بنشر تصريحاته الكفرية على حسابه في الشبكة، فلم تكن "تغريداته" إن زعم أنها توبة له، منزَّلة من تلقاء نفسه، وإنما أتى بها كرد على ما افتُضح من كفره، وهذا شبيه بأفعال الزنادقة، فالزنديق هو الذي يعلن توبته بعد الاطلاع على كفره، قال العدوي في حاشيته: "الزنديق: أي الذي تاب بعد الاطّلاع عليه" [٣١٤/٢].

أما قول أبي عيسى في "تغريداته": (أما ما نحن عليه فميثاقنا في الجبهة واضح بَيِّنٌ)

فقد سبق أن تكلمنا عن حقيقة هذا الميثاق من الناحية الشرعية فلا متعلَّق له به.[٣٣]

فإذا تقررت ردَّة أمراء ما يعرف بالجبهة الإسلامية؛ كأبي عيسى الشيخ رئيس مجلس الشورى، وزهران علوش القائد العسكري، وحسان عبود رئيس الهيئة السياسية، بما تقدم من مناطات كفرية كتولي المرتدين والكفار وتصحيح مذهبهم وغير ذلك. فليعلم أن كل من التحق بهؤلاء المرتدين بعد العلم بحالهم وقاتل تحت رايتهم فحكمُه حكمُهم سواء بسواء، فلا خلاف بين أمة التوحيد في حكم من صار مع المرتدين وأعداء الدين، في أنه من جملتهم وحكمَه حكمُهم.

قال ابن تيمية رحمه الله في حكم من التحق من المسلمين بالتتار المظهرين لشعائر الإسلام: (وكل من قفز إليهم من أمراء العسكر وغير الأمراء فحكمه حكمهم، وفيهم من الردة عن شرائع الإسلام بقدر ما ارتد عنه من شرائع الإسلام) [الفتاوى: ٢٨/٥٣٠-٥٣١].

وقال رحمه الله: (وبهذا يتبين أن من كان معهم ممن كان مسلم الأصل هو شر من الترك الذين كانوا كفارا، فإن المسلم الأصليَّ إذا ارتد عن بعض شرائعه، كان أسوأ حالا ممن لم يدخل بعد في تلك الشرائع، مثل مانعي الزكاة وأمثالهم ممن قاتلهم الصديق، وإن كان المرتد عن بعض الشرائع متفقها أو متصوفا أو تاجرا أو كاتبا أو غير ذلك، فهؤلاء شر من الترك الذين لم يدخلوا في تلك الشرائع وأصروا على الإسلام، ولهذا يجد المسلمون من ضرر هؤلاء على الدين ما لا يجدونه من ضرر أولئك.) [الفتاوى: ٢٨/٥٣٤-٥٣٦].

فإذا تقرر هذا فليعلم أن حكم الردَّة لا يطَّرِد عندنا في أفراد وأتباع ما يسمى بالجبهة الإسلامية، إلا بعد

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٣٣ – راجع ما قلناه عن الميثاق سابقا، وسنفرده بدراسة مستقلة إن شاء الله تعالى.

علمهم بحال رايتهم المتمثلة في أمرائهم، فلا يحكم بردّة أعيان هذه الطائفة إلا بعد علمهم بحال أمرائهم وردّة هؤلاء الأتباع يكون من جهة اتباعهم المرتدين من أمراء ما يسمى بالجبهة الإسلامية؛ فالقاعدة أن التابع له حكم المتبوع، وهذه التبعية والمشاركة لهؤلاء الأمراء ردّة عن دين الإسلام، فهم كالطائفة الواحدة في الأحكام الدنيوية وكذلك في الأخروية.

قال تعالى: ﴿وَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا إِنَّا أَطَعْنَا سَادَتَنَا وَكُبَرَاءَنَا فَأَضَلُّونَا السَّبِيلَا ۞ رَبَّنَا آتِهِمْ ضِعْفَيْنِ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ وَالْعَنْهُمْ لَعْنًا كَبِيرًا﴾ [سورة الأحزاب: الآية: ٦٧ ـ ٦٨].

وقال تعالى: ﴿كُلَّمَا دَخَلَتْ أُمَّةٌ لَعَنَتْ أُخْتَهَا حَتَّى إِذَا ادَّارَكُوا فِيهَا جَمِيعًا قَالَتْ أُخْرَاهُمْ لِأُولَاهُمْ رَبَّنَا هَؤُلَاءِ أَضَلُّونَا فَآتِهِمْ عَذَابًا ضِعْفًا مِّنَ النَّارِ قَالَ لِكُلٍّ ضِعْفٌ وَلَكِن لَّا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾ [سورة الأنعام: الآية ٣٨].

قال الإمام القرطبي رحمه الله: (﴿قَالَتْ أُخْرَاهُمْ لِأُولَاهُمْ﴾ أي آخرهم دخولا وهم الأتباع لأولاهم وهم القادة.) [الجامع لأحكام القرآن: ٧ / ٢٠٥].

وقال الإمام الماوردي رحمه الله: ﴿قَالَتْ أُخْرَاهُمْ لِأُولَاهُمْ﴾ يعني الأتباع للقادة؛ لأنهم بالاتباع لهم متأخرون عنهم، وكذلك في دخول النار تقدم القادة على الأتباع.

﴿رَبَّنَا هَؤُلَاءِ أَضَلُّونَا فَآتِهِمْ عَذَابًا ضِعْفاً مِّنَ النَّارِ﴾ يريد بأحد الضعفين عذابهم على الكفر، وبالآخر عذابهم على الإغواء....

فأجابهم الله قال: ﴿لِكُلٍّ ضِعْفٌ﴾ يعني أنه وإن كان للقادة ضعف العذاب، لأن أحدهما بالكفر، والآخر بالإغواء، فلكم أيها الأتباع ضعف العذاب، وهذا قول الجمهور) [النكت والعيون: ٢/ ٢٢٢].

وختاماً فهذه كلمات نكتبها إلى كل طالب للحق متحرٍ له من جنود الجبهة الإسلامية الذين كان يخفى عليهم حال أمرائهم، فإلى هؤلاء نقول:

يشهدُ الله تعالى أننا نرجو في كلامنا هذا أن نبذلُ لكم من النصيحة ما نعتقد أنها براءة لذمتنا أمام بارئنا، ولأننا نحرصُ على أن نكون سبباً لهدايتكم عملاً بوصية رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم لعلي رضيَّ الله عنه حين قال له: (لَأَنْ يُهْدَى بِكَ رَجُلٌ وَاحِدٌ خَيْرٌ لَكَ مِنْ حُمْرِ النَّعَمِ)[٣٤].

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٣٤ ـ رواه الإمام البخاري.

وإنَّ من النصيحة لكم كشفُ أحوال القائمين على أمر هذه الجبهة من أمراء وقيادات؛ لتكونوا على بصيرة من أمركم وتقفوا على زيف دعواهم، فالفرق شاسع بين ما يَدَّعُونه من العمل على تحكيم شرع الله تعالى كما يزعمون، وبين ما يخفونه من الولاءات لطواغيت المنطقة الذين يسعون إلى إقامة دولة خاضعة لإملاءات الغرب، ولكن بثوبٍ إسلامي.

فاحذر يا عبد الله أن تكون جندياً لأمراء مرتدّين عن دين الله تعالى، فيجعلوا منك وقوداً لمعارك تحقق مآرب الغرب الكافر وأذنابهم.

وإنه يوشك أن تتجلي غمرات هذه الأحداثِ وتتكشفَ الحقائقُ، حتى نرى عيانا ما أخبرنا به نبينا صلى الله عليه وسلم فيما صح عنه أنه قال: **(حَتَّى يَصِيرَ النَّاسُ إِلَى فُسْطَاطَيْنِ فُسْطَاطُ إِيمَانٍ لاَ نِفَاقَ فِيهِ وَفُسْطَاطُ نِفَاقٍ لاَ إِيمَانَ فِيهِ)**[35].

وإنكم اليوم تقفون بين هذين الفسطاطين، فانظروا إلى أي الفسطاطين تتصرفون وفي زمرة من تحشرون؟

أما أنتم أيها الأمراء فإننا نذكركم الله تعالى، وندعوكم إلى إعلان توبتكم والبراءة من ردتكم الواضحة الفاضحة، ما دامت التوبةُ ممكنةً وبابها مفتوح.

فإن العبد إذا ألمَّ بذنب فاعترف به ثم تاب، تاب الله عليه، كما جاء في صحيح مسلم عنه صلى الله عليه وسلم أنه قال: **(فإن العبد إذا اعترف بذنب ثم تاب، تاب الله عليه)**.

ووالله لرجوعكم إلى الحق بالتوبة والإقلاع عن الكفر، خيرٌ من تماديكم في الباطل الذي لا يعقبُه إلا سخط الله ثم خزي الدنيا والآخرة.

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٣٥ – أخرجه أحمد ١٣٣/٢ وأبو داود برقم ٤٢٤٤ وغيرهما من حديث عبد الله بن عمر رضي الله عنهما.

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Third Paper: A Reading of some of the Experiences of the Syrian Opposition Forces with Extremist Organizations

Mr.Abbas Shareefa[75]

Introduction:

The experiences of opposition factions in dealing with extremist forces have varied according to region or faction. While they have differed in type, most of the factions' experiences began with cooperation and ended with confrontation and conflict. While the factions' experience with Daesh was the clearest and the quickest to transform from a policy of containment and trying to divide up to "confrontation and conflict," this was not the case with their experiences with other extremist factions such as Jabhat Nusra, Jund Al-Aqsa and the Turkistan Islamic Party, as their experiences with them passed through phases and different models before arriving to open conflict.

Despite the success of the opposition factions in eradicating Daesh from Eastern Ghouta and the Western countryside of Aleppo, the Idlib governorate and number of other regions, it made a mistake in its dealing with the Al-Qaeda affiliated "Jabhat An-Nusra," and other extremist factions such as Jund Al-Aqsa and the Turkistan Islamic Party, which was accompanied by a transformation of some of the Salafi Jihadi groups towards a relatively moderate and national discourse.

This paper aims to shed light on the experiences of factions in confronting and dealing with extremist thought and factions with the aim of extrapolating beneficial lessons through demonstrating the practice and discourse of different factions with regard to confronting extremist projects and discourse. By doing so, we hope to extrapolate "the best practices" in politically and intellectual confronting extremist discourse and extrapolate the most important mistakes which likely led some youth to be influenced by extremism.

This paper theorizes that the relationship between the armed factions and extremist organizations passed through many paths and transformations in position and proceedings, beginning with welcoming and cooperation, passing through tensions and disputes and security confrontations, to a final separation and comprehensive military confrontation. This paper is unique in that it attempts to analyze the experiences in confronting extremist thought and dealing with it to determine conclusions of different policies and their positive or negative effects.

Methods and Samples of the Study:

1- The faction of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front as a popular revolutionary faction had a long experience in conflict with Daesh, and then with Jabhat An-Nusra and Jund Al-Aqsa.

2- Jaysh Al-Islam as a coherent faction military and ideologically in conflict with extremist thought and factions, succeeded in almost entirely wiping out Daesh, and relatively so that of Jabhat An-Nusra from Eastern Ghouta.

3- Jaysh al-Fath as a case of high coordination between a group of revolutionary factions: Ahrar Al-Sham, Jaysh Al-Sunna, Faylaq Al-Sham, Liwa Al-Haq, Ajnad Al-Sham; and two extremist organizations of Jabhat An-Nusra and Jund Al-Aqsa.

4- The Noor Ed-Din Zengi movement as an experience which experienced partial success in confronting Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham's project.

Study Problems:

1- The great number of cases of coalitions and divisions and number of the factions' projects.

2- The mix of ideological social factors with politics, in drawing the nature of the relationship between the factions and between them and extremist organizations.

3- The lack of official statements and journalist interviews, most likely due to the crisis the factions are in, especially on the nature of the relationship between the factions and extremist organizations, as the relationship is at its core one serving pragmatic causes and the faction's continued existence.

1-Experience of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front in Dealing with Extremist Thought and Factions:

The Syrian revolutionaries front is a military alliance which formed in December between several groups and factions under the Free Syrian Army including under it more than 15 factions,[76] and the front was strangely classified under the moderate opposition.[77] Several Western newspapers even described the Syrian Revolutionaries Front as an appropriate alternative to the Assad regime.[78]

It would always declare that its aim was the fall of the Syrian regime, and would not fight anyone else, and its leaders declared that he would not fight any of the Islamic factions other than ISIS which began its aggression against the Syrian Free Army.[79]

On October 26, 2014 clashes broke out between the Syrian Revolutionaries Front and Jabhat An-Nusra in the Habl Az-Zawiya region of the Idlib countryside. Jabhat an-Nusra was successful in forcing its control over those regions, which mean the loss of the Syrian Revolutionary Front's primary stronghold in Northern Syria in November 2014.[80]

1-1- The Reasons which Motivated An-Nusra to Eliminate the Syrian Revolutionaries Front:

Despite An-Nusra's justification that the primary reason for its attack upon on the Syrian Revolutionaries Front was the "corruption" spread among the faction on the military level in terms of storing up weapons and not opening up fronts against the regime, and on the civilian level in terms of the tolls they would take from civilians while allowing cars carrying cash towards Turkey. However, this was a mere justification for the other real reasons that motivated An-Nusra towards this attack, which we summarize as follows:

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76 The front was in the beginning of its establishment part of the following factions: The Military Council in the Idlib Governorate, The Gathering of Battalions of Syria's Martyrs, Union of Free Zawiya Brigades, the Ansar Battalions, the Battalions of the Coming Victory, The Seventh Group, Riyad Al-Saliheen in Damascus, Special Assignments Brigade of Damascus.
See: Announcement of The Syrian Revolutionaries Front Establishment at the following link:
https://bit.ly/2R0XTuh
77 This was partially due to that the Syrian Revolutionaries Front at the time was seen as a reaction to the establishment of the "Islamic Front," which included extremist factions, whereas the establishment of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front was limited to only factions affiliated under the Free Syrian Army, and did not carry the same "Islamic" ideological background which the "Islamic Front" brandished.
78 David Ignatius: In Syria, a rebel with a cause, The Washington Post, March 13, 2014, link:
https://wapo.st/2H1Qvh1.
79 From an interview with the leader of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front with Alouni's interpretation,
https://bit.ly/2U4J6kj
80 A video message from Jamal Maruf to Al-Jolani, https://bit.ly/2S0oex7

1-The War over Resources: With the end of combat with Daesh, the Syrian Revolutionaries Front lost its resources in the Shaer oil field in Hama countryside, which used to bring immense sums of money. It replaced these resources with collection barriers at the Turkish-Syrian border to collect money from oil buses that smuggle oil to Turkey. An-Nusra also lost the most important of its oil resources after the defeat of its organizational branch in Ash-Sharkia and the loss of the Konyo field to Daesh. It began to search for resources to cover its increased expenditures. Here An-Nusra's attention was towards the border region in Harim, Sarmada, Salqin, and Darkush, which the Syrian Revolutionaries Front controlled, hence its pretext of a war against corruption when it was, in fact, searching for resources to fund its special project.

2-The Revolutionary Leadership Council and War of Projects: It was after the war between Daesh and the factions ended, that the latter felt the need to a unified project that would protect the revolution's gains.

The essential building blocks of the project of the Revolutionary Leadership Council which included in its ranks more than 100 factions, the most important factions existing at that time agreed upon it, and the Syrian Revolutionaries Front was a part of this project which was announced on 11/29/2014 in the city of Gaziantep.[81] The Syrian Revolutionaries Front was searching for a military alliance that would stop An-Nusra's desire to devour it,[82] however the Revolutionary Leadership Council did not act in an institutional manner, and the Syrian Revolutionaries Front was therefore eliminated form its own backyard without movement from the other factions.[83]

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81 Announcement of the Council of Revolutionary Leadership's Establishment, https://bit.ly/2ASTK6s, an interview with the leader of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front on the formation of the Council of Revolutionary Leadership, https://bit.ly/2RUSedS.

82 The leadership of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front could sense An-Nusra's aims through several indicators, such as the intensification of An-Nusra's media campaign against them and the previous aggression which target its presence in the border regions.

83 The factions' stance on the announcement of the war against the Syrian Revolutionaries Front, revolved between silence and publishing announcements calling for a Sharia court, or for military force. Not a single faction present in the north announced its stance beside the "Syrian Revolutionaries Front."

The ganging up against the Syrian Revolutionaries Front happened through delusions, most of which did not belong to Jabhat An-Nusra at least at surface level. An-Nusra resorted to this style to demonstrate that any demand of accountability from "the Syrian Revolutionaries Front was actually from the people, however after eliminating the Syrian Revolutionaries Front, An-Nusra officials began to publish things related to the front's corruption to excuse its aggression, such as the following:

A clip attributed to Jamal Maruf and his controversies as told by a member of his entourage, https://bit.ly/2DrfpEJ

A clip of a mass grave attributed to Jamal Maruf that was discovered in Jabal Al-Zawiya, https://bit.ly/2FFByB9

3-The Existence of an Extremist Trend within An-Nusra that desired Revenge from Jamal Maruf: After the majority of military factions-from them the Syrian Revolutionaries Front- entered into open confrontation with Daesh in the beginning of 2014, that gave birth to a reaction of many of the elements, whether those that remained inside "Jabha An-Nusra" which refused then to enter any battle and took the role of being neutral or was inside some of the faction and which had seeds of extremism.

Most of those elements which hated the other factions and sympathized with Daesh, took refuge in "Jabhat An-Nusra" which formed a group very extreme and a great amount of whom pushed for revenge from the other factions, so that the leader of An-Nusra could take advantage of this group to get rid of other factions and work on building an "Emirate."

1-2- The Pretext of Combat between the Syrian Revolutionaries Front and Jabhat An-Nusra and the end of the Revolutionaries Front:

The majority of extremist factions, among them Jabhat An-Nusra, were successful in carrying out any rebellion through media which would mobilize their forces before any operation rather than using security means. This is what it resorted to in its dealings with the Syrian Revolutionaries Front and is where it spread its justifications for aggression, which are:

1-Accusation of Corruption and Dealing with Foreign Intelligence Services and Aggression against Jabhat An-Nusra:

The declared pretext from the leadership of Jabhat an-Nusra for its conflict with the Syrian Revolutionaries Front was their corruption, thieves and dealing with foreign intelligence services.[84]

The failed and cold battles of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front on the military camps of Wadi Ad-Dayf were also great media material for Jabhat An-Nusra,[85] to accuse it of dealing with the regime and of passing food to his troops in exchange for money.[86]

In the same context, Jabhat An-Nusra took advantage of the bad behavior of the elements of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front and amplified them to mean

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A video of Jabhat An-Nusra clear out an underground weapon store of Jamal Maruf, https://bit.ly/2T4xVYL.

84 Al-Jolani said in an audio interview with the Al-Manara Al-Baydaa' affiliated with Jabhat An-Nusra: "Jamal Maruf transgressed against the people of Jabal Al-Zawiya and An-Nusra elements there, and he protected a number of spies and bandits."

85 The factions waged several failed battles against Wadi Dayf and Al-Hamadiya, such as the battle of Al-Bunyan Al-Marsoos in 4/2013, and the Qiyamah battle on 07/16/2014, and the One Army in 8/9/2014.

86 Jabhat An-Nusra focused on the Syrian Revolutionaries Front to the exception of the rest of the factions which we are participating with in battles, as the factions which participated in Wadi Al-Dayf were near 32 in number.

"corruption" through the Sharia lessons that were begin given to its soldiers, in addition to the sermons which legitimized the getting rid of the faction.[87]

2-Searching for the revolutionary Abi AbdulAziz Qatri and Manufacturing Victimhood: Jabhat An-Nusra accused the Syrian Revolutionaries Front and specifically Jamal Maruf, of killing "Abu AbdulAziz Al-Qatri" to rally the muhajireen and some extremist factions such as the Jund Al-Aqsa faction, which saw Al-Qatri as a revolutionary and their murdered leader.[88]

After the military and media campaign by Jabhat An-Nusra, it began rebelling against one of the biggest factions of the Free Syrian Army in Jabl Az-Zawiya and in all of Syria.[89] It began by controlling the border regions in Harim, Sarmada, Salqin, and Darkush, as An-Nusra expelled the Revolutionaries Front's battalions from that strategic region without any memorable reaction from the Syrian Revolutionaries Leadership, except for some cases in Sharia courts, and the tensions between the two sides remained, until Jabhat An-Nusra decided to finish them off from their stronghold in Jabl Az-Zawiya.

1-3- Analysis of Syrian Revolutionaries Front Experience in Dealing with Extremist Factions: The Factors leading to its Failure:

The experience of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front represented the first of confrontations with extemists, as Jabhat An-Nusra was able to completely eliminate one of the biggest factions of the Free Syrian Army. The questions that begs itself is

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87 An-Nusra's media instrument, which would have an essential role in all of its following combat operations, began to put the responsibility on the Syrian Revolutionaries Front for the failure of all the battles in participated in due to its corruption and lack of desire or ability to face the regime.

See for example, Hizub Tahrir's statement on it, as an example of their support for An-Nusra against the Syrian Revolutionaries Front: https://bit.ly/2Sbmgu2.

88 Huzaifa Azzam witnessed the combat that happened between Jabhat An-Nusra and the Syrian Revolutionaries Front, and during the combat between the Syrian Revolutionaries Front and the Free Syrian Army on the one hand against ISIS, the narratives on ISIS media was that Jamal Maruf was murdering the muhajireen. Here, the leader of Jund Al-Aqsa, which was neutral, visited Jamal Maruf to ask him not to kill the muhajireen, and during this visit Al-Qatri was killed in Jamal Maruf's house.

See Huzaifa Azzam's testimony at the following link: https://bit.ly/2MAdJvw

It was later discovered that Al-Qatri was accidently murdered in Jamal Maruf's house by a man who children had been killed by ISIS and mistakenly that Al-Qatri belonged to the organization.

89 The countdown for conflict with the Free Syrian Army began after the Emir of Jabhat An-Nusra, Abu Muhammad Al-Jolani, speech was leaked, after Daesh was besieged in the Northern and Western countryside of Aleppo in March, 2014 with the presence of some of An-Nusra's youth in a military camp in Northern Aleppo countryside, including that of the Sheikh Al-Muhsini, in which he confirmed that his intent was to "establish an Islamic emirate in Syria that would collect Zakat and establish justice and fight the corrupt so that Allah the Almighty's Sharia be established."

why did the Syrian Revolutionaries Front fail in confronting Jabhat An-Nusra? Was the strategy that the Syrian Revolutionaries Front followed a failed one? And why did it stop in confronting extremists?

1-3-1- The Factions' Disharmony and the Lack of a Social Base:

Despite some charitable activities and the aid to residents that the Syrian Revolutionaries Front used to give,[90] it was unable to attract a social base in Jabl Al-Zawiya to its ranks or at the least gain their sympathy and defense. We believe that one of the most important reasons that led to that were the ill behavior of its battalions and groups, and the presence of other faction's projects which were competing with the "Syrian Revolutionaries" which prevented them from being able to expand its influence in the Jabl Az-Zawiya region. The villages there were divided between factions, with several factions inside even one village, which made it easier for An-Nusra to take advantage of the factions' sensitivities and divide the loyalty of the people.[91]

In the same social context, there were also some families and social components which supported the regime and had taken up arms for it, and lost their sons to the revolution, causing them to hate and desire for revenge against it, and found joining extremist groups as a useful way for revenge and regaining their social reputation they had lost at the beginning of the revolution due to standing with the regime. [92]

1-3-2- Expansion in Quantity at Expense of Quality:

Jabhat Tahrir Al-Sham greatly increased in number and in geographical spread, and this increase in number reached to 20 thousand fighters,[93] and a geographical spread over the north and south, at the expense of the strictness of its administrative structure which remained fragile, and at the expense of ideological homogeneity of the soldiers, especially in relation to the component that would hesitate to confront any project in conformity with the revolution's goals.

This intellectual and organizational fragility was exposed in the first attempt of rebellion that the faction witnessed, as not only were the allies of the Syrian Revolutionaries Forces let down by the Syrian Leadership Council and its affiliated

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90 The Syrian Revolutionaries Front Aid Organization distributing aid to the people of Kafrouma in the countryside of Ma'rat al-Nu'man: https://bit.ly/2HzoUFS.

91 Al-Jolani mentioned in an audio message that "The combat should not be depicted as only being between Maruf and An-Nusra, as two battalions from Saqoor Al-Sham and two battalions from Ahrar Al-Sham and Jund Al-Aqsa, and a number of people from Jabl Al-Zawiya, also participated in it." See: https://bit.ly/2S6ny9I.

92 According to field information obtained by the researcher, the reports point to more than 400 regime operatives in Jabal Al-Zawiya at the beginning of the revolution.

93 According to an interview conducted by the researcher with one of the leaders of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front on 12/19/2018

factions and the factions that support the SRF, but the inaction came from the leadership within the faction, as it did not fight with the leader of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front except for the Martyrs of Syria Brigade was formed in 2012 and that was the end of the faction.

This is what makes us say that the Syrian Revolutionaries Force was finished without almost any war, and the leadership was not able to convince its soldiers of the legitimacy of its battle with Jabhat An-Nusra, for several reasons related to the consciousness and creed of its soldiers and the leaders who were programmed only to fight the regime, the expansion of quantity at the expense of quality, and the unpreparedness to fight people who appear to be externally religious, even if they were aggressors and extremists with a project in opposition to the revolution.

1-3-3- Lack of Revolutionary Consciousness:

The fall of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front came in a context in which "Islamic ideology" was on the rise among the factions to the point that many of the ranks of the Free Syrian Army and Islamic faction would see Jabhat An-Nusra as a faction closer to them in ideology and thought than that of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front. This was to the point that some of them would not defend themselves against An-Nusra considering it to not be targeting the troops and only the leadership.

Furthermore, the nature of that stage which witnessed fierce battles between the revolutionary factions and the regime, the factions were assessing building a shared military means and its divided Jabhat An-Nusra and the Syrian Revolutionaries Front in terms of media, which did not realize then the danger of its political project. Perhaps the problem of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front was that it was the first victim of Jabhat An-Nusra at a time when its danger had not yet been discovered.

1-3-4- Foreign Influence:

A majority of the leaders of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front came to be convinced, even if unaccounted, that there was a foreign actor who wanted to restrict the scene to being between only two types: the Islamists and the regime, and did not desire a third party, that is, the Free Syrian Army. There were great benefits for the Islamic factions to end the Syrian Revolutionaries Front and get rid of a competitor with great spread and regional and international support, even if this end came at the hands of the Jabhat An-Nusra, with the factions thinking the aggression would end there and not come to them.

In addition, the Syrian Revolutionaries Force was the biggest faction in the Free Syrian Army, with a large spread over the South in Deraa capturing attention, and pointing to the danger of this faction which possessed a strong presence on the

ground, especially, from many of the supporting states who did not want big factions in the Syrian revolution.

1-3-5- Failing in Testing Reactions:

An-Nusra did not begin its hostilities against the Syrian Revolutionaries Front in the latter's center in Jabl Al-Zawiya, but rather tested first the reactions from the other parties. It began by breaking battalions affiliated with the Syrian Revolutionaries Front along the borders of the region of Harim-Salqin-Dirkosh, it then moved ? and permanently, and the center of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front did not move to respond with its troops or battalions, but rather sufficed with raising a case in the Sharia courts that to this day has not been held. This gave Jabhat An-Nusra the indication of the fragility of the interconnection between the Syrian Revolutionaries Front' components and the lack of a fighting spirit were they to target their headquarters in the future.

1-3-6- Discourse Not Being Applied with Practical Programs:

The discourse of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front distinguished itself with a clear national discourse with the essentials of the Syrian revolution in terms freedom, democracy and the right of the Syrian people to determine its destiny and the build the state it wants.

But this discourse produced for foreign media did not transform into educational programs for the rank soldiers and leadership of the lower level, and the lessons which aimed at the regime revolved around Sharia positions on Jihad and fighting regimes.

The Syrian Revolutionaries Front did not work to produce a group of intellectuals who could produce the political material to educate the soldiers, such as what the Fastakim Union in Aleppo did for example, it sufficed with depending on the military power of its troops, which deprived the fighters of any ideology against any extremists who target the Syrian revolution and its project and aims.

1-3-7- A Failed Media Campaign for the Battle:

Despite Jabl Az-Zawiya being a well-fortified place which the leadership of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front took advantage of during the conflict with An-Nusra, it did not have great effect, as many of the battalions refused to go out to confront An-Nusra, because they had no conviction in the battle.

In the media treatment, the repeated appearance of the leader of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front, walking in front of the camera and simply improvising, carrying his rifle strangely and with a wireless device, gave a clear indication of the confusion among their ranks and the lack of strength holding the components

together, and the leader's appearance had a degree of raising the low morale and sending a message to his troops.[94]

1-3-8- Relying on Mediators and Choosing the "Sharia Court":

The Syrian Revolutionaries Front was dealing with the demands of An-Nusra by appealing to the Sharia committee, and by sending unannounced mediators to Jabhat An-Nusra, to the point that the leader of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front put himself in the difficult position to swear and announced oath to the Jabhat An-Nusra, according to the witness Dr.Hudhaifa Azzam.[95]

The leadership of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front also refused to announce their differences on the media, due to the advice of some shuyookh for different reasons, the most important of which was avoiding sedition and focusing on fighting with the Assad regime.[96]

The leadership's reliance on mediators and forming Sharia courts and committees,[97] which An-Nusra took advantage of to gain time, whereas the front was waiting for these initiatives to give fruit in stopping An-Nusra which was advancing on the ground and already deciding the battle.

The troops not wanting to fight against An-Nusra almost made them lose any military pressure to force An-Nusra to obey the Sharia court. After the besieging of

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94 The leader of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front Jamal Maruf threatens Al-Jolani and Jabhat An-Nusra, https://bit.ly/2CNf3GR.

95 See the following link https://bit.ly/2MAdJvw
96 It came out during a meeting between Jamal Maruf and one of the leaders of Faylaq Al-Sham that the shuyookh did not want any sedition in light of the regime army's attacks, and were fearful of how the battles would affect the project of the Council of Revolutionary Leadership. See the following link: https://bit.ly/2MAi7dY.

97 Al-Jabha Al-Islamiyya suggested an initiative to place a limit to the ongoing conflict between Jabhat An-Nusra and the Syrian Revolutionaries Front that would focus on an immediate ceasefire and exchange of hostages.

The initiative carried the signatures of the head of the Shura Council and leader of the Saqoor Al-Sham battalions, Abu Eesa Al-Sheikh. Jabhat An-Nusra demanded they retreat from the city of Harem and the rest of the areas it had recently taken, whereas the Syrian Revolutionaries Front asked them to break the siege on their headquarters. Al-Jabha Al-Islamiyya offered to both to spread its forces in the areas that saw conflict as a neutral side.

The initiative also called for the establishment of a shared power from all of the factions that would take the responsibility of "fighting the corrupt and presenting them to Sharia courts," in addition to establishing an independent Sharia committee whose task it would be to mediate in conflicts between the factions.

See: Al-Jabha Al-Islamiyya proposes an initiative to solve the differences between Jabhat An-Nusra and the Syrian Revolutionaries Front: 7/24/2014/, https://bit.ly/2UjlY1k.

the Front in some village of Jabl Az-Zawiya, An-Nusra did not find any need to obey the Sharia court as long as the battle had already been decided on the ground.

Chart comparing Jabhat An-Nusra and Syrian revolutionaries front:

Comparison between Jabhat An-Nusra and the Syrian Revolutionaries Front		
	Syrian Revolutionaries Front	**Jabhat An-Nusra**
Leadership	A field leadership with no control over the faction, and troops who lack confidence in their leadership in battles with extremists	Central leadership who leads from behind and tightly controls the organizations
Number	Enormous size with more than 7000 in the North	Between 4000-5000 fighters in the North
Media	A weak media which only reacts, more than a studied and organization media strategy	A strong media campaign before its fierce aggression against the Syrian Revolutionaries Front excusing its eradication
Security	Weak security	Bought off and penetrated into the ranks of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front, making a large number of their battalions neutral
Popular support	A popular support which seesawed with the absence of conciliatory initiatives with those hurt from the revolution, who have been held accountable by Jabl Az-Zawiya's revolutionaries.	Popular support which emphasized with them before conflict with the Syrian Revolutionaries Front
Armament	A strong armory with massive heavy weapons and warehouses of ammunition	Well-stocked armory
Allies	Part of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front (Syrian Martyrs' Brigade)	Jund Al-Aqsa, and undeclared battalions from other factions
Spread	All the liberated areas with a large concentration in Idlib	All the liberated areas with a large concentration in Idlib
Sharia Discourse	A sharia discourse of reconciliation and the impermissibility of spilling the blood of Muslims.	Sharia discourse in the barracks focused on fighting the corrupt and kuffar.

Strategy	Primitive defense strategy and fragile fortification	A studied and organized plan of attack
Leader	A civilian leader who worked in construction before the revolution	Leader with experience in Iraq and in armed groups for more than five years
Age of Establishment	Declared in December 2013 as an outgrowth of the Syrian Martyrs	Formed mid-2012
Political Project	A national project without any tools	An undeclared emirate with tools, while hiding behind the national project
Ideology	Local Moderate Religiosity	Salafi Jihadi
Administration	A system of units and battalions more on paper than in actuality, reflecting their aim of only controlling the faction	A system of counties, and geographic areas, reflecting the nature of their aim of controlling geography
Administrators	A large group of officers who had disbanded from the regime	A group of prisoners from Saydnaya and Syrians and foreigners who had been fighters and shuyookh in Iraq
Human Losses	Approximately 19 dead	Approximately 70 dead
International Ally	Victim of Saudi-Qatari polarization	A security apparatus employed to abort the revolution and its factions
Dealings with Minorities	The leader of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front visited Druze villages and promised to protect them as citizens	Forcing them to Islam, opening masjids in Druze areas, then executing a massacre in the town of Qalb Lawzah
International Classification	Under the Moderate Factions supported by the West	Under terrorist groups, which was reinstated after its change in name to Fath Al-Sham and the declaration of its breaking relations with Al-Qaeda in 29 July 2016

2- The Experience of Jaysh Al-Islam in Dealing with Extremist Groups

Jaysh Al-Islam is n Syrian Opposition military organization that was formed during the Syrian revolution and it is one of the biggest "Islamic" military factions in the revolution. It participated in and established a number of the political and military bodies opposing the regime.

Just months after the onset of the peaceful revolution in Syria and the regime's crushing of it with military force, a small armed group was formed in Ghouta in Eastern Damascus under the name of "Siryat Al-Islam" in September 2011. Its operations were limited in conflict against the regime forces around the city of Douma, and after months it developed to become "Liwa Al-Islam." It then transformed to what it is now known as "Jaysh Al-Islam" after a group of the battalions from Eastern Ghouta affiliated with it and its spread to many Syrian governorates.

Jaysh Al-Islam is categorized as being built on Salafi thought, and its fighters are trained according to a moderate Islamic creed. It's curriculum, according to its leader Zahran Alloush, himself is: Islam, which includes the essential rules of justice and fairness and truth, but it but from this description it takes its generalness and clarification of its ultimate political goals it aims to achieve, but not the means to do so.[98]

In general, the statements of the leadership of Jaysh Al-Islam make it clear that aims for the downfall of the current Syrian regime and the establishment of a system in accordance with the rulings of Sharia.[99]

Jaysh Al-Islam's experience in dealing with the extremist organizations distinguishes itself with a degree of relative success: as it was able to eliminate Daesh in Eastern Ghouta,[100] and was able to push out An-Nusra from the areas of Ghouta under its control, however it was not able to completely eliminate it in all of Eastern Ghouta.[101]

2-1- Jaysh Al-Islam's Approach in Confronting Extremist Groups

Jaysh Al-Islam relied on a multi-faceted military, security, political and Sharia-based policy in its dealing with extremist factions.

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98 Jaysh Al-Islam: One hand fighting Assad, the other ISIS. Al-Jazeera archive: https://bit.ly/2NqI7J6.
99 Television interview on Al-Jazeera with Zahran Alloush, leader of Jaysh Al-Islam, conducted by Tayseer Alouni: ://bit.ly/2SY5ZcZ.
100 Journalistic Report: Jaysh Al-Islam pushes Daesh out from its last stronghold in Eastern Ghouta, Orient.net, 7/1/2014: https://bit.ly/2sM3xa9
101 Several battles occurred between Jaysh Al-Islam and Jabhat An-Nusra, the most important of which: the first battle on 4/28/2016, which ended with the seizing of Jaysh Al-Islam's weapons; the second battle, in which Jaysh Al-Islam took back the city of Misraba adjacent to the city of Douma on 6/29/2016, and the third on 4/28/2017 which ended with Jaysh Al-Islam reclaiming a large portion of their weapons.

2-1-1- Jaysh Al-Islam's Sharia and Political Approach in Confronting Extremist Factions:

1- The founders of Jaysh Al-Islam followed the events in Afghanistan, Algeria and Somalia closely and saw that one of the most important reasons for the failure of that experience was Al-Qaeda and its branches' role in it.[102] Therefore, that historical memory of the leader of Jaysh Al-Islam was ready in their dealings with "Jabhat An-Nusra" and ISIS and from the beginning they had a proactive plan to confront the dangers of these organizations.

2- The Sharia and Dawa campaigns that the Sharia Body of Jaysh Al-Islam carried out had a large role in its reply to the doubts of these organizations, such as debates, tactical lessons in the headquarters, in addition to having seekers of knowledge among the army in the ranks of fighters against these organizations.[103]

3- Working to breaking to break up the ideological system of Al-Qaeda and its curriculum, in the issues of Iman and Kufr, excommunicating the ruler, Walaa and Baraa, and the basic components of their thought .[104]

2-1-2- Jaysh Al-Islam's Military and Security Approach in Confronting Extremist Factions:

1-The administration gave the leadership of Jaysh Al-Islam the ability to take decision to combat and confront these organizations easily and without hesitation.

2-Working to obstruct the entrance of Al-Qaeda to operation rooms, or participating with them in battles and not giving in to their two, not allowing them to obtain arms.

3-Establishing a security mechanism with the security body from the beginning and confronting takfiri thought and whoever works with them, and forbidding them from taking any center, headquarter or masjid to spread their ideas and activities in the areas of the Jaysh's influence, in addition to preparing aims for the areas where they were present, 50% of the battles were security, and 50% military. The security arm also worked to break their ranks and stop their plans aiming at the assassination of a number of the leadership of Jaysh Al-Islam.

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102 See for example: Video clip of Head of Jaysh Al-Islam's Sharia Body Sameer Kaaka speaking on the truth of Jabhat An-Nusra, link: https://bit.ly/2TltrwS

103 See for example: Video clip explaining Jaysh Al-Islam's beginning of conflict with Daesh in Maydaa, with Zahran Alloush and head of Sharia body at the head of the campaign, https://bit.ly/2sRWblj.

104 Of the principles which Jaysh Al-Islam used to break up the ideological structure of Jabhat An-Nusra: describing them as khawarij from the onset, seeing Jihad in Syria as only being a defensive one and not requiring a separate banner, explaining the idea of applying the Sharia which Al-Qaeda uses to promote its project, and that it is not limited to physical punishments and criminal punishments.

2-1-3- Jaysh Al-Islam's Media Approach in Confronting Extremism:

The internal awareness of the army, and producing statements making their corruption apparent and how they had destroyed the revolutions in several countries, and the leadership of the group held lectures on their experiences of debates with Al-Qaeda in prison, as did the awareness campaigns for the people played a big role in making the corruption of these organizations clear, as was their activity on social media also important in that regard.

2-2- Conclusion of Jaysh Al-Islam's Experience in Dealing with Extremist Thought and its Factions:

1-Jaysh Al-Islam distinguished itself from other factions in that it had a clear ideology of fighting against extremist and takfiri factions and not reconciling with them.[105]

2- The ideological factor was not the only factor in the relative success Jaysh Al-Islam achieved in confronting extremist organizations, as the dimension of geography and social solidarity in the city of Douma also played a large role in the organizational cohesion of Jaysh Al-Islam, which was completely missing from the branches of Jaysh Al-Islam in Northern Syria.

3- The personality of their leader, Zahran Alloush, who was serious and well-organized in his logistics and security and administration played a large role in the speed of mobilizing his troops and getting them to obey orders.

4- The conclusion of Jaysh Al-Islam's experience was success within the borders of the center, as the center of Jaysh Al-Islam was in Ghouta, where it achieve the greatest success in breaking up ISIS, whereas it was not entirely successful in breaking up Jabhat An-Nusra compared to its losses.

On the other hand, the center of extremist organizations was never in Eastern Ghouta, but rather Raqqa and Idlib, which Jaysh Al-Islam is innocent of it given the extreme besiegement it faced for five long years.

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105 We would like to point here that, despite the fact that the ideological dimension had a great importance in uniting the rank and file of Jaysh Al-Islam against extremist organizations, this dimension also played a negative role in uniting "popular" factions against Jaysh Al-Islam because of their methodological differences (Salafi, Ashari,etc.), especially with the statements of Jaysh Al-Islam's leadership on the legitimacy of their unified domination of Eastern Ghouta, which pushed the factions to band together against the likely threat from Jaysh Al-Islam.

3- The Experience of "Jaysh Al-Fath" in Dealing with Extremist Thought and Factions:

"Jaysh Al-Fath" was established on March 24, 2015 from seven large groups of armed forces in Northern Syrian, and this army was made up of the factions: "Ahrar Al-Sham," "Jabhat An-Nusra," "Jund Al-Aqsa," "Jaysh As-Sunna," "Falyaq Ash-Sham," "Liwa Al-Haq," and "Ajnad Al-Sham." At that time, Jaysh Al-Fath was made up of tens of thousands of fighters, most of whom were from Ahrar Al-Sham, An-Nusra, Falyaq Ash-Sham and Ajnad Ash-Sham.[106]

Jaysh Al-Fath began its battles towards Idlib, and was able for a short period of time to sweep Idlib and liberate the military encampments surrounding it, in addition to the two cities of Ariha and Jasr Al-Shagour.

Afterwards, there manifested some essential issues for the factions of Jaysh Al-Fath such as local, aid, services and educational issues. The question that poses itself, how was the interaction of the factions within Jaysh Al-Fath with extremist thought and factions in these and other issues?

3-1- Media Appearances and Dealing with Minorities: Complete Absence of Any Revolutionary Exterior:

The military gains on the ground were not invested into political gains for the sake of the revolution, rather it prevented any highlighting of the revolution or even raising its flag.[107] It gave a bad image to the media on the liberation of Idlib, which allowed the regime to push its narrative that extremist groups were the ones controlling Idlib.

Abdulllah Al-Muhsini Al-Saudi who was categorized on a terrorist list, was the one who most appeared on Media outlets,[108] and Abu Muhammad Al-Jolani[109] also

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106 Jaysh Al-Fath was established in conditions where the factions ??? Jabhat An-Nusra was the initiator for the idea of Jaysh Al-Fath and determined its name and the factions that would work with it. Ahrar Al-Sham saw that the priority in military battles was the regime strongholds along the coast, however according to the deliberations An-Nusra had some hesitations and preferred Idlib, according to audio testimonies of some leaders of Ahrar Al-Sham obtained by the researcher.

This is how the faction's strong military power was turned away from the strategic aim of the regime in Damascus and the coast to liberating Idlib instead. Ahrar Al-Sham was afraid of Jabhat An-Nusra solely dominating Idlib, especially after the leaked speech on the latter's intent to form an Emirate in the North of Syria, and as such entered into Jaysh Al-Fath late.

Despite that, there were voices warning of Jaysh Al-Fath's project replicating the project of Mujahideen's Shura Council in Iraq through which Daesh was able to break up the Iraqi resistance fighters for the benefit of Al-Qaeda.

107An activist narrates to "Syria.net" Jaysh Al-Fath's statements forbidding any revolutionary flags in its regions, Syria.net, 3/11/2016, https://bit.ly/2CS5HK0
108 See: Dr. Abdullah Al-Mahsini in his witnessing of Idlib's liberation, Orient: https://bit.ly/2Roezw8.
109 Al-Jolani:" An-Nusra does not aim to rule Idlib," Al-Jazeera, 1/4/2015: https://bit.ly/2Bd8jC3.

categorized as a terrorist, broadcast for him in an audio recording. The components of Jaysh Al-Fath close to the revolution were not able to change the media image which had appeared during Idlib's liberation.

In the same context, there were transgressions against the Christian minority and its possessions in the first days of Idlib's liberation at the hands of the Jund Al-Aqsa. The "moderate" factions tried to prevent those attacks and provide protection to individual minorities and their possessions.[110]

And Amnesty International published a report that claims that Jaysh Al-Fath committed crimes against the Christian minority in the city,[111] and Ahrar Al-Sham responded with a long response refuting these claims.[112]

3-2- Administering Idlib: Between "Shura Council of Al-Fath" and "Municipal Administration":

Following the liberation of Idlib, many of the voices of activists and writers tried to make a political and media investment in this victory through demonstrating the civil side and the ability of the people and civil forces to elect an administration of Idlib,[113] and this was the opinion of some of the components of Jaysh al-Fath such as Ahrar Al-Sham and Faylaq Al-Sham,[114] but the great pressure from Jund Al-Aqsa and An-Nusra on the ability of the Mujahideen to administer the city. Therefore, some of the faction found that they would lose influence on the scene if they insisted on a civil administration and An-Nusra and Jund Al-Aqsa would alone administer the city of Idlib.[115]

After the idea of the factions taking over the administration of the city which Jaysh Al-Fath had liberated, the moderate factions tried to make the administration appear to be civil and even if only superficially, as they called for it to be named as governor instead of a "wali," and the position of governor was given to the two officials close to Ahrar Al-Sham.[116]

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110 No Christmas for the Christians of the Idlib Countryside this year as well, Al-Mudun, 12/23/2016: https://bit.ly/2HFtaUn.
111 Syria: Torture was my Punishment, Amnesty International, 7/5/2016, ps. 32-35.
112 "Ahrar Al-Sham" responds to "Amnesty," Syria.net, 7/14/2016, https://bit.ly/29Gdvj9.

113 See for example: Burhan Ghalyoun, "The Syrian Opposition and the Challenge of Burned Ground," 4/3/2015, https://bit.ly/2G8ph7S.
114 According to the audio testimony of one of the leaders of Faylaq Al-Sham to the researcher.
115 Liwa Al-Haq who were known for their heavy weaponry, were a secret affiliate of An-Nusra, and always used their vote for An-Nusra's benefit.

116 They are Mado Hamdon from Banish, then after him Bilal Jabiro from Idlib.

Then after pressure from Jabhat An-Nusra and Jund Al-Aqsa the idea of a governorate was amended with the argument that it was resembled the administration of the regime, and the move to an administration through what was called "The Shura Council of Jaysh Al-Fath,"[117] and the Sharia Council.[118] Here, the administrative chaos and deep polarization between Ahrar Al-Sham and the factions close to it and Jabha An-Nusra, Jund Al-Aqsa and the factions close to them began.

After the failure which the administration of Jaysh Al-Fath suffered from, it proceeded to hold "popular elections" to choose the members of the local council, which some saw as an attempt at moving against those parties who had refused to deal with the military, whereas others considered that Jaysh Al-Fath did not give civilians an administration with full powers, and would intervene into civilian affairs.[119]

With the attempt of the new city council to organize the civilian and service affairs in the city, the administration of Jaysh Al-Fath tried to delay handing over the administrative and service issues, as it did not submit anything to the council except for "Management of Services" and the heating, electricity and water services, that is, the exhausted services, which were difficult to make work in light of the lack of funding and possibilities, which led to weak popular support for the council, which appears to have been the desire of the Jaysh Al-Fath's administration which remained in charge of the remainder of public services in Idlib, without fulfilling the memorandum of understanding previously signed with the "local administration in the city of Idlib."

Then Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham advanced to end the local council of the city of Idlib after establishing the civil administration affiliated with it.[120]

Based on the above, we can notice the abject failure that the revolutionary factions suffered from in their dealing with extremist factions on the administrative level, as the latter were able to force their agenda and administrative vision it held in terms of "application of the Sharia," which it was able through to force the rest of the factions through steps which spelled the death of the governorate's administration: such as

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117 The vote distribution in Majlis Al-Shura was Ahrar Al-Sham+ Saqoor Al-Sham with 7 votes, Jabhat An-Nusra with 5, Jund Al-Aqsa with 3, Faylaq Al-Sham with 3, Jaysh Al-Sunna with 2, and Ajnad Al-Sham with 1 vote.

118 The Sharia Council included: Abdullah Al-Muhsini (Saudi) and he is qadi of Jaysh Al-Fath, Muhammad Abdessalem (Egyptian), and Abd Al-Razzaq Al-Mahdi (Syrian).

119 Journalistic Report: "In light of Democracy: The First City Council of Idlib," Sham Network, 1/20/2017, https://bit.ly/2k94h2u.
120 Journalistic Report "Tahrir Al-Sham" Ends "City Council of Idlib," Al-Mudun, 8/29/2017, https://bit.ly/2TbPXvn.

subjecting the administration to factional quotas which block efficiency, letting foreigners onto the Sharia committee, refusing to raise the revolution's flag, etc., ending in a complete control over the city's administration.

3-3- The Issue of Education During the Assad Regime:

Education was a heavy burden upon Jaysh Al-Fath's material resources, the school expenditures and teachers' salaries were more than they could handle, and the organizations which Jaysh Al-Fath were in contact with refused to support education as it was underneath the control of Jaysh Al-Fath. Some organizations even stopped their support of education after it was attacked by Jabhat An-Nusra.[121]

After the refusal of these organizations to support education, the "administration of Jaysh Al-Fath" had only two options in front of it to administer this issue, either leaving it to the regime, or asking for the help of the interim government affiliated with the coalition. After discussions, the "Shura Council" took the decision to leave the issue of education to the regime, and left the vast majority of the governorates schools under its supervision, excusing that corrupting effect of the regime would be less than that of entering the coalition which held a "project of the secular coalition."[122]

The factions in this issue yet again confirmed their inability to confront extremists' projects, and were once more forced to go along, which led to disastrous effects later which were reflected in education, especially in terms of the administrative chaos and multiple references.

3-4- Legislative Issue:

From the participating factions in Jaysh Al-Fath, a council to administer legislation in the city of by assigning a delegate from each faction, and the legislative body of Jaysh Al-Fath was established from the two officials associated with the factions

And the influence of extremist factions manifest in this important issue through the following actions

- Refusing to appoint legislation to lawyers or unaffiliated judges

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121 Report: After Attacks on its Teams… Save the Children Comments on its Projects in Syria, Akhbar Al-An, 10/19/2015, https://bit.ly/2GFOc3Q.
122 According to the fatwa of "Shura Al-Fath," the "legitimacy of the kafir regime government" is weak, contrary to "the legitimacy of the secular coalition" which could gain some acceptance among the population and form a competing project to that of the "Islamic Jihadi" project. Furthermore, the continuation of the former is less harmful than that of the latter, and on this basis they would not allow for the interim government to supervise the issue of education.

-Refusing the idea of depending on a specific rationale in rules, as those affiliated with Jabhat An-Nusra, Jund Al-Aqsa and Ahrar Al-Sham " refused to rely on the "Unified Arab Law," instead on fiqh in ruling and legislating, which meant leaving the issue to the discretion of the judge.

- Singing the rulings with fake and not real names, especially the judges affiliated with Jabhat An-Nusra and Jund Al-Aqsa, as the factions were not able to force them to state their real names in their rulings.

- Allowing non-Syrian foreigners into the judiciary

- Not enforcing the condition of Sharia qualifications and degree; as most of those responsible from Jabhat An-Nusra and Jund Al-Aqsa do not hold degrees in Sharia

These actions, among others, point to the extent of control that the extremist factions had on the issue of the judiciary. Perhaps, of the reasons for that: the focus of extremist factions on this sensitive subject given what they suffered in control and ruling administrative issues (which is one of the essential authorities in ruling), in addition to relying on this issue to the "authoritative" even inside the revolutionary factions, which were the most likely to carry interpretations closer to the extremist factions.

Conclusion of Jaysh Al-Fath's Experience

This experience confirms the complete failure of the revolutionary and opposition factions in their military alliance with extremist factions, which led to negative results on the service, administrative and political levels, as the revolutionary factions were not able to force their vision in those issues, and were forced to go along with the extremist factions which enforced their near-complete control over the service, education and judicial issues.

Some of the revolutionary factions did not suffice with their failure in allying and cooperating with extremist faction in Idlib, but rather repeated that experience in other regions in Aleppo, Qalamoun, Eastern Ghouta, Deraa and the Hamah countryside.

The result of this mistake of allying and cooperating with extremist factions will led to accumulated mistakes on different levels, and the moderate vision will be able to lighten "comprising with extremism."

4- Experience of the "First" Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi Movement[123]

The Nour al-Din al-Zengi movement was established towards the end of 2011 alongside the emergence of other armed movements which spread throughout the territories and villages northwest of Aleppo or "the western countryside." It ran the administration of several towns north of Aleppo such as Qabtan Al-Jabl, Al-Mansoura, Hor, and the Sheikh Suleiman village. Furthermore, the movement announced its change in name to The Nour al-Din Al-Zengi movement following its withdrawal from Army of Muwahideen in May of 2014. This was followed by further expansions in the group's battalions and training of fighters. This was seen in the split of the Sons of the Companions Brigade from that of the al-Tawhid Brigade and their joining the Nour al-Din Zengi movement. This resulted in the rise in total number of fighters to approximately 2000.[124]

The Nour al-Din Zengi movement announces that its primary aim is the downfall of the regime and establishing a state built on institutions.[125] It has strong support from the people of the Western Aleppo Countryside, in addition to a high degree of organization, especially in terms of military and security. Furthermore, its focus on civil work especially and in an organized manner, as it opened several offices to take care of civilian affairs in the areas under its control.

Nour Al-Din fought with the factions of the Army of Muwahideen[126] fierce combat with Daesh, and the factions of the Western countryside were able to for good push it out of the region in the beginning of 2014. Nour Al-Din would late announce its split from Jaysh Al-Muwahideen.[127]

Nour Al-Din was counted among the factions of the Free Syrian Army, before Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham was formed with the faction Jabhat Fath Al-Sham (the former An-Nusra), to become a part of an extremist faction. Therefore, its experience is a unique one in that was part of an extremist faction, and then split off to fight against it in existential battles.

Therefore, we will show the beginning of the transformation of the relationship between Nour Al-Din Al-Zenki with Jabhat An-Nusra and then the reasons that helped in its fight after splitting off from it.

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123 This paper was written before the last offensive of Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham against Al-Zengi, through which it was able to completely eliminate the faction.

124 Announcement of establishment of the Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi in Andzara, 12/14/2012, https://bit.ly/2Sl8Jfs.

125 Taufeeq Shihab Al-Din: "Reasons for Conflict with Daesh," Al-Jazeera, 3/14/2014, ://bit.ly/2BNoF4I.

126 Announcement of the Establishment of Jaysh Al-Muwahideen, 1/2/2014, https://bit.ly/2tDC5eR

127 Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi passed through several factional affiliations, beginning with inclusion among Liwa Al-Tawheed, then the establishment of Jaysh Al-Muwahideen and Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyya, and then inclusion among Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham.

4-1- Transformations in the Relationship between the Nour Al-Din Zengi Movement and Jahbat An-Nusra:

The relationship between them saw several phases, beginning with alliance, to unification, and finally to direct combat between them.

4-1-1- Phase of Alliance:

The Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi Movement joined the Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham alliance which was led by Jabhat Fath Al-Sham in the beginning of 2017.[128] It was not long before the signs of disunity manifested in the new alliance, with the decision of Hayet to open a new battle against the Ahrar Al-Sham Movement, which lasted for three days, and ended in July 21, 2017, with the elimination of the Ahrar at the expense of the expansion and strengthening of Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham's control, which pushed Nour Al-Din to split from the body.

4-1-2- Phase of Political Conflict:

The first attack of Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham against the Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi movement was on 11/10/2017 near to the town of Al-Dana in the northern countryside of Idlib, with limited skirmishes that developed into armed conflict within a limited geographical space.

The battles continued with the declared justification being a response to the fight of El-Zengi movement, but in reality the real goal was the desire of An-Nusra to be the only partner to coordinate with the Turkish army had begun its monitoring points, as based on the Astana agreements.

The result was the failure of Jabhat An-Nusra's military operation after 12 days of continuous fighting, and the entrance of the Turkish army to coordinate with the Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi movement in the Western countryside of Aleppo.

4-1-3- Phase of Existential Conflict

Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham began a violent campaign on February 14, 2018 which lasted for 67 continuous days against the Nour Al-Din strongholds in the Western countryside.

As is the custom of extremist groups, Jabhat An-Nusra used a superficial reason to excuse its rebellion against the factions; it accused the movement of killing "Abu Ayman Al-Masir" at one of its checkpoints and used the incident to stir up the muhajireen and enter Jaysh Al-Thuwar[129] in its region for combat.[130][131]

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128 Fatah Al-Sham Merges with Four Factions in Syria, Al-Jazeera, 1/28/2017, https://bit.ly/2Vfv53W.

129 For what crime was "Abu Ayman Al-Masri" killed, Ebaa Agency, 2/17/2018, https://bit.ly/2ErXkXg.

As for the real and un-declared reasons of Jabhat An-Nusra, they can be summarized as being the end of the El-Zengi movement's existence in the Western countryside, to monopolize the political scene by finishing off an effective power on the ground, to control all of the strategic checkpoints between Dara Ezza and the Ifrin region and Jabal Al-Shaykh, in addition to fusing with the "Olive Branch" forces with the Western countryside of Aleppo which were under the control of Nour Al-Din.

The campaign ended with the failure of Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham's excuse despite its recruitment of the Turkistan Islamic Party.[132] Nour Al-Din left the battle enforcing its conditions and winning more regions under its control, especially in the town of Dar Ezzat.

The question that must be asked is what are the factors that aided the El-Zengi movement to prevail in its confrontation with Jabhat An-Nusra? This is what we will seek to answer in the next section:

4-2- Factors in Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi's Success in its Confrontation with Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham:

There were several factors that aided the El-Zengi' movement's success in its confrontation with Jabhat An-Nusra: some which are internal reasons, and some of which are related to how it dealt with them.

4-2-1- Subjective Factors that Aided in El-Zengi Movement's Success in Dealing with Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham:

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130 Jaysh Al-Thuwar was formed from several factions and battalions which were previously affiliated with Jahbat Thuwar Syria and Hazm Movement and was later joined by elements from Liwa Ahrar Al-Zawiya, all of whom left Syria after the attack led by Jabhat An-Nusra against them, beginning from the end of 2014.

And the establishment of Jabhat Thuwar, which was declared on 5/3/2015 included "Liwa Al-Maham Al-Khasa- Liwa 99 Infantry- The Elite Leadership of Saraya- Liwa Hamza- Liwa Al-Qaaqa- Liwa Shuhada Al-Atarib- Sultan Selim Battalion- Front of Kurds from Idlib and "Qadasiyya Battalions and ? 777 from Homs Countryside"

See: Jaysh Al-Thuwar from Birth to Rebellion, Sham Network, 2/14/2016, bit.ly/2tCplW2.

131 Amr Haj Ahmed, "What are the Motivations behind the Conflict between "Tahrir Suriya" and "Tahrir Al-Sham," Orient.net, 2/26/2018, https://bit.ly/2rR2cOU.

132 The Turkistan Islamic Party was established in East Turkestan in 1997 at the hand of Hasan Masum, who was able to recruit thousands of Uyghur Muslims to fight for the independence of East Turkestan (Xinjiang) from China, before members of the party headed to Afghanistan to fight alongside Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Masum was killed in May, 2002 during a US raid in Afghanistan, to be succeeded by AbdulHaq Al-Turkestani, who still heads it to this day.

Soldiers from the group moved to Syria on an individual basis and in small groups and focused their presence in the region of Jasr Al-Shagour and around it.

For more information, see: Adnan Ahmed, Al-Qaeda and Sister Organizations in Idlib: East Turkestan for Revenge from China, Al-Arabi Al-Jadeed, 10/15/2018, https://bit.ly/2SnD4dl.

Those factors are mostly in the central leadership of the movement, and its self-readiness to confront extremist thought.

A: Central Leadership: the leadership of the Al-Zengi movement, which had a field nature connected to its soldiers, was able to lead the movement with complete control and with full command over the details of the battle. Despite its quick decisions in combat and peace, there were not any cases of individual or collective desertion from the faction. Rather, what was seen was readiness of all the elements and battalions, which was represented in the great trust between the leadership and the rank and file, and the professional administration in military, media and politics.[133]

B: Self readiness of the Soldiers: There was solidified intense hatred of Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham among the movement, which only remained with Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham's repeated violations against the movement especially and the Free Syrian Army in general. This had a great effect in the speedy rounding of troops to fight back Tahrir Al-Sham, as the leadership of the movement did not have to exert great effort in convincing its troops, as did the media attempts of Tahrir Al-Sham to convince Nour Al-Din troops to dissent, as regionalism remained a factor in the banding together against Tahrir Al-Sham's ideological discourse.

As well as the experience that the soldiers of Nour Al-Din gained in dealing with extremist groups through Jabhat An-Nusra's breaking up of 20 previous factions, most of whom were influenced by An-Nusra's discourse of corruption and "working with the Americans."

4-2-2- Factors of Success related to how the El-Zengi movement dealt with Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham:

The style which the El-Zengi movement used to confront Jabhat An-Nusra varied, benefiting from the mistakes of other factions that caused their elimination. Of the most notable were its studied media discourse and use of psychological warfare, and building alliances with other factions, and not allowing forieng fighters from Al-Jolani, in addition to investing in its geo-strategic location.

1- Studied Media Discourse: Al-Zengi's administering of media discourse was one of the best in the Syrian revolution in confronting extremist groups, as it always took care of motivations that Tahrir Al-Sham could use to make takfir of the movement and convince its elements of the legitimacy of combat with them. Even when Noor Al-Din split off and existed from Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham it recounted

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133 A video message from one of the leaders of Noor Al-Din Al-Zengi on the beginning of Conflict with Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham, https://bit.ly/2EtkY5M.

the excuses in a manner that refuted Tahrir Al-Sham's domination of Sharia and spilling of blood, and the necessity of unity in the face of its rebellion.[134]

Its media policy also worked to take down the leadership of Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham and send messages of sympathy and endearment. This could be observed in their leaders and sharia authorities' embarrassment in front of their troops.[135] This was in addition to popular disenchantment with their actions.[136]

2- The utilization of psychological warfare: The Zengi movement excelled in its exercise of psychological warfare through various tactics and methods which include:

- During the time of its joining Tahrir Al-Sham, the Zengi movement successfully recorded numerous phone calls linked to the leadership during its conflict with Ahrar Al Sham. The content of the calls revealed the moral depravity of the movement's leadership as well as their willingness to lie and accuse Al-Saqoor of killing two of their counterparts. This was in addition to their mocking of the council's sheikhs, mentioning Abdullah Al Muhisni's arrest,[137] and talking lightly of martyrs which were all elements in shattering the symbolic image and sacredness of Tahrir Al Sham's leadership. This resulted in a loss of trust between the sharia authorities and their leadership on the one hand, as well as between militants and their leaders on the other.

- They released videos of dozens of Tahrir's militant captives requesting their leaders to exchange them and release their families, which were disseminated and put significant pressure on Tahrir Al Sham.[138]

- Demonstrations of power, heavily armed military and artillery played a role in boosting the morale of members of Al-Zengi and lowering the morale of Tahrir Al Sham who had previously imagined that battle

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134 Announcement of the Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi Movement's Disbanding from Tahrir Al-Sham, 7/20/2017, https://bit.ly/2BQxESJ.

135 The leaders of An-Nusra giving remunerations to their troops to hold up in the face of Al-Zengi and Ahrar Al-Sham in Idlib and its countryside, https://bit.ly/2GF9Fdj.

136 The Syrian street in the liberated areas reacting with anger towards Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham's practices in the region of Western Aleppo, Medad Press, https://bit.ly/2IzUfJ3.

137 That was a shock to the groups supporting Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham in terms of the rank that Al-Muhsini held amongst them, especially since he was the general qadi of Jaysh Al-Fath. That contributed to Al-Muhsini and Maslah Alyani disbanding from Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham. All of the leaks are available on the Telegram of Khaled Al-Shamali, https://t.me/Dkhaled_1.

138 Hostages from Tahrir Al-Sham imploring their leaders to hastily exchange for them, https://bit.ly/2XkGvoO.

with Al Zengi would be a light matter as in the case of the other factions.[139]

- Displaying the kills and corpses of Tahrir Al Sham soldiers who were killed in battle against Al Zengi, followed by emotive discourses blaming the leadership for the loss of lives as well as regret for the taking of 'poor' lives.[140]

- Popular mobilization and displaying the morale of the civil activities headed by the movement in the area. This also included video messages by women dedicated to soldiers of Tahrir Al Sham.[141]

- Addressing the psychological warfare practiced by Jabhat Al-Nusra's media through exposing the lies disseminated on their channels. This was carried out through a channel specialized in exposing false news.

3- Expanding regional influence and building alliances with factions: The Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi Movement was also successful in including the battalions of Thuwar Al-Sham in the Western countryside and its headquarters in Atarib, with the leadership of Ali Shakardi, and Bayrak Al-Sham under the leadership of Khaled Al-Amr to its ranks, which increased its power and expanded its influence in the Western countryside, and there did not remain except for pockets for Tahrir Al-Sham and the headquarters of Faylaq Al-Sham.[142]

Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi also took the initiative in forming the Syrian Liberation Front alongside Ahrar Al-Sham,[143] and an undeclared alliance with the Saqoor Al-Sham faction. This meant that it was able to hit Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham in most of the liberated areas, instead of keeping the battles limited to the Western countryside of Aleppo.

4- Taking the Advantage of Foreign Fighters from Jolani's Hand: the leadership of Tahrir Al-Sham would always play the Muhaijreen card in every aggression or campaign against other factions, but Al-Zengi was able to take it out of Jolani's hand by adding some of them to their ranks, such as Sheikh Ali Al-Arjani (Kuwaiti Sharia scholar), the disbanding of Al-

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139 A video clip of Al-Zengi soldiers displaying their readiness, https://bit.ly/2XnM4Td.

140 The dead of Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham who fell while invading the village of Takad, https://bit.ly/2XoChg3.

141 Reaction of the elite of Qabtan Al-Jabl and Ainzara to Abu Al-Abd Ashdaa and Abu Al-Yaqdhan, some of the most prominent leaders of Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham, https://bit.ly/2GGa1QN.

142 Announcement of Thuwar Al-Sham and Bayrak Al-Sham's Inclusion into Al-Zengi, https://bit.ly/2tBsPIw.

143 Announcement of Al-Ahrar and Al-Zengi's Inclusion into the Syrian Liberation Front, https://bit.ly/2SkBpFn.

Muhsini after the leaks of the leadership insulting the sharia authorities, and Nour Al-Din was successful to a large degree in getting the foreign fighters, especially from the Gulf, to be neutral. Al-Zengi also employed the assassination of an Egyptian affiliated with Ahrar Al-Sham (Abu Turab) against Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham to prove their lies and its hypocrisy in using Muhajireen.

5- Good Geostrategic Investment: Nour Al-Din excelled in its important, well-connected and well-fortified location, which it was able to invest in by closing roads and opening checkpoints, and strategically covering its rear in the areas of Ghasan Al-Zaytoun.

As it was also able to balance in immediate response to any response before calling for a sharia court or forming a committee, by encircling Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham in the areas of of Adnan Kufr…., which formed a weak point for Hayet.

6- Sharia Discourse: Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi requested an announcement from the Syrian Islamic Council on the necessity of responding to Tahrir Al-Sham's rebellion,[144] as there were also Sharia responses from Ali Al-Arjani (the Kuwaiti sheikh), and a call from the leader of Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi to the sheikh Abu Al-Harith Al-Masri (a sharia authority in Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham) who had made takfir of the movement.[145]

7- Responding to Every Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation with Continuation of Direct Conflict: Al-Zengi responded to every reconciliation initiative, especially the one made by notables and sheikhs.[146]

It also allowed for notables to meet with the prisoners of Jaysh Thuwar, in order to get rid of Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham's justification that the former had gathered together to fight against the Hayet.[147]

And Al-Zengi was able in its negotiations to make the solution not be between it and Tahrir Al-Sham, but a comprehensive one for all of the regions of Aleppo, Hama, the Coast, and Idlib, and not allow the decision for peace or war be in Tahrir Al-Sham's hands, in addition to refusing its control over

144 The Syrian Islamic Council's Statement with regard to Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham's Aggression against Al-Zengi, https://bit.ly/2E9XZLI.

145 Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham between Revoking Truces and Fleeing from Debates, Ebaa News Agency, https://bit.ly/2E9XZLI.

146 Initiative of the Tribal Council and its meeting with the Leadership of Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi, Medad Press, 11/16/2017, https://bit.ly/2EeoTlA.

147 Visit of Sheikhs to Prisoners of Jaysh Al-Thuwar among both parties, https://bit.ly/2BTkgNI.

crossings and economic points in the liberated areas, releasing all the prisoners from all the factions, and hand power to institutions elected by the Syrian people.[148]

4-3- Negative Points in Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi's Experience with Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham:

A- Regionalism played a positive role in defense, as the nature of troops is to hold to their lands and people in the face of any attack, however at the same time, it was a weak point during combat outside of their regions, which weakened Al-Zengi in controlling the areas that were ruled by Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham, to the contrary of their opponent, whose troops are most likely not connected to any specific region.

B- Despite Ahrar Al-Sham and Saqoor Al-Sham moving with Al-Zengi against Tahrir Al-Sham, the project of the Syrian Liberation Front a side project that did not develop into a full merger, which made it effectiveness less than expected in responding to Tahrir Al-Sham, as several battalions from Ahrar Al-Sham did not participate in fighting against Tahrir Al-Sham, and preferred for their regions to remain neutral.

C- The discipline which was clear amongst the troops of Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi inside its regions, was not at the same level in the areas retrieved by Tahrir Al-Sham, as there were several offenses from its troops which caused the residents to not trust them.

D- The participation of forces from Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi in attacking the Fastakim Union and Jaysh Al-Islam during the besiegement of Aleppo made them lose much sympathy from Syrian activists,[149] as was did their previous participation in a project with Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham make them lose much of the trust of the faction, especially the Euphrates Shield factions.

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148 Conditions of Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi for a Ceasefire, https://bit.ly/2SpigC2.

149 Al-Zengi attacked during the Assad forces and its allies' invasion of the besieged neighborhoods of Aleppo the headquarters of the "Fastakim Union" and took their equipment and weapons. The movement was accused at that time of participating with Jabhat An-Nusra for the fall of Aleppo.

See Aqeel Hasan, "Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi Movement" The Greatest Genius Mistake, Al-Mudun, 11/6/2016, https://bit.ly/2GJajGq,

Concluding Remarks of the Study:

We think that the general nature of the experience of the Syrian revolutionary factions with extremist factions was a negative one, with the exception of some limited successes. Perhaps, the main reason for that, is the weakness of early awareness among the leaders of these factions of the danger of this thought and its disastrous consequences, which led to an accumulation of mistakes and making them worse, which only made it harder for these factions to treat them after they later became aware.

Nonetheless, every experience of a faction with extremist factions and thought had its own reality and characteristics, and the results of the experiences covered by the study are as follows:

1- The Experience of Syrian Revolutionaries Front

Weakness of popular support and intellectual direction, absence of a project of resistance, organizational inefficiency, passive media, and "cold allies" who did not stand strong in the face of a clear methodology, loud media, direct action and clear project which Jabhat An-Nusra used in its war against the Syrian Revolutionaries Front.

Furthermore, the experience can be summarized as being a confrontation between an organization with a clear organization and ideology and effective media, with a clear goal and project, and one of an inefficient organization with a lacking media.

2. The Experience of Jaysh Al-Islam:

Several factors aided in the relative success of Jaysh Al-Islam compared to other factions, the most important of which: a clear ideology against extremist organizations, a regional dimension and social cohesion in the city of Douma, in addition to a coherent organization. This relative success was limited to Eastern Ghouta, the center of Jaysh Al-Islam and did not extent outside of it whether to the north, the center of Jabhat An-Nusra, or to the East, the center of Daesh, in comparison to the great besiegement it faced for five continuous years.

3. The Experience of Jaysh Al-Fath

- The experience of Jaysh Al-Fath proved the infeasibility of containment of breaking up extremist organizations, which have a coherent methodology, especially with factions that suffer from ideological and organizational. Jabhat An-Nusra was able through its entrance among the factions affiliated with Jaysh Al-Fath to break it up from the inside, especially since the leadership of Jabhat An-Nusra was working with Ahrar Al-Sham

through communication with the leaders of the lower ranks, whereas the former was working with the latter through the head of the hierarchy, which would later show its effect in breaking up Jaysh Al-Ahrar and its joining Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham.[150]

- The factions were excited to gain military victories, with studying the political feasibility of these victories, a prelude to political suicide. The military victories of Jaysh Al-Fath were in fact political defeats for the revolution which was not even able to raise its flag in the city of Idlib. At the same time, it was a political victory for the regime which convinced the world that Idlib was controlled by foriegn "extremist terrorist groups" The victories of Jaysh Al-Fath in Idlib ended in a great military defeat in Aleppo.

- The experience of Jaysh Al-Fath's administration was an exact repeat of that of the alliance with extremist organizations in Deir Ez-Zour and Raqqa, and the experience of the quartet in Aleppo, all of which ended in utter failure and with greater control for extremist organizations of the civil, military and political scene of the Syrian Revolution.

- The experience of Jaysh Al-Fath strengthened Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham's later idea of dominating Syria, instead of strengthening the idea of moderation and organizing for the benefit of the revolution, especially after its failure in lobbying the factions to merge with it to protect itself from the danger of classification. The random communication between the troops of Ahrar Al-Sham and the leadership of Fath Al-Sham also eased the task of breaking up the ranks of the internally-polarized Ahrar Al-Sham (and the exit of what came to be called Jaysh Al-Ahrar from them), after the seizure of the Bab Al-Hawa crossing which it administered.

4. Experience of Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi:

- The experience of the first Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi was successful in protecting the faction and its existence through investing in all of its media and military cards, religious discourse, and social pressure. It was able to achieve military spite in Hayet Tahrir Al-Sham, which made the latter acquiesce for peace and a ceasefire. This success however remained within the limits of the region controlled by the faction and did not develop into an initiative to finally eliminate extremist organizations.

- The summary of its experience is that Nour Al-Din Al-Zengi was that it was a confrontation between a socially-strong power and a strong ideology, with the social cohesion was able to hold back the ideological.

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150 Aqeel Hasan, "Jaysh Al-Ahrar: "A Faction Inside a Faction," Al-Mudun, 12/12/2016, https://bit.ly/2U5A8n9.

Recommendations and Suggestions:

First: With Regards to Sharia Authorities' Roles in Confronting the Tide of Extremism:

1. Ensuring the support of unifying Sharia authorities, strengthening them and raising awareness amongst youth and other segments of society.
2. Ensure independence of Sharia authorities from governments, varying agendas and political parties.
3. Emphasize the role of scholars and religious leaders in confronting extremism and extremist thought. This is achieved through responding to doubts, and dialoguing and debating with extremist rhetoric, to draw attention to the contradictions in their ideas and behavior.
4. Attention to not confusing any extreme discourse with the extremist discourse which dilutes religious constants and plays with them.
5. Interact with and get close to the youth and respond to their question, which means allocating long periods of time for them.
6. Not leaving the supporters and the popular havens of extremism alone and focusing on their discourses by all means and with the appropriate language and means.
7. Warning against the Extremists' worldview and pay attention to its dimensions and historical roots.
8. Confirming the importance of specializing in religious knowledge among different segments of the people, and clarifying that it comes from study confirmed by ulema through ijazas and documentation by them.
9. Calling a group of Sharia authorities to specialize in the areas of political fiqh and the fiqh of reality, and re-opening the door of ijtihad and presenting fatwas for a number of problematic issues which extremist thought has been able to take advantage of.
10. For the discourse of Sharia authorities to have enough diversity to be appropriate for different segments of society and their needs, and speaking to each with the language and terms appropriate for them, and focusing on directing a special discourse for women.
11. Confirming the necessity to break up the ideological and education structure of extremism first, then popular mobilization and making the inviolability of society before security work or military confrontation with extremists.
12. Paying attention to the psychological dimension in youth discourse, and choosing role models and able to present a convincing discourse and a live example of someone who practices what he preaches.

13. Confirming the importance of Media's role and its effect in strengthening independent unified Sharia authorities, introducing them, and preparing the people to accept them.
14. Challenging the extremism of liberal discourse and confronting it intellectual as it is one of the biggest reasons for the emergence of extremist thought and its spread.
15. Being connected to those with interests in Syria who have joined political reform projects and follow an Islam of moderation.
16. Political ijtihad for moderate ulema to present concepts related to the big contemporary issues which extremists discuss and use to polarize the people.
17. Supporting the political participation of the factions as a means to confront extremism and violent terrorism.

Second: With regards to the criteria for distinguishing extremist groups from moderate groups in the revolution:

1. Defining terms of extremism and terrorism, explaining each term it, determine its indicators and measures, and following this by arranging the terms according to their degrees of danger.
2. Working to classify the entirety of the militant groups which fought alongside Assad and determining criteria to measure the extremism of their ideas and behaviors.
3. Working to develop standardized criteria for state terrorism, which possesses means individuals do not, classifying terrorist states and warning against them.
4. Determining the criteria in the paper in a language that fosters standardization.
5. With regards to the criteria of behavioral extremism, it is necessary to study and analyze the circumstances and reasons of such extreme behaviors prior to carrying out evaluations in order to reach more objective and fair conclusions.
6. Develop previously existing standards by experts and specialists and work towards acquiring greater compatibility and accreditation in order to form a unified reference to measure extremism throughout varying sectors.

Thirdly, With Regards to the Factions' Experiences in dealing with Extremism and its Discourse:

1. The need to record historical facts of occurrences in the revolution, and to collect testimonies and various accounts of those who lived it, in an attempt to document the period. This is to be done through testimonies, extracting information and analyzing them to reach the results without rushing to judgment due to the complexity of the issues at hand.