# Introduction

In the decade that has passed since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, many once-obscure people have become celebrities of a sort. Names such as 'Osama bin Laden' and 'Ayman al-Zawahiri' have become well known, even to people with only a passing interest in the Middle East, terrorism and Islamism. One name that is clearly not part of this group belongs to the person whose ideas and influence form the subject of this book: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. Although this Jordanian radical Islamic ideologue has received some media attention because of the spectacular acts of terrorism by Abu Musʿab al-Zarqawi, a former leader of al-Qaʿida in Iraq and once a student of al-Maqdisi's, he remains virtually unknown to the general public, even in the Middle East. It therefore came as a surprise to many when, in 2006, the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, New York, published a study of radical Islam that concluded that, contrary to popular perception, the most influential scholar in the world of militant Islamism today was not former al-Qaʿida leader Osama bin Laden or his successor Ayman al-Zawahiri, but precisely this little-known man called Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.[1]

It is clear that al-Maqdisi has indeed been an influential ideologue among like-minded Muslims across the world and that his influence goes far beyond simply having been the teacher of al-Zarqawi. His Arabic website (www.tawhed.ws) offers the largest library of jihadi literature on the Internet and his writings have been translated into about a dozen

[1] William McCants (ed.), *The Militant Ideology Atlas*, Executive Report, West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2006, 8–9.

other languages, most of which are available on his English website (www.tawhed.net). Al-Maqdisi is seen as an important ideologue by Islamist movements from Algeria to Indonesia, his works are praised and quoted by radical Muslim scholars across the Muslim world and he has been a prominent scholarly adviser to Jihadi-Salafi groups in the Gaza Strip and the North Caucasus since 2008.[2]

Despite the geographical diversity of these groups and scholars, however, they seem to have at least one thing in common, namely that all of them belong to a branch of Sunni Islam called Salafism. Since Salafi ideology is the basis of al-Maqdisi's writings and central to explaining his influence on others, we must first deal with this topic in some detail before turning to a historical overview of the development of radical Islam in the Arab world and an explanation of the theoretical framework and the methodology of this study and the sources used. This introduction concludes by presenting an overview of the rest of the book.

## The Salafi Ideological Basis

Just like al-Maqdisi's name, 'Salafism' was not a household word before 11 September 2001. Although several publications partly dealing with (aspects of) Salafism as it has developed since the 1970s had appeared before '9/11'[3], this was not reflected in common knowledge about the subject. This changed dramatically after the terrorist attacks on that day, when a large number of people became interested in the Salafi ideas associated with al-Qa'ida, the organisation behind the attacks. Although the number of books and articles dealing with al-Qa'ida and global radical Islam increased greatly after 2001, the rising interest in Salafism was only partly matched in scholarly publications focussing on the ideological tenets of this branch of Islam. Several publications have explored the link between Salafism and al-Qa'ida[4], have treated the

[2] For an overview of the groups and scholars influenced by al-Maqdisī, see Joas Wagemakers, 'A Quietist Jihadi-Salafi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi', unpublished PhD thesis, Radboud University, Nijmegen, 2010, 1–2.

[3] Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'The Salafi Movement in Jordan', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2000, 219–40.

[4] *Id.*, 'The New Global Threat: Transnational Salafis and Jihad', *Middle East Policy*, vol. 8, no. 4, December 2001, 18–38; Quintan Wiktorowicz and John Kaltner, 'Killing in the Name of Islam: Al-Qaeda's Justification for September 11', *Middle East Policy*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2003, 76–92.

former as a de-territorialised and a-cultural phenomenon[5] or have dealt with contemporary Salafism in individual countries such as Iraq[6] and Yemen[7]. It was not until quite recently, however, that in-depth studies dealing with Salafism as a whole and its ideology in particular started appearing.[8] Apart from the importance of Salafi ideas for this study, the relative lack of in-depth treatments of the ideological underpinnings of Salafism is therefore another reason to deal with this subject at some length. Moreover, it also introduces some of the main concepts and terminology used throughout this study.

### *Defining Salafism*

I use the term 'Salafism' to refer to those Muslims who try to emulate the 'pious predecessors' (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, hence the name Salafism) as closely and in as many spheres of life as possible and construct their beliefs, their behaviour and their reading of the sources of Islam to further that goal. Based on several traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (*ḥadīth*s), these predecessors are usually limited to the first three generations of Islam and are considered to be – in the words of the Prophet – 'the best of my community' (*khayr ummatī*).[9] They are believed to embody the purest and most authentic form of Islam. Salafis subsequently see themselves as the group that follows the only 'true' form of Islam and therefore believe they are the *ṭā'ifa manṣūra* (the victorious group) or the *firqa nājiya*

[5] Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Umma*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

[6] Mohammed M. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007, 63–87.

[7] Laurent Bonnefoy, 'Salafism in Yemen: A "Saudisation"?' in: Madawi al-Rasheed (ed.), *Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Arabia's Political, Religious and Media Frontiers*, London: Hurst & Co., 2008, 245–62; François Burgat and Muhammad Sbitli, 'Les Salafis au Yémen ou . . . la modernisation malgré tout', *Chroniques yéménites*, no. 10, 2002; Bernard Haykel, 'The Salafis in Yemen at a Crossroads: An Obituary of Shaykh Muqbil al-Wadi'i of Dammaj (d. 1422/2001)', *Jemen Report*, no. 2, 2002, 28–37.

[8] Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, London: Hurst & Co., 2009; Bernard Rougier (ed.), *Qu'est-ce que le salafisme?* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008; Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'The Salafi Movement: Violence and Fragmentation of Community', in: Miriam Cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence (eds.), *Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hiphop*, Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005, 208–34.

[9] For these traditions, see *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book 57 ('Kitāb Faḍā'il Aṣḥāb al-Nabī . . . '), chapter 1 ('Faḍā'il Aṣḥāb al-Nabī . . . '), nos. 2–3; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, book 44 ('Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥāba . . . '), chapter 52 ('Faḍl al-Ṣaḥāba, thumma lladhīna Yalūnahum, thumma lladhīna Yalūnahum'), nos. 2533–6.

(saved sect), the group of Muslims that – according to several *ḥadīth*s – will remain steadfast in their pursuit of the truth and will consequently be saved from hellfire.[10]

The concept most central to those I (and others) refer to as Salafis is *tawḥīd* (the unity of God). Apart from simply seeing this as monotheism as it is generally understood (the belief in only one god), Salafis distinguish three different kinds of *tawḥīd*: *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* (the unity of Lordship, referring to the belief that there is only one Lord and Creator), *tawḥīd al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt* (the unity of names and attributes, indicating that God is one and utterly unique in all his characteristics) and *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* (the unity of divinity, referring to the idea that only God is divine and therefore the only being worthy of worship). Because Salafis have such a strict understanding of what constitutes *tawḥīd* and because this concept can be seen as the basis of Islam, practices such as the veneration of so-called saints among Muslims are denounced as examples of violating the unity of God and are thus seen as expressions of polytheism (*shirk*) and unbelief (*kufr*). According to Salafis, the person guilty of such a sin is a polytheist (*mushrik*) and an unbeliever (*kāfir*) who becomes the subject of excommunication (*takfīr*) since he or she can no longer be called a Muslim. Salafis also object to any popular or cultural traditions added to the doctrines or practices of Islam, which – in their view – tarnish the purity of the religion as embodied by the lives of the pious predecessors. Such practices are referred to as 'religious innovations' (*bidʿa*, pl. *bidaʿ*) by Salafis, who try to shun them as much as possible.[11]

Salafis as I describe them also express what they believe to be their strict emulation of the *salaf* in not following the different schools of Islamic law (*sharīʿa*). In Sunni Islam, there are four such legal schools (*madhāhib*, sing. *madhhab*): the Hanafi, Shafiʿi, Maliki and Hanbali schools, each named after the person on the basis of whose ideas these schools developed. It has traditionally been common practice for Sunni Muslims to follow the rulings of one of these *madhāhib* (*taqlīd*), often depending on the geographical region one is from, with each of the four schools recognising each other as orthodox and legitimate. Salafis reject *taqlīd*, however,

[10] Bernard Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action', in: Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, London: Hurst & Co., 2009, 33–4; Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2006, 207; *id.*, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001, 111–12, 120.

[11] Haykel, 'Nature', 39; Wiktorowicz, *Management*, 113–17.

since they believe one should only follow the original two sources of Islam, the Qur'ān and the example of the Prophet Muhammad (Sunna) as embodied by the various *ḥadīth*s. If these do not provide clear-cut answers to their questions, Salafis advocate independent interpretation of these two sources (*ijtihād*), freed from the boundaries that the various schools impose.[12]

### *The Roots of Salafism*

Although Salafism in its present form came into existence in the latter half of the twentieth century, its roots go back hundreds of years. The desire to emulate the pious predecessors – particularly the Prophet himself and the first four 'rightly guided caliphs' (the so-called *rāshidūn*) – can be said to have always been part of Sunni Islam in general, not just its Salafi current. It is the strictness and methodology with which Salafis try to live up to the standard set by the *salaf* and their willingness to gear their teachings and beliefs towards that goal, however, that distinguishes them from other Sunni Muslims. Because of their emphasis on precisely emulating the first generations of Islam, Salafis attach great importance to finding, studying and following *ḥadīth*s about the predecessors. This search for as many details about the *salaf* as possible in order to apply them in one's own life so as to live in a strictly Islamic way is rooted in the eighth-century movement known as the *ahl al-ḥadīth*. This group of scholars from Medina had a strong preference for using only the Qur'ān and the Sunna in their reasonings.[13] This trend to rely on *ḥadīth*s to complement the Qur'ān at the expense of non-scriptural sources of the *sharī'a* such as analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) or scholars' own legal opinions (*ra'y*) eventually became important to all schools of Islamic law, especially the Hanbali one, which followed the principles espoused by the scholar Ibn Hanbal (780–855).[14] Through Hanbali scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292–1350) and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–92), the principles behind the *ahl al-ḥadīth* – emulating the pious predecessors as closely as possible – strongly influenced the modern-day movement we now call Salafism.

[12] Haykel, 'Nature', 42; Wiktorowicz, *Management*, 119–20.
[13] Haykel, 'Nature', 38.
[14] Joseph Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, 63, but see also Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools* (transl. Marion H. Katz), Leiden: Brill, 2002, 18–49, esp. 18–22, and 287–97.

Despite the fact that the tenets of Hanbalism and the teachings of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab (often referred to as 'Wahhabism') have been major sources of influence on Salafism, they should not be equated with it. There is a tendency among some to lump especially the terms 'Wahhabism' and 'Salafism' together. Although there is indeed reason to do so – many of the beliefs, doctrines and sources used are the same – there are differences. The term 'Salafism' refers to the broad movement of Muslims who meticulously try to live according to the example of the *salaf* as they see fit, whereas 'Wahhabism' – a term rejected by its adherents – refers to the specific type of Salafism propagated by the eighteenth-century reformer Muhammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhab from the central Arabian region of Najd. One could thus say that Wahhabism is the Najdi branch of Salafism. There are, in fact, many Muslims whom one might call Salafis but not Wahhabis. Adherents to the belief that the *salaf* should be emulated as closely and in as many spheres of life as possible have been found in areas outside Najd for centuries[15] and they have sometimes differed ideologically with the latter, for instance on Wahhabis' overly strict enforcement of their beliefs, their lack of tolerance towards others and their limited use of *ijtihād*.[16]

Just as contemporary Salafism should not be equated entirely with Wahhabism, it should also not be confused with the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century movement often referred to as Salafism.[17] This modernist trend, propagated by thinkers such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838/39–97), Muhammad ʿAbduh (1849–1905) and Rashid Rida (1865–1935) did indeed try to move Islam back into the direction of the *salaf* but with a completely different objective. Whereas contemporary Salafis try to emulate the predecessors to purify Islam and revert to its supposedly original and true form, Al-Afghani, ʿAbduh, Rida and others did so in order to rid Islam of the centuries of legal and historical

[15] Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002 [1982], 268–96.

[16] Hala Fattah, '"Wahhabi" Influences, Salafi Responses: Shaikh Mahmud Shukri and the Iraqi Salafi Movement, 1745–1930', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2003, 127–48; Stéphane Lacroix, 'L'apport de Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani au salafisme contemporain', in: Bernard Rougier (ed.), *Qu'est-ce que le salafisme?* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008, 46–7.

[17] Recent research has shown that the term 'Salafism' in the modernist sense was not an accurate term to describe its adherents and did not represent a clear trend. See Henri Lauzière, 'The Construction of *Salafiyya*: Reconsidering Salafism from the Perspective of Conceptual History', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2010, 369–89.

baggage that had, in their view, turned it into a rigid religion unfit for modern times. By going back to the earliest period of their religion, they wanted to strip Islam of this 'burden' so it could be rebuilt again from the bottom up in a way that was assertively Islamic but compatible with the challenges of their time. Although these reformists shared a preference for certain concepts with their present-day namesakes, such as an emphasis on *tawḥīd* and a rejection of *taqlīd*, in the end theirs was a thoroughly modernist discourse, as opposed to the purifying tone of contemporary Salafis.[18] In some cases, such as among nineteenth-century Salafi scholars in Iraq and Syria, Muslims espoused both a purifying and a modernising form of Salafism: on the one hand they strove to strip Islam of what they considered to be sinful deviations and religious innovations, but they also did so partly in order to better prepare the religion for the challenges presented by modern life. This partial embrace of modernity, albeit one couched in a purifying religious discourse, is a crucial difference with the contemporary Salafism that is central to this study.[19]

### *Labelling Salafism*

This discussion suggests that labelling Salafism is somewhat problematic and that the name 'Salafism' is not universally applied to the same group of people. This is indeed the case, and not just among scholars of Salafism. The people referred to in this study as Salafis also reject this label sometimes. Believing that labelling believers in different ways only leads to unwelcome divisions within Islam, some Muslims I call Salafis have argued that they should really be seen as followers of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, the *ahl al-Sunna wa-l-jamāʿa* (the people of the Sunna and the community), or simply as Muslims. The first of these three options more or less boils down to the same as the term 'Salafis', the second is too subjective to be

[18] For a good overview of Al-Afghanī's, 'Abduh's and Riḍā's ideas, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983 [1962], 103–60, 222–44.

[19] For such Salafi trends in Iraq, see, for instance, Itzchak Weismann, 'Genealogies of Fundamentalism: Salafi Discourse in Nineteenth-Century Baghdad', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2009, 267–280; for Syria, see David Dean Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria*, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; Mun'im Sirry, 'Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī and the Salafi Approach to Sufism', *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2011, 75–108; Itzchak Weismann, 'Between Ṣūfī Reformism and Modernist Rationalism – A Reappraisal of the Origins of the Salafiyya from the Damascene Angle', *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2001, pp. 206–237; *id.*, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus*, Leiden: Brill, 2001, pp. 263–304.

useful for an academic study and the third is far too broad to be of any use. It is therefore important to note that my use of the term 'Salafism' and its derivatives is not based on what the people I refer to as 'Salafis' call themselves. Instead, it is partly based on common practice among Western scholars of the subject, but also on my own observation that some Muslims share the strict attempt to emulate the *salaf* in various ways, legitimising the use of a label derived from that word. My use of the term 'Salafism' should therefore be seen as a label that *I* use, not as one that is necessarily endorsed by the people it refers to.

The people I label 'Salafis' all share the basic ideas I have outlined here. There are, however, significant differences between Salafis. Two different terms are particularly relevant in this respect: *ʿaqīda* (creed) and *manhaj* (method). The term *ʿaqīda* refers to the beliefs and doctrines that Salafis subscribe to and has been described earlier in its most basic form. Because of Salafis' desire to purify Islam of religious innovations and other 'un-Islamic' influences, defining exactly what their creed entails is very important to them, hence the many documents outlining the exact beliefs of Salafis.[20] *Manhaj*, on the other hand, refers to the method of applying this creed. The Saudi Salafi scholar Salih b. Fawzan al-Fawzan has distinguished three different forms of this concept. The first of these is Salafis' method of dealing with the sources of Islam. The second is the method of worship (*ʿibāda*) and the third is the *manhaj* of dealing with society.[21]

The first form of *manhaj* is probably universally agreed upon by Salafis since they all believe in a strictly literal reading of the sources, even if that means texts cannot be reconciled with one another, and eagerly search for textual – as opposed to rationally argued – proof for their beliefs.[22] The second and third forms, however, are controversial. Although Salafis agree that the worshipping of saints is a form of *shirk*, they do not have the same ideas on what constitutes worship. As we will see later, several scholars – including al-Maqdisi – believe that following laws can also be seen as a form of worship, a point that is contested by others. The third form of *manhaj* mentioned by al-Fawzan is probably the most controversial

[20] See, for example, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-ʿUthaymīn, *The Muslims* [sic] *Belief*, www.allaahuakbar.in/scholars/uthaymeen/muslims_belief.htm, n.d.; Abū Baṣīr al-Ṭarṭūsī, *Hādhihi ʿAqīdatunā wa-Hādhā lladhī Nadʿū ilayhi*, www.tawhed.ws/r?i=xdvnxy3h, 2002.

[21] Ṣāliḥ b. Fawzān al-Fawzān, *Why Manhaj?* www.allaahuakbar.in/aqeedah/manhaj/index.htm, n.d.

[22] Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy', 210–12; *id.*, *Management*, 114–15.

one, however, as it deals with contentious social and political issues such as parliamentary participation and the use of violence.

Based on the division between *ʿaqīda* and *manhaj*, Wiktorowicz, in a seminal article, has distinguished three types of Salafis: quietists (or purists, as he calls them), politicos and jihadis.[23] According to Wiktorowicz, they all agree on issues relating to *ʿaqīda* but differ when it comes to *manhaj*, which he more or less equates with the third form of *manhaj* distinguished earlier, namely the method of dealing with society. Quietists focus on the propagation of their message (*daʿwa*) through lessons, sermons and other missionary activities and stay away from politics and violence, which they leave to the ruler (*walī l-amr*). This group includes major Salafi scholars such as the Syrian scholar Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani (d. 1999) and the Saudis ʿAbd al-ʿAziz b. Baz (d. 1999) and Muhammad Salih al-ʿUthaymin (d. 2001).[24] Politicos, on the other hand, do engage in political debate, or even participate in elections and parliaments, and include Saudi scholars such as Salman al-ʿAwda, Safar al-Hawali[25] and the Egyptian Abu ʿAbdallah ʿAbd al-Rahman b. ʿAbd al-Khaliq. Jihadi-Salafis are perhaps the least-defined group in the literature on Salafism in general and are usually seen simply as violent Salafis or the ones who support jihad. This is wrong, however, since – as we will see later on – *all* Salafis view jihad as a legitimate Islamic concept and support it (at least in principle) in cases where non-Muslim enemies invade Muslim countries, even though they may have practical objections to actually waging war in such cases. The people I refer to as Jihadi-Salafis go much further than just supporting such a 'classical jihad', and believe that religiously motivated war may also be waged to solve political problems within Muslim societies themselves, most particularly to overthrow the supposedly unbelieving rulers of Islamic countries. Thus, Jihadi-Salafis, in my use of the term, are those Salafis who believe that jihad should not just be waged against invading or aggressive non-Muslim enemies but should also be used in a revolutionary way against the 'apostate' rulers in their own midst.

Although Wiktorowicz's article has done much to clarify the differences among Salafis, his division of them is somewhat too schematic. His assertion, for example, that all Salafis agree on the creed is true when it

[23] *Id*., 'Anatomy', 225–8.
[24] Haykel, 'Nature', 49; Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, London & New York: Routledge, 2007, 248.
[25] See Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, New York: Palgrave, 1999, 61–113, for an in-depth treatment of these men.

comes to its basic tenets as just described but not when dealing with its details. Questions about issues such as what constitutes faith and, especially, when a Muslim can be said to have lost his or her faith and can be declared an 'infidel' are controversial among Salafis and are answered in different ways, as we will see later on. Furthermore, Wiktorowicz's treatment of the term *manhaj* suggests that Salafis are either quietists, politicos or jihadis. In this study, however, I argue that this need not be the case since Salafis may well transcend the borders of one particular type of *manhaj* and emphasise, for instance, both *da'wa* and jihad in their writings as useful ways of expressing contention and dealing with society and politics.

One such example of a Salafi whose ideology challenges the division made by Wiktorowicz is al-Maqdisi. I contend that al-Maqdisi, even though he is clearly a Jihadi-Salafi, uses arguments, concepts and terms that show he is very close to the quietist creed. Moreover, his emphasis on the use of *da'wa* shows that he also partly adopts the method of quietist Salafis. Therefore, one might say that al-Maqdisi is, in fact, a 'quietist Jihadi-Salafi'. In this study, I argue that al-Maqdisi's closeness to quietist Salafis in both *'aqīda* and *manhaj* is a major factor in explaining his influence among certain Salafis and his lack thereof among others.

## The Development of Radical Islam

The outline given here has described in some detail what Salafism entails and has pointed out that al-Maqdisi belongs to its jihadi branch. Jihadi-Salafism, however, did not come into existence in an ideological vacuum, as the information given here might suggest. Before it became what it is nowadays, it went through many stages of development and was often influenced by events and groups not directly linked to Salafi beliefs. The following paragraphs deal with the development of radical forms of Islam in the Arab world and how this culminated into Jihadi-Salafism as we know it today. Just like the description of Salafism, this must be dealt with in some detail since it introduces many of the events relevant for the rest of this book and provides a historical basis from which subsequent chapters continue.

### *The Muslim Brotherhood and Its Heirs*

The roots of today's radical Islamic organisations in the Arab world can be traced to the founding of a movement that is still widespread and