



Salafists and Sectarianism: Twitter and Communal Conflict in the Middle East

BY GENEIVE ABDO



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Introduction

The widening divide between Shi'a and Sunni believers has become one of the most important factors in destabilizing the Middle East, and there seems to be no end in sight. The blossoming of the Syrian war into a full-scale sectarian conflict between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims and its spillover into parts of Iraq and Lebanon has re-ignited a debate among U.S. policymakers and Western analysts over whether fundamental doctrinal differences or political rivalry and socio-economic grievances lie behind the conflict.

Although actors on both sides are driving this conflict, it is today's Salafists who are proving to be the dominant standard-bearers of anti-Shi'a discourse—not taking into account the violent jihadists, whose popular appeal and staying power have yet to be demonstrated despite some spectacular and headline-grabbing territorial gains and terrorist acts. The Salafist movement has shown itself adroit at exploiting opportunities to advance its rhetorical and theological positions amid the religious re-examination and outright contestation among religious subgroups sparked by the recent Arab uprisings and their successful challenge to existing institutions of power in the region.

At the heart of the resurgent Salafist movement is the seemingly sudden emergence of a compelling message of a return to the ideas and morals of the era of the Prophet Mohammad at the expense of Islam's subsequent rich tradition of religious interpretation. Given that the uprisings occurred on the heels of a surge in Shi'a power in both Iraq and Lebanon, the Sunnis were predisposed to feel threatened. The sectarian war in Syria has been pivotal in providing a narrative for both sides in answering the fundamental questions within the world of Islam: Who is a Muslim and who gets to decide? Although these are age-old questions within Islam, the violence that has ensued since the Arab uprisings over these very issues threatens to redraw the map of the Middle East and create instability for years to come.

The conflict over resolving these two questions is both a Shi'a-Sunni debate as well as an internal conflict among the different strands of Sunni thought. While some scholars and specialists argue that the root of the conflict is the result of weakening or collapsed states in the aftermath of the Arab rebellions, this study will open a much-needed window on one of the fundamental causes—if not the fundamental cause—of today's violence: Islam itself is being revised in the midst of political upheaval in the Middle East. Jihadists, Salafists, Shi'a militias and other non-state actors are actively trying to re-define Islam as they see it.

The following study focuses on rising Salafist players who are intimately engaged in the public debate—not the radical jihadists who are fighting in Syria and Iraq but the non-violent Salafists who are successfully using social media and other such platforms to express their negative views of the Shi'a and, by association, the Alawites and Iran. They are using social media to take advantage of conflicts throughout the region in order to raise their public profiles and influence public opinion. Although much media focus and attention is devoted to the radical jihadists, those Salafists who do not condone violence also have an important role in the future of destabilizing the Middle East. Uncovering and understanding their subculture, and in particular their public discourse, is vital to prudent and responsible policy formulation.

Penetrating and engaging with the world of contemporary Salafism presents a number of challenges to the researcher. However, as this study will show, new social media technologies taking hold around the world, in particular Twitter feeds, can offer valuable insight into Salafist ideas and practice and help identify leading personalities, uncover important relationships, and reveal significant discursive trends. "Social media has revolutionized the way that the world has understood the Syrian conflict and how that conflict has been waged,"

asserted a study published by the United States Institute of Peace.¹ “Syria has been at the cutting edge of the evolution of new uses of social media and the Internet by political actors, insurgent groups, journalists and researchers.” As skeptics of the power of social media have noted, Twitter cannot inspire revolutions and did not create the Arab uprisings, for example. The political and social conditions for revolution or violence must be present and do not emerge from cyberspace. These same critics argue that individuals are responsible for creating the Arab uprisings, not the tools available to them. Nonetheless, Twitter and other forms of social media have proven to be valuable tools in influencing events on the ground once they are already underway, creating an interactive discussion between those in cyberspace and the foot soldiers on the ground.

As I will show, chief among the central threads of Salafist discourse in Arabic is an abiding belief that the Shi’a are not real Muslims, and are out to extinguish Sunni believers who, in the Salafist view, are the only true Muslims. This paper will also suggest ways in which events on the ground, whether major battles in the Syrian war or the mere arrest of a Sunni leader, provide fodder for religious intolerance in the Twitter sphere, which then can exacerbate religious strife on the ground. Any doubts about the power of social media, including Twitter and YouTube, to engage and mobilize forces for religious struggle should have been dispelled by the recent recruitment and propaganda successes of the militant Sunnis of the Islamic State.

While direct causation cannot be established between the Salafists’ sectarian discourse, as spread and amplified by social media such as Twitter, and specific events on the ground, I would argue that neither can it be summarily ruled out. To ignore or downplay the role of religion, religious identity, and religious grievance in shaping and even driving today’s conflicts is to fall into the same trap that has long plagued Western analysis of the Muslim world:

a reluctance or downright refusal to acknowledge the very real part of religious identity in fomenting and perpetuating political and social activism and inter-communal violence in the Middle East.

This is, perhaps, not that surprising, as the causes are both contextual and discursive. In the first place, this phenomenon can be partly ascribed to very real differences between the Muslim and Western worlds on the place of religion in public and private life. Where Islam offers its adherents a complete prescription for human existence and behavior, Western religious practice has become increasingly isolated and cordoned off from the public square. Religion, then, must be seen within the context of Muslims’ beliefs and practices; the two cannot be simply divorced from one another to fit an alien, Western model. According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in November 2013, in Iran and Iraq at least three-quarters of Shi’a and Sunnis said religion is very important to them. Only in Lebanon was there a difference between the sects: 66 percent of Lebanese Sunnis said religion was important, compared with 51 percent of Lebanese Shi’a.

The careful reader will note that I am not suggesting that other causes—social, religious, economic, and so on—are not also important factors in today’s sectarian rivalries and conflicts and thus unworthy of discussion and analysis. I am, however, making a case for the respectful study and analysis of religious difference and the role that it plays in the modern Middle East. Toward that end, I will explore ways in which the social media platform of Twitter, with its enormous reach, low costs, and ease of access, has allowed religious debate in the Middle East to go transnational among millions of users.

While the mosque was once the central forum for local political thought and debate and had a great effect in Islamizing Arab societies into the 1990s, its reach was always relatively narrow, easy to moni-

1. Marc Lynch, Deen Freelon, and Sean Aday, “Syria’s Socially Mediated Civil War,” *United States Institute of Peace*, Peaceworks no. 91 (2014), 27.

tor, and limited in appeal. The only other medium that can possibly compete with social media is television. Some of the Salafists this author will feature later in this monograph have millions of Twitter followers, scattered across many Arab countries. A few years ago, before the Arab uprisings, some were completely unknown. Now, they rank among the region's most influential non-state actors.

The Salafists are just one example of the emergence of influential non-state actors in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. They pose a formidable challenge to the United States government as it tries to deescalate conflicts in the region. Whether it is Hamas, Hezbollah, the Muslim Brotherhood, or ill-defined movements such as the Salafists, the U.S. has few channels for dialogue and, even if some channels exist, the rising anti-Americanism among these actors makes potential dialogue and negotiation highly improbable.

In the case of some Salafists featured in this study, the government of Saudi Arabia provides them with a home and with relative security. The United States should pressure its allies to coordinate efforts to decrease religious intolerance, a stated American value. In addition, Washington should avoid appearing to take sides in the Sunni-Shi'a conflict. Already, due to Washington's willingness to negotiate with Iran over its nuclear program, many Sunni leaders perceive the United States to be siding with the Shi'a. As a result, actions of these Sunni figures are geared toward reducing Shi'a Iran's influence in the Arab world.

The first section of this study will explain Salafist belief and how it has changed since the Arab uprisings began. The second section will feature key Salafist leaders—identified through their success propagating their views on Twitter—and the third section will present important Twitter feeds from 2013 and offer an analysis of what they reveal about views towards the Shi'a and whether such tweets have had any effect on events being played out in Syria, Iraq, and across the Middle East.

What is Salafism?

A proper understanding of contemporary Salafism requires some initial unpacking of the term, particularly as it is often employed in Western discourse. Among the common distortions imposed from without is a reflexive conflation of the Salafists with the Wahhabis, whose integral ties with the Saudi state mark them as one component of a global originalist trend within Islam.

Rather, it is important to see Salafism as a multi-dimensional notion that cannot easily be circumscribed by narrow political or national affiliation or allegiance. And after the Arab uprisings, as more Salafists from nearly every Arab country enter politics, in some cases informally and in others through political parties, the notion of Salafism itself has become diversified. Ahmad Moussalli, of the American University of Beirut, only slightly oversimplifies the case when he noted in a recent study of contemporary trends in Islam, “As a rule, all Wahhabis are Salafists, but not all Salafists are Wahhabis.”²

The charge of “Wahhabism,” with its implication of direct association or even subservience to Saudi national or royal interests, is frequently leveled against the Salafists by opponents of the movement, particularly in those countries where a growing Salafist minority is seen as a potential threat by local Muslim authorities.³

The ambivalent relationship between the Salafists and a Saudi religious and political establishment that is increasingly the subject of the movement’s wrath—even as the kingdom plays host to a large number of influential Salafist clerics—only further complicates the picture. How, the observer might well ask, can a religious movement under the name

of Salafism have room for both the violent extremism of al Qaeda and the political conservatism of Saudi religious officialdom?

Analysts have generally responded to these challenges by parsing the Salafist movement into several main tendencies or orientations, under different headings but essentially comprising the following groups: traditionalists, whose quietist approach focuses on spreading the religious call, or *da’wa*; the politically engaged, intent on application of Salafist principles to politics and governance; and the so-called jihadists, who pursue their goals through violence and revolution.⁴

It is important to note at the outset that while violent groups do certainly exist under the rubric of contemporary Salafism, the more common trend and significant trend is the *salafiyya al dawwiyya* [the evangelizing Salafists]. In his seminal essay, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” Wiktorowicz makes an important distinction within the broader tendency of evangelizing Salafists between what he calls the “politicos” and the traditionalists, or purists. Wiktorowicz notes that in recent years the politically active have shaken the purists’ long-standing grip on authority because the former argue they have a better understanding of modern concerns and are thus better equipped to apply the Salafist creed in today’s world.⁵

After the Arab uprisings, this notion of authority has become more salient and is certainly the case with the Salafists now gaining influence in the Arab world who will be featured later in this paper. Although they are religious scholars in their own right, their new-found authority stems largely from

2. Ahmad Moussalli, “Wahhabism, Salfism, and Islamism: Who is the Enemy?” *Conflicts Forum*, January 2009.

3. Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, no. 29 (2006), 207, note 1.

4. For example, Wiktorowicz divides global Salafists into “purists, politicos, and jihadis,” 209–239. See also: Christopher M. Blanchard, “The Islamic Tradition of Wahhabism and Salafiyya,” *Congressional Research Service*, RS21695, January 25, 2006.

5. Wiktorowicz, “Wahhabism, Salfism, and Islamism: Who is the Enemy?”, 208.

their political stances: they fight against Bashar al Assad; they oppose policies of Western governments; and they warn against Shi'a Iran's excessive interventions and ambition for greater influence in the Sunni Arab world. In addition, some are critical of the Sunni monarchies in the Gulf, and they present themselves as alternatives to the purists who tow the government line in some Gulf States.

This paper then focuses on these very Salafists who believe that calling all Muslims to the true Islam does not exclude engaging in political activity. In fact, some Salafist groups, such as the Ansar al Sunna in the Sudan, the Noor party in Egypt, and Salafists in northern Lebanon, all of whom could be classified as *da'wa* Salafists, no longer withdraw from current affairs or adopt a fully apolitical stance. In some cases, they feel they are being dragged into politics because of the wars in Syria and Iraq, which in their view, they believe necessitate commentary and action.

Core Beliefs

The important distinctions drawn above between competing quietest and activist tendencies among today's Salafists must not obscure the fact that a single body of religious thought has formed the heart of the movement from the beginning—one that unites both “politicos” and traditionalists. Here, the central guiding principle rests on a strict reading of Islam's defining notion, the unity of God, or *tawhid*. This focus on *tawhid* is accompanied by a general rejection of human agency, in particular reason and legalistic or logical argumentation, in understanding and applying divine law. Flowing from this is a narrow focus on the Koran and the Sunna, or lived example of the Prophet Muhammad, and a general dismissal of man-made religious law, metaphorical interpretation, or other “innovations” in religious thought and practice.

Thus, the movement seeks a return to an Islam—real or imagined—as practiced at the time of the Prophet and his original followers, the so-called “ancestors,” *al salaf*, from which we derive the term Salafists. The notion of three authoritative generations rests on a popular *hadith*, or saying of the Prophet Muhammad: “The best of my [the Prophet's] community are my generation, then those who came after them, and then those who follow them.”⁶ This exclusive focus on the perceived practices and beliefs of the first Muslims forms the bedrock of Salafist doctrine, whatever their political or social stances. And, it is the crucial antagonism toward the Shi'a, who do not recognize the Sunni line of succession to the Prophet Muhammad and cast doubt on the religious authority of the Prophet's immediate circle. Over the centuries, the difference between the two sects has crystallized around the question of who should succeed Muhammad as the head of the political and religious community. Should the new leader be chosen from his compan-

ions or only from his direct bloodline? The Shi'a believe his successor should have stayed within the Prophet's family, but the Sunni believe the most qualified person among his companions should have succeeded him, which in fact happened.

The resulting claims of authenticity, doctrinal certainty, and distinct unity of purpose, underscored by distinctive modes of dress, personal appearance, and speech, have successfully attracted Muslim believers worldwide. This appeal is all the more compelling in contrast to the dizzying forces of globalization arrayed against traditional religious and social values. Salafism, then, has proven to offer a potent message in a Muslim world deeply affected by the U.S.-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and then, by the Arab popular rebellions, all of which have toppled old certainties and provoked the search for new approaches.

As with other faith traditions, including Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity, such an uncompromising stance naturally increases the likelihood that those who disagree will be pushed beyond the borders of acceptable practice and labeled unbelievers, a process known in Islam as *takfir*. Whereas legal rulings are generally seen within the broader Islamic tradition to lack absolute certainty and thus have a multiplicity of acceptable answers, there can be no such flexibility in the unyielding Salafist understanding of *tawhid*. In other words, the Salafists have attempted to stake out a monopoly over response to the age-old question: Who is a good Muslim?

“To ensure the purity of Islam as they define it, contemporary Salafists articulate a very demanding interpretation of monotheism, which has the consequence of making unbelief more likely,” writes

6. Cited in Bernard Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,” in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 34.

Wiktorowicz. “They also advocate an expansive definition of innovation (*bid’a*), which narrows the scope of acceptable Islamic practice, and they remain wary of extra-scriptural influences and sources of knowledge in religious matters.”⁷

To counteract man’s natural inclination to further his own interests or fulfill his own base desires in the name of religion and religious rulings, the Salafists place a particular premium on the sayings and actions of the Prophet, as recorded in the *hadith*, over later and thus fallible interpretation, however learned. Not surprisingly, *hadith* scholarship plays an important role in Salafist intellectual life, and those who cast doubt on the accepted corpus of *hadith* are prone to being cast out as unbelievers.

The same stress on the *hadith* also reflects the complexities and seeming contradictions in the Koran, a text which in the Salafist view remains inherently obscure to human understanding and beyond human reason. Among the most significant targets of Salafist suspicion have been the canonical schools of Sunni religious law, established in the centuries after Mohammad’s revelation and, as far as the Salafists are concerned, far removed from both scripture and the practices and beliefs of his day. In particular, Salafists oppose emulation (*taqlid*), which they believe to be blind following, of these schools of thought and prefer independent religious interpretation, or *ijtihad*, and its application to contemporary conditions and problems, albeit within narrow, literalist limits.⁸ Herein lies one particularly important area of difference between the Wahhabis and most Salafists: the former follow the Hanbali school, or *madhhab*, while many Salafists reject the practice of *taqlid* altogether in favor of *ijtihad* grounded in a strict reading of the Koran and the accepted Sunni *hadith*.⁹

Despite a reputation for doctrinaire conservatism, such an approach has given contemporary

Salafism a flexibility and openness lacking among other Muslim traditionalists, who generally remain bound within the confines of one or another of the main schools, or *madhhabs*. This has led some scholars to label them “relatively open, even democratic.”¹⁰ Although this might be true for some Salafists, such as those in Egypt who formed political parties and ran in elections shortly after the uprising began in 2011, it is premature to characterize Salafists elsewhere as embracing recognizable democratic principles.

Like the Wahhabis, Salafists also strongly oppose popular religious traditions, such as the worship of saints and spirits and appeals for their intercession with God, the veneration of tombs of local religious figures, the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday, and so on, all of which represent idolatry and a violation of their cardinal principle, *tawhid*. Many of these practices reflect the integration of folk customs or ethnic traditions into Islam as it spread out from the Arabian heartland. Rooting them out and returning Muslims worldwide to a pristine reading of the faith is central to the Salafist mission. Needless to say, Salafism also rejects the many Western accretions to Islamic thought, chiefly from Classical Greek and early Christian influence, as dangerous, alien innovations grounded in necessarily fallible human attempts to understand God’s will.

As we can see, the interrelated beliefs that sit at the heart of Salafism—an uncompromising reading of the notion of *tawhid*, an originalist notion of true religious practice, with its inherent historicist approach to the first Muslims, and deep-set suspicion of human agency and reason as applied to religious interpretation—virtually guarantee that the movement will target divergent tendencies within Islam. Among the largest and most threatening of these tendencies are the Shi’a, whose own notions of history and rich traditions of *ijtihad* stand in direct opposition to core Salafist ideas.

7. Wiktorowicz, “Wahhabism, Salfism, and Islamism: Who is the Enemy?”, 219.

8. Roel Meijer, “Introduction,” in *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 4.

9. Ibid, 42.

10. Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,” 36.

Anti-Shi'a sentiment then has a long and tenacious history among the Sunni forebears of modern Salafism, including the revivalist Wahhabi movement that first arose in the Arabian Peninsula in the eighteenth century. Wahhabism remains a bedrock of the Saudi state, although its rulers have periodically had to rein in clerical animosity toward the Shi'a as a result of fear that the Shi'a might rise up against the state, as the Shi'a have done periodically in neighboring Bahrain, over the last two decades and particularly since 2011, when a popular uprising began that continues today.

Founder Mohammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) absorbed Hanbali teachings that the Shi'a, who differ with the majority Sunnis (among other ways) over the proper line of succession from the Prophet, were infidels for their refusal to recognize the righteousness of the Prophet Mohammad's companions. For Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, as for the modern Salafists, this Shi'a "rejectionism" undermines the supreme importance of the "pious ancestors" and with it the entire Salafist theological enterprise.

A brief look back reveals the extent to which these religious differences remain as relevant as ever. In his 18th-century treatise *The Refutation of the Rejectionists*, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab refers to all those who deny the legitimacy of the first two caliphs Abu Bakr (632–634) and Omar (634–644) while defending Ali's right of succession to the Prophet as rejectionists—this includes the Twelver Shi'a. Ibn Wahhab, like other like-minded Sunni scholars, has tried to prove the Shi'a are heretics because of their claims that the Prophet had designated his cousin and brother-in-law, Ali, to replace him, the Shi'a denial of the first three caliphs as leaders of the *ummah*, and particularly the Shi'a critical view of the Prophet's companions, who are considered by the Sunni to be the authenticators of *hadith* material, most valued by the Sunnis. As a result, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and others have argued that the Shi'a are opposed to the core principles of Sunni belief.

"This is the destruction of the basis of religion, because its base is the Koran and the *hadith*," wrote Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.¹¹ Thus, he declared the Shi'a unbelievers and saw in them a corrosive danger to Islam far greater than any external threat posed by either Christians or Jews.¹² For the Salafists, the Shi'a veneration of their imams—in the case of the so-called Twelver Shi'a who predominate in Iran, Ali ibn Abi Talib, the son-in-law of the Prophet, and Ali's eleven successors—smacks of idolatry and offends the all-important notion of *tawhid*.

11. Mohammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Al-Radd 'ala al-rafida*, quoted in Guido Steinberg, "Jihadi-Salafism and the Shi'is," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 113.

12. Steinberg, "Jihadi-Salafism and the Shi'is," 113.

Roots of the Current Shi'a-Sunni Tension: The Salafists' Role

Syria

In the Levant and Iraq, the Salafists have been involved in sectarian discourse since the 1950s. In Syria, the confessional distinction became more dominant after the late president Hafez al Assad took power in the early 1970s, particularly after he convinced the Lebanese Shi'a cleric Musa al Sadr in 1973 to declare that Syria's ruling Alawites were an offshoot of Twelver Shi'ism. Religious identity was so important to Assad that he moved to make religion part of the country's national identity.

This led the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria to openly challenge this designation and label the Alawites “unbelievers.” When Assad's regime became the only Arab country to support Iran in the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988), this only further escalated sectarian conflict in Syria. The Iranian revolution in 1979 had already produced alarm among Sunnis in the Arab world, and Assad's open alliance with Iran was a critical move in threatening the Sunnis inside the country.

A leader in the Muslim Brotherhood, Sai'd Hawwa, who was the group's ideologue, published a booklet entitled, *Khomeini, Deviation in Doctrines, Deviation in Positions*. In the booklet, he criticizes the Shi'a veneration of the imams, and asserts that the Shi'a teach that the Koran had been altered—in what would be a direct challenge to Salafist (and, in fact, orthodox Sunni) belief. He also denounces their rejection of the Prophet's companions. Hawwa argued that the Iranian revolution was an attempt to take over all Arab countries with Shi'a populations—much like the argument being made today about Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, Syrian

President Bashar al Assad, and former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki.

In the 1980s, another influential Syrian, Mohammad Surer Zain al Abidin, in his book, *Then Came the Turn of the Fire-Worshippers*, went even further on an anti-Shi'a campaign. Al Abidin, a Salafist, lumped all Shi'a in the same category and accused them of being part of a “Persian conspiracy.”¹³ He also charged Iran with trying to take over the Arab world—the same argument the Sunnis have been making since the Arab uprisings began. The late Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zarqawi was highly influenced by this text, according to references he made in his anti-Shi'a speeches.

Salafist thought in general has a long history in Syria. The reformist ideas of Mohammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Jamaledin al Afghani, the prominent religious scholar, and his students including Mohammad Abdu and Mohammad Rashid Rida, reached Syria through Jamal al din al Kasimi (1866–1914) who brought Salafist thought to the country through his invitation to unite the four Sunni streams to pray together in the same mosque. He also advocated a purer version of Islam that would unite Muslims. He had several students including Mohammad Bahjat al Bitar (1894–1976) and Ahmad Monther Al Othma (1909–1982) who were Salafists and worked to spread the doctrine.¹⁴

The initial Salafist *da'wa*, or call to Islam, was not successful in penetrating the Syrian community, where the appeal of the Muslim Brotherhood proved more attractive.¹⁵ Salafism returned under Sheikh Nasir al-Din al Albani (1914–1999), who had studied under Mohammad Bahjat Bitar. He

13. His title is a polemical reference to the ritual use of fire in Zoroastrianism, which was predominate in Persia before the coming of Islam.

14. Ali Abdallah, “Salafiyoo Sooryawal Thawra [Syria's Salafists and the Revolution],” *Al-Jumhuriya*, last modified December 12, 2013, <http://therepublicgs.net/2013/12/12/سلافيو-سوريا-والثورة/>.

15. *Ibid.*

also took his Salafist direction from the thinker, Mohammad Rashid Rida, who was more of a rationalist than many of today's Salafists.

Lebanon

In Lebanon, the Salafist mainstream was established by Sheikh Salem al Shahhal in 1946. After returning from a visit to Medina in 1964, Shahhal founded a group in Tripoli called Shabab Mohammad. It was later disbanded, and he formed another group called Al Jama'a Muslimun, which literally means, "The Group is comprised of Muslims." It was not connected to any other mainstream Islamic group.¹⁶ It was mostly focused on charity work and *da'wa*. Salem sent his three sons, Dai, Radi and Abu Bakr to study Sharia at the Islamic University in Medina. As Salem grew older, his son Dai took control and this marked the second phase of Salafist work. Instead of merely focusing on the *da'wa*, Dai combined both the *da'wa* and politics and during the Lebanese civil war in the 1970s, he founded an Islamic Army to defend the Sunni people.¹⁷ The Salafist movement in Lebanon took hold in the early 1980s.¹⁸

After the Taif agreement in 1989, which ended the Lebanese civil war, al Shahhal went on to resume *da'wa* work through religious schools, charity work with orphans, building mosques and creating the Koran Karim radio station. He also founded Jam'iyyat Al Hidayya wal Ihsan, which was the official face of the movement in 1988. Its work covered traditional *da'wa*, as well as education and social work.¹⁹

The government disbanded the Jam'iyyat in 1996, and accused it of inciting sectarianism in some of the books they distributed. However, the real motivation of the crackdown appears to have come from

the Syrian regime that then exercised considerable control over Lebanon.²⁰ The Syrian Army managed to crack down on Islamists in Tripoli in 1985. After the Syrian Army withdrew from Lebanon in 2005, the Jami'yat Al Hidayya wal Ihsan was allowed to operate again.²¹

Al Shahhal died in 2008 but Dai al Islam al Shahhal has picked up the mantle. In 2006, he established an association called Zadal-Akhira Institute. This association along with a multitude of Wahhabi-inspired charities provides a good foundation for Salafists to mobilize and expand their base.

Among the Salafists in Lebanon, there is a direct connection with their Saudi counterparts, who serve as mentors for some of the Salafist leaders this author met over the last two years. Lebanese Salafists, such as Dai al Islam al Shahhal, studied theology in Saudi Arabia and are undoubtedly influenced by the traditional Wahhabi antagonism toward the Shi'a. In the late 1970s, when Saudi Arabia's theological schools became an alternative to Cairo's al Azhar, the university that is considered the seat of learning for Sunni Muslims, Salafism took hold in Lebanon. The Saudi influence—and no doubt money—endeared some Lebanese to the Salafists.

When Rafik Hariri was Prime Minister, his Mustaqbal (Future) Movement publicly distanced itself from the Salafists, but there was a private alliance. The Future movement believed Salafist support was useful in elections, and both sides believed they had a common enemy—Hezbollah and Iran, and by association, the Shi'a in general.

Hariri's assassination in February 2005, which, according to a United Nations' Special Tribunal, was due to a Syrian-backed plot by agents of the Assad regime and some leaders in Hezbollah, allowed the

16. Ali Abdel-Aal, "Salafiyyat Lubnan...Al Nasha'awal Tatawor [Lebanese Salafism...Foundation and Development]," March 2010, <http://lojainiat.com/main/Content/سلفية-لبنان-النشأة-والتنشؤ>.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Mohammad M. Alloush, "Waqe' al Salafiyya fi Lubnan [The Salafist Reality in Lebanon]," *Al-Jumhuriya*, September 8, 2012, <http://therepublicgs.net/2013/12/12/سلفية-سوريا-والثورة>. This link goes to the article in footnote 14.

Salafists to attain greater prominence. Hariri was close to the Saudi royal family and was himself a powerful Sunni leader who posed a threat to Hezbollah. His assassination made him a martyr and a rallying point for all Sunnis because they had a common enemy—Shi'a Hezbollah.

In 2006, Hezbollah's war with Israel also mobilized the Sunnis, who feared the Shi'a militia's victory against Israel would make the movement too powerful. In addition, the 2008 Hezbollah takeover of parts of Beirut gave credibility to the anti-Shi'a rhetoric from Sunnis, including Salafists. During these years, some Sunni political leaders found the Salafists useful, but since that time they have generally parted ways.

Now, in part because of the absence in Lebanon of a strong Sunni leadership, Salafist power in the north is again on the rise. This is particularly the case as the Syrian war continues to simmer across the border. The moderate Salafists are forming a movement that bears resemblance to Hezbollah in the 1980s, when it began mobilizing support in Lebanon. But even so, they are quick not to exaggerate their influence. One Salafist leader in Tripoli told this author in June 2014 that he estimates their support in Lebanon to be only 5 to 6 percent of the population.

Iraq

According to Yehia al Kobeissi, one of the few authorities on Salafism in Iraq, Salafism did not take hold there in significant ways until the 1960s, and spread through individuals or small mosques, failing to create an intellectual party or movement. Sheikh Abdel Hamid Nader states that the first attempt to form a Salafist movement was in the 1960s by a group who studied under Sheikh Abdel Karim al Sa'eka. They succeeded in founding

Jama'at al Mowahidin, a group that produced an attempt at the Islamic Party in 1960.²²

In the mid-1970s, there was another attempt to forge a Salafist identity that was more political in nature and deviated from the strict proselytizing agenda. When the Iraqi state authorities discovered these Salafists, they were arrested in Mosul and Baghdad.²³ As a result, there was no organized and politically self-conscious Salafist movement in Iraq in any meaningful sense until 2003, according to al Kobeissi.²⁴

Now, Salafism in Iraq can be classified into three main streams, according to al Kobeissi and other analysts. The first trend is traditional Salafism that is not ideological and is close to the Muslim Brotherhood in thought. This trend is still present in Iraqi Salafism today, as represented by Jami'yat al Aadab al Islamiyya (founded in the mid-1940s) and such figures as Sheikh Sobhi Badri Samer'ee, who died in 2013, and Sheikh Abdel Hamid Nader.²⁵

The second trend is Al Salafiyya al Jameeya, which came into the spotlight after the U.S. invasion of Iraq. This group encouraged Iraqi citizens to join the army and police and participate in the political process. One of its leaders took a Sunni post in an Iraqi governorate. The group argued, in a book published in 2004, for the religious legitimacy of Iraqis taking posts in the occupied state, even if the appointment had come at the hands of the "*kafir*" occupying power, meaning the United States. This group follows traditional Salafist thought in that they do not believe in overthrowing the ruler of the state, and in December of 2012 issued a fatwa prohibiting protests against Iraqi Prime Minister al Maliki.²⁶

The third trend is jihadi Salafism that developed as a direct reaction to the U.S. invasion. Among

22. Yehya Al Kobeissi, "Al Salafiyya fil 'Iraq: Takalobat al Dakhelwa Tajathobat al Kharej [Salafism in Iraq: Internal Vicissitudes and External Enticements]," *Al Jazeera Center for Studies*, May 6, 2013, 5, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/ResourceGallery/media/Documents/2013/5/6/201356103854252734Salafism%20in%20Iraq.pdf>.

23. *Ibid.*, 9.

24. *Ibid.*, 11.

25. *Ibid.*, 8.

26. *Ibid.*, #.

the most prominent local jihadi Salafist groups is Al Jaysh al Islami, which was founded immediately after the U.S. invasion. This organization joined with two others, Jaysh Ansar al Sunna, and Jaysh al Mujahideen, on May 2, 2007 and formed Jabhat al Jihad wal Islah to counter Al Qaeda in Iraq.

The recent fear of Iranian Shi'itization of the Sunni Arab world did not begin with the Syrian war, but with the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. In 2003, this simmering animosity was transformed into a virtual Sunni-Shi'a civil war by the U.S. invasion and its many knock-on effects, chiefly the rise of Shi'a power in what had been the Sunni political stronghold of Iraq. The emergence of the Islamic State is a perfect example of a sectarian, extremist group which evolved in the aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion to oust Saddam Hussein from power. At that time, it was called al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and led by Abu Musab al Zarqawi, who was killed in 2006 by a U.S. air strike. One of al Zarqawi's central aims was to target Iraqi Shi'a. The militant group had fertile ground to wage a sectarian war. Not only did they wage war against coalition forces, but they appeared justified in their actions. Some Iraqi politicians who favored the U.S. invasion deliberately resisted building an inclusive political system in part because there was little incentive: there was little outside pressure and it was an opportunity for them to take advantage of the embryonic, weak state.

One of AQI's strongest bases during the U.S. invasion was in the town of Fallujah, where one of the most decisive battles in the Iraq war occurred in 2004. Once a Sunni stronghold of Saddam Hussein, where the Sunni elite enjoyed a privileged life, now the Sunnis of Fallujah and the rest of the Anbar province believe they have been marginalized by years of a U.S.-backed Shi'a government.

For many Sunnis, the arrival of Western forces, with the connivance of Shi'a Iran, posed a direct threat to the Muslim community of believers, and even more so when U.S.-backed Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki marginalized the Sunnis, leading to the

chaos of war and the emergence of competent and well-armed resistance leaders. Iraqi Shi'a proved willing and able to fight back. In other words, all the necessary ingredients were now present for a full-scale sectarian conflict.

After a U.S. counterterrorism campaign against AQI in 2006 and 2007, AQI's power and activity decreased and the group is believed to have started new roots in Syria, setting the stage for the militant group's takeover in 2014 of territory in Syria and Iraq. They changed their name to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, ISIS. In many ways, the Islamic State's activities in Syria today began in Iraq after the U.S. invasion.

Sectarianism and the Arab Uprisings

By 2010, when the Arab uprisings started, religious identity, while significant, did not appear to be the central cause of this new polarization in the Arab world. Instead, the key mobilizing issue was the removal of dictators from power. In Egypt, liberals worked alongside the Muslim Brotherhood to oust President Hosni Mubarak. In Iraq, a country with a long history of discrimination against the majority Shi'a population, many Sunni and Shi'a held the common objective of deposing Saddam Hussein, long before the Arab uprisings began in other countries and even though their sectarian differences were simmering.

The determination on the Arab streets was driven by demands for human dignity, social justice for all, and a better standard of living. Even in Bahrain, where the majority Shi'a population had been at odds with the Sunni monarchy, their Sunni fellow citizens were initially sympathetic to their socioeconomic grievances.

However, by 2012, the uprisings began to take on a far more sectarian tone. Now, in nearly every Arab country, even in Egypt where the Shi'a represent less than one percent of the population, religious difference is center stage, causing the social contracts by which these societies once adhered to break under the weight of sectarian tension for the first time since the Iran-Iraq war from 1980–1988. While the Sunni and Shi'a identity is shaped by modern-day experiences, it draws heavily upon past religious conflicts.

Accompanying the complex question of religion's direct role in today's divide is another, equally important query: why now? The peaks and wane of sectarian identity becoming primordial in Arab societies have depended upon the social and political context. Sectarian identity has the potential to go

from being latent and somewhat irrelevant to being inflamed in a short period of time—and this was the case with the Arab uprisings. In the modern nation state, it is always present—perhaps not in the romanticized memories of many who will argue that Shi'a and Sunni existed peacefully until the Arab uprisings—but due to its perpetual presence it is easily ignited with such developments as the US invasion of Iraq, and the subsequent Arab uprisings that opened the gates to deepening the Shi'a-Sunni divide.

In Iraq and Syria, the Sunnis believe they are facing an existential threat—with the Shi'a contributing materially to this threat. The perception among Sunnis today in nearly every Arab society is that the Shi'a, backed by Iran and Hezbollah, are determined to expand their religious influence and power in the region. This is the result of a Shi'a-led government in Iraq that enforced highly discriminatory policies against the Sunnis, Assad's survival, at least for now, over the opposition, with heavy material support from Hezbollah and Iran, and of warming relations between Iran and world powers, including the United States. The rise of violent Shi'a militias has also led the Sunnis to believe their faith is at risk.

As an Iraqi religious scholar explained, the U.S. invasion in 2003 allowed the Shi'a in Iraq to gain political supremacy, which they then used to marginalize the Sunnis. “The Shi'a objective in Iraq was to force the Sunnis to leave the country,” Muthana Hareth Al Dari, a leader in the Muslim Association of Scholars in Iraq, said in an interview. “Iraq was the gate because it encouraged the people to say no and stand up for their faith. The dominance of the Shi'a in Iraq and the increasing sectarianism encouraged sectarianism in other countries.”²⁷

27. Sabbah Yassin, interview by author, Amman, Jordan, October 2014.

In nearly every Arab country, Shi'a and Sunni remember the days before the Arab uprisings when religious sect was not a marker of identity. Whether these memories are simply versions of a glorified past or grounded in reality is hard to access. But in some cases, such as Iraq, the lack of sectarian identity was due to repression by the ruling power of Saddam Hussein. In Iraq, for example, Hussein banned the Shi'a from publicly practicing their religious traditions, such as Ashura, even though he allowed the Shi'a to hold high posts in the government.

A former Iraqi ambassador to Jordan, Sabbah Yassin, blames the United States for creating the conditions that allowed for a Shi'a-led government, which ultimately marginalized the Sunni population. And, after years of abuse after the U.S.-led invasion, he explained, the Sunnis had no recourse except to welcome the invasion of the Islamic State (ISIS) into parts of Iraq. "Support for ISIS is simply to get revenge on the Shi'a after years of abuse," Yassin said in an interview.²⁸

The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, with the Saudis using sectarianism to advance their own agenda, certainly has affected public perceptions, particularly through the media. Although Ayatollah Ali Khamenei often speaks publicly about the need to unite all Muslims, the Sunnis believe Iran has expansionist ambitions based upon its activity in Iraq and Syria, where Tehran is directly involved in keeping Assad in power. All of these conditions came together around the time of the Arab uprisings, causing the Shi'a-Sunni divide to deepen and eventually to rupture into outright conflict.

At a conference on Salafism organized by the Al Jazeera Center for Studies in January 2014, Syrian researcher Marwan Kabalan, observed: "Salafist movements have historically formed in response to one of two things: the state fails to address internal societal needs, or the state fails to address external threats to protect its people."²⁹ The uprisings created both of these conditions in many Arab states.

28. Ibid.

29. Malak Chabkoun, "No Single Definition for Salafism, AJCS' Conference Finds," *Al Jazeera Center for Studies*, February 13, 2014, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/events/2014/01/201412194433987696.htm>.

Non-Violent Salafists and Their Religious Discourse

As part of this study, a handful of influential Salafists were selected in order to examine in detail their religious and political discourse. They were selected for their influence measured by their degree of influence using social media analysis tools, which measure on a scale of 1–100 a person’s influence, or what is called social authority. For Twitter, the score is based upon the number of mentions and retweet rate of a few hundred of the users last tweets. Circulating someone else’s content to your network is significant. According to social media experts, it shows someone’s commitment to the original content. Therefore, some of the Salafists featured in this study were chosen because of their high social authority ratings.

Other Salafists, such as those in northern Lebanon, were selected even though they have only a few thousand followers, because of their close proximity to Syria and their demonstrated influence on Lebanese involvement in the Syrian war. The Lebanese Salafists are also highly influenced by leading Salafists in Saudi Arabia, which demonstrates the transnational nature of the messaging. Western and regional governments worry that the instability in Lebanon—not only due to Hezbollah’s military participation in the Syrian war but also the economic and political strains on the Lebanese state—will cause the country to erupt into its own civil war.

The subject matter for this study has been drawn from Twitter feeds in Arabic from 2013. While it does not attempt to present a scientific analysis of all such feeds over that period, it nonetheless opens a window into the discourse on Twitter in Arabic in order to better understand Salafist views of the Shi’a and events underway in the region.

At the same time, the changing tools and patterns of communication that shape our world today must be acknowledged, and it has become clear that Arabic Twitter feeds provide a much wider lens through which to examine Salafist views than more traditional one-on-one interviews between western researcher and subject. In fact, the information resulting from interviews is often formulaic or downright false. In addition, tweeting is often done to influence immediate events on the ground, such as the wars in Syria and Iraq. While clerics in the 1990s issued fatwas or *tafseer*, or Koranic commentary, today’s leading clerics have gone viral virtually, using Twitter, Facebook, and other forms of social media as their main platforms.

What emerges from the tweets under examination is the importance of the centuries-old rift between the Sunnis and the Shi’a, only now set in a contemporary context. In fact, sectarian conflict and its associated historical grievances frame and even determine Sunni discourse in almost all its guises, whether the topic at hand is political, economic, or social. Clearly, this phenomenon has very real implications for any attempt by outside players to understand, react to, and influence events on the ground.

As the tweets below indicate, the language the Salafists use to describe the Shi’a is almost invariably sectarian, describing their foes as infidels. For example, Hezbollah is regularly referred to as *Hezb al Shaytan*, or ‘Party of the Devil.’ The Salafists believe Hezbollah has maliciously monopolized the name of God by calling themselves “the Party of God”—especially because they are Shi’a, or unbelievers. Therefore, the Salafist refer to Hezbollah as Hezb al Lat—a reference to a pre-Islamic Arabian goddess who was one of the three main goddesses

of the city of Mecca. She is mentioned in the Koran (Sura 53:19), and pre-Islamic Arabs considered her as one of the daughters of Allah, along with Manat and al 'Uzza. In pre-Islamic Arabia, Allah was like the other polytheistic deities. Therefore, by calling Hezbollah this term, the Salafists are refuting their Islamic legitimacy as a religious party and movement. The Salafists also refer to the Shi'a as *rafidha*, or the rejectionists, due to their rejection of the Sunni beliefs about who should be the successor to the Prophet.

Such references clearly demonstrate that while the conflict has been reignited in the context of the recent transformations in the Middle East, set in motion first by the 2003 U.S. invasion and then the Arab uprisings, these disputes are ultimately grounded in unresolved doctrinal difference and in related events dating back many centuries. Therefore, the Shi'a are unbelievers, *kuffar*, and more dangerous than Jews or Christians because they pose an existential threat from within the faith.³⁰

Such views toward the Shi'a drive today's discussions on Twitter.³¹ The relevant tweets generally fall under four categories: rehashing ancient religious differences; fear the Shi'a will become the majority Muslim sect in the Arab world; linkages between violence on the ground and contested religious beliefs; and calls for practical action, such as donations of aid and money for the Syrian rebels, who are seen as fighting the Sunni cause against the pro-Shi'a of the Alawite elite.

For example, this tweet falls into the first category: "The Shi'a say Hussein (may God be pleased with him) knows the unknown, so we tell them if he

knew the unknown why did he go to his fate? So they remain silent with the answer," tweeted Adnan al Arour, an influential cleric in Saudi Arabia.^{32, 33} Al Arour makes repeated references to Hussein and other Shi'a imams in relation to the events during the decisive 2013 battle for Qusayr in Syria, often in a mocking and sarcastic manner. This sarcasm often evokes anger and hostility from his followers. Al Arour asked if the Shi'a were killing the children of Qusayr to avenge Hussein's death at the battle of Karbala. One follower responded to al Arour on June 9, 2012 when he tweeted: "What is funny and sad is that the people who are killing our Sunni brothers in the name of Hussein in Syria and Iraq are also the grandchildren of those who betrayed Hussein and participated in his killing under the leadership of Ibn Marjana."³⁴

This tweet falls into the third category: "Where are the Twelve Imams who are present and know the unknown that you so desperately look towards?" tweeted Abdul Rahman Mohammad Said Dimashqiah, a cleric based in the United Kingdom, who very much demonstrates the rift as being a war of opposing doctrines.³⁵ He also employs sarcasm and mocks the Shi'a for believing that the Twelfth Imam—the Hidden Imam, or Mahdi—will return to earth one day in order to make Islam the triumphant religion around the world. Similarly, Salem al Rafei, a Salafist in northern Lebanon asked: "Is it really revolution that has shown them in their true light, hypocrites who claim to belong to Islam when they kill Muslims? They claim to defend holy places and they bomb mosques."³⁶

Mohammad al Arefe, a cleric in Saudi Arabia, is focused on Hezbollah in particular. Many of his

30. Oliver Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 113.

31. It is worth noting here that the Shi'a, too, also feel historic grievances, as well as the effects of being a perennial minority, albeit a considerable one, within the larger Muslim *ummah*. It is not for nothing that the ruling Iranian clerics regularly remind their fellow believers that this struggle is as real today as it was centuries ago, when proto-Sunni forces slaughtered Imam Hussein, the younger son of Ali and champion of what would become the Shi'a, as summed up in the common slogan, "Everyday is Karbala."

32. Here, al Arour is mocking the Third Imam of the Shi'a, whose martyrdom at Karbala in 680 helped transform proto-Shi'a dissenters into a distinct Muslim sect. According to the Shi'a, Hussein knowingly went to his death at the hands of the overwhelming forces of the Sunni caliph. The motif of the unwinnable, but noble, struggle is integral to the Shi'a worldview.

33. Adnan al Arour, Twitter Post, November 14, 2013, <https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/401055389430468608>.

34. Ibn Marjana is another name for Ubaydullah bin Ziyad, who helped prepare the Sunni army to fight Hussein at Karbala.

35. Abdul Rahman Dimashqiah, Twitter Post, August 17, 2013, <https://twitter.com/DrDimashqiah/status/368508952629104640>.

36. Salem al Rafei, Twitter Post, June 4, 2013, <https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/341959698918027267>.

tweets fall into the second category because he fears Iran and Hezbollah will take over the Sunni world. “The relationship between Hezbollah and Khomeini is one of body and soul, and the party has used it to spread Shi’ism in the Arab world,” he tweeted on June 6, 2013.³⁷

Similarly, he tweeted one day earlier: “After the victory of the Safavid [i.e., Iranian Shi’a] order in Syria, God Forbid, Iran will fight to occupy the Gulf. They see us as *kafirs* anyway!”³⁸

The following religious scholars were selected for the study as examples of how religious and political discourse fuels anti-Shi’a sentiment.

37. Mohammad al Arefe, Twitter Post, June 6, 2013, <https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342700307639332864>.

38. Mohamad al Arefe, Twitter Post, June 5, 2013, <https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342231738895966208>.

Nabil al Awadhy

Nabil al Awadhy is a self-described Salafist cleric known for his televised sermons on shows hosted by Al Watan Channel, Risala Channel, and MBC.³⁹ In recent years, the Kuwaiti-born cleric has become particularly well-known for bellicose rhetoric regarding the wars in Syria and Iraq. Like many other Kuwaitis, al Awadhy has been an extremely vocal supporter of the rebel opposition seeking the overthrow of Bashar al Assad and his Alawite-dominated government. Indeed, widespread support from Kuwaiti Sunnis for the Syrian opposition has propelled a financial campaign that has raised millions for the rebels.⁴⁰ Perhaps as a reflection of Kuwait's troubled history with Iraq, al Awadhy often talks connects the suffering of the Sunnis in Iraq with those in Syria as a way to demonstrate that the Shi'a in both countries are out to kill Sunnis. For example on June 22, 2013 he tweeted: "To the men of Iraq and its heroes: Maliki is still sending his savafid soldiers to Syria to kill children and violate women and destroy the country."

Comments from clerics like al Awadhy stroke the fires of sectarianism, which play out on the battlefield in Syria, and have the potential to direct a stream of weapons, fighters, and money into the war. Al Awadhy has said that the leaders of other Muslim countries must "send out the armies to help out the people in Syria and arm the Free Syrian Army, or [they] are traitors."⁴¹

Furthermore, al Awadhy makes it clear that he sees the Syrian war as part of a wider sectarian struggle

between Sunni and Shi'a and that Shi'a Iran is the driving force in this conflict. Al Awadhy has also demonstrated that he believes the war to be a holy one—that it is mentioned in the Koran and the *hadith* as the battlefield at the end of days, blessed and chosen by Allah.⁴²

Al Awadhy was born in Kuwait in 1970, and one source states that he is a Bedouin who was granted Kuwaiti citizenship.⁴³ Al Awadhy graduated from the College of Basic Education with a BA in mathematics, and went on to receive an MA and PhD from universities in the United Kingdom. Sheikh al Awadhy also studied *fiqh*, or the understanding of and knowledge of the teachings of the Prophet, and the Koran at the University of Kuwait.

Al Awadhy is a preacher at the Mostashfa Mubarak al Kabri Mosque, a speaker and imam in the Ministry of Awqaf, the ministry in charge of religious endowments, a journalist for the Kuwaiti *al Watan* newspaper, and the general supervisor for 'the Center of New Converts' in the United Kingdom.⁴⁴

Al Awadhy is frequently the subject of scrutiny by anti-Islam websites such as "Islam-Watch.org" and "yourdailyMuslim.com."⁴⁵ These websites lambast al Awadhy, claiming that he frequently finishes many of his sermons by praying for Allah to infect non-believers with AIDS or strike them with a terrible catastrophe.

39. Forum post about Nabil al Awadhy on Badiouh.com: <http://www.badiouh.com/vb/showthread.php?t=9471>.

40. Elizabeth Dickinson, "Shaping the Syrian Conflict from Kuwait," *Foreign Policy*, December 4, 2013.

41. "Sheikh Nabil Awadi Accounts the Rulers of the Muslims for Their Betrayal Against Syrians," *YouTube*, August 30, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JccjmC1tmrU#t=70>.

42. "World Famous Sheikh Nabeel Alawadi: Syria is a sign of a coming great change," *Nahda Productions*, March 14, 2012, <http://nahdaproductions.org/islamic-revival/arab-world/item/573-world-famous-sh-nabeel-alawadi-syria-is-a-sign-of-a-coming-great-change-beautiful-words>.

43. "Man Howwa Al Shaykh Nabil Al Awadhy [Who is Sheikh Nabil Al Awadhy?]," *Google Answers* (Arabic), August 19, 2011, <http://ejabat.google.com/ejabat/thread?tid=49b46c7004a0db06>.

44. "Sirat Al Shaykh Nabil Al Awadhy [Sheikh Nabil Awadhy's Biography]," *Mohazarat.net*, <http://www.mohazarat.net.qa/index21.htm>.

45. Sami Alrabaa, "Radical Muslim Chaplains Root Cause of Islamic Fanaticism and Terror," *Islam-Watch.org*, February 14, 2009, <http://www.islam-watch.org/Sami/Radical-Muslim-Chaplains-Islamic-Fanaticism-and-Terror.htm>.

Al Awadhy is an active Twitter user and holds accounts in Arabic and English, with the Arabic version featuring 4.11 million followers, and the English account numbering more than ten thousand.⁴⁶ His social authority score is 95. Al Awadhy uses Twitter as a platform for his preaching, and commonly tweets about Syria, Iran, and the Shi'a. On June 5, 2013, for example, he wrote, “#Qusayr will remain a thorn in their beards. Their doctrinal war will burn them,” discussing the then on-going battle for Qusayr in Syria.⁴⁷

In related tweets, al Awadhy declared that Iran now controlled Iraq, and he further condemned the criticism against the Sunnis for the fighting when, according to him, the Shi'a were the ones attacking the Sunnis: “Since the invasion by America of Iraq and it being given to the followers of Iran ... they have been killing Sunnis! And if Sunni people defend themselves, they accuse them of sectarianism and terrorism!”⁴⁸

On June 24, 2013, al Awadhy tweeted: “Iran wants to take attention away from Syria and shift it to Lebanon. The head of the snake does not know that Muslims will not give up on Iraq, or Syria, or Lebanon. And Iran will be returned to the Muslims!”⁴⁹

These tweets are particularly interesting as they demonstrate not only al Awadhy's support for the Syrian opposition, but show that he clearly views the fighting as a division between the Sunnis and the Iran-backed Shi'a. Al Awadhy calls particular attention to the Iranian role in Iraq, implying that the Shi'a government now in control of the country is actually an arm of Iran. This reflects a feeling of marginalization common among Iraqi Sunnis that has been growing since the handover to the new Shi'a-led government. Furthermore, al Awadhy directly implicates the United States and says that it has given Iraq to Iran and the Shi'a.

Al Awadhy's commentaries on the war reflect both political and religious angles. While al Awadhy calls

on political leaders to aid the rebels, he also makes a plea for all Muslims—by which he means orthodox Sunnis—to follow the call and join the fight, either through picking up arms themselves or through the financial contributions to opposition groups. Al Awadhy uses both hadith and scripture to back up his demands, making it clear to all able-bodied Muslim men that he is able to reach that the fight in Syria is not only a holy war, but one that will determine the future and will trigger a great shift in the *ummah*.

While some more mainstream Sunni clerics share such views, the difference between them and a Salafist, such as al Awadhy, is that they do not call for joining the fighting in Syria. In fact, many have called for an end to the conflict. As with all the sheikhs in this paper, their views and activity involving the wars in Iraq and Syria have increased their number of followers. Al Awadhy had 3.9 million followers in March of 2014 and by September had increased his numbers to 4.1 million. At the time this study was conducted, he had 3.9 million followers.

46. English Twitter Account: @NabilAwadhy; Arabic Twitter Account: @NabilAlawadhy.

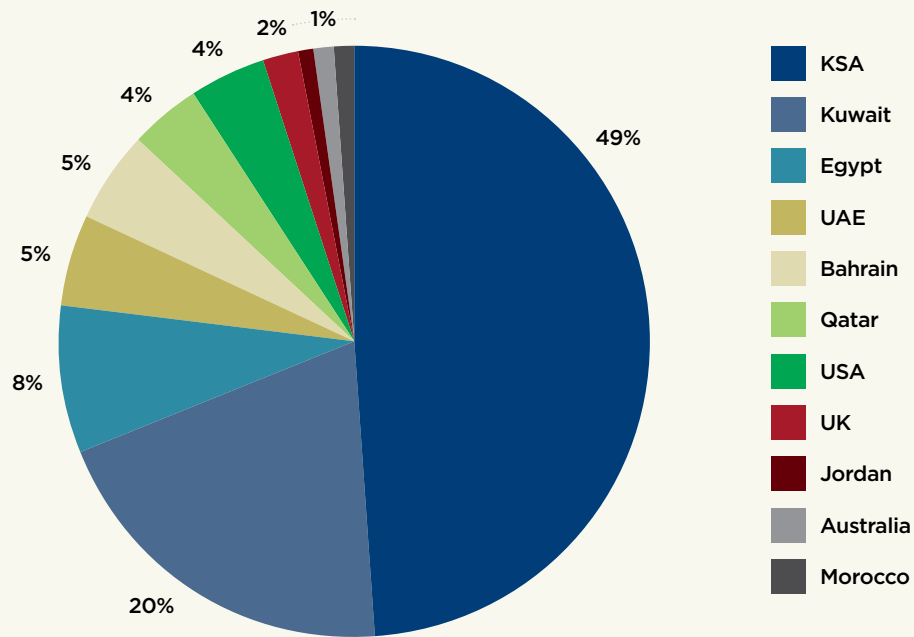
47. Nabil al Awadhy, Twitter Post, June 5, 2013, <https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/342203848817004544>.

48. Nabil al Awadhy, Twitter Post, June 23, 2013, <https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/3488132183256227840>.

49. Nabil al Awadhy, Twitter Post, June 24, 2013, <https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/349090771653255169>.

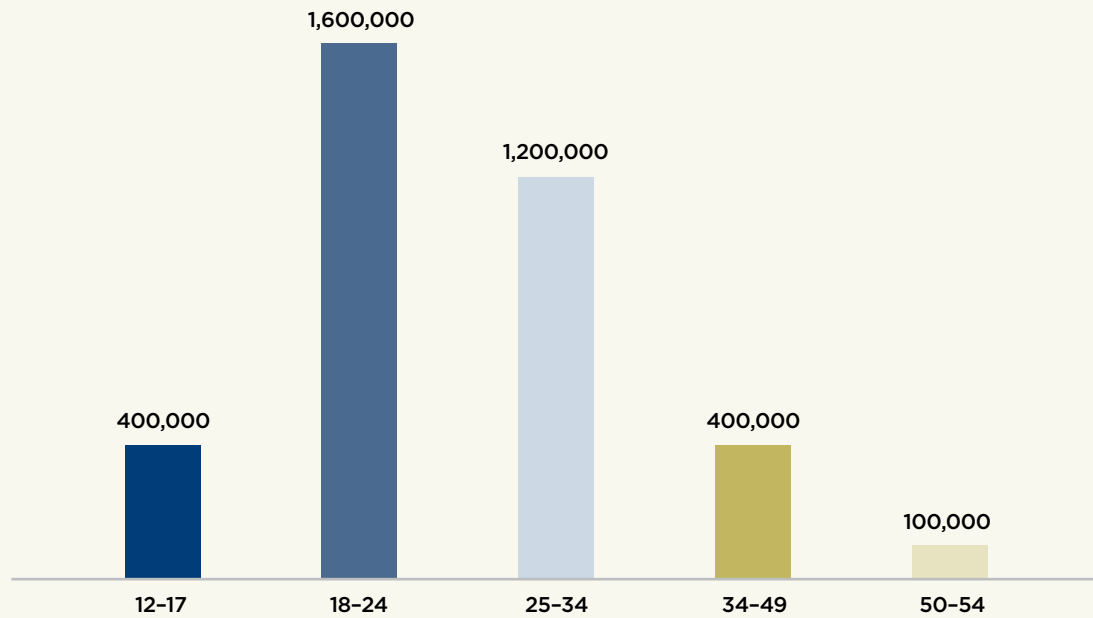
Nabil al Awadhy: Country Distribution

Total Twitter Followers: 3,900,000



Nabil al Awadhy: Age Distribution

Total Twitter Followers: 3,900,000



Mohammad al Arefe

Mohammad al Arefe is a well-known Saudi cleric who enjoys a popular base that includes more than eight million followers on Twitter and has a social authority score of 99.⁵⁰ He is particularly notable for controversial statements that have been widely perceived as increasing sectarian tensions in the region. Al Arefe is a professor at King Saud University in Riyadh and is also cited as being the Imam of the King Fahd Academy of the Saudi Navy and a preacher at Al Bawardy Mosque in Riyadh. He hosts a weekly television show on the Iqraa channel in which he emphasizes the importance of individual and collective charity work.⁵¹

Al Arefe was well-known for incendiary comments towards the Shi'a across the Middle East, even before the Syrian war began. In a sermon in 2009, Arefe claimed that the Shi'a murdered Sunnis in Iraq in gruesome ways, saying, "They would use the most severe torture methods against them. They would kidnap a child, boil him in water, skin him like a sheep, and then, they would bring him on a platter, wrapped in a cloth, and when his family uncovered the platter, they would find this 7–10 year old boy."⁵²

In an interview on May 15, 2011, al Arefe said: "Shi'ism is a heresy. It did not exist at the time of the Prophet or Abu Bakr or Othman. They have an issue with making Ali (peace be upon him) greater than he is. Then they started with other heretical things like building shrines on graves, praying to others than God, claiming that Ali knows the unknown and that he brought the dead back to life." Asked in the same interview if it is the role of re-

ligious scholars to de-escalate sectarian tension, al Arefe answered: "I say that we need both types of scholars. Those who keep the situation calm and others who also say the truth as long as it is wisdom that guides them."⁵³

Al Arefe often criticizes the Shi'a-led government in Iraq and connects events there with the war in Syria. On Dec. 31, 2013, for example, he tweeted: "The Shi'a Council in Najaf supports the military operation on the Sunni people in Anbar...Then they say 'We are not sectarian.'"⁵⁴ Al Arefe then went so far as to criticize Iraq's highest Shi'a authority, Grand Ayatollah Ali al Sistani, saying that he was an "infidel and debauched."

Born in Saudi Arabia in 1970, al Arefe has a PhD in the fundamentals of religion.⁵⁵ At times, he has been in trouble with the Saudi authorities, who believe his anti-Shi'ism serves a useful purpose but who also arrested him for traveling to Egypt in 2013 and denouncing the coup that ousted former president Mohammad Morsi from power. Al Arefe's ideas and beliefs are closer to Salafism, but also bear some similarity to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. However, even though he might at times be at odds with the Saudi government, he provides a glaring example of how the Wahhabis negatively view the Shi'a.

Al Arefe is a Salafist by birth though he has been criticized repeatedly by radical Salafist scholars for deviating from the Salafist mainstream school of thought. They also criticize him for supporting Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and claim that he is a follower of Mohammad Qutb, the brother of Mus-

50. Mohammad al Arefe's Twitter account: @MohamadAlarefe.

51. "Official website of Sheikh Mohammad A. Al-Areefi," last modified 2013, <http://arefe.ws/ar/index.php?com=content&id=1>.

52. Excerpt from a Friday sermon by Mohammad al Arefe: "Saudi Cleric Muhammad Al-Arifi Vilifies Shiites, Calling Iraqi Ayatollah Sistani 'an Infidel'," *MEMRI*, December 11, 2009, http://www.memritv.org/clip_transcript/en/2336.htm.

53. "Sheikh Mohammad al Arefe: The problem of the Shiites and Sunnis," *YouTube*, May 15, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bavI3Y_LS78.

54. Mohammad al Arefe, Twitter Post, December 31, 2013, <https://twitter.com/KhalidALBakr/status/417958865318060032>.

55. "Official website of Sheikh Mohammad A. Al-Areefi," last modified 2013, <http://arefe.ws/ar/index.php?com=content&id=1>.

lim Brotherhood intellectual and ideologue Sayyid Qutb. Salafists generally do not support the Muslim Brotherhood because of the movement's long history of involvement in state politics.

An ardent supporter of the Syrian revolution, al Arefe has often encouraged young men to fight in the civil war, and in a meeting with prominent Muslim scholars in Cairo last year he called for jihad in Syria "in every possible way."⁵⁶ In the summer of 2013, he traveled to the United Kingdom, where critics pointed to the cleric's sectarian rhetoric that led to him being banned from Switzerland. It was suggested that similar measures should be undertaken to ensure that al Arefe's sectarian diatribe did not provoke any further discord in an already tense Middle East.⁵⁷ He defended his trip, saying that his mission was to raise awareness of the Syrian conflict and encourage the engagement of the British Muslim community to aid with refugees fleeing the ongoing civil war. Al Arefe dismissed any allegations that he was visiting the United Kingdom to "whip up sectarian tensions" as "nonsense."⁵⁸

Al Arefe is no stranger to controversial statements about social issues, and he has been lambasted for some such remarks. Among them, he has instructed believers on the correct way to beat one's wife, not in excess or near her face, but just enough to tell her that he is fed up.⁵⁹ He has said that the hot temperatures in the Gulf causes girls to reach puberty faster, making child marriages permissible.⁶⁰ In addition, he has said that girls should not sit alone with their fathers, lest she provoke his lust.⁶¹

Arefe is one of many clerics living in Saudi Arabia who are tolerated, despite their inflammatory ac-

tivity in social media. Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul-Aziz al Sheikh, Saudi's top religious cleric, has denounced Twitter as a tool for spreading unjust and incorrect messages.⁶² Yet many of the kingdom's most popular clerics, including al Arefe, continue to use it as a powerful vehicle for spreading their views and messages. His rise to Internet stardom has been rapid: he had one million followers in 2012 and around 4 million last year. A review of his Twitter feeds suggests that he receives thousands of new followers every day, which is considered numerous. In March 2014, he had 8.3 million followers and by September he had 9.5 million.

56. "Fight or Flight? Saudi Cleric Heads to London After Call for Jihad in Syria," *Al Arabiya*, June 22, 2013, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/06/22/Fight-or-flight-Saudi-cleric-heads-to-London-after-calling-for-Jihad-in-Syria.html>.

57. "Sunni vs. Shi'a...in Gerrard's Cross: New Mosque Highlights Growing Tensions Among British Muslims," *The Independent*, June 24, 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sunni-vs-shia-in-gerrards-cross-new-mosque-highlights-growing-tensions-among-british-muslims-8671969.html>.

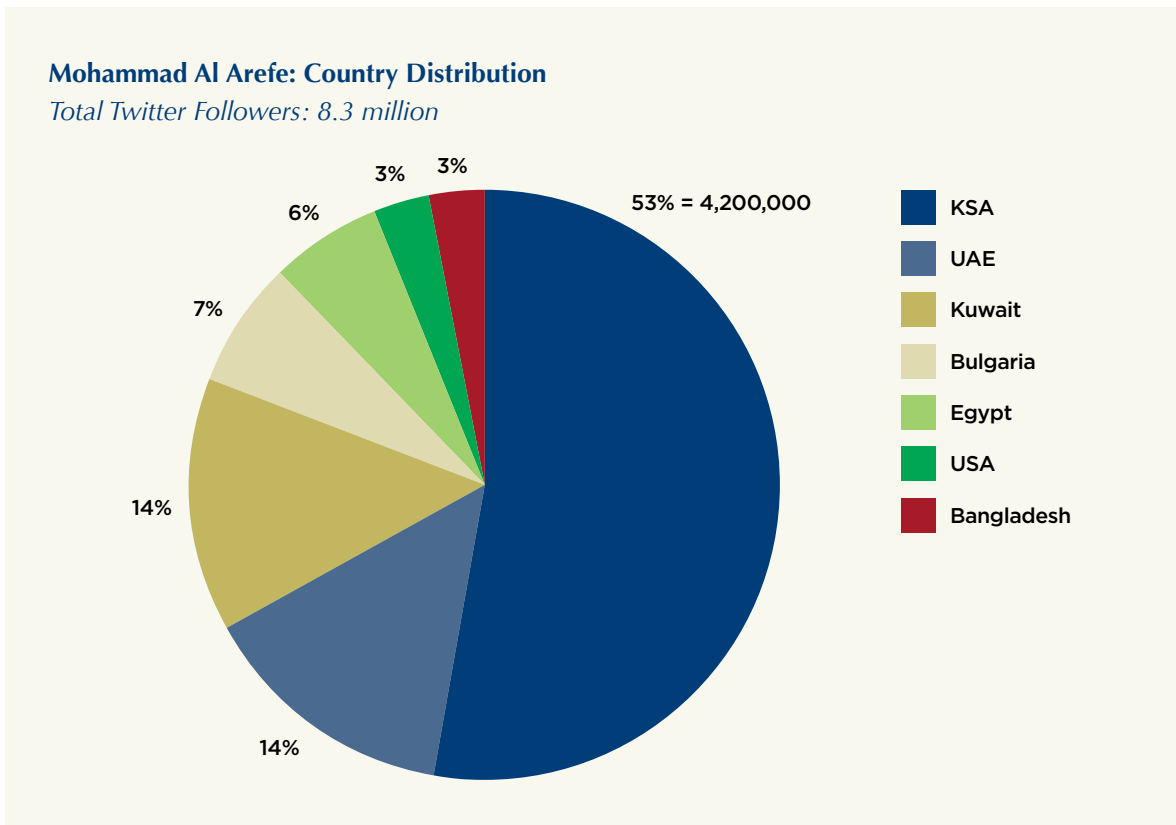
58. "Controversial Saudi Preacher Mohammad Al-Arefe Denies Anti-Shia Stance and Defends UK Visit," *Huffington Post UK*, June 28, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/06/28/mohammad-al-arefe_n_3517727.html.

59. "Does Islam Allow Men to Beat Their Wives, Explained by Mohammad al Arifi," *YouTube*, May 14, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kISeOGY4jqE>.

60. "Sheikh Mohammad al-Arefe: Why Did Aisha Get Married So Young?" *YouTube*, March 7, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-j--DHnRRDE>.

61. "Al Arefe prohibits girls from sitting alone with their fathers," *YouTube*, April 19, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HudLtlJ4YnA>.

62. "Top Saudi Cleric Says Twitter Is For Clowns," *Al Jazeera*, March 24, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middle-east/2013/03/20133246150585567.html>.



Sheikh Dai al Islam al Shahhal

As the son of the founder of the Salafist movement in Northern Lebanon, Dai al Islam al Shahhal is an active figure throughout Lebanon and, in particular around the Tripoli area. His social authority rating is 52. When this author visited him at his house in June 2014, armed bodyguards protected the entrance. Like many Salafists in northern Lebanon, al Shahhal fears the Syrian intelligence working to keep Assad in power. “Today, many foes of the Assad regime have waned, but not the Salafists,” al Shahhal, an elderly man with a long white beard, said in the interview.

For years, he has focused on protecting the Sunnis in Lebanon as opposed to the Sunni *ummah* region-wide, particularly since the war began in Syria. He very much sees Hezbollah as an Iranian project aimed at igniting a Shi’a-Sunni civil war. His intolerance for the Shi’a is more in response to events on the ground, as opposed to a proactive sectarian campaign similar to those conducted by other Salafist clerics. And he blames the United States for what he says is support for the Shi’a.

“The Americans have committed a historical scandal because they are willing to support the minority—the Shi’a—to create a balance in the face of growing Sunni influence. If the Sunnis had been able to prove themselves as a world power, the Americans, who act on their own self interests, would have let go of Iran and built power with the Sunnis,” al Shahhal said.

He stopped short of saying the Shi’a are not Muslims but implied as much. “I don’t want to say [whether they are Muslims or not]. Ideologically, their ideas are

corrupt. Their beliefs are not based on proof. They are not on the right track. They are misled.”

For much of his life, al Shahhal has embraced Salafism, beginning in 1977 when he officially began *da’awa*. Born in Tripoli, Lebanon, in 1960, he studied in the Sharia department of the Institute of Education and Teaching in Tripoli, and furthered his studies at the Islamic University in Medina where he graduated in 1984.⁶³ Having been forced to leave Tripoli in 1986 following the massacre of Sunnis at the hands of the Syrian army in Bab al Tabbaneh, a nearby district, al Shahhal continued preaching in Beirut and Sidon. He returned to Tripoli following the end of the war in 1990.

Even though he has a little more than 3,000 Twitter followers, al Shahhal is regularly identified as one of the most influential members of the Salafist movement in Lebanon, in part due to his family history. However, since the Syrian war began, some Sunnis in the Tripoli area believe his ideas have become too extreme. His father, Salem, founded Lebanon’s Salafist movement in the late 1940s and 1950s. Salem al Shahhal is still seen as one of the “spiritual icons” of the Salafist movement.⁶⁴ Having taken up his father’s mantle, the son has been politically active for many years. Recently, he said that “[the Sunnis] see their political leaders as weak...today, the pulse of the street in Lebanon is with the Salafists.”⁶⁵

Al Shahhal describes Salafism as the “one true face of Islam” and has declared that the goal of the movement is “a call to go back to the basics” of the religion, primarily through the spread of

63. “Hiwar Shabakat Alloukehmaa’ Fadilat al Shaykh Dai al Islam al Shahhal [Alloukeh Network’s Conversation with Sheikh Dai al Islam al Shahhal],” *Alukah*, February 10, 2011, http://www.alukah.net/world_muslims/0/29541/.

64. Omayma Abdel-Latif, “Lebanon’s Sunni Islamists: A Growing Force,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, no. 6 (January 2008).

65. Nour Samaha, “Lebanon’s Sunnis Search for a Savior,” *Al Jazeera*, June 15, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/06/2013615115015272727.html>.

66. Abdel-Latif, “Lebanon’s Sunni Islamists: A Growing Force,” 13.

religious education.⁶⁶ He frequently uses language that characterizes the Salafist movement as the defenders of the Sunni people, especially those in Lebanon, against a Shi'a-led conspiracy—a clear reference to Hezbollah and its powerful backer Iran. Al Shahhal also spreads his ideas through media outlets that he has established. He founded the Holy Koran radio station in 1992, the Good Word radio station in 2005, and the Echo of Islam television channel in 2008.⁶⁷

Like many clerics in the Tripoli area, al Shahhal believes he has a great stake in the Syrian conflict—more so than some Saudi or Kuwaiti religious scholars. As a result, he has taken an active role in the deteriorating security situation in Tripoli and wider Lebanon, primarily due to the spillover of the Syrian war across the border. Following the dual bombings of Sunni mosques in Tripoli in August 2013, he declared that the Sunnis of Tripoli would be taking matters into their own hands, and he blamed the Syrian regime and Hezbollah for the attacks.⁶⁸ In the midst of an on-going security crackdown in Tripoli, al Shahhal has been a vocal critic of the Lebanese military and has led several protests against the Army.⁶⁹

Al Shahhal has frequently voiced his criticism not only of the Lebanese government, but also against all those he sees as being involved with the “conspiracy...targeting the Sunni sect to make way for the Iranian project.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, al Shahhal has continued to maintain that the Sunnis of Lebanon were being specifically targeted: “Lebanon is held hostage and [its] army is treating its people as the Syrian army treats its people.”⁷¹

In April 2014, Lebanese security allegedly confiscated two cars from al Shahhal's convoy during a protest condemning army raids in Tripoli. Two people, who media reports said belonged to al Shahhal's entourage, were arrested. Al Shahhal also announced following a meeting with Interior Minister Nouhad Machnouk that any “violations” during the implementation of a security plan in Tripoli could ignite civil strife in the fragile region, and warned him against taking any action that would qualify as “injustice toward Tripoli and its sons.”⁷²

An active supporter of the Syrian rebels, al Shahhal has voiced unwavering backing for the opposition in the media and on Twitter. “To the oppressed [Syrian people] we say: We are with you and beside you and feel your pain.”⁷³ He has pledged the support of the Salafist movement, saying that they “express rage at what is happening to the Sunnis in Syria at the hands of the criminal regime,” and that “as Sunni people, we cannot distance ourselves [or] turn a blind eye to the oppressor and neglect the oppressed.” In March 2014, he had 3,300 Twitter followers and by September, the number had increased to 4,400.

Al Shahhal has encouraged young men in Tripoli and elsewhere in Lebanon to support the Syrian uprising and “sacrifice blood and life” in order to prevent the Shi'a-backed plot to take over the region. In fact, his own son, Zayed, fought with the Syrian rebels in the battle of Qusayr.⁷⁴ Al Shahhal has denied, however, that he has explicitly called for a jihad in Syria and has maintained that he has only stated that he would issue a fatwa encouraging

67. “Hiwar Shabakat Alloukehmaa' Fadilat al Shaykh Dai al Islam al Shahhal.”

68. “Scores Dead in North Lebanon Twin Blasts,” *Al Jazeera*, last modified August 24, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/08/201382311249855388.html>.

69. Antoine Amrieh and Mohammed Zaatari, “Soldiers Killed in Akkar After Tripoli Protests,” *The Daily Star*, April 9, 2014, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Apr-09/252760-soldiers-killed-in-akkar-after-tripoli-protests.ashx#axzz3HTJnuejM>.

70. *Ibid.*

71. “Lebanon's Armed Forces Under Fire,” *The Economist*, April 15, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/pomegranate/2014/04/lebanons-armed-forces>.

72. “Machnouk, Salafist Sheikh Discuss Tripoli Security,” *The Daily Star*, April 4, 2014, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Apr-04/252284-army-makes-more-arrests-in-tripoli.ashx#axzz3HTJnuejM>.

73. “Salafist Leader Says Won't Abandon Syrian Rebels,” *The Daily Star*, April 16, 2012, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Apr-16/170358-salafist-leader-says-wont-abandon-syrian-rebels.ashx#axzz3HTJnuejM>.

74. Tim Whewell, “Lebanese Families Drawn into Syrian Conflict,” *BBC*, June 18, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22953101>.

support for Syria against the Shi'a-led government and its allies, though he has denied that the Salafist movement poses any sort of violent threat against the people of Lebanon or the civilians of Syria.⁷⁵

Al Shahhal has often been noted for his firebrand rhetoric against Hezbollah, and has reportedly led protests at which Hezbollah flags have been burned. His cousin, Hassan al Shahhal, signed a memorandum of understanding with Hezbollah that forbade the killing of Muslims by fellow Muslims. The document was denounced by al Shahhal and was subsequently withdrawn just one day after its signing.⁷⁶

Al Shahhal also recently was a leading force in organizing a meeting of Salafists from rival factions, and has expressed interest in developing a Sunni front that would also include Islamists and secularists.⁷⁷

Al Shahhal is reportedly still very well-connected with Saudi Arabian charitable organizations that have donated large amounts of money to his organizations and movements.⁷⁸ According to AUB Professor Ahmad Moussalli, in 2008 the new Salafist movement in Lebanon was attempting to “break down the new relations between Lebanon and Syria in the interests of Saudi Arabia and its supporters.”⁷⁹

Al Shahhal maintained close ties to the late grand mufti Bin Baz, who made it possible for hundreds of students from Lebanon and Palestine to study Islamic theology at Saudi Universities during the Lebanese Civil War, among them al Shahhal himself, who was one of the leading ideologues of Salafism in the 20th century.⁸⁰

75. “Al Shahhal denies Calls for Jihad, Says Salafists Pose No Threat,” *Naharnet*, March 8, 2013, <http://m.naharnet.com/stories/en/74768-al-shahhal-denies-calls-for-jihad-says-salafists-pose-no-threat>.

76. Garrett Nada, “Lebanon’s Sheikhs Take on Assad and Hezbollah,” *Woodrow Wilson Center*, May 10, 2013, <http://www.wilson-center.org/islamists/article/lebanon%E2%80%99s-sheikhs-take-assad-and-hezbollah>.

77. Radwan Mortada, “Lebanon: Rival Salafist Sheikhs Seek Unity,” *Al Akhbar*, April 1, 2013, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/15405>.

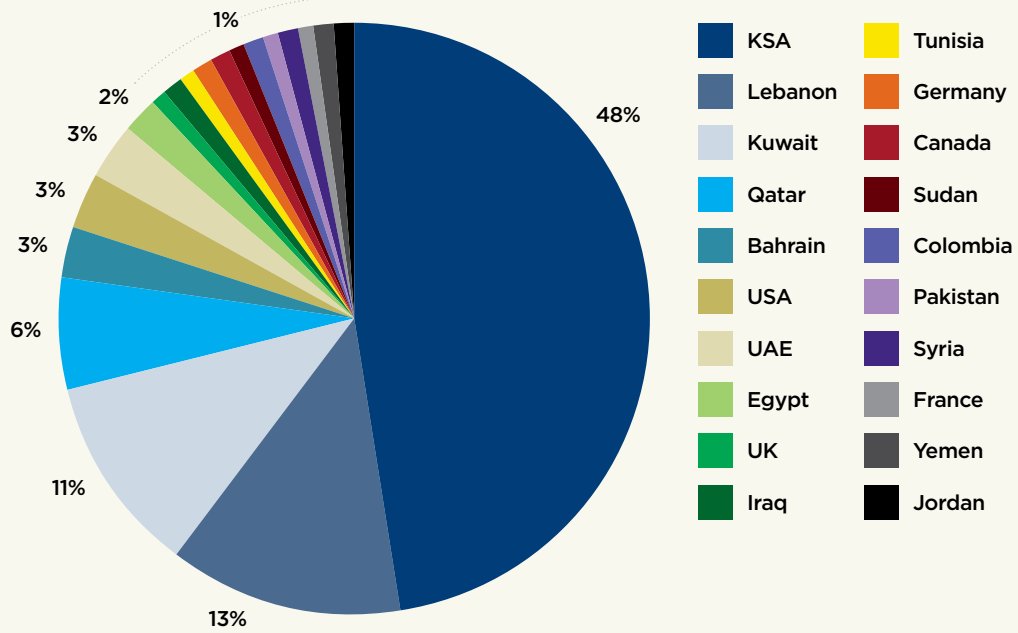
78. Abdel-Latif, “Lebanon’s Sunni Islamists: A Growing Force,” 17.

79. Lucy Fielder, “Tripoli Rumbles On,” *Al Ahrām*, no. 911 (August 2008), <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/911/re4.htm>.

80. Moussalli, “Wahhabism, Salfism, and Islamism: Who is the Enemy?”

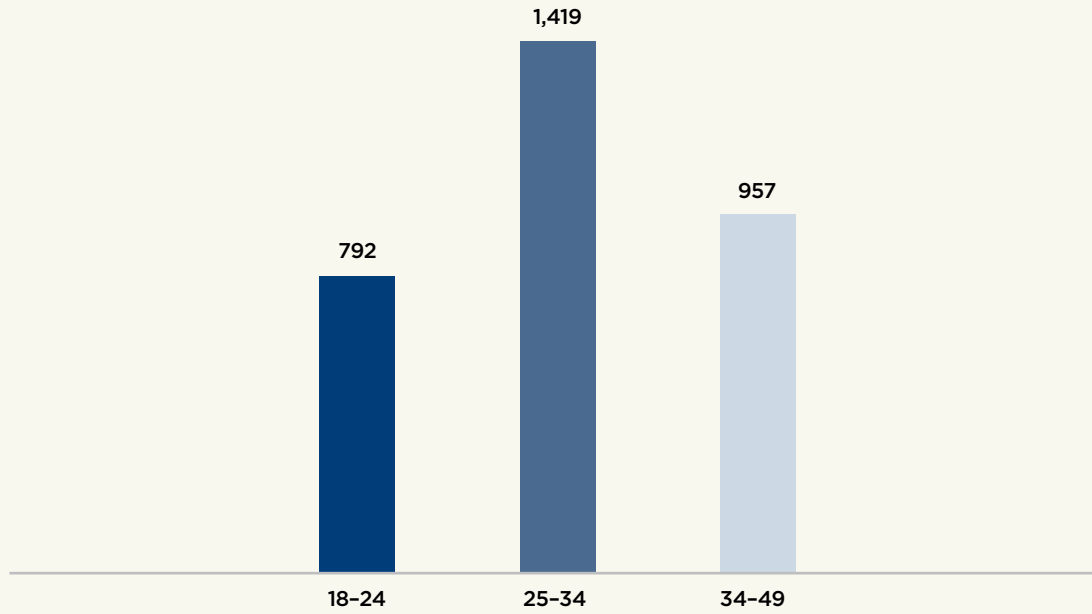
Dai al Islam al Shahhal: Country Distribution

Total Twitter Followers: 3,300



Dai al Islam al Shahhal: Age Distribution

Total Twitter Followers: 3,300



Adnan al Arour

The meteoric rise of Salafist scholar and religious activist Adnan al Arour reflects the radicalization and escalation of sectarian sentiment across the Levant. Al Arour has emerged from obscurity in Hama, Syria, to become a powerful force shaping the direction of the war in Syria and influencing negative Sunni attitudes against the Shi'a of the region. The Syrian war provided him with a platform. His social authority is 86.

At first, al Arour's uncompromising stand against the Shi'a—he once publicly vowed to “grind the flesh” of pro-regime Alawites and “feed it to the dogs”—attracted few followers, and it allowed the Assad regime to paint him, and by association the opposition, as a dangerous extremist who must be crushed.

However, as the deadly conflict in Syria escalated and over-heated sectarian rhetoric became more acceptable on all sides, al Arour found his public voice, aided by the increasing marginalization of mainstream opposition forces and his own flamboyant populist style.

Al Arour, who had a social authority score of 86 based upon his tweets in 2013, plays multiple roles in order to leverage his power and to influence broader audiences. His main hats include: Islamic scholar; televangelist; philanthropist through his Al Salam Group for Relief and Development, which raises food and money online for the Syrian rebels; and his very formidable activism on social media through his Twitter and Facebook accounts. For example, one of his most favorited tweets of 2013—which was retweeted 8,843 times and favorited 1,558 times—said: “Whoever wants to support Qusayr and the others with aid and rice and sugar and other things ... you can connect with us by

phone. ... For after God, we have only you.”⁸¹ This tweet was one of many al Arour used to help mobilize military support for the rebels, as they tried unsuccessfully to defeat Assad.

In satellite channels broadcast from Saudi Arabia and through his astute use of social media, al Arour's discourse deftly anticipated the radical shifts in Sunni public opinion. Believed to have taken refuge in Saudi Arabia, al Arour has collected almost 1.6 million Twitter followers, the vast majority of whom are men. Around 50 percent of his followers are between the ages of 18 to 24.

An analysis of al Arour's Twitter activity in 2013 shows that each of his tweets is, on average, retweeted around 300 times, and he receives an average of 15 replies for each one that he posts. The importance of his views on the Syrian war can also be gleaned from his Twitter data: his most re-tweeted posts, some repeated as many as 10,000 times, all concern the conflict there.

His tweets appear to peak in response to significant events in Syria, such as the intervention of Hezbollah militia, who joined forces with Assad's forces to expel the Sunni rebels outside Qusayr in May 2013. In fact, one of al Arour's most popular tweets by his followers and most re-tweeted posts is related to that very battle, when he tried to mobilize military support to help the rebels defeat Assad and Hezbollah militia.⁸²

Such tweets attract the attention of his supporters, especially second-tier Salafist leaders, such as Ahmad al Assir, who was once active in Lebanon, and Salem al Rafei, who follow al Arour from Lebanon. Those tweets are then turned into commands to be executed on the ground, hence the brief rebellion

81. Adnan al Arour, Twitter Post, June 6, 2013, <https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/342558612293570560>.

82. Adnan al Arour, Twitter Post, June 6, 2013, <https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/342558612293570560>.

by al Assir's militia against Hezbollah forces in June 2013 and during the battle of Qusayr in Syria in late May and early June 2013.

Al Arour relies on his Twitter feeds to promote his satellite television program on Shada TV, *Maa' Sooriya Hatta al Nasr* (With Syria Until Victory), which al Arour devotes almost exclusively to events in Syria and to the role of Hezbollah and Iran in support of the Assad government against the Sunni opposition. As part of another one of his television programs, *Laa'lahom Yahtadun* (May They Be Guided), he created a platform through which he could debate with Shi'a callers on religious issues in an attempt to guide them back to the correct path, that is, to Sunni Islam.

His sarcastic style and readiness to antagonize his opponents in televised sectarian debates has helped al Arour gain a broad audience among those Sunni eager to confront the Shi'a. Further bolstering al Arour's popular appeal is his personal charisma and a marked ability to speak the language of the street, in contrast to other sheikhs who use the rigid, old style.

For example, on one program al Arour often talks about the Shi'a directly with sarcasm: "The Shi'a have not and will not answer this one question that will take down this entire sect. I advise you nicely to memorize this one question instead of cursing them. Is Ali (peace be upon him) our master? This great Imam pledged his allegiance to Abu Bakr in front of the angels. Did he pledge his allegiance to Abu Bakr through revelation from God, consciously on his own, or under pressure? The Shi'a say that he did so under pressure. If so, why don't you follow what Ali did and do the same? Second, if he did so through revelation or consciously, then those who doubt his allegiance to Abu Bakr are creating sedition and their argument falls. I ask you to look at the facts. Those who say he was a coward

and submitted to Abu Bakr under pressure, I tell you that Ali was one of the bravest people. Ali also used to pray behind Abu Bakr. The Shi'a believe that Abu Bakr is a *kafir*. Does it make sense for Ali to be praying behind a *kafir*?"⁸³

He also uses his television program to send signals to the rebels to follow certain strategies and to the Syrian people to perform specific nonviolent protest actions. In the early days of the revolution, al Arour asked the Syrian people to chant *Allah-u Akbar* ("God is the Greatest") from their rooftops as a peaceful tactic to keep the momentum of the rebellion going and to signal disobedience, despite the Assad regime's violent response to such symbolic protests.

In general, an examination of his tweets in 2013 shows his vitriol against Iran, Hezbollah, and the Shi'a in general. In one tweet on August 31, 2013, the Sheikh asks how the Sunnis can fail to respond to an invasion by the Shi'a into Sunni lands: "Oh honorable Shi'a and noble Christians, don't worry for our leader Bashar [al Assad] and our Imam Khamenei will make us proud and bomb Tel Aviv before he bombs us."⁸⁴ In another tweet from May 23, 2013, al Arour writes: "Hezb al Shaytan penetrates borders and kills and slaughters and supports the falling army and the Safavids come from Isfahan through Iraq. ... Then you want us to remain silent?"⁸⁵

Part of al Arour's success stems from the effective way in which he uses sectarianism to convince his followers that the Shi'a aim to eradicate the Sunnis. Two tweets from May 26, 2013, typify his religious intolerance. "The Shi'a are the most *takfiri* (those who excommunicate other Muslims) of sects for they cast out anyone who doesn't believe in their Imams or who doubts one of their sect or who allies with one of their enemies."⁸⁶ In another tweet that day, al Arour wrote: "The

83. "Sheikh al Arour Challenges the Shi'a with Three Questions," *YouTube*, March 9, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGKOO2dTcBw>.

84. Adnan al Arour, Twitter Post, August 31, 2013, <https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/373588010132328448>.

85. Adnan al Arour, Twitter Post, May 23, 2013, <https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/337681942671683584>.

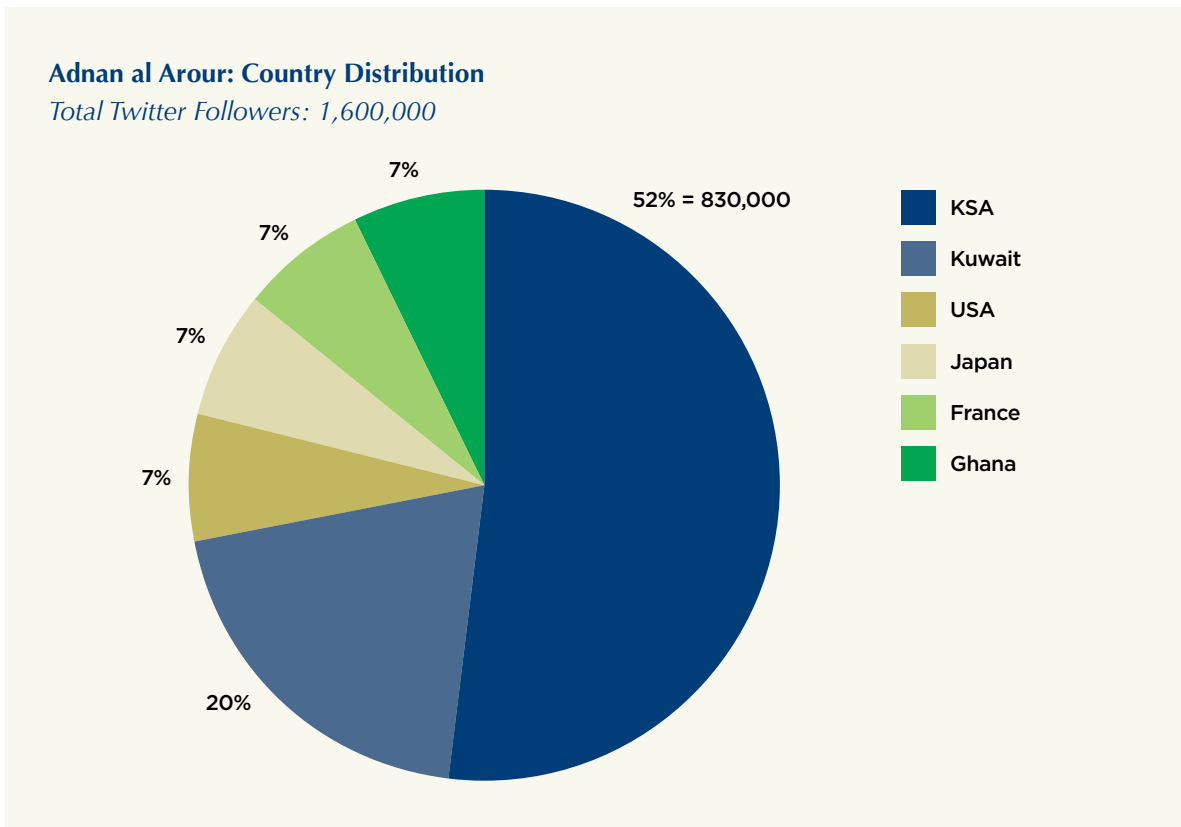
86. Adnan al Arour, Twitter Post, May 26, 2013, <https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/338741253950808064>.

Mahdi, according to the Shi'a doctrine, is thirsty in the basement, hiding and quenching his thirst with the blood of the Sunnis, and they say in their books that there is nothing between the Mehdi and the Arabs except slaughter."⁸⁷

Al Arour does not confine his remarks exclusively to events in Lebanon and Syria, for his sectarian views are regional and often take aim at the Shi'a-dominated government in Iraq under Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki. On January 1, 2014, he tweeted: "Nobody is hidden from the injustices of the Maliki government, for he killed them (the Sunnis) on account of their identity and Iraq has never seen sectarianism like it has seen it under Maliki's term."⁸⁸ Like the other clerics, his followers increase the longer the conflicts continue. In March 2014, he had 1.6 million followers and by September, 1.8 million.

87. Adnan al Arour, Twitter Post, May 26, 2013, <https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/338740597286375424>.

88. Adnan al Arour, Twitter Post, January 1, 2014, <https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/418457033759653888>.



Salem al Rafei

Through his sermons in his Al Taqwa mosque in Tripoli, an active Twitter feed, and his membership in the Association of Muslim Scholars, a group of clerics in Lebanon that participates in political and religious activities, Salem al Rafei advances a narrative of Sunni martyrdom at the hands of the Shi'a. Al Rafei also uses this narrative for domestic political purposes, condemning Hezbollah and accusing the Lebanese Armed Forces of collaborating with the armed Shi'a-dominated movement. He argues that due to this collaboration, the state does not provide adequate security for non-Shi'a Lebanese civilians, particularly those in the north of the country.

Although al Rafei has little more than 3,000 Twitter followers, his social authority reading is 42 due to the fact that his Tweets are consistently retweeted, an indication that his followers engage with the content of his posts and then disseminate the information to their own networks of friends and followers. In March 2014, he had 3,600 followers and by September, the numbers increased to 4,000. Al Rafei studied in the Sudan, where he received his PhD in *sharia*. He has published dozens of books and keeps a large library in the basement of his house. He lived for about 10 years in Germany, until being deported in 2005 for his radical sermons. Now, he teaches in mosques and *sharia* institutes, and serves as imam of the Al Taqwa mosque.

Al Rafei is an example of how mainstream Salafism has left behind its strictly theological roots and taken on much more of a political hue. "We were dragged into politics over Syria," according to al Rafei. "Most Shi'a—and I am not saying all Shi'a—have decided to take part in the Iranian project," al Rafei told this author in June 2014. In recent interviews, al Rafei has become increasingly direct about

his views on sectarianism. In his eyes, the so-called Iranian project is Tehran's attempt to take over all Muslim lands—that is, to put the Muslim world under Shi'a control.

In a YouTube video, al Rafei strikes a notably more strident tone. "Look at the Iranian project and how they treat Muslims in the Arab world. They denied the importance of the prophets and cursed them. They also allied with the enemies of the *ummah* to control Islamic and Arab lands."⁸⁹

When this author first met al Rafei in 2012, he announced that the Salafists in the Tripoli area were creating a political party to formally enter the fray. But to date this has not happened, in part due to fundamental disagreements over this project. Those who are quietest and part of the *da'wa*, the Salafist trend that meticulously keeps out of politics, remain steadfast against it. Al Rafei is considered the leader in the politicization of the Salafist movement in Lebanon, which began after the Syrian withdrawal from the country in 2005. The Syrians had conducted a harsh crackdown on the Salafists in northern Lebanon for many years.

Since the start of Syrian war, the most important event in Lebanon to mobilize the Salafists against Hezbollah and all Shi'a was an attack on June 5, 2013 against Sheikh Ahmad al Assir, who is considered a Salafist and who was the former imam at the Bilal Bin Rabah Mosque in the city of Sidon. He is now believed to be in hiding. Al Assir had become perhaps the most inflammatory Salafist voice against Hezbollah, Iran, Assad, and the Shi'a and Alawites in general. On that day in the suburb of Abra, outside Sidon, the Lebanese Armed Forces pushed for a decisive conclusion to the threat posed by al Assir,

89. "Speech of Sheikh Salem al Rafei at the Iraqi spring festival," *YouTube*, April 5, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tY9Hrhqwqog>.

after at least 10 soldiers and two gunmen loyal to the anti-Hezbollah sheikh were killed the previous Sunday when al Assir supporters attacked a military base. During the clash on June 5, fierce fighting broke out between al Assir and his supporters against the military. Hezbollah apparently aided the Lebanese army in its attack in Abra, according to many reports. This caused not just the Salafists but many Sunni clerics to join in the public campaign to denounce the violence against al Assir.

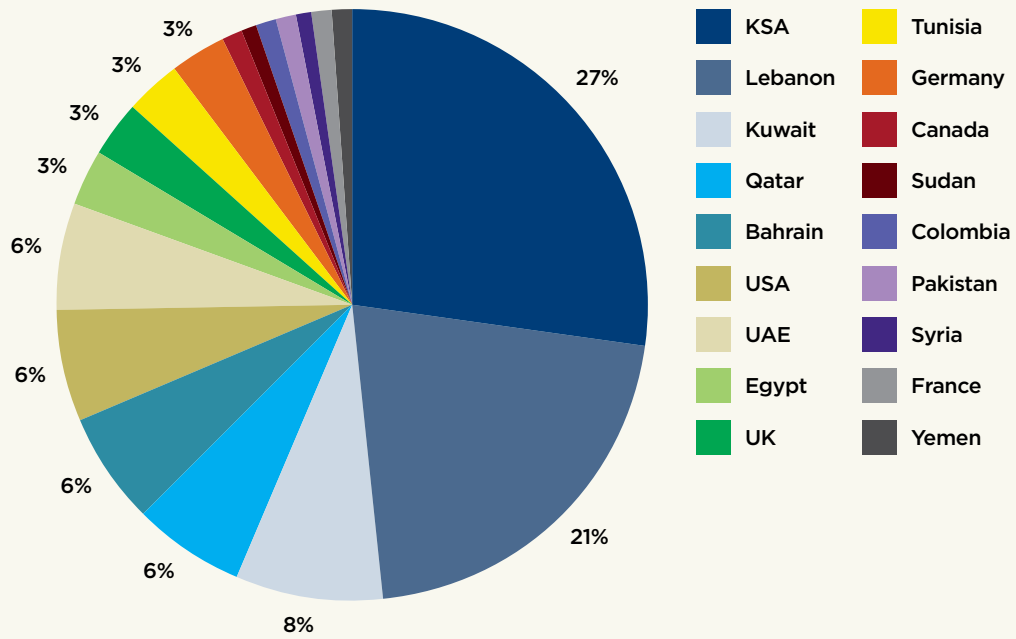
Al Rafei, who defended al Assir, was at the forefront of this conflict, and he volunteered to mediate between the sheikh and the Lebanese army. Since that time, al Assir has been on the run. But al Rafei has kept the battle alive and has framed it as stark evidence of Shi'a aggression against the Sunnis. He told *An Nahar*, a leading Lebanese newspaper, that the army's attack against al Assir was not against the Salafists, but against all Sunnis.⁹⁰

A year later, al Rafei's mosque in Tripoli was bombed, a few minutes after an attack on Bilal Baroudi, another Salafist imam, and his al Salam mosque. The apparently coordinated blasts—the biggest and deadliest in Tripoli since the end of Lebanon's own civil war—struck as locals were finishing Friday prayers. The explosions came a week after a huge car bomb killed at least 24 people in a part of Beirut controlled by Hezbollah, and it was clear, according to al Rafei, that he was targeted because of his campaign against Hezbollah and the Shi'a in general. Al Rafei blamed the Syrian intelligence agencies for the bombing, and he said he had received threats beforehand. "I received threats from the Syrian intelligence and I told them I will stop my sermons (against Assad) if they stop the killings. They tried to assassinate me even before the bombing," he said in an interview with this author.

90. "Salem al Rafei for Annahar: Phenomenon of the captive Sheikh the end and the elimination of presence in Tripoli," *Annahar*, June 25, 2013, <http://www.annahar.com/article/44388-سالم-رافعي-للالنهار-ظاهرة-شيخ-الاسير-لا-تنتهي-واستبعد-وجوده-في-طرابلس>.

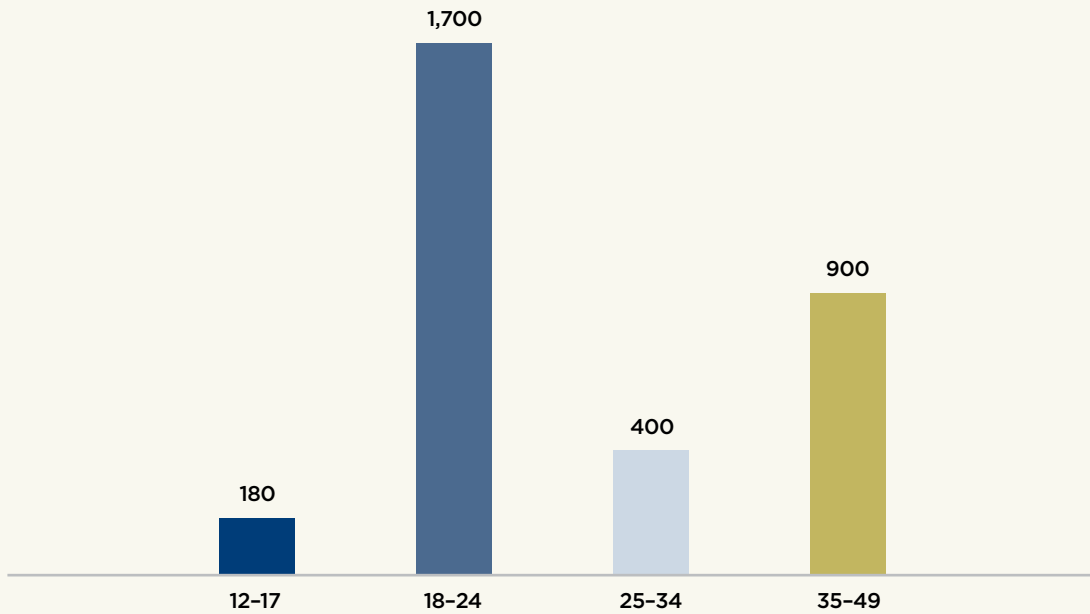
Salem al Rafei: Country Distribution

Total Twitter Followers: 3,600



Salem Al Rafei: Age Distribution

Total Twitter Followers: 3,600



Bilal Baroudi

Bilal Baroudi is a notable anti-Syrian regime Salafist cleric from Tripoli, Lebanon, who has also been the target of a failed assassination attempt because of his views on Iran, the Shi'a and Hezbollah. Like many of his fellow Salafist preachers, Baroudi believes "Shi'a-ruled Iran is trying to take over the Sunni world," he told this author in an interview in June 2014.

Baroudi considers himself a Salafist, but like most Salafists, he is not part of any organized movement. In an earlier interview, in October 2013, he told this author: "What we believe is Salafism, not organized Salafist organizations. We count ourselves as part of the Salafist school in the sense of it teaching us how to live in the world. For Muslims to progress, they need to clean their religious channels of all chemical things that are distorting the original Salafist view.

"The danger of the idea of Salafism in the way that I see it is that there is no immediate source that can tie people down. It's loose. Because of this it will face a lot of dangers."

Baroudi was born into a religious family and attended al Azhar University in Cairo, where he studied the Koran and the Koranic sciences for nine years (1987–1996). In particular, Baroudi specialized in Koran recitation rather than Islamic jurisprudence. Baroudi returned to Tripoli following his graduation from al Azhar and became known as one of the most skilled reciters in northern Lebanon.

As part of the ongoing debate among Lebanon's Salafists over whether they should formally enter politics, Baroudi weighs in against the formation of a political party because it is "unnatural" for the Salafists to do so. "But I do consider my role as

showing the good and bad things about the leader, whoever is in power at the time," he told this author in June 2014.

In August 2013, a car bomb exploded outside the Salam mosque while Baroudi was preaching. The explosion followed another at Al Taqwa mosque during a sermon given by Salem al Rafei, another well-known Salafist who also opposes the Assad regime. The twin Tripoli bombings sparked protests by Sunni followers of the two sheikhs. They blocked the streets and chanted slogans against the Shi'a group Hezbollah and its leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, who they blamed for either inspiring the bombings or actually orchestrating the attacks through an Alawite group in the Tripoli area. The attacks reportedly killed at least 43 and wounded 600 more people, most of whom were worshippers.

Baroudi said in response, "I had issued a fatwa prohibiting young men from taking part in the conflict in Syria," adding that he called "on the state to remove the weapons of strife from Lebanon as well as the rockets that targeted Qusayr," a reference to an important battle in the Syrian war in which the Assad regime claimed victory.⁹¹

Many linked the motivation for the bombings to both Baroudi and al Rafei's harsh condemnations of the Syrian regime and Hezbollah's support for it. Baroudi had previously told worshippers before the bombing, "Hezbollah is responsible for the consequences of this jihad invasion against Sunnis in Qusayr," adding, "the response that is coming will be harsh."⁹²

When talking about the bombing, Baroudi gave this author a tour of all that remained of his mosque, a brick shell, which also served as his

91. "Death Toll Rises to 42 in Tripoli, Lebanon Explosions," *YaLibnan*, August 23, 2013.

92. Mariam Kharouny and Alasdair MacDonald, "Sermons on Syria Fan Mideast Sectarian Flames," *Reuters*, June 7, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/07/us-syria-crisis-muslims-idUSBRE95613320130607>.

home before the attack. He said the extremists tried to plant the explosives directly underneath the area of the mosque where he was preaching that Friday. But a car obstructed their access. Instead, the explosives were set off farther away, causing the entire mosque to be hit and destroyed. Baroudi was struck near his heart by shrapnel, but a pen in his shirt pocket apparently prevented the flying debris from penetrating his skin. He blames the attacks on a lack of security provided by the state, and he thinks this is intentional.

“Our religion commands us in the Koran not to burn a garden, or cut a tree, or burn a church. It is forbidden and it is not religion. But they (the Western world) have the nerve to accuse us of these things when they have the blood of two million Iraqi children on their hands. The Alawites should take a stance against the people from their communities who were behind the blasts. The government—the Lebanese president and the head of the Army—did not make a statement of condemnation. They were nowhere to be found.

“They (the Shi‘a and Hezbollah) want to kill us because they cannot handle people who say the truth, and the Syrian people are oppressed.” Following the bombings, Baroudi announced that if the government were unable to protect the city from violence, then the people would take up arms themselves to defend it. The warning proved unneeded as the security forces quickly swooped in.⁹³

In 2008, fighting broke out when the Hezbollah movement and its pro-Syrian allies overran Sunni neighborhoods in Beirut. Lebanon’s Salafist movement took credit for containing the pro-Syrian groups in northern Lebanon at that time, and Baroudi said: “Now that there are problems, all the Sunnis are becoming Salafists.”

Baroudi, who has a social authority score of 11, as well as many other pragmatic Salafists, does not condone violence. “Islamism and Salafism in par-

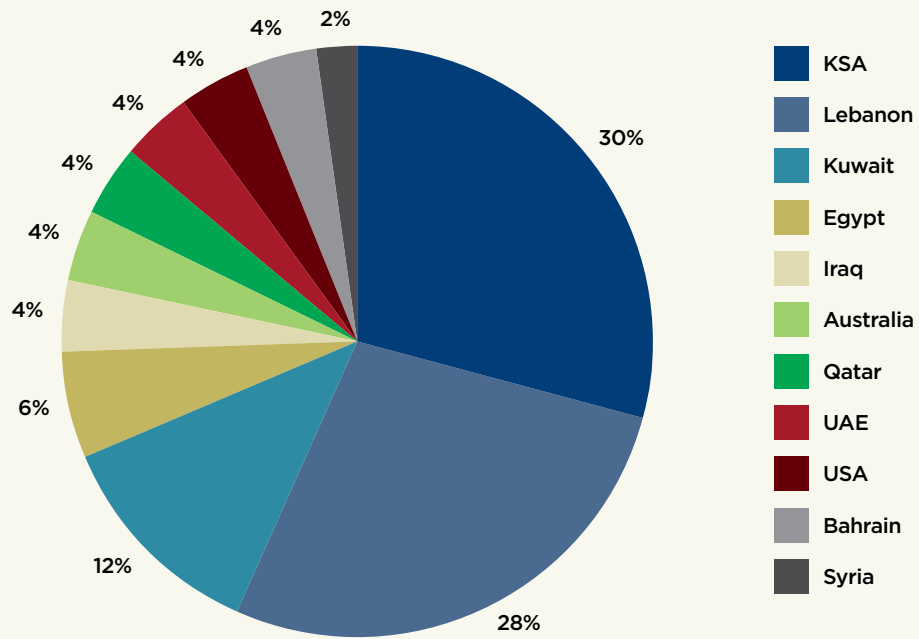
ticular, are against all actions targeting innocent people, whatever the justifications and reasons. Courage is in confrontation and not in bombings in safe areas. We strongly condemn all the bombings and we consider that this has nothing to do with our Islam,” he said.

“We are at loggerheads with Hezbollah over its positions, but we feel that what is happening in the southern Beirut suburbs (Hezbollah strongholds bombed periodically, presumably by Sunni extremists) is unacceptable. We said following the blasts that rocked Al Taqwa and Al Salam mosques that the Tripoli blasts and the southern suburbs bombings are carried out by the same entity. We are keen to use a unified vocabulary that unites and heals... we have received no cooperation from Hezbollah. To the contrary, the party accuses us of harboring terrorism and, through its media, it threatens us, provokes us and allows our bloodshed,” said Baroudi, warning that Sunni-Shi‘a strife in Lebanon will affect everyone and no one will survive it.

93. “At a Tripoli Blast Site, Residents Shoulder State’s Burden,” *Syria Deeply*, August 26, 2013, <http://beta.syriadeeply.org/2013/08/tripoli-blast-site-residents-shoulder-states-burden-2/>.

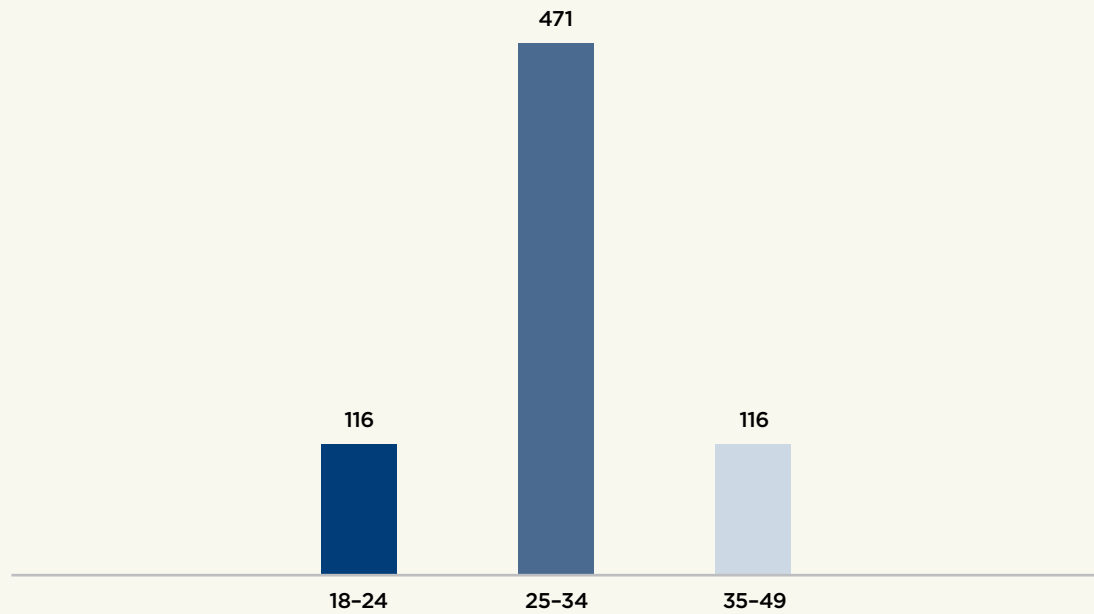
Bilal Baroudi: Country Distribution

Total Twitter Followers: 826



Bilal Baroudi: Age Distribution

Total Twitter Followers: 826



Conclusion

A detailed index of tweets from 2013 for each cleric is provided in subsequent pages. These tweets show the following:

Through Twitter feeds, the religious scholars featured in this study attempt to influence events on the ground in real time by mobilizing their followers and trying to spread intolerant and xenophobic rhetoric about the Shi'a, Iran, Hezbollah, and the Syrian regime. The success or failure of this effort is difficult to assess with any precision. However, a review of their impact within the social media universe, as measured by such indicators as the number of followers and the frequency of re-tweets, provides evidence of their importance. And, like any form of media, it can be assumed that at least some of their followers were convinced by these messages. Twitter has become one of their preferred outlets for disseminating their views, allowing them to reach audiences at unprecedented levels.

One-third to one-half of their Twitter feeds contains religious references to ancient disputes. Given that the doctrinal differences are unlikely to be resolved, this does not give hope that the sectarian conflict will de-escalate. Nor does it provide any real opening for the United States or other Western powers—as non-Muslim actors, and thus without standing in the debate—to influence the course of the conflict.

While the Salafists in Lebanon tend to focus on Lebanese politics and Syria, others link the war in Syria with Iraq. As regional conflicts are now bleeding across borders, linking the perceived abuse of the Sunnis in one conflict to another is certain to further destabilize the region and inspire Sunni engagement in cross-border conflict. Social media and the internet in general encourage regional discussion that has the potential to link atrocities in one country to another.

As part of their animosity toward what they call the “Shi’a project,” many of the clerics blame their

own governments, regional governments, and the United States for what they perceive as the slaughter of Sunnis in the Arab world. This significantly contributes to anti-American sentiment in the region, which is spread through Twitter. Although it is difficult to determine whether their anti-American sentiment stems more from U.S. government policies or cultural and ideological differences with Americans, it is clear that Washington’s decision in 2013 not to bomb Syria, its general reluctance to heavily arm the Syrian rebels, the invasion of Iraq which led to a Shi’a-backed government that continues today, and Washington’s support of the coup that ousted former Egyptian President Mohammad Morsi from power have all fueled hostility toward the United States among the Sunnis in Arab countries. Using social media allows the Salafists to present powerful counter-arguments as non-state actors and seriously challenge the policies of governments.

The Salafists featured in the study oppose the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to a profound degree, in particular because ISIS has no reservations about killing other Sunni Muslims. In the playbook ISIS published called *Dabiq*, which clearly states the group’s strategy and intentions, ISIS emphasizes the control of people, territory and resources as necessary for succeeding in its ambitions. *Dabiq* also makes clear that ISIS seeks to operate its “caliphate” by establishing political institutions and by using religious institutions, such as *sharia* courts, to support and justify the political arm of its “state” as well as its military operations. Sunni religious scholars, including pragmatic Salafists, are adamantly opposed to such tactics.

Salafists condemned ISIS’s beheadings of foreigners, other Muslims and religious minorities. They believe such extremism discredits the more moderate Salafists in the eyes of their followers. As ISIS conquers more territory and recruits more fighters—foreign and indigenous—the pragmatists are

at risk of being marginalized, which is not in the interest of the West or regional governments. Recent history in the Middle East has shown that marginalizing moderates only creates more opportunities for extremists to step in to fill the void.

The debate within Islam underway throughout the Middle East and the violence over this conflict provides little role for outsiders. As with previous crises that have periodically brought to a head what is essentially an intra-Muslim conflict, there can be no constructive role for Western governments.

However, as the region slides into further chaos, the United States could shift its policies to deflate the power of non-state actors, such as the Salafists, by working with their competitors and creating a public diplomacy campaign to convey a clear message that Washington is not taking sides in the conflict.

First, the United States should begin an outreach campaign with established Salafist political parties in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen. The outreach would not indicate the United States supports their positions, such as their views on religious minorities and women, but would merely be an acknowledgement of their political importance. These more moderate Salafists could be empowered through such interaction with the U.S. and could eventually serve as a counterweight to the Salafist religious scholars who are fueling sectarian sentiment. For example, in meetings with Salafist leaders in Egypt, who have been completely marginalized as a result of the coup against the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafists suggested engagement with the United States. Such engagement would bring legitimacy to their political and religious role in Egyptian society and limit the space for more radical actors opposed to the current military-led government. In other words, the United States should acknowledge the moderate Salafists as relevant actors to enable them to serve as a counterweight to those who are more sectarian.

Second, the United States should encourage the development of a strong Sunni leadership in

Lebanon. In part, the Salafists' response reflects a political and social vacuum left among the Sunni by the recent setbacks suffered by the Future movement, once led by slain former Prime Minister Hariri. When Hariri's movement was strong in the Sunni-dominated Tripoli area, the Salafists were forced to either cooperate with the movement or remain silent.

Third, the United States should begin a public diplomacy campaign directed at the Sunnis in the Arab world, as it negotiates with Iran over its nuclear program, to emphasize Washington's fundamental commitment to religious tolerance. The current negotiations with Iran and world powers have created a perception among some Sunnis that the United States seeks to support a coalition of Shi'a-led states and non-state actors in the region. Now that Assad seems likely to be in power for the foreseeable future, Hezbollah remains politically strong in Lebanon, another Shi'a-led government is ruling Iraq, and Iran continues to meddle in the Arab world, the Sunnis have reason to believe Washington has switched sides. The recent airstrikes on the Islamic State have re-enforced this view. Surprisingly, at least part of the Sunni population in Iraq supports the Islamic State's conquest of Iraqi territory and believes the United States is targeting the militant group in order to preserve the Shi'a-led government in Baghdad, according to recent interviews.

Fourth, the United States should press Iran over Tehran's interventions in Arab countries, as it continues talks over the nuclear issue. If an agreement is eventually reached with Iran, it is likely to be an accord that will lift sanctions imposed on Iran—Tehran will have little incentive to change its policies in Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and other countries. By compartmentalizing the nuclear issue, the United States is losing leverage, and appearing to accommodate Iran. The nuclear negotiations with Iran are a source of great anxiety for Sunni societies and states, which tend to view Tehran's regional ambitions through the lens of sectarian struggle rather than as an expression of more traditional geo-politics.

Appendix I: Salafist Tweets and Major Events in the Middle East

As part of this study, tweets of the scholars above were also examined with an eye to their relationship to important events in 2013 that reflect the heightened Shi'a-Sunni conflict. The Twitter sphere was particularly active during these events. Although it is difficult to form a direct causal relationship between the tweets and events on the ground, the tweets show that events do escalate anti-Shi'a sentiments on Twitter.

April 20 2013: Syrian Army Captures Radwaniyeh, near Qusayr

“Reports from Syria said the four key villages of Qadesh, Mansouriyah, As'adiyah, and Radwaniyah—all lying around the town of Qusayr in Homs province on the border with Lebanon—were captured by government forces.”⁹⁴

Adnan al Arour:

- April 18, 2013 (263 retweets, 43 favorites): Every sheikh who stood by the regime should be tried the way Bashar will be tried and every sheikh who took a neutral position shall be tried with cowardice. #Syria (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/324969736339353600>)
- April 21, 2013 (620 retweets, 70 favorites): The international community wants to provide us with non-lethal weapons!! And they give us communication tools to spy on us and pinpoint the locations of our fighters. #Syria (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/326048671386984448>)

May 19 2013: Hezbollah Fighters in Syria: Thousands Sent to Assad's Aid in Qusayr

“Syrian government forces backed by Lebanese fighters from the militant group Hezbollah pushed into parts of Qusayr, a strategic city long held by rebels, according to an antigovernment activist and

pro-government news channels. Both sides called it one of the war's most intense ground battles. The fight inflamed regional tensions as Hezbollah plunged more deeply into the conflict in Syria.”⁹⁵

Mohamad al Arefe:

- May 20 2013 (3,792 retweets, 309 favorites): God grant victory to our people in #Qusayr, oh God help the fighters persevere and unite the hearts of the people of truth (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/336256949010182144>)
- May 20 2013 (773 retweets, 130 favorites): God forgive me and them, and give victory to our people in Syria and Qusayr, and everywhere. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/336361635222532096>)

Salem al Rafei:

- May 18 2013 (3 retweets): The Shi'a of Qutayf in Saudi Arabia are participating in the killing of the Sunni people in Syria. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/335692986438529024>)
- May 18 2013 (2 retweets, 1 favorites): Oh God, be with our brothers in Qusayr and not against them. Grant them victory over the *kafirs*. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/335892216276979712>)
- May 19 2013 (5 retweets, 1 favorites): Don't be lazy or stingy in helping save your brothers in Qusayr. You hold the biggest weapon that anyone can have, that of prayer to God. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/336009343147327488>)
- May 19 2013 (3 retweets, 1 favorites): Breaking: Our heroes in Qusayr are dealing with the most gruesome of battles with the regime and Hezb al Lat. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/336064514703388674>)
- May 19 2013 (4 retweets, 2 favorites): I invite the Sunni people in all corners of the world to stand

94. “Syrian Army Captures Strategic Villages Near Lebanon Border,” *Press TV*, April 20, 2013, <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/04/20/299361/syrian-army-captures-key-villages/>.

95. Anne Bernard and Hwaida Saad, “Hezbollah Aids Syrian Military in Key Battle,” *The New York Times*, May 13, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/20/world/middleeast/syrian-army-moves-to-rebel-held-qusayr.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

with their brothers in Qusayr. Pray for them and ask God to help them persevere. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/336080296413904897>)

- May 19 2013 (130 retweets, 7 favorites): Our people in Qusayr are now fighting to rid tyranny and raise the word of God against those who worship the devil. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/336081390456168448>)
- May 20 2013: Qusayr will be your cemetery, Hezb al Shaytan. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/336534687461830660>)

June 5 2013: Qusayr Captured by Syrian Government and Hezbollah

“The Syrian army seized control of the strategic border town of Qusayr, in a major advance for Bashar al Assad’s forces in the two-year civil war. Rebels said they had pulled out of Qusayr, which lies on a cross-border supply route with neighboring Lebanon and where they had fought fierce battles with government forces and Hezbollah guerrillas for more than two weeks. One Hezbollah fighter told Reuters that they took the town in a rapid overnight offensive, allowing some of the fighters to flee.”⁹⁶

“A car bombing in a part of Beirut dominated by the Shia group Hezbollah has led to at least 18 deaths and over 200 injured. The attack is seen as the latest echo of Syria’s conflict in neighboring Lebanon.”⁹⁷

Adnan al Arour:

- June 4, 2013 (311 retweets, 33 favorites): The Syrian people did not originally set out to kill the regime nor did deliberately set out on the sectarian path. They asked peacefully, but the regime forced the fighting against them and used sectarianism to kill them. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/341992558198652928>)
- June 4, 2013 (985 retweeted, 63 favorites): If something happens in Syria and it falls in the hands of Iran, their coming goal is the Gulf and they have begun to implement this plan with He-

zbollah’s entrance into Syria. Iran has occupied Syria—a full occupation. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/342004054798499841>)

- June 4, 2013 (1,549 retweets, 94 favorites): If a chicken belonging to a Muslim crossed the Lebanese border they would have arrested it on charges of terrorism!! But the tanks and rockets of Hezb al Shaytan openly cross with an American order and an Iranian request and there is Arab silence!! (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/342005432753201152>)
- June 5, 2013 (706 retweets, 59 favorites): The battle of #Qusayr will not change anything, it doesn’t count for more than 1/400th of the territory of anger. If it fails, this will not affect our revolution, God willing. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/342223898600943617>)
- June 5, 2013 (1,033 retweets, 78 favorites): There was a withdrawal from Qusayr in the night, without losses worth mentioning and our fight is not in Qusayr nor for the land of Qusayr. Our battle is a battle of right and wrong and faith and *kufri*. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/342330856242835456>)
- June 5 2013 (921 retweets, 54 favorites): Regardless of the withdrawal from Qusayr, we and God are the victors. We have gained more faith and more conviction in the truth of our doctrine. And we have unmasked the truth of the true enemies to the *ummah*. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/342340165357936641>)
- June 6 2013 (8,692 retweets, 1,478 favorites): Whoever needs to support Qusayr or elsewhere with rice or sugar or other things, and your understanding is sufficient, reach us by phone at 00966598312678/ for we have no one after God but you. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/342558612293570560>)
- June 6, 2013 (1,075 retweets, 120 favorites): I swear if we lose all of #Syria, and we die on the true faith, this is what God prefers and it is the ultimate victory. The victory after the victory of the true faith (Sunni) is the ultimate victory. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/342718037088157696>)

96. Erika Soloman, “Syrian Army Captures Strategic Border Town of Qusair,” *Reuters*, June 5, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/05/us-syria-crisis-town-idUSBRE95406220130605>.

97. “Car Bomb Blast in Beirut Kills at Least 20, Injures Dozens,” *Time*, August 15, 2013, <http://world.time.com/2013/08/15/car-bomb-blast-in-beirut-kills-at-least-20-injures-dozens/>.

- June 9 2013 (1,180 retweets, 90 favorites): “America has given Iraq to Iran on a plate of gold,” according to Prince Saud Faysal. So who has now given Syria to Iran on a plate of blood? (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/343753887334940673>)
- June 9 2013 (959 retweets, 73 favorites): What is strange is that Arab and Islamic states hear Iranian agents and the *rawafid* saying ‘We will slay you and occupy Gulf states’ and the Gulf states don’t do anything about it!! (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/343803883950325760>)

Mohamad al Arefe:

- June 5 2013 (789 retweets, 132 favorites): Don’t forget the jihadists of Syria in support and in prayer, from yesterday they have been bombarded with rockets by Iran and Hezb al Lat. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342186195566096384>)
- June 5 2013 (5,080 retweets, 442 favorites): Oh Arab leaders, do you understand the danger of the situation in #Syria and #Qusayr? If you don’t, this is a calamity! And if you do understand, the calamity is bigger! (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342190666157285376>)
- June 5 2013 (1,748 retweets, 273 favorites): After the victory of the Safavid order in Syria, God forbid, Iran will fight to occupy the Gulf. They see us as *kafir* anyway!! (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342231738895966208>)
- June 6 2013 (611 retweets, 71 favorites): #Hezbollah’s doctrine and its supporters are *rawafid* Safavids, and their primary beliefs include: having many Imams, changing the words of the Koran, making the Imams Divine... (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342697284439527424>)
- June 6 2013 (611 retweets, 81 favorites): And of #Hezbollah’s doctrine: that the state is for the Imams only, excommunicating those who came before them, and cursing the caliphs Abu Bakr, Omar, and Othman. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342697738531643392>)
- June 6 2013 (591 retweets, 70 favorites): #Hezbollah has expanded in Arab countries, there are branches in Bahrain and the Hijaz [Saudi Arabia]

and Kuwait and Yemen and elsewhere that have yet to be discovered! (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342699946878853120>)

- June 6 2013 (528 retweets, 61 favorites): The relationship between #Hezbollah and Khomeini is one of a body to the soul, and the party has used it to spread Shi’ism in the Islamic world.
- June 6 2013 (511 retweets, 69 favorites): The *rawafid* Safavid #Hezbollah is taking over Sunni mosques in Lebanon and changing their names. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342701436100042752>)
- June 6 2013 (1,080 retweets, 136 favorites): A lot of people are fooled by #Hezbollah for three main reasons: ignorance of the Safavid *rawafid* doctrine, Hezbollah’s concealment of their actions, and their astounding media. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342701909741801472>)
- June 6 2013 (380 retweets, 53 favorites): The Assad regime has the ability to arm #Hezbollah politically in Lebanon, so this is why the Hezb stands by the regime today. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342702445023096832>)
- June 6 2013 (653 retweets, 95 favorites): This is #Hezbollah today fighting in Syria and Qusayr fighting with the *rawafid* Safavid Iranians and the Assad regime all together united in doctrine and hatred <http://arefe.ws/twitter/8b6d8a72.jpg>. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342703175557578752>)
*links to a photo of killed children

Salem al Rafei:

- June 3 2013: Qusayr—the rebels are blocking attempts of a siege and have destroyed three tanks and killed nearly 35 members of Hezbollah. <http://www.youtube.com/VhzRDazt8M> (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/341615417724391424>)
- June 4 2013: MTV: “Hezbollah” raises the amount for compensation...50 thousand for each one killed. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/341807771857080320>)
- June 4 2013 (1 retweet): It really is revolution that has shown them in their true light, hypo-

criters who claim to belong to Islam when they kill Muslims. They claim to defend holy places and they bomb mosques. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/341959698918027267>)

- June 5 2013 (14 retweets, 2 favorites): Qusayr has withstood more than 25 days against Russia and China and Iraq and Iran and Hezb al Shaytan and Bashar's gangs and Arabs letting them down. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/342302995993722880>)
- June 5 2013: A large and angry protest is taking place in Ain al Hilweh at this time to protest the Hezb al Shaytan's (Hezbollah) killing of our people in Syria. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/342345668494520320>)
- June 5 2013 (6 retweets, 1 favorites): Of the positives of the battle of Qusayr: God has exposed Hezb al Shaytan more and more to people who used to believe them. The term Hezb al Shaytan is now replacing Hezbollah all over the world. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/342362404530819074>)
- June 5 2013 (2 retweets): They congratulate each other and fire shots into the air in jubilation and they don't know that the battle of Qusayr, for God, was not intended to make the regime fall. Its point was to expose the fake resistance and remove God's name from their party and replace it with the devil. Before Qusayr it was called Hezbollah and before Qusayr it was called a resistance and after it, it has become a terrorist group. Before Qusayr, it defended people and the state, and after it, it became a killer. Its security zones will not remain safe after Qusayr. This small town in a short while has played its role and excelled. Don't be sad. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/342401723790422017>)

Nabil al Awadhy:

- June 5 2013 (1,293 retweets, 112 favorites): The Muslim leaders have not realized the gravity of the situation. Qusayr is not just a city! This is the start of a dangerous war! Oh God, grant victory to your followers and let down all those who have

let them down. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/342187968859078656>)

- June 5 2013 (2,545 retweets, 157 favorites): For your information, you who are the tails of Iran, the Free Syrian Army still controls more than 60% of Syrian land. And God willing, their victory is close. The tyrant will be defeated one day. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/342201263489953792>)
- June 5 2013 (1,281 retweets, 91 favorites): #Qusayr will remain a thorn in their beards. Their doctrinal war will burn them. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/342203848817004544>)
- June 5 2013 (1,745 retweets, 100 favorites): Oh God, we ask you to punish Iran and its followers. Iran stands behind every evil faced by the *ummah* today. Any regime that stands with them is of them! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/342298517651456001>)

June 24 2013: Clashes Between the Lebanese Armed Forces and Ahmad al Assir

"At least 16 soldiers were killed and dozens wounded in Lebanon's southern city of Sidon over two days of intense fighting between the army and gunmen loyal to Salafist Sheikh Ahmad al Assir. Six soldiers were killed and 10 others injured in clashes that were sparked after supporters of the extremist cleric ambushed an army checkpoint. The number of casualties among Assir's gunmen is not yet known."⁹⁸

Salem al Rafei:

- June 24 2013 (6 retweets): Sheikh Salem al Rafei: We won't do anything to control the street. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/349112113035345921>)
- June 24 2013 (22 retweets): The Muslim Scholars Association invites all mosques in Lebanon to raise the calls in God's name in their minarets until the attack on Bilal bin Rabah mosque ceases. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/349116837990109184>)
- June 24 2013 (10 retweets): Sheikh Salem al Rafei on the show *Ma Waraa al Khabar* on Al Jazeera live: There is a plan to end Assir that came from Hezbollah and it is being implemented by

98. "Sidon Clashes Kill 16 Soldiers as Assir Remains At Large," *Al Akhbar*, June 24, 2013, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/16219>.

the Army and members of the Hezb and Amal are participating in the bombing and attacking of the Bilal bin Rabah mosque. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/349240297303195649>)

Nabil al Awadhy:

- June 23 2013 (2,013 retweets, 111 favorites): This is what they have been planning. ... After the millions that they have received from governments in the Gulf, the leaders of the Lebanese Army are conspiring with Hezb al Shaytan to kill the Sunni people, beginning with their sheikhs. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/348810285341085697>)
- June 23 2013 (4,957 retweets, 292 favorites): To the governments of the Gulf: where are the billions from your people that you have spent on Lebanon?! Their weapons are being used against the Sunni people!! As usual, they are killing us with our money!! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/348810824103624708>)
- June 23 2013 (1,657 retweets, 122 favorites): Since the invasion of America of Iraq and it being given to the followers of Iran...they have been killing Sunnis! And if Sunni people defend themselves, they accuse them of sectarianism and terrorism!! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/3488132183256227840>)
- June 24 2013 (962 retweets, 84 favorites): What is strange is the silence of the Arab governments about what is happening in Lebanon!! Have they sold it like they sold Iraq and Syria?! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/349086303670919168>)
- June 24 2013 (1,688 retweets, 152 favorites): Iran wants to take attention away from Syria and shift it to Lebanon. The head of the snake does not know that Muslims will not give up on Iraq, or Syria, or Lebanon. And Iran will be returned to the Muslims!! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/349090771653255169>)
- June 24 2013 (1,355 retweets, 85 favorites): Do the Arab people know about the Iranian satellite channels broadcasting in the Arabic language and Hezb al Shaytan's channels who are broadcasting

via Arabic satellites!! They are fighting you with your money! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/349105826067275776>)

August 21 2013: Ghouta Chemical Massacre—Around 1500 Killed

“At least 1,300 people have been killed in a nerve gas attack on Syria’s Ghouta region, leading opposition figure George Sabra said on Wednesday. In response, the opposition Syrian National Coalition called for an urgent U.N. Security Council meeting on the subject. “I call on the Security Council to convene urgently,” National Coalition leader Ahmed al Jarba added to Al Arabiya news channel, condemning the Syrian army’s bombardment of the Ghouta suburbs of Damascus as a “massacre.”⁹⁹

Adnan al Arour:

- August 21 2013 (1,422 retweets, 76 favorites): What happened today with the use of chemical weapons is not a crime of the regime on its own but also the crime of the Security Council and the Arab League and everyone who does not support the Syrian people, both governments and people. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/370156688634302464>)
- August 21 2013 (671 retweets, 51 favorites): If a thousand preachers in a thousand mosques have not been able to show the true colors of the world and the *rawafid* and the countries of human rights, the revolution has certainly exposed all of them in their true light. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/370156944612655104>)
- August 21 2013 (512 retweets, 37 favorites): Where are those who personally bet against me that the regime wouldn’t use chemical weapons?! (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/370195676648714240>)
- August 21 2013 (2,711 retweets, 110 favorites): The Salam Union under the oversight of Sheikh Adnan announces the launch of a campaign to buy face masks and protective medicine from poison gas, we look to God and then you for help in this campaign. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/370201194422996993>)

99. “Syrian Opposition: 1,300 Killed in Chemic Attack on Ghouta Region,” *Al Arabiya*, August 21, 2013, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/08/21/Syrian-activists-at-least-500-killed-in-chemical-attack-on-Eastern-Ghouta.html>.

- August 21 2013 (2,595 retweets, 156 favorites): The campaign will be called: Save a Muslim with a facemask, and our goal is to buy 100,000 masks, knowing that each one costs around 200 Saudi Riyals. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/370201342804914176>)
 - August 21 2013: (3,753 retweets, 782 favorites): You can support the campaign by donating money to the account at Rajhi Bank, IBAN: 261608010110546, SA0280000261608010110546, The account is in the name of Adnan Mohammad Mohammad Arour. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/370201698028908544>)
 - August 21 2013 (752 retweets, 45 favorites): What happened today in Ghouta is terrorism by the Assad gang, but it is with express international permission, and with permission from the Security Council. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/370287669688819713>)
 - August 21 2013 (1,034 retweets, 89 favorites): The Syrian people are our great loss, what is happening is divine wisdom, and it is written destiny, and God is testing us, and we must be patient and persevere. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/370289492403306496>)
 - August 22 2013 (1,311 retweets, 80 favorites): The #Save_a_Muslim_with_a_face_mask was launched yesterday and it aims to buy 100,000 face masks and preventative medicine from poisonous gases. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/370484239021510656>)
 - August 22 2013 (3,441 retweets, 611 favorites): You can support the #Save_a_Muslim_with_a_face_mask campaign by donating money to the account at Rajhi Bank, IBAN: 261608010110546, SA0280000261608010110546, The account is in the name of Adnan Mohammad Mohammad Arour. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/370484528671772672>)
 - August 22 2013 (678 retweets, 72 favorites): How can you blame the youth for falling into the trap of excommunicating other Muslims when they see these massacres! (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/370635743661522944>)
 - August 22 2013 (2,356 retweets, 164 favorites): The US occupied Iraq because they thought it had chemical weapons, and today chemical weapons are openly being used in Syria and the US wants to first make sure that chemical weapons are being used. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/370649170354270208>)
- Mohamad al Arefe:*
- August 21 2013 (9,805 retweets, 521 favorites): #Ghouta_is_being_exterminated_by_chemical_weapons God we look to you for strength, we ask you to punish the criminals and not show them your mercy. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/370125947480977408>)
 - August 21, 2013 (5,330 retweets, 453 favorites): It is not permissible for a Muslim to frighten another Muslim. Horrifying and scaring them is a great sin in itself, imagine how great a sin this bloodshed and killing is. Woe to those who can grant these people victory and yet remained silent! pic.twitter.com/UBfvqvHw3Z (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/370148869344350208>) *links to a photo of people killed in the chemical attack
- Nabil al Awadhy:*
- August 21 2013 (2,266 retweets, 131 favorites): #Ghouta_is_being_exterminated_by_chemical_weapons. The world will keep watching our ummah being killed. Our people must bring victory to one another. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370037534601908225>)
 - August 21 2013 (2,065 retweets, 117 favorites): Where are the threats of the lying West if there was going to be a use of chemical weapons?! Oh God, we all have no one but you. #Ghouta_chemical_massacre #Ghouta_is_being_exterminated_by_chemical_weapons (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370039972641796096>)
 - August 21 2013 (873 retweets, 48 favorites): We have no one to rely on God, but you. #Ghouta_chemical_massacre #Eastern_Ghouta_massacre. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370043545240883200>)

- August 21, 2013 (2,477 retweets, 197 favorites): Enemies of the *ummah* let tyrants kill their people and burn the state, and they imprisoned a ruler [former Egyptian President Morsi] that the people had chosen. Oh God, our own people are our enemies. #Eastern_Ghouta_massacre. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370045166687502336>)
 - August 21 2013: (5,933 retweets, 401 favorites): If they paid one tenth of what they paid for the overthrow and killing of the people of #Egypt to jihadists in Syria, it would have been freed long ago! But it is the era of betrayal! #Ghouta_is_being_exterminated_by_chemical_weapons. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370047172172976128>)
 - August 21 2013 (2,494 retweets, 202 favorites): The video footage showing how children of Syria were killed by chemical weapons should break all barriers of fear among our people. What is happening to them will happen to us one day if we remain silent!! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370047742753513472>)
 - August 21 2013 (3,306 retweets, 166 favorites): Oh God, to you we talk about our weakness, oh Merciful One, you are our source of power, and it is you we rely on. #Ghouta_is_being_exterminated_by_chemical_weapons. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370066688630218752>)
 - August 21 2013: (2,733 retweets, 147 favorites): Bashar did not commit his massacre today without a green light from tyrants like him and after safety from punishment by the international community. #Ghouta_is_being_exterminated_by_chemical_weapons. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370069869175128064>)
 - August 21 2013 (1,897 retweets, 113 favorites): 'And do not count God as ignorant to what the tyrants are doing' #Ghouta_is_being_exterminated_by_chemical_weapons. #Eastern_Ghouta_massacre. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370076888225443840>)
 - August 21 2013: (2,246 retweets, 115 favorites): Oh God, have mercy on their killed and accept them as martyrs and heal their wounds and give their families patience and perseverance oh Merciful One. #Ghouta_is_being_exterminated_by_chemical_weapons. #Eastern_Ghouta_massacre. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370077423607349248>)
 - August 21 2013 (4,499 retweets, 202 favorites): Oh God, misery is upon us and everything has become difficult and all the solutions are no longer working, we have no one but you God to help us. Oh God, save us all and save those in our *ummah* who are weak. #Ghouta_is_being_exterminated_by_chemical_weapons. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370079934900736000>)
- Adnan al Arour:*
- December 5 2013 (411 retweets, 48 favorites): We are waiting for Hezbollah to take revenge for its commander in Israel, like they are taking revenge for Hussein in Syria against its women and children. Or are Muslim children considered to be more criminal and *kafir* than Israelis, to Hezbollah? (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/408586204792492032>)
- 2013 Escalation of Crisis in Iraq**
- In the run up in 2013 to the escalation of the conflict in Iraq in June 2014, which led to the radical group, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), invading large swathes of Iraq, al Arefe and al Arour were warning the Shi'a-led Maliki government and calling for an end to the violence against the Sunnis. Al Arour and al Arefe do not support extremist Sunni groups such as ISIS, however, they are linked by their anti-Shi'a views. They have commented extensively on Twitter about the marginalization of the Sunnis in Iraq, even as they call into question the religious legitimacy of ISIS, which projects itself as a religious and political movement.
- Mohamad al Arefe*
- Oct 5 2013: Iraqis are our people and their blood runs through our veins. Their history is of bravery, leadership, morals, chivalry and generosity. #The_displacement_of_Sunni_people_in_Iraq. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/386489045187981312/photo/1>) *He links to a poster that says that the cause is greater than a party or an assembly or a sheikh or a thinker or a jihadist. It says that "our cause" is the presence of Sunni people in Iraq.
 - Oct 3 2013 (tweeted by @alajmi_saad, re-tweeted by @MohamadAlarefe): A statement from Sheikh Abdallah al Sa'ad about the # forced_displacement_

of_the_Sunni_in_Iraq. An invitation to unite. <http://twitmail.com/email/781004497/16/> بيان-حول-ما-حصل-من-تهجير-لأهل-السنة-في-جنوب--العراق (https://twitter.com/alajmi_saad/status/385982103844028416)
**He links to a statement about the displacement of Sunnis in southern Iraq, particularly in Nassiriya, Basra, and Zubeir and the death threats they are facing in addition to the kidnapping of their children and other crimes of torture and rape. In addition, it talks about the attacks on Sunni mosques on the part of Twelver Shi'a with the support of the Iraqi and Iranian governments.*

- June 2 2013: A statement from the Iraqi jurisprudent assembly calling on the Islamic Cooperation Association and Azhar in Egypt to defend the mosques of Sunni people. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/341279251384897536/photo/1>)
**He links to a statement issued by the Fiqh Council of Senior Scholars. The statement says that in light of the targeted killings toward people praying in mixed areas in Baghdad and attacks on mosques and the government's inability to provide security for these mosques, the council calls upon the Islamic Cooperation Association and Azhar to take a position on the massacres Iraqi Sunnis are facing, whether in Baghdad or other Iraqi cities. The Council calls upon them to intervene and help protect the mosques and the people from sectarian militias who are tied to external powers. The Council also called on international human rights organizations to play its part in protecting Sunnis in Iraq against the extermination and genocide they faced and for which the government bears full responsibility.*
- April 26 2013: Yes to #justice_for_our_sons_in_Iraq. Everyone who can help them must exert their full energy in doing so. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/327883460704342018>)

Appendix II

The following selection of tweets from 2013 for each cleric demonstrates that they fall under three categories: religious references, political references to events on the ground, and solicitations, either for fundraising purposes or political mobilization. As stated above, the religious references point to long-standing disputes between the Shi'a and Sunnis and are intended to portray the Shi'a as non-believers. In some cases, the tweets are fused with both political and religious commentaries.

Data from Twitter was collected via www.twtrland.com. All figures are approximate.

Religious reference

Adnan al Arour

- 15 Dec 2013: The Shi'a collect money publicly... they kill publicly, their sectarianism reeks night and day, on the other hand the Sunnis...! (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/412312003508584448>)
- 14 Nov 2013: The Shi'a say that Hussein (may God be pleased with him) knows the unknown, so we tell them if he knew the unknown why did he go to his fate?! So they remain silent with no answer. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/401055389430468608>)
- 14 Nov 2013: I think that the slapping for the Shi'a is a punishment from God to them with their hands because along with their forefathers they agreed to disappoint the biggest of martyrs (Hussein). (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/401054613471633408>)
- 29 Aug 2013: I call on all Shi'a everywhere, make us understand, is killing children allowed? If you want to kill these children because they are the grandchildren of Mo'awiyya then I attest to God that you are *kafirs* and that you are the biggest *kafirs* God has ever created. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/373177538916274176>)
- 22 Aug 2013: How can you blame the youth for falling into the trap of excommunicating other Muslims when they see these massacres! If it wasn't for our firm rules, we would have excommunicated all the leaders one after the other. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/370635743661522944>)
- 9 June 2013: What is the relation of Hussein (may Allah be pleased with him) with the butchering of children in Qusayr? What is the relation of the killing of Hussein with the revolution in #Syria? (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/343803025497923585>)
- 5 June 2013: There was a withdrawal from Qusayr in the night, without losses worth mentioning and our fight is not in Qusayr nor for the land of Qusayr. Our battle is a battle of right and wrong and faith and *kufri*. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/342330856242835456>)
- 26 May 2013: The Shi'a are the most *takfiri* of sects, for they cast out anyone who doesn't believe in their sect or doubts one of them or is allies with one of their enemies. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/338741253950808064>)
- 26 May 2013: The Mahdi according to the Shi'a doctrine is thirsty in the basement/hiding and is quenching his thirst with the blood of the Sunnis and they say in their books that there is nothing between the Mahdi and the Arabs except slaughter. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/338740597286375424>)
- 17 Jan 2013: We forbid the killing of a bird with no reason and we forbid the killing of ants and bees and they accuse us of sectarianism when they kill and butcher Muslims in the thousands and they're not sectarian!! #Syria (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/291988415178756096>)

Mohamad al Arefe

- 31 Dec 2013 (*tweeted by @KhalidALbahr, retweeted by @MohamadAlarefe*): The #Shiite Council in #Najaf supports the military operation on the #Sunni people in #Anbar... then they say: (we are not sectarian)...!! #Iraq (<https://twitter.com/KhalidALbahr/status/417958865318060032>)

- 30 Dec 2013 (*tweeted by @YZaatreh, re-tweeted by @MohamadAlarefe*): In Anbar, there is a battle to make the Sunni Arabs kneel, and after them all Iraqis. Maliki is practicing sectarian rallying to cover his failures on every front. He will never succeed. (<https://twitter.com/YZaatreh/status/417728783068569601>)
 - 2 Oct 2013 (series of two tweets): A report for the French newspaper Le Monde: 1/ There is no such thing as temporary marriage for jihad. 2/ This is an Iranian Syrian lie to distort the image of noble jihadists. <http://new.elfagr.org/Detail.aspx?nwsId=436044&secid=7&vid=2#> Also: The Iranian and Syrian regimes lied and created the #lie_of_temporary_marriage_for_jihad and then slandered Muslim scholars by saying they had said it was okay for a jihadist to marry his sister, mother or daughter if the need arose. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/385456510077526016>) (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/385456897090150400>)
 - 21 Aug 2013: It is not permissible for a Muslim to frighten another Muslim. Horrifying and scaring them is a great sin in itself, imagine how great a sin this bloodshed and killing is. Woe to those who can grant these people victory and yet remain silent! pic.twitter.com/UBfvqHw3Z (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/370148869344350208>)
 - 6 June 2013: The relationship between #Hezbollah and Khomeini is one of a body to the soul, and the party has used it to spread Shi'ism in the Islamic world. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342700307639332864>)
 - 6 June 2013: #Hezbollah's doctrine and its supporters are *rawafid* Safavids, and their primary beliefs include: having many Imams, changing the words of the Koran, making the Imams Divine...to be continued. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342697284439527424>)
 - 6 June 2013: And of #Hezbollah's doctrine: that the state is for the Imams only, excommunicating those who came before them, and cursing the caliphs Abu Bakr, Omar and Othman. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342697738531643392>)
 - 6 June 2013: The *rawafid* Safavid #Hezbollah are taking over Sunni mosques in Lebanon and changing their names. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342701436100042752>)
 - 2 June 2013: A statement from the Iraqi jurispudent assembly calling on the Islamic Cooperation Association and Azhar to defend the mosques of Sunni people. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/341279251384897536/photo/1>)
- Dai al Islam al Shahhal*
- 2 Dec 2013: And we can't ignore any decision that targets the Sunni sect. (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/407638840678301697>)
 - 28 Sep 2013 (series of seven tweets): 1/ The attack on our Sunni people and brothers in #Baalbek and their vulnerability at the hands of the organization called Hezbollah, a sectarian power whose purpose is to create war and sedition. 2/ Sectarian sedition in #Lebanon is therefore normal to occur; the reactions are strong and uncontrollable toward the allies of this Hezb in different areas. 3/ We hold Hezbollah and its allies accountable for the blood that's been spilled and the repercussions of this as well as the Lebanese state for its silence on the actions of the Hezb #Lebanon #Baalbek. 4/ Like what is happening now in #Baalbek where sectarian claws do their deeds in Chiah and the Sunnis in Baalbek and the official security forces watch and do nothing #Lebanon. 5/ Last night is so similar to May 7 and it appears that the state of Hezbollah asked the Lebanese state to come up with a security plan in Dahiye #Lebanon. 6/ And under its rule so that it can have time to hit the opponents of the Syrian regime and Iranian project in Lebanon and ignite a Sunni-Shi'a sectarian war in the Arab and Islamic world #Lebanon. 7/ So it is normal for Sunnis of the world not to be quiet on the Safavid project targeting the Sunni people in Syria and Lebanon and the area. The Information office of Sheikh #Shahhal. (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/384024148181540864>) (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/384025933491236864>) (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/384026557180035072>) (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/384027274666053632>) (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/384027997378207744>) (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/384028662821310464>) (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/384029411529728000>)

- 13 June 2013: Sheikh Dai al Islam #al-Shahhal: The Sunni people in #Lebanon are threatened, and we have warned of this, and we found no ears that listened. #The_stance_of_the_scholars_from_Syria. (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/345278963804946433>)
- 4 Feb 2013: From the statement of the Sheikh: the undermining of Sunni blood over and over on the hands of forces and officers of this organization compromises it...#Arsal #Lebanon. (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/298534426231570433>)
- 29 Jan 2013: There is a lot of anger from the people of #Tripoli toward #Future movement because it gives priority to leaders and not to the interest of the Sunni sect. #TripoliLB. (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/296235023865094144>)

Salem al Rafei

- 24 Oct 2013: God, I give you the city of knowledge of scholars Tripoli, God bring back its security and make its citizens safe, and take revenge upon those who seek to destroy it from the Ba'ath party criminals. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/393508244104433664>)
- 28 July 2013: Two and a half years it's been and we've been hearing and seeing photos of killing and torture and arrests of the Sunni people in Syria!!! On the hands of the criminal alliance... Today... [fb.me/XInQJJ9e](https://www.facebook.com/XInQJJ9e) (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/350700428201168897>)
- 28 June 2013: This is Sidon, the land of dignity, Sidon does not bow down to anyone but God...Sunnis do not bow down to anyone but God. God is Great. God is Great. [fb.me/27i66h8vt](https://www.facebook.com/27i66h8vt) (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/350675338394734593>)
- 13 June 2013: Al Qaradawi: Iran's rulers are helping Christians, and Christians are not Muslim, and the Shi'a are fighting us based on sect. They chant: "Oh Hussein," for they are polytheists. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/345148725582249985>)
- 4 June 2013: It really is the revolution that has shown their true light, hypocrites who claim to belong to Islam when they kill Muslims. They claim to defend holy places and they bomb mosques. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/341959698918027267>)
- 19 May 2013: Our people in Qusayr are now fighting battles between those whose allegiance

is to God and who fight to remove tyranny and raise His name and those whose allegiance is to the Devil. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/336081390456168448>)

Bilal Baroudi

- 28 Dec 2013: When will the Sunnis realize that they are targeted no matter how much they give up of their principles? Haven't we considered what happened to the Sunni people in Bosnia (and they didn't have any fundamentalist movement)? (<https://twitter.com/AlsalamBilal/status/417021822899851264>)

Nabil al Awadhy

- July 6 2013: (Wherever a Wahhabi is found, we must fight them to the death)!! Watch how Iraqi Shiites are inciting to kill Muslims in Syria. #<https://twitter.com/hashtag/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A?src=hash> A very dangerous video
- June 22, 2013: To the men of Iraq and its heroes: Maliki is still sending his Savafid soldiers to Syria to kill children and violate women and destroy the country!! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/348559685491761152>)
- April 23, 2013: Why are monotheistic believers killed in Iraq?! On what guilt is their blood violated? And what religion is Maliki and his gangs using to do this? #https://twitter.com/hashtag/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A?src=hash, The_Iraqi_Spring. #https://twitter.com/hashtag/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A?src=hash, Hujaira_Massacre. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/326614378478714880>)
- April 4, 2013: What I have seen in very painful footage far removed from humanity in #https://twitter.com/hashtag/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A?src=hash, Iraq's prisons and what Iraq has reached to today, is exactly what Americans wants in cooperating

with the savafids. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/319811964111036416>)

- April 4, 2013: Iraq's prisons are filled with those oppressed and tortured and sectarianism controls the minds of those responsible for them. Videos of the torture are spreading without condemnation. The savafids are following in the footsteps of the Americans! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/319809729826275330>)
- January 23, 2013: @anti_kardashn: A report for BBC on the sectarian government in Iraq <http://t.co/EW07xRLv> #https://twitter.com/hashtag/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A?src=hash,The_Iraqi_Spring. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/294020039772880896>)

Political reference

Adnan al Arour

- 29 Dec 2013: The most dangerous issue that ISIS is criticized about is that it refuses the rule of God. ISIS sees itself as a state and any jihadists other than them are seen to not be a part of that state. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/417379377769218049>)
- 15 Dec 2013: It is expected that they will accuse the jihadists of chemical weapons, Arour of terrorism, and that the *rawafid* and Hezb al Shaytan will be granted certificates of innocence by the Council of Betrayal and the League of Disappointment. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/412313145651122176>)
- 5 Dec 2013: We are waiting for Hezbollah to take revenge for its commander in Israel, like they are taking revenge for Hussein in Syria against its women and children. Or are Muslim children considered to be more criminal and *kafir* than Israelis, to Hezbollah? (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/408586204792492032>)
- 21 Nov 2013: We have demanded from ISIS for months to present the killers to legal courts and they have refused. Why are they not presenting these killers to the legal courts but are stalling instead? #Syria. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/403598894287695874>)
- 8 Nov 2013: The rebels aren't fighting the regime, the regime has fallen months ago, the rebels are fighting the Iranians and Hezb al Shaytan. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/398768286159998977>)
- 26 Sep 2013: At the time the Shi'a were covering Syria with crimes, the Saudis and the Qataris and the Kuwaitis and others were covering Syria with aid. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/383302136034902016>)
- 31 Aug 2013: Oh honorable Shi'a, don't worry if Bashar and Hassan don't bomb, because Iran, whose leaders in their elections promised to throw Israel in the sea, will bomb, so leaders don't disappoint those who elected you. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/373590702753873920>)
- Aug 31 2013: Oh honorable Shi'a and noble Christians, don't worry, for our leader Bashar and our Imam Hassan Khamenei will make us proud and bomb Tel Aviv before they bombs us. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/373588010132328448>)
- 21 Aug 2013: What happened today in Ghouta is terrorism by the Assad gang but it is with express international permission, and with permission from the Security Council. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/370287669688819713>)
- 21 Aug 2013: If a thousand preachers in a thousand mosques have not been able to show the true colors of the world and the *rawafid* and the countries of human rights, the revolution has certainly exposed all of them in their true light. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/370156944612655104>)
- 13 June 2013: The Arab League and most of its states are conspiring against the Syrian revolution, and if they had any honor they would have went in and saved #Syria. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/345269227722264580>)
- 9 June 2013: What is strange is that Arab and Islamic states hear Iranian agents and the *rawafid* saying "we will slay you and occupy Gulf States" and the Gulf States don't do anything about it!! (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/343803883950325760>)
- 9 June 2013: "America gave Iraq to Iran on a plate of gold," according to Prince Saud al Faisal. Who is now giving Syria to Iran on a plate of blood? (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/343753887334940673>)
- 6 June 2013 (*said by Arour, tweeted by Zajel_ksa, retweeted by Arour*) #AlArour: The piling of Hezbollah and the regime on #Qusayr is because of

- their repeated defeats and failures. (https://twitter.com/3ajel_ksa/status/342729095924305920)
- 5 June 2013: The battle of #Qusayr will not change anything, it doesn't count for more than 1/400th of the territory of anger. If it falls, this will not affect our revolution, God willing. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/342223898600943617>)
 - 5 June 2013: Despite the withdrawal from Qusayr, we and God are the victors. We have gained more faith and more conviction in the truth of our doctrine. And we have unmasked the truth of the true enemies to the *ummah*. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/342340165357936641>)
 - 4 June 2013: If something happens in Syria and it falls in the hands of Iran, their coming goal is the Gulf and they have begun in implementing this plan with Hezbollah's entrance into Syria. Iran has occupied Syria a full occupation. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/342004054798499841>)
 - 4 June 2013: The Syrian people did not originally go out to fight against the regime nor did they go out with sectarianism. They asked peacefully but the regime forced the fighting against them and used sectarianism to kill them. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/341992558198652928>)
 - 4 June 2013: If a chicken belonging to a Muslim crossed the Lebanese border they would have arrested it on charges of terrorism!! But the tanks and rockets of Hezb al Shaytan openly cross with an American order and an Iranian request and Arab silence!! (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/342005432753201152>)
 - 30 May 2013: Do you want us to stay silent about Hezb al Shaytan's interference in #Syria so it will be ruled by the *rawafid*...?? (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/340203331819544576>)
 - 26 May 2013: We thank the noble Shi'a who stood by the Syrian revolution or who stood on the sidelines and did not join with Hezb al Shaytan to kill those who sheltered them and comforted them from Qusayr and elsewhere. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/338601076188135425>)
 - 23 May 2013: Hezb al Shaytan penetrates borders and kills and slaughters and supports the falling army and the Safavids come from Isfahan through Iraq...then you want us to stay silent?? (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/337681942671683584>)
 - 23 May 2013: Oh Arab rulers, why do you keep silent on the interference of Hezb al Shaytan? (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/337657134709870595>)
 - 21 April 2013: The international community wants to provide us with non-lethal weapons!! And they give us communication tools to spy on us and pinpoint the locations of our fighters. #Syria. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/326048671386984448>)
 - 18 April 2013: Every sheikh who stood by the regime will be tried alongside Bashar and every sheikh who took a neutral position shall be convicted of cowardice. #Syria. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/324969736339353600>)
 - 11 April 2013: We ask all those who support ISIS, what is the ruling on those who don't pay homage to it and to those who are obedient to the unknown? The scholar issues fatwas based on knowledge and those who stray simply curse and accuse. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/322457044688977920>)
 - 11 March 2013: God is Great, the small signs of the fall of the regime have shown, and the big signs are following, from them Hezb al Shaytan and Maliki's interference... (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/311228482657083392>)
 - 7 March 2013: #America is the one who ignited sectarianism when it gave #Iraq to Iran and #Syria. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/309744878936530944>)
 - 24 Feb 2013: If we only had what Hezb al Shaytan has from weapons and support, there would no longer be devils nor tyrants. #Syria (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/305751955236605952>)
- Mohamad al Arefe*
- 31 Oct 2013 (*tweeted by @YZaatreh, re-tweeted by @MohamadAlarefe*): Iranian tyranny; from Damascus' countryside to other areas in Syria, and even Iraq and Yemen. This won't stop without a Saudi-Turkish understanding, but...!!! (<https://twitter.com/YZaatreh/status/305751955236605952>)

- tus/396004385534115840)
- 6 June 2013: #Hezbollah, the Safavid party, was founded in Lebanon in 1982 and branched out from the Shiite movement Amal that killed Muslims in Sabra and Chatila. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342696782930780160>)
 - 6 June 2013: Hassan Nasr al Lat of #Hezbollah said that the religious source for them was Iran and that gave them a religious and legal cover to fight with weapons. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342698811757563904>)
 - 6 June 2013: Ibrahim al Amine, a leader in #Hezbollah, said that they don't consider themselves a part of Iran, that instead Iran was Lebanon and Lebanon was Iran. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342699468187107328>)
 - 6 June 2013: #Hezbollah has expanded in Arab countries, there are branches in Bahrain and Hijaz and Kuwait and Yemen and elsewhere that have yet to be discovered! (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342699946878853120>)
 - 6 June 2013: Khomeini gave Iranian officials the task of keeping him up to date on the movements of the *rawafid* Safavid work in Lebanon and #Hezbollah leaders are only appointed by Iran. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342700906195865602>)
 - 6 June 2013: The previous secretary general of #Hezbollah Subhi al Tufaili: Hezbollah is the one who guarded the borders of Israel. <http://youtu.be/l8emZ6oVmEY> (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342701111876145152>)
 - 6 June 2013: A lot of people are fooled by #Hezbollah for three main reasons: ignorance of the Safavid *rawafid* doctrine, Hezbollah's concealment of their actions, and their astounding media. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342701909741801472>)
 - 6 June 2013: The Assad regime has the ability to arm #Hezbollah politically in Lebanon, so this is why the Hezb stands by the regime today. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342702445023096832>)
 - 6 June 2013: This is #Hezbollah today fighting in Syria and Qusayr fighting with the *rawafid* Safavid Iranians and the Assad regime all together united in doctrine and hatred. <http://arefe.ws/twitter/8b6d8a72.jpg> (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342703175557578752>)
 - 5 June 2013: After the victory of the Safavid order in Syria, God forbid, Iran will fight to occupy the Gulf. They see us as kafirs anyway!! (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342231738895966208>)
 - 5 June 2013: Oh Arab leaders, do you understand the danger of the situation in #Syria and #Qusayr? If you don't, this is a calamity! And if you do understand, the calamity is bigger! (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342190666157285376>)
- Nabil al Awadhy*
- 20 Aug 2013: If they had paid one tenth of what they have paid to overthrow and kill the people of #Egypt to the jihadists in Syria, it would have been freed long ago! But this is the era of betrayal. #Ghouta_is_being_exterminated_by_chemical_weapons. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370047172172976128>)
 - 24 June 2013: Do the Arab people know about the Iranian satellite channels broadcasting in the Arabic language and Hezb al Shaytan's channels who are broadcasting via Arabic satellites!! They are fighting you with your money! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/349105826067275776>)
 - 24 June 2013: Sanioura: "the Army must remove all militants from #Sidon." And what about the areas of Hezb al Shaytan?! Will you demonstrate your manhood in them too?! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/349086844220215296>)
 - 24 June 2013: Iran wants to take attention away from Syria and shift it to Lebanon. The head of the snake does not know that Muslims will not give up on Iraq, or Syria, or Lebanon. And Iran will be returned to the Muslims!! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/349090771653255169>)
 - 24 June 2013: The Lebanese Army does not want a truce! And they don't care about the wounded even if they were children or women!! They only answer to and submit to Hezb al Shaytan!! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/349082008456138752>)
 - 24 June 2013: What is strange is the silence of

the Arab governments about what is happening in Lebanon!! Have they sold it like they sold Iraq and Syria?!!! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/349086303670919168>)

- 23 June 2013: Since the American invasion of Iraq and it being given to the followers of Iran... they have been killing Sunnis! And if Sunni people defend themselves, they accuse them of sectarianism and terrorism!! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/3488132183256227840>)
- 23 June 2013: This is what they have been planning... after the millions that they have received from governments in the Gulf, the leaders of the Lebanese Army are conspiring with Hezb al Shaytan to kill the Sunni people, beginning with their sheikhs. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/348810285341085697>)
- 23 June 2013: To the governments of the Gulf, where are the billions from your people that you have spent on Lebanon?!! Their weapons are being used against the Sunni people!! As usual, they are killing us with our money!! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/348810824103624708>)
- 5 June 2013: The Muslim leaders have not realized the gravity of the situation. Qusayr is not just a city! This is the start of a dangerous war! Oh God, grant victory to your followers and let down all those who have let them down. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/342187968859078656>)
- 5 June 2013: For your information, you who are the tails of Iran, the Free Syrian Army still controls more than 60% of Syrian land. And God willing, their victory is close. The tyrant will be defeated one day. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/342201263489953792>)
- 5 June 2013: #Qusayr will remain a thorn in their beards. Their doctrinal war will burn them. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/342203848817004544>)
- 5 June 2013: Oh God, we ask you to punish Iran and its followers. Iran stands behind every evil faced by the *ummah* today. Any regime that stands with them is of them! (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/342298517651456001>)

Dai al Islam al Shabbal

- 5 Dec 2013: We ask not to grant the opportunity to those who want the army to clash with

the Sunni people. #Tripoli. (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/408721194792521728>)

- 2 Dec 2013: Mikati sells Tripoli and we can't read this decision as anything but targeting the Sunni sect and especially its stronghold Tripoli and we will work to abort this plan and smash it politically. (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/407562390730203136>)
- 23 June 2013: #Lebanon falls hour after hour completely in the grip of #Hezb_eLat, and what is dangerous is they are fighting the Sunni people with the hands of the Army, as it appears to us clearly #Sidon #Tripoli. (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/348904537442119680>)
- 17 May 2013 (*tweeted by @muhanna93, r-tweeted by Shabbal*): The *rawafid* of Qutayf are fighting with Iran and Hezb al Shaytan and Bashar in Syria. And this is the evidence: <https://twitter.com/FSAUnited/status/335473556945244162/photo/1> (<https://twitter.com/muhanna93/status/335485884344442880>)
- 29 Jan 2013: The Sunni sect is in need of overcoming personal interest, given that it is targeted politically and security wise from Iranian armed militias in #Lebanon. (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/296236047485001729>)
- 29 Jan 2013: The operation to make #Tripoli arms free will not apply to Jabal Mohsen considering it is a follower of Hezbollah. This operation therefore, will not be successful unless Hezbollah is stripped of its weapons. #Lebanon. (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/296239882681073664>)

Salem al Rafei

- 29 June 2013: Haaretz: Iran and Israel are an eternal alliance—Haaretz paper states that Israel needs Iran... [fb.me/1RDmRabjh](https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/350876398879117312) (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/350876398879117312>)
- 29 June 2013: “Hezbollah” removes Syrians from Abra—More than ten Syrians have been stopped by “Hezbollah” during the clashes... [fb.me/2FDCbsUOO](https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/350880817767120896) (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/350880817767120896>)
- 29 June 2013: The Muslim Scholars Association from Abra: If those in positions of power do not respond to our demands, we will consider them against the Sunni people in Lebanon and we will declare civil disobedience in

- all Sunni areas. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/350945195837239296>)
- 25 June 2013: Dr. Faisal al Kassem: I didn't know Lebanon had an Army until Nahr al Bared Camp was destroyed and when Bilal bin Rabah Mosque was captured in Sidon. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/349491063855128576>)
 - 24 June 2013: Sheikh Salem al Rafei on Al Jazeera in the show *Ma Wara' Al Khabar* live: The state is weak in front of Hezbollah and it only becomes strong when it comes to us. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/349236879620710401>)
 - 24 June 2013: Sheikh Salem al Rafei on the show *Ma Waraa Al Khabar* on Al Jazeera live: There is a plan to end Assir that came from Hezbollah and it is being implemented by the Army and members of the Hezb and Amal are participating in the bombing and attacking of the Bilal bin Rabah mosque. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/349240297303195649>)
 - 24 June 2013: Al Mustaqbal: The spread of agents for Hezb al Lat at the American Roundabout near Ain al Hilweh Camp. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/348942171753312256>)
 - 24 June 2013: Al Mustaqbal: 4 dead and 15 injured for Hezb al Lat in clashes in Sidon were moved to the Raii' Hospital and the Hezb is hiding information from security forces. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/348939920305442816>)
 - 18 June 2013: Al Mustaqbal Newspaper: 5,000 Shi'a Iraqis fight with the Assad forces—Syrian sources revealed the participation of about... [fb.me/2aca3HN0u](https://www.facebook.com/2aca3HN0u) (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/346879891616174080>)
 - 5 June 2013: Of the positives of the battle of Qusayr: God has exposed Hezb al Shaytan more and more to people who used to believe them. The term Hezb al Shaytan is now replacing Hezbollah all over the world. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/342362404530819074>)
 - 5 June 2013: Qusayr has withstood more than 25 days against Russia, China, Iraq, Iran and Hezb al Shaytan and Bashar's militias and the disappointment of the Arabs!! Of what downfall do they speak!!! (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/342302995993722880>)
 - 5 June 2013: They congratulate each other and fire shots into the air in jubilation and they don't know that the battle of Qusayr, for God, was not intended to make the regime fall. Its point was to expose the fake resistance and remove God's name from their party and replace it with the devil. Before Qusayr it was called Hezbollah and before Qusayr it was called a resistance and after it, it has become a terrorist group. Before Qusayr, it defended people and the state, and after it, it became a killer. Its security zones will not remain safe after Qusayr. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/342401723790422017>)
 - 20 May 2013: Qusayr will be your cemetery, Hezb al Shaytan. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/336534687461830660>)
 - 19 May 2013: Information about civil disobedience and anger between the people in Dahiye after information about Hezb fighters being wounded in Syria last night (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/336229704086478848>)
- Bilal Baroudi*
- 13 Nov 2013: When will our people in the Gulf realize that the American Iranian bonding happened at the same time Nasrallah threatened the Gulf? They have to change their plans in facing them before they are raided by the plots. (<https://twitter.com/AlsalamBilal/status/400717990708396033>)
 - 19 April 2013: US support for the Syrian opposition includes non-lethal military weapons. Isn't this conditional non-lethal aid strange? Why does the West want to prolong death in Syria? (<https://twitter.com/AlsalamBilal/status/325334526840684545>)
- Utilitarian**
- Adnan al Arour*
- 29 Dec 2013: More than 30 journalists have been arrested in Aleppo by ISIS and some of them are journalists for Liwaa al Tawhid while others are journalists for the Shada channel. I challenge ISIS to prove just one allegation against these people. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/417382117635407873>)
 - 6 June 2013: Whoever wants to support Qusayr and the others with aid and rice and sugar and other things...and your understanding is sufficient. You can connect with us by phone on 00966598312678/ for after God, we only have you. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/342558612293570560>)

- 12 April 2013: Sheikh Adnan #AlArour talks about the ISIS issue, 2013-4-11 https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=w3Inu8GzccE, #Jabhat_al_Nusra #Syria. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/322643391689142273>)
- 12 April 2013: Will ISIS unite or create divisions? Should we advise those who wish to divide to be with the ones who want to unite? (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/322674518147620864>)
- 11 April 2013: All those who support ISIS and their methods should leave the lands of tyrants and live under them and this is according to their origins. (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlarour/status/322460047995195392>)

Mohamad al Arefe

- 30 Dec 2013: Our people in #Iraq are in a difficult time, saving them is a duty, they are being killed and are homeless and hungry. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/417862138750046208/photo/1>)
- 1 Nov 2013 (*tweeted by @OmawiLive, re-tweeted by @MohamadAlarefe*): The rawafid assemble Shi'a women whose aim is to provide temporary marriage for Shi'a fighters #entertainment_jihad pic.twitter.com/h5sHsZ8hNx It is important to share this picture. (<https://twitter.com/OmawiLive/status/396126578578849792>)
- 22 Oct 2013: #Our_prisoners_in_Iraq, a case that needs justice immediately, I thank brother Tamer al Balheed @thamr33 head of the committee for the prisoners for his efforts. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/392730339635777536>)
- 5 Oct 2013: Iraqis are our people and their blood runs through our veins. Their history is of bravery, leadership, morals, chivalry and generosity. #The_displacement_of_Sunni_people_in_Iraq. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/386489045187981312/photo/1>)
- 3 Oct 2013 (*tweeted by @alajmi_saad, re-tweeted by @MohamadAlarefe*): A statement from Sheikh Abdallah al Sa'ad about the # forced_displacement_of_the_Sunni_people_in_Iraq. An invitation to unite. <http://twitmail.com/email/781004497/16/> بيان-حول-ما-حصل-من-تهجير-لأهل-السنة-في-جنوب-العراق (https://twitter.com/alajmi_saad/status/385982103844028416)
- 1 Oct 2013 (*tweeted by @Muslim_LTI, re-tweeted by @MohamadAlarefe*): Statistics: Ethnic cleansing of the Sunni "Arabs" in #Iraq... Share the tweet as much as you can...#re-tweet #share #tweetinaphoto. https://twitter.com/Muslim_LTI/status/385140700263624704/photo/1 (https://twitter.com/Muslim_LTI/status/385140700263624704)
- 5 June 2013: I will give a sermon this Friday about Syria and the crimes of Hezb al Lat in the past and now, and the crimes of the Sa-favid *rawafid* in history, and the importance of jihad. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342228620254785536>)
- 5 June 2013: Don't forget the jihadists of Syria in support and in prayer, from yesterday they have been bombarded with rockets by Iran and Hezb al Lat. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/342186195566096384>)
- 20 May 2013: God grant victory to our people in #Qusayr, Oh God help the fighters persevere and unite the hearts of the people of truth. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/336256949010182144>)
- 20 May 2013: God forgive me and them, and give victory to our people in Syria and Qusayr, and everywhere. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/336361635222532096>)
- 26 April 2013: Yes to #justice_for_our_sons_in_Iraq. Everyone who can help them must exert their full energy in doing so. (<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe/status/327883460704342018>)

Nabil al Awadhy

- 21 Aug 2013: #Ghouta_is_being_exterminated_by_chemical_weapons The world will keep watching our *ummah* being killed. Our people must bring victory to one another. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370037534601908225>)
- 21 Aug 2013: Where are the threats of the lying West if there was going to be a use of chemical weapons?!! Oh God, we all have no one but You. #Ghouta_chemical_massacre. #Ghouta_is_being_exterminated_by_chemical_weapons. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370039972641796096>)

- 21 Aug 2013: We have no one to rely on God, but you. #Ghouta_chemical_massacre. #Eastern_Ghouta_massacre (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370043545240883200>)
- 21 Aug 2013: Enemies of the *ummah* left tyrants to kill their people and burn the state, and they imprisoned a ruler that the people had chosen. Oh God, our own people are our enemies. #Eastern_Ghouta_massacre. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/370045166687502336>)
- 4 June 2013: An invitation to attend a symposium tomorrow... "Hezb al Lat...and sectarian terrorism" pic.twitter.com/I4vIBsCsh5. (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/341996059859496960>)
- 2 March 2013: Dangerous words from Sobhi al Tufaili! For your information, he is the founder of what is called Hezbollah. #Syria. youtu.be/CUETtP-wegM (<https://twitter.com/NabilAlawadhy/status/307943595812462593>)

Dai al Islam al Shahhal

- 28 June 2013: Sheikh Shahhal to Annahar: The anger of the street will continue until we receive the bodies and the prisoners are released. #Sidon #Tripoli #Lebanon. (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/350602478720516096>)
- 24 June 2013: I say it honestly they want to humiliate them...I invite the men of the Sunni sect to unite... #Tripoli #Sidon. (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/349253957014659073>)
- 24 June 2013: I will never forget May 7. I cannot forget my sect. #alShahhal. (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/349254343096143873>)
- 24 June 2013: #al-Shahhal: Why have four Sheikhs been attacked in Beirut in one day, who is pushing things to escalate?!!! (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/349263588101324800>)
- 13 June 2013: A word for the Sheikh Dai al Islam #al-Shahhal in the festival of victory for #Syria in which he speaks about the duty to rescue the Sunni people in Syria. #Cairo. <http://t.co/dFH96kFk5x> (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/345263770165194752>)
- 6 June 2013 (series of nine tweets): 1/ The developments in #Tripoli are forcing those in positions of responsibility to move fast before the situation deteriorates quickly after which it will be hard to realize #AlShahhal. 2/ What is un-
- doubted is that there are sound people in the Army who don't like evil and don't wish it, so it is asked of those not to provide opportunities to the Syrian regime and its allies #AlShahhal. 3/ We invite them to hamper the opportunities of the allies of the Syrian regime in Dahiye and in Rabieh and those who try to belittle the organization of the army and its legitimacy #AlShahhal. 4/ The allies of the Syrian regime are trying to use the Lebanese Army as much as possible to kill the Sunni people much like the Syria regime is doing to the Syrian people #Syria #AlShahhal. 5/ From here, we ask everyone in the Army and outside it to look at the public interest and to exercise caution...#Lebanon#Syria#AlShahhal. 6/ We don't have much time and may they know that undermining people's dignity and blood in a provocative way is absolutely unacceptable #AlShahhal. 7/ Is the objective to incriminate the Sunnis????!!! And we advise the youth of #Tripoli and elsewhere not to waste their energy. #Lebanon #Syria #AlShahhal. 8/ Let's all work to unite our class which our enemies are trying so hard to penetrate and divide, and let all the Sunni people and the youth of Islam cooperate to unite the word. 9/ And to bring victory to the vulnerable of our Sunni sect in all #Lebanon and in all organizations and bodies. #Tripoli. (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/342690418309349377>) (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/342736952530989057>) (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/342738928710864896>) (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/342740700833652737>) (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/342741261951852544>) (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/342742310519443458>) (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/342743352682352640>) (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/342744315774263296>) (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/3427452770080604160>)
- 23 May 2013: There are strong clashes between the Sunni people in #Tripoli #Lebanon and Al-Nasiriyyeen (Alawites of Syria). This clash will play a role in determining the balance of power in the region. Your prayers and support. (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/337695454483578880>)

- 22 May 2013: I sent my son to #Qusayr for victory or martyrdom. But what is being rumored about his martyrdom isn't true, for he is in good health fighting the enemy as best he can. #AlShahhal (<https://twitter.com/Daeislam/status/337234617063063553>)
- 3 Feb 2013 (*tweeted by @dr-aboubakr, retweeted by Shahhal*): Save #Arsal from the conspiracy of Hezbollah and the regime in #Syria. Save the #Sunni people in #Lebanon @sonnaleb3. (https://twitter.com/dr_aboubakr/status/298132288389124096)

Salem al Rafei

- 2 July 2013: Sheikh Salem al Rafei: the Army is colluding with "Hezbollah" to kill the Sunni people, and does the Army allow itself to call on a militia against the Sunnis? Does this Army respect itself? (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/352021692182310913>)
- 2 July 2013: A new scandal: New evidence and testimony of Abra residents confirms Hezb Iran bombs Bilal bin Rabah and its surrounding area. <fb.me/2Era1vPif> (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/352161897958748160>)
- 29 June 2013: The Association of Muslim Scholars: We say to each Muslim not to turn themselves in to the security forces should they request, so you don't die under torture in their prisons. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/350976308567752707>)
- 29 June 2013: Association of Muslim Scholars: After the facts, photos and live testimonies were taken from the people in Saidon, members of Hezb Iran were implicated... <fb.me/3029f1Sru> (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/350979233264316416>)
- 28 June 2013: Sheikh Salem al Rafei, may God preserve him, speaks today: the second message to "Hezbollah:" We say to Hezb al Shaytan: your leader... <fb.me/6nJVxH65S> (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/350639700601602049>)
- 28 June 2013: Sheikh Salem al Rafei, may God preserve him, directs a message to the youth: when defending the honor of the Sunnis, we will be in the front lines and you will not accept any less from us. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/350580654020370433>)
- 28 June 2013: A message to the Lebanese Army: we say to the Lebanese Army that "Hezbollah" has publically declared war on Sunnis in Syria and it appears that... <fb.me/HPUB4TGG> (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/350628731733286913>)
- 9 June 2013: A message to those not going to jihad after the massacres of the regime in Qusayr and Banyas and after the raising of Shiite flags in Qusayr... <fb.me/M7tSZITk> (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/343652414496329729>)
- 5 June 2013: A large and angry protest is taking place in Ain al Hilweh at this time to protest the Hezb al Shaytan's killing of our people in Syria. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/342345668494520320>)
- 4 June 2013: MTV: "Hezbollah" raises the amount of compensation... 50 thousand for each one killed. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/341807771857080320>)
- 19 May 2013: Information says: Tens of wounded for the Iranian Hezb al Shaytan in hospitals in Beqaa and Beirut and their Facebook pages are asking for blood types of all kinds. And it is said that the biggest leaders of the Hezb have gone to the Lebanese Syrian borders to raise the morale of the killers. (<https://www.facebook.com/sheikhsalemrafei/posts/658554070825608>)
- 19 May 2013: Breaking news: Our heroes in Qusayr are dealing with the most gruesome of battles with the regime and Hezb al Lat. (<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/336064514703388674>)

Bilal Baroudi

- 28 Dec 2013: Our battle is a battle of existence and presence and identity, our existence is in our principles, our presence is in our stances, and our identity is in our pride of belonging. He who loses his identity has no existence or presence. (<https://twitter.com/AlsalamBilal/status/417022607549300736>)
- 28 June 2013: He who thinks that the campaign in Sidon is to clamp down on the phenomenon on Ahmad al Assir is blind. It is a campaign that began in the streets of Baghdad and its last stop is Mecca. Wake up!! (<https://twitter.com/AlsalamBilal/status/350587981431701505>)
- 8 June 2013: <http://www.masjedalsalam.com/node/194> Friday's sermon from Salam Mosque entitled: Who fell in Qusayr?? For Sheikh Bilal Baroudi. (<https://twitter.com/AlsalamBilal/status/343558482521382912>)

- 1 March 2013: @lordonasis <http://www.masjed-alsalam.com/node/183> This week's Friday sermon entitled: Who is seeking sedition? For Sheikh Bilal Baroudi from Salam Mosque. (<https://twitter.com/AlsalamBilal/status/307461793658322944>)
- 9 Feb 2013 (*tweeted by @YZaatreh, re-tweeted by Bilal Baroudi*): Nouri al Maliki: "The Alawites in Syria are fighting with their women and men in order to stay." An open incitement for them to keep on killing. This is rudeness and hostility towards the Syrian people. (<https://twitter.com/YZaatreh/status/300195999530491904>)
- 12 Jan 2013: <http://www.masjedalsalam.com/node/177> Friday's sermon for Sheikh Bilal Baroudi from Salam Mosque entitled: This is Hezbollah. (<https://twitter.com/AlsalamBilal/status/290173205023432706>)

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