

Straight From the Horse's Mouth:

Exploring De-radicalization Claims of Former Egyptian Militant Leaders

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Abstract

Towards the end of the 1990s, leading figures from two of Egypt's most prominent Islamist militant movements began releasing a series of documents that expressed seeming ideological revisions, culminating in a re-evaluation of perspectives and a cessation of violence. Conventional wisdom since the publication of these revisions maintains that the groups have "deradicalized".[1] In the aftermath of the January 25th, 2011 Egyptian revolution, many of these re-visionary authors were released from jail, and appeared on national television for the first time. Analyzing select interviews of these authors, as well as content from their re-visionist writings, this article re-examines the conventional wisdom of deradicalization. Contrary to previous findings that deradicalization has indeed occurred, it is argued that there is little evidence of real ideological deradicalization. Indeed, two of the four examples cited provide evidence of significant ideological recidivism as measured by both implicit and explicit calls to violence.

Keywords : Egyptian Islamic Jihad; Islamic Group; Islamism; narratives; deradicalization.

Introduction

In Omar Ashour's (2009) seminal study [2] on former militant groups in Egypt and Algeria, [3] Ashour concludes that Egyptian groups have substantially deradicalized, albeit to varying degrees. Ashour's assessment is based on a definition of deradicalization that emphasizes a group's position on violence while slighting a group's shift (or lack thereof) in worldview pertaining to its Islamist ideology.

Deradicalization, as defined by Ashour, is '...primarily concerned with changing the attitudes of armed Islamist movements toward violence, rather than toward democracy.'[4] It does not matter if the content of these groups' ideologies remain '...misogynist, homophobic, xenophobic, and anti-democratic...' so long as they agree to erase violence from their rhetoric and political agendas. [5] Ashour considers groups ideologically moderate if they accept the electoral element of the democratic process. Moderates '...accept the Schumpeterian definition of democracy, tend to emphasize majoritarianism, and are reluctant to accept minority rights in general and those they consider to be "illegitimate" minorities in particular.'[6]

Importantly, Ashour acknowledges the limits of his own terminology in accounting for real ideological deradicalization. In cases where Islamists alter their agendas to accommodate liberal democratic values, as well as accept 'constitutional liberalism and provisions for protecting minority rights,'[7] they should be considered "liberal Islamists." [8] However, as Ashour contended back in 2009 (a view that arguably still holds true today), 'Within the largest Islamist movement, liberal Islamists are a very rare breed, and indeed could even be perceived as a theoretical extreme with little or no concrete instantiations.'[9]

Since Ashour's study, there have been few follow up studies carried out on the Egyptian Islamist militants of old. The sincerity of the leaders' proclamations have not been analyzed and, save for a number of terrorist attacks on tourist resorts in the Sinai, Egypt witnessed relative calm up until the January 25th, 2011 revolution. However, following the revolution, a significant number of Islamists – including former militants – were broken out of prison and granted official pardons by the Brotherhood-led government. A number of these

individuals were then hosted on popular Egyptian TV shows for the first time. Leaders from both the al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (henceforth "Islamic Group"/ "IG"), and Tanzim al-Jihad (henceforth "Egyptian Islamic Group"/ "EIJ") featured in interviews, where they openly discussed their Jihadist experiences, their ideologies, and their current dispositions.

Offering valuable insight on the current views of former Jihadists within shifting circumstances, these interviews allow us to track the deradicalization process of some of the leading figures of these movements. They offer us a chance to comparatively analyze the evolution of their ideological viewpoints (if any) over time.

Picking up from where Ashour left off, this article expands on the definition of "deradicalization" to include core ideological constructs in which tracking change is key to identifying sincere ideological moderation. Although it is fair to say that behavioral transformation (e.g. the delegitimization of violence) alone can imply ideological moderation and lead to further ideological deradicalization, [10] it is insufficient as a single indicator in describing individuals and/or groups as deradicalized. It is acknowledged in conventional literature on deradicalization that the advocacy of violence or the lack thereof is often the result of a number of factors that may have little to do with a change in worldviews. [11] Therefore, any study of deradicalization should also seek to gauge changes in individuals' actual worldviews. This includes accounting for motivations underlying the behavioral shifts, and assessing the extent to which these are merely strategic or indeed permanent rejections of previous ideological positions.

In this regard, I will provide my own assessment of the former militants' positions on violence to determine whether they are absolute or conditional. If violence is prohibited purely due to its practical unsuitability, does that really amount to moderation, i.e. a degree of ideological deradicalization? I contend that only the unconditional condemnation of violence should be considered an indicator of real ideological moderation.

Following an overview of terminology, this article presents three primary case studies of former leaders from both the IG and EIJ. All three were senior figures in their respective groups and movements, and each played significant roles in dictating their groups' theological outlooks. For each, the initial revisions made by both the group and the leader (where relevant) will be summarized. I will then contrast them with the leaders' most recent views as expressed in selected interview materials. In both, I specifically search for evidence in their speech acts that implies change in commitment to extremist attitudes and political views. I am more interested in shifts in the ideas that underpin the worldview, as opposed to mere alternations between differing means and methods by which these individuals continue pursuing the *same ideology*. A short overview of recent commentary by a fourth leader from the IG is included at the end due to the relevance of his views to this article's topic. On the basis of these four examples, deradicalization claims are studied and conclusions on the nature of deradicalization are provided.

Caveats

I analyze interviews conducted between the overthrow of the Mubarak regime and the end of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood regime for three of the four ideologues included. My basic assumption for using material from within this specific timeframe is that the victory of an Islamist-friendly government provided a safe environment in which former militants could openly discuss their past and present views. The interviews on which I focus were given when each leader presumably dropped his rhetorical guard because he felt he could speak honestly without fear of recrimination or punishment from the regime. The fourth ideologue included at the end of the paper is IG leader Rifa'i Taha. The select interview with Taha is the only one that

falls out of the specified timeframe, yet is included due to its relevance for the article's conclusions. It is also important to note that many of the militants covered in this article were being interviewed for the first time.

For many of the interviews, only a number of those included in this article contained questions that specifically addressed members' ideological views, past and present. Interviews found for other former militants were not as in-depth as the ones used in the present article, which is why I cover two members from the EIJ, yet only one (in-depth) from the IG. Rifa'i Taha (IG) is included as a concluding note due to his sudden emergence, and the scarcity of interview material on which to base a more coherent narrative. All the subjects analyzed were spiritual mentors in leadership positions for their respective groups. They were responsible for providing both initial ideological direction as well as leading the revisions process. Given the significant role that leadership can play in the evolution of terrorist organizations, changes in ideology as dictated by the leaders are presumed to have a strong influence on the direction that remaining group members will take.

The narratives constructed from the interview material represent my own interpretation of the interviews. This is a task which involved translation of the videos from Arabic to English, then a compiling of the findings into single, coherent narratives. Despite being a native Arabic speaker, I may have missed certain nuances in translation. The same goes for my reading and interpretation of a number of the original revisions. Having said this, my primary concern addressing the material available was to gauge views and intentions on *specific* topics. These topics revolve around the two main questions I pose regarding the assessment of ideological moderation. Namely, the positions of former militants on violence and whether they are conditional or unconditional (absolute). [12] Their commitment to the ideology itself, based on the rejection of one or more of the key constructs of Islamist ideology, will be covered in the overview on terminology.

The discussion of the initial revisions provided is also more in-depth for the first militant leader, Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, due to the fact that I am aware of only a few analyses of the leader's work. [13] This is perhaps a result of the more scattered manner in which leaders of the EIJ produced their revisions.

Finally, I recognize that both the number of interviews used in the article, and the general number of interviews available for the selected former militants, is small. The scarcity of sources from which to draw a larger-scale comparison of narratives also makes it difficult to make deterministic conclusions. Further, given the scope of the article, neither all details nor all interviews for the given timeframe could be provided. However, the interviews selected are sufficient in providing answers to the basic questions posed in this article for the assessment of ideological moderation.

Islamist Deradicalization

The terminology of 'extremism' as it pertains to political ideologies and worldviews finds many parallels in the characteristics of Islamism and is useful for describing the nature of "radicalism" in the Islamist context. Borrowing from a study by Schmid (2014) on terminology, extremist ideologies can be summarized as follows: Extremists '...strive to create a homogenous society based on rigid, ideological tenets; they seek to make society conformist by suppressing all opposition and subjugating minorities.' [14] Furthermore, extremists are very often 'anti-democratic, anti-pluralist, authoritarian...non-compromising...single-minded black-or-white thinkers...[and prefer] 'uniformity over diversity, collective goals over individual freedoms.' [15] These characteristics can be easily transposed onto Sunni Islamist ideology in all its manifestations. [16]

Islamist radicalism is a religiously inspired form of radicalism that seeks to reform societies according to fundamentalist interpretations of Islam. The ultimate goal of the new radicals is not the expansion of individual freedoms, but rather the transformation of society whereby individual freedoms are made subservient to an enforced system of beliefs. Islamism, at its core, rejects political ideologies and systems of governance that *they* perceive are running contrary to the Islamic Shari'a. [17] The society they envision is one in which individual "freedoms" are dictated according to select understandings not only of Islam, but of single sects or even sub-sects within Islam. This is driven by the notion that Islam provides more than simply moral and spiritual direction to its adherents; it provides details on how to run both personal and public (state) affairs (*din-wa-dawla*). Islamist ideology thus pushes for the intertwining of the public and private realms of society under a single, imposed Islamic identity. [18] This fundamentalist approach to religion (and governance) is *black and white* and leaves little to no room for dissent and/or discussion.

Religious governance in Islamism is based on the conviction that other systems of governance are religiously prohibited as they replace Allah's laws with manmade ones: a practice that is illegitimate and amounts to *shirk* (- alienation from God and thus amounting to *kufr* – becoming an unbeliever). [19] Islamists are therefore intolerant of other systems of governance and thus politically *anti-pluralistic*. [20] Islamists that will participate in the political processes of other systems of governance have generally been found to adopt only their administrative processes in an attempt to gain influence and/or to push select items on the Islamist agenda in a piecemeal fashion. [21]

Islamists are also inherently *anti-democratic* insofar as the values and ethics of democracies, as practiced in Western societies, are concerned. This is because Western secular democracies are perceived by Islamists to be morally corrupted in their tolerance and protection of certain individual freedoms, and in their perceived unabashed materialism. Citizens of secular democracies are also free to independently negotiate amongst varying identities—some which may have little to do with their religious affiliations—and as such are influenced less by collectivist endeavors than by individual ambitions and concerns. For the Islamist project, such a system of values is anathema to its political ideology as theirs is a collectivist system of governance that relies on the submission of members of society to a uniform fundamentalist Islamic vision, which spells out codes of conduct by which all must abide. [22]

By extension, because Islamists claim to be doing God's work in implementing the Shari'a, their authority should be unquestioningly accepted. And so, contrary to the diversity and tolerance of democratic principles of human rights and individual freedoms, the practice of the latter as envisioned for an Islamist "state" is very different. In this respect, freedoms and rights are defined by the religious understandings of those in power.

The ideological constructs presented above constitute the core constructs of Islamism that are generally agreed upon across the entire spectrum of Islamist movements; constructs that define a political ideology that is inherently extremist in its nature. The "heterogeneity" among Islamists is manifest primarily in the means and methods they employ to realize their political vision. [23] The first issue is that of political participation, which has already been addressed above. The second, and perhaps more important, is the legitimacy and permissibility of the use of violence to pursue the ideology's political goals. The concept of armed Jihad (henceforth "Jihad") has been discussed in detail elsewhere, [24] yet an important distinction amongst Islamist groups is their position on Jihad as a tactic for the enforcement of Shari'a through their pursuit of an "Islamic" state.

On the one hand are groups that argue a top-down approach, whereby apostate leaders are forcibly removed, any resistance from the population is swiftly and (if need be) violently quelled, and Shari'a instituted. Violence is justified on the grounds that Muslim rulers are apostates (*kufr*) for ruling with other than

what Allah has ordained, and are thus committing *shirk*. The same argument may also apply to Muslim populations if they are seen as actively preventing the instatement of Shari'a, and willingly supporting alternate forms of governance. Islamist groups that follow this method are more commonly known as Salafi Jihadists or *takfiris*. On the other hand are those that believe in the steady indoctrination of populations into accepting their worldview and political agendas through a grassroots approach. This involves preaching (*da'wa*), non-violent activism, lobbying and/or political participation. [25] I am not aware of statistics on the actual percentage of Islamist groups that make up each category, yet a cursory study of the Islamist scene suggests that grassroots Islamists constitute the majority.

Because Islamism's core ideological core tenets closely correspond to elements of extremist political ideologies, any claim to deradicalization by militants should not only entail a rejection and/or condemnation of violence, but also a moderation in core Islamist ideological views. [26] This is supported by studies on Islamism that show clear linkages between its violent and non-violent manifestations, suggesting that we should be paying as much attention to the non-violent ideological components of Islamist ideology when assessing deradicalization. [27] In this context, the previously outlined core constructs of extremist political ideologies can be used to develop rough parameters for guiding the assessment of ideological deradicalization as follows:

- *From anti- to pro-pluralistic*: In the political context, this would involve the willingness to work with other political parties and accept compromise on Shari'a rules that would discriminate against segments of society who do not adhere to the faith and/or the interpretations adopted by Islamists. Essentially, it would mean rejecting the idea of the Islamic Shari'a as a comprehensive body of laws that form the backbone of a state constitution, and accept civil law as the primary legal code by which to rule. As Tibi (2012) states, 'Shari'a is interpretative, not legislative, and thus cannot be institutionalized.' [28]
- *From anti- to pro-democratic*: The term "democratic" here involves, first, the recognition of basic human and political rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and subsequent legal instruments based on it. Human rights are not tailored according to select understandings of specific belief systems, but are safeguarded as *non-negotiable* rights of individuals. Most importantly, this would involve the rejection of the view that a religious order should be imposed on society, and accepting that individuals have a right to choose the role religion plays in their own lives. This would essentially entail the separation of religion and state. Secondly, accepting the administrative elements of the democratic process – such as election procedures – does not suffice. Islamists accept this procedure due to its familiarity with the Islamic concepts of *shura* (consultation) and *ijma'* (consensus). Yet purely adopting instruments of the democratic process without subsequent changes in the attitudes of Islamists does not amount to moderation. [29]
- *Religious pluralism*: This would involve the acceptance that there is no one interpretation of the Islamic Shari'a, and that *ijtihad* – or interpretation – is an endeavor that should continue in order to make the religion more practicable for every day and age. Unlike the prevailing Islamist fundamentalist view that religious practices should seek to emulate the earliest practitioners of Islam and their followers, moderation in this context would suggest a need to reinterpret and/or reform religious concepts so as to better suit the realities of the modern day and age.
- *From conditional to unconditional violence*: As previously mentioned, the delegitimization of violence should not be conditional nor based on theological arguments that merely postpone Jihad so as to make it more effective for a future conflict in the continued pursuit of the ideology.

*Former Militants' Ideological Views**Sayyid Imam al-Sharif's "Document for Guiding the Jihad in Egypt and the World"*

Among the most prominent of the EIJ ideologues is Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, aka "Dr. Fadl". His manual *al-'Umda fi 'Idad al-'Udda* ("The Essentials of Making Ready [for Jihad]") was extensively used in training camps in Afghanistan both during and after the anti-Soviet Jihad years. [30] Al-Sharif was allegedly given the leadership position of the EIJ by Ayman al-Zawahiri in Afghanistan for a number of years, before the latter revoked the title over a leadership dispute. [31] With the exception of one initiative led by another EIJ leader that will be covered in the next section, most attempts at producing a cohesive set of revisions (like those of the IG) by EIJ members failed. [32]

Then, in 2007, al-Sharif supposedly penned and released the "Document for Guiding the Jihad in Egypt and the World" to the Egyptian "Al-Masri Al-Yawm" paper and the Kuwaiti "Al-Jarida". [33] Al-Sharif's revisions were primarily hailed for their strong repudiation of the al-Qaeda Jihadist warfare doctrine, and thus drew strong criticism from then-deputy of Al-Qaeda Core (AQ-C) leader al-Zawahiri. [34] The revisions were not fully accepted by all members of the EIJ, yet were generally understood as meant to deliver a blow to the global Jihadist movement in general.

Given the evolution of both AQ and other Jihadist groups since 2007, it is safe to say that the revisions did not have the impact hoped for by many in the field of counter-terrorism. A closer inspection of the revisions further shows that the aim of eventually leading an armed struggle for the purpose of realizing Shari'a-based states and (eventually) a Caliphate are nevertheless *explicitly* reiterated in the revisions. Al-Sharif's delegitimization of violence excuses Muslims from their Jihad duties due to the prevailing weakness of Jihadists relative to their opponents. The foundation for the hypothetical army required to re-establish the Caliphate is not strong enough and so, the Islamic effort is better served by preaching with the aim of ideologically preparing segments of the population to constitute such a future army. This argument is theologically developed in two ways.

The first relates to capability and timing. In each section where Jihad is addressed, certain limiting conditions are stated on both the individual and collective levels of Jihad based on calculations of the capability to carry it out. This limitation not only refers to physical and financial capability, but also the duties that the Jihadist has to his family, the larger Muslim population, and the rules of Jihad regarding permissible situations/ contexts and targets. All restrictions placed on the use of violence primarily prohibit the bloodshed of Muslims and warn against it, with *dhimmi* (non-Muslims living in a Muslim state) [35] given second priority in only very specific situations.

The theological arguments provided for the "delegitimization" of Jihad in this regard are based on the scripture relating to the (primarily) Meccan phase of the Prophet's life. During the initial Meccan stages of the Islamic revelation and the expansion of Islam, the Prophet encouraged coexistence and tolerance so as not to disrupt his missionary work. After Muhammed's *hijra* (emigration) to Medina, and his successive religious and military domination of the city, Islam could more forcefully be imposed, given the strength of the Prophet and his followers. [36] Likening the current, prevailing conditions to the early days of Islam, al-Sharif calls for tolerance and restraint so as to safeguard the interests of Muslims; further violence would only give cause to inviting aggression against Muslim populations.

This being said, al-Sharif is careful to note other limiting conditions for the practice of Jihad should conditions for a successful armed struggle arise. The first is financial capability, [37] and here al-Sharif heavily

criticizes those that partake in criminal activities in order to finance the Jihad. [38] The obligation of Jihad is dropped if the Jihadist is unable to find honest sources of funding and/or unable to provide for his family for the duration that he is away from home. Other limiting conditions include the impermissibility of fighting without the permission of the parents, and the necessity of paying off all debts before leaving for Jihad. [39]

With regards to *takfir* (excommunication based on wrong belief), the general argument made is that it is impossible to know the measure of belief of fellow Muslims because it is impossible to look into their hearts. And thus, if individuals are openly practicing the main rites of Islam, they are Muslims. [40] The same goes for the ruler, except in those situations where solid evidence can be given to prove his disbelief. [41] In this case, removing the leader is a duty insofar as the negative consequences of his removal do not outweigh the benefits. If the latter is the case, al-Sharif gives a number of alternative Shari'a judgments of which patience, *hijra* (emigration), and disobedience are a few. Further, the fact that populations tolerate the rule of a disbeliever does not imply that they too are disbelievers. This is because it is impossible to know what is in their hearts, and they are similarly granted the excuse of weakness to remove the ruler.

The second broader argument relates to differences in how communities were organized in the time of the *Salaf* (direct successors of the Prophet), and how they are organized today. Because many Islamic rules are based on the ability to clearly separate between the 'abode of Islam/peace' and the 'abode of war', it is impossible to apply the same rules today given the nonexistence of the respective abodes. [42]

Al-Sharif uses various examples from the *Hadith* and the *Sunnah* to stress the importance of treaties, and the impermissibility of treachery in peacetime with the non-Muslims. This argument is made in reference to protecting tourists in Muslim-majority lands, and discrediting "homegrown" attacks by Muslims in Western societies. [43] Further, because there are no signs distinguishing Muslims from non-Muslims in the world today, there is no reliable means of ascertaining whether the target of the attacks will be primarily infidel or not. Again, the discussion on the permissibility of killing infidels is unclear. On the one hand, there are conditions which make them impermissible as targets in peacetime. On the other, the permissibility of killing infidels in wartime is hardly dwelled upon in the revisions, save to mention select categories of infidels that are generally impermissible targets even in wartime. [44]

Finally, although al-Sharif refrains from using names in his series, he is deeply critical of the so-called "Internet Jihadists" and those whose actions led to the demise of the Islamic Emirate (presumably Afghanistan). [45] It is within this context that al-Sharif is arguably reprimanding bin Laden for carrying out the "Manhattan raid" of 9/11, a move which led to the invasion of Afghanistan and the destruction of the Emirate.

While the Dr. Fadl's revisions clearly urge restraint and a more "rational" approach towards the practicability and permissibility of concepts that sanction violence, they do not entirely delegitimize the use of force. Violence is delegitimized on the grounds that the conditions for it to take place are not optimal. The ideal world, as implied by al-Sharif, *should* be one where there are distinct abodes which discriminate, based on religious affiliation. His worldview, with its justifications, continues to be strictly modeled on the example of the Prophet and his Companions, and the world as it existed at the advent of Islam. The primary difference between his views and those of violent Islamists is the means by which their shared worldview should be put in place. In this sense, it is obvious that al-Sharif is attempting to emphasize the need for a more intensive grassroots approach for the sake of realizing the conditions required for a "just" and successful future Jihad. And so, al-Sharif not only fails to deliver on providing an unconditional delegitimation of violence, but also fails to show moderation /compromise on key ideological constructs of Islamism. Indeed, the end goal of a

Caliphate is one al-Sharif continues to subscribe to, as he states in the closing chapters of the revisions series. [46]

The Zumur Cousins' "Third Alternative Between Despotism and Surrender"

Another important leader from the EIJ that took part in the revisions initiative was Egyptian military intelligence colonel Abbud al-Zumur. In 2009, Abbud and his cousin Tariq al-Zumur, the latter an IG member, teamed up to draft "The Third Alternative Between Despotism and Surrender." These revisions were drafted with the intention of highlighting the cousins' vision for the future of the Islamic current in general. [47]

The theological content parallels many of the arguments forwarded in the "Correcting Conceptions" revision series of the IG that will be reviewed in the next section and so, not much detail will be provided here. However, these revisions differed mainly from the latter's in that they included specific conditions deemed necessary for maintaining Islamist disengagement from violence. The first is that the state must guarantee the Islamists their political and social rights, as well as allow them to continue *da'wa*. (spreading the teachings of Islam) The second involves the release of political, i.e. Islamist, prisoners from jail. The final condition is the development of legal mechanisms through which corrupt and unjust leaders can be tried. [48] The Zumurs' publication is otherwise equally clear in its continued pursuit of progressing the Islamist cause.

The Islamic Group (IG) and the "Correcting Conception Series"

The IG's ceasefire initiative and revisions developed over a number of years. [49] The process involved in-depth discussions among the leadership both in Egyptian prisons and abroad, and ended with the group's publication of the "Correcting Conceptions Series" and a complete termination of armed activities in 1999.

Ewan Stein succinctly summarizes the major shifts in the IG's ideology in his study on the group. [50] For Stein, the most significant change is the group's backtracking on the issue of *takfirism*. [51] Prior to the revisions, the group endorsed the view that rulers who did not implement the Shari'a in its entirety were *kuffar*, and could thus be forcefully removed. The post-revision view suggests that not ruling according to Shari'a is not *kufur*, but sinning ('*asyan*). [52] Similarly, whereas rulers should avoid implementing laws or governing in ways that directly contradict the sources of Shari'a, the revisions acknowledge that not 'every rule of earthly order must be found in these sources.' [53] The primacy of God's sovereignty, *hakimiyya*, is also no longer the sole task of the ruler through the implementation of Shari'a, but the task of every Muslim through independently abiding by the Shari'a. [54] Taken together, these points show a tendency to de-emphasize the importance of focusing efforts on the removal of the ruler. Instead, recognition is given to the importance of "every Muslim" in bringing about the change in society that the group wishes to see.

The second major ideological revision is the group's views on *hisba*. [55] Prior to the revisions, *hisba* was encouraged as an individual duty due to the perceived lack of "real" Islamic authority to do the job. It was encouraged so long as its outcome did not cause large-scale strife and discord i.e. *fitna*. And so, the individual *muhtasib* was given the authority by the group's Charter to pursue the duties of *hisba*; even if it meant that un-Islamic behaviors be beaten out of those practicing them. [56] The renewed interpretation of *hisba* in the revisions is less flexible, and understands it as a state's responsibility first and foremost. [57] As Stein explains, 'the ruler, no longer being considered an infidel, can appoint official *muhtasibun*.' [58] Individual *hisba* is limited to situations where the officially appointed *muhtasibun* are unavailable, and the crime significant enough to prompt immediate "voluntary" intervention. [59] In both points, excuses are made for the ruler

so as to keep him within the Muslim fold and prevent him from being targeted. Physical coercion of any sort is similarly discouraged on the grounds that the authority of such coercion does not belong with individuals, but with the state.

As with al-Sharif however, the duty of waging Jihad is conditional. Here, and referring primarily to revisions penned by Nagih Ibrahim (the final case study in this article), the killing of a Muslim transgressor is even more pressing than that of the infidels. Similar to al-Sharif's views, this duty depends on the direness of its consequences for the Islamic *ummah*; if its costs outweigh its benefits, then it is no longer an obligation to carry out. [60] The same categories of "protected" individuals, as mentioned in al-Sharif's revisions, are also deemed impermissible targets of Jihad. [61]

For both groups, the use of violence is clearly discouraged. Whereas such a rejection could amount to a measure of moderation, with violent measures being the most extreme tactics in the militant's toolbox, the reasons for abandoning Jihad remain clearly conditional. The duty of Jihad, as a means of spreading Islam, is not questioned. What *is* questioned is the utility in adopting such means given the overwhelming weakness of those possessing the desire to carry it out. Thus, the theological delegitimization provided in the revisions temporarily relieves the Muslim from his duty using clauses from Islamic scriptures. Should the condition of weakness be reversed however, the revisions are arguably guidelines for appropriate Islamic conduct in waging a "just" Jihad.

Current Militants' Ideological Views

In the following section, the current views of three of the individuals either partially or fully responsible for drafting the aforementioned revisions are studied.

Sayyid Imam al-Sharif Now: The Myth of Deradicalization

The following narrative is constructed from elements gathered from three interviews [62] with al-Sharif, [63] and focus on the main differences between the revisions and his later views.

The most significant revelation emerging from the interviews is the suggestion that al-Sharif may not have authored the final revisions. Al-Sharif claims that he did not want to write anything in the first place, but was urged to do so by the Egyptian State Security. The security apparatus needed a written statement from al-Sharif to counter the strong influence of his earlier works on Jihad. According to al-Sharif, he was pressured to emphasize opinions about the futility of Jihad. [64] Important for the security apparatus back then was that a senior figure from within Jihadist circles be shown to condemn violence against the state in a bid to discourage further acts of violence. However, having to hand write the revisions in prison before handing them to members of the state security, al-Sharif claims to have never seen the final document; suggesting that parts of the final publications may have been doctored by the state. This could be an explanation for the seeming recidivism observed in the following narrative. Namely, al-Sharif never changed his views because the original revisions were never fully representative of his views in the first place.

Al-Sharif reiterates his view that Jihad continues to be a duty incumbent on Muslims, and has been since 1810. The year 1810 allegedly marks the beginning of the infiltration of Western/European laws aided by the *wali* of Egypt and Sudan, Muhammed Ali Pasha. Since then, successive Egyptian regimes have been ruling in a style other than what Allah has ordained, and this amounts to *kufir*. [65][66] In contrast to his views on *takfir* in the revisions, al-Sharif asserts that current Muslim regimes and societies are guilty of *kufir* because they do not rule solely by the Shari'a. With the exception of administrative laws that do not contradict the

Shari'a, every other area of governance is accommodated for in the scripture. This stands in sharp contrast to the cautionary tone he adopted in the revisions regarding *takfir*.

Islamic governance for al-Sharif means the immediate implementation of Islamic punishments, or *hudood*, as prescribed in the scripture. According to al-Sharif, '...There is no such thing as *hudood* only being implemented after the erection of an Islamic state. *Hudood* are *necessary* to bring about the Islamic state. And Allah said: 'And there is for you in legal retribution [saving of] life, O you [people] of understanding, that you may become righteous.' (Surat Al-Baqarah 2:179). [67] After all, 'When Amr ibn al-'As came to Egypt, were there Muslims? No. They were mostly Copts. But he nevertheless implemented the *hudood* and the Shari'a.' [68]

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB), Egypt's ruling party at the time of these interviews, similarly fails to escape the apostasy charge. Its failure to apply the *hudood*, as well as immediately implement Shari'a, when it came to power, is one of the biggest indicators that it is a "hypocrite" government. It paid lip service to the Islamic cause, yet demonstrated no real intention of establishing an Islamic state. There are "nullifying" actions in Islam, which if carried out by Muslims, invalidate the faith of a person. [69] The failure to implement the full body of Shari'a laws, including the prescribed *hudood*, is one of the nullifiers that render the ruler an apostate.

In contrast to his views in the revisions, Muslims' failure to remove what he sees as apostate regimes makes them complicit in the government's apostasy. 'The Jihad is a duty upon the belly dancer...because they are all Muslims [despite sinning]. So as long as they are still within the Islamic faith, they are obliged to carry out the duties as prescribed by Allah under the umbrella of [the verses] 'oh you who have entered into the faith...'' [70] However, as with his views on capability in the revisions, if society is not able to remove the apostate ruler, a number of alternative solutions exist for the Muslims who live in this state. [71]

For al-Sharif, the study of Islam is unlike that of other sciences. In the natural sciences for example, the best of the findings are the most recent. In religion, the best is the earliest. [72] This is because, the Hadith makes clear that 'The best of my community are my generation and then those who follow them and then those who follow them', and this is relevant not just to *tawhid* ["the oneness" of Allah], but to all of Islam. The closer you get to the time of the *rasul*, the closer you are to the truth, and justice.' [73] And so, *ijtihad* (exegesis) is not a process that is supposed to progress Islamic theology so that it better applies to current situations, but one that ended at a certain point in history and culminated in distinctive Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).

For al-Sharif, although there are several types of Jihad-like Jihad al-nafs (battling the internal devil) - '...the meaning of the word in Shari'a means the killing of apostates. All the other forms of Jihad do exist, but they are extras and when referred to are referred to specifically as alternative forms of jihad...if there is no other word attached to the core word "jihad", then it means combatting the apostates.' [74]

As with his views in the revisions, Jihad should be based on a cost-benefit analysis. According to al-Sharif, capability also rests on the willingness of the state (Egypt) to lend support to the Jihadists. Because al-Sharif views both state and society as apostate, his conclusion is that Jihad is unlikely to take off any time soon. [75] In none of the interviews does al-Sharif make an effort to dwell on the conditions and limitations of Jihad that are mentioned in the revisions.

Finally, al-Sharif's main critique of al-Qaeda-Core (AQ-C) is that the organization was not founded on a solid program or *manhaj*, [76] as much as it was on a cult of personality built around Osama bin Laden. [77] Besides his criticism of AQ-C's lack of *manhaj* however, al-Sharif reserves his most scathing comments for Ayman al-Zawahiri. Five specific points are made to discredit the current AQ-C leader, of which most are attacks on his integrity and personality, and not on his ideological views. [78]

Al-Sharif's current views are significantly at odds with those in his alleged revisions. Although he maintains that the current conditions for Jihad remain too weak for a successful armed struggle, al-Sharif backtracks on his revisionary views on *takfirism*; castigating fellow Muslims for not uniting to overthrow what is obviously apostate rule. Despite not explicitly calling for renewed Jihad, al-Sharif is nevertheless ideologically legitimizing it through his denunciation of entire Muslim populations as being apostate. The conclusion reached from the interviews is that, should the capability arise, Jihadists would have the right to shed the blood of the apostate regimes and those in society who support them. Al-Sharif thus fails to show change on any of the parameters for ideological moderation identified in this article. Given his allegations of having been coerced into cooperation with state security services, it is likely that what is observed in these interviews is not recidivism but a continuation of his ideological persuasions prior to his imprisonment.

Abbud al-Zumur Now: The Extremist Middle Ground?

I consulted several interviews for constructing Abbud al-Zumur's narratives, but used only one that best summarizes Zumur's views in all the interviews he featured in. [79] Tariq al-Zumur, Abbud al-Zumur's "Third Alternative" co-author and cousin, is not covered here due to the lack of available interviews that featured him, discussing the topics addressed in this article.

Zumur states that the reason the Egyptian Jihadist movement decided to give up violence was because Mubarak was fighting the entire Islamist movement 'as though he were fighting Israel.' [80] Refraining from provoking the wrath of the state was seen as necessary for expanding Islam via alternative means—a higher priority than fighting a ruler whose blood was *nevertheless viewed as legitimate to spill*. In this sense, Mubarak was still viewed by the various Jihadist groups – including the IG – as an apostate, but killing him was perceived to be counterproductive to the achievement of the desired Islamist end state.

When asked about the charge of apostasy and the permission to spill the blood of Muslims, Zumur states that a decision on the latter may be reached according to the *ijtihad* of the Islamic student. Insofar as the student carries out certain actions according to what the learned scholars say, no blame can come to the student if it is later discovered that s/he erred. Further, because the scholar is limited by his/her own worldly bounded rationality when carrying out *ijtihad*, he is also exempt from the responsibility of error. [81]

For example, in the case of Sadat, '...several [religious] scholars [82] issued *fatawa* that both permitted his assassination/murder [as well as] removing or replacing the Sadat regime... The religious problems on which the *fatawa* were based pertained to Sadat's religious transgression against the Shari'a in slowing down its implementation, his attack against the religion and the cussing of the clergy, as well as the Camp David treaty which...led to a collapse [in the Arab world] whose repercussions we are still suffering from today.' [83] Because the Egyptian courts failed to arrest and prosecute Sadat for failing to implement the Shari'a and for participating in foreign policies that they found offensive to Islam, they decided to take the matter into their own hands.

For Zumur, the use of violence is contextual. Besides the cost-benefit analysis that underlies the decision-making behind the utility of violence, different contexts apparently allow or disallow violence. Not every ruler that does not implement the Shari'a should be killed: '...there could be a ruler who wants to implement Shari'a but cannot because there are national and local pressures preventing him from doing so, and the religious scholars do take all of this into account...and so he is let off.' [84] To this end, Zumur is arguably more moderate in his calculations on what constitutes an apostate ruler than al-Sharif is. However, the repeated definition of apostasy as a measured relation to the degree and speed of the implementation of Shari'a indicates that Zumur's ultimate Islamist end goals remain unchanged. Further, it is not a matter

of not being required to rule according to the Shari'a, but of recognizing pressures that may be impeding the implementation of the process. Given the subjectivity of the process of identifying which pressures are significant enough to stall the application of Shari'a, even this ideological leeway is ineffective in delegitimizing violence.

Asked specifically about the nature of the "Islamic" state that Zumur and his ideological cohorts have in mind, Zumur responds by claiming that it is possible to have such a state in a democracy. 'If it [democracy] is how I understand the popular definition of democracy, which is the nation being governed by those within it [self-governance], then such self-governance cannot occur in an absolute manner, because there are excesses in the current form of democracy. In the revisions...we [the Islamists] say that there are traditions that should not be omitted. In other words, the majority rule is available in Islam—the majority rule of the people of knowledge, the majority rule of those that have learned and carry out Islamic punishments i.e. *qisas*....The popular understanding of democracy that allows the existence of opposing ideas, as well as the elections is allowed and is available as a tool of "democracy". Islam does not prevent elections.' [85]

For Zumur, whereas the minority rights are apparently "ignored" in secular democracies, Islam outlines the rights of minorities regardless of the composition of the majority. [86] And so, if Islam were to be the source of governance of a state, then minorities would automatically be protected. These minority rights would involve the payment of the *jizya* tax by the Christians so that they may be protected from having to fight in wars against countries whose armies are primarily composed of Christians, for example. 'Psychologically and emotionally this is not fair, so they pay for this protection and this exemption of having to fight.' [87] Similarly, the *hudood* are a must, and are viewed favorably by Zumur, 'If one or two people publicly have their hands cut off, then other people will be deterred from stealing.' [88]

Finally, when asked if a political party whose ideology opposes that of the Islamists' were to win a majority in the elections, Zumur replies that the Islamists would then have to be content with the peoples' choice and being a "minority". He compares such a scenario to that of Muslims living in Western democracies where, despite the majority rule not being Islamic, the Muslims continue to live there as a minority. [89] The subtle implication of this is that, should Egyptians choose an alternative political ideology to rule them (not Islamist, i.e. not Islamic), then (the Islamists, i.e. real Muslims) will have to be content with living as a (Islamist = Islamic) minority in an (un-Islamic) Egypt. The condition in this case however should still be the ability to prosecute an unjust ruler, presumably in the case whereby the ruler attempts to crackdown on the Islamists' activities. Again, one is faced with the problem of defining what is meant by "unjust."

What becomes clear from the interviews is that Zumur shows little change on any of the core ideological constructs of Islamist ideology. Furthermore, given the conditions listed for the continuation of a ceasefire as found in the "Third Alternative", which Zumur also refers to in the interviews, I find little evidence to suggest that this delegitimization of violence is anything but conditional and thus temporary. Out of all the conditions mentioned in the "Third Alternative", Zumur places stress on the one that demands the development of a mechanism for holding unjust rulers accountable for their actions. My reading of this particular emphasis is that, given the still vibrant revolutionary zeal that existed at the time of these interviews and that thrived on similar sentiments, Zumur's emphasis on unjust leaders as a drive to radicalism attempted to both excuse past actions and position the Islamist narrative within that of the mainstream. In other words, he is trying to downplay the differences between the Islamists and the remainder of the nation by showing them that their narratives are more similar than is commonly perceived. It is clear, however, that Zumur maintains his view that any non-Islamist form of governance is also non-Islamic. As with the revisions, he also maintains that so long as the Islamists are allowed to continue their *da'wa* activities, i.e. the grassroots approach, violence is not necessary.

Nagih Ibrahim: Potential Ideological Deradicalization?

There are clear differences between the thoughts and ideological revisions of IG preacher Nagih Ibrahim and those of al-Sharif and Zumur. Like those studied before him, Nagih Ibrahim was responsible for partially drafting revisions for his group. The content of both the revisions and the more recent interviews in the case of Ibrahim are different from the latter in that these suggest a degree of ideological moderation, as per the parameters identified earlier in this article, that the others do not.

According to Ibrahim, [90] the reason for the spread of modern day *takfirism* is due to the weakness and failure of moderate preachers to effectively counter it. There are select individuals (i.e. *muftis*) that have the right to engage in the passing of binding legal edicts or *fatawa*, and they are afforded that right because they have spent a majority of their lives being educated in the scripture and the various schools of *fiqh* and are thus qualified to do so. Unlike Zumur and al-Sharif, Ibrahim rejects the opinion that Muslims who simply have some knowledge of their religion can adopt the task of passing *fatawa* that prescribe actions. Even those engaged in *da'wa* are not allowed to issue edicts, nor are they allowed to prescribe actions.

Unlike al-Sharif, Ibrahim recognizes the concept of *ijtihad* and encourages pluralism in the interpretation of the scripture and the various schools of *fiqh*. Ibrahim cites Imam Malik ibn Anas, a highly respected Sunni scholar, whose most famous response to questions on matters related to jurisprudence was 'I don't know.' The idea behind this example is that even learned scholars of jurisprudence take caution when passing *fatawa*, for fear that they may be wrong in their opinions. When they pass such edicts, *muftis* are effectively "signing off" on behalf of Allah and his Prophet. And so, many *muftis* will spend considerable time on framing and drafting an edict before they pass it. Even then, as Ibrahim contends, the best of the *muftis* will never claim to provide infallible opinions. Ibrahim cites Imam al Shafi'i's famous contention, 'My opinion is right, with the possibility that it may be wrong.' [91]

These views on accountability for *fatawa* in Islam, the role of *ijtihad*, as well as the ease—or difficulty—of passing edicts stands in stark contrast to even the less extreme Zumur. These views also arguably present a less fundamentalist interpretation of religion that clearly indicates a movement away from religious anti-pluralism to religious pluralism in Ibrahim's acceptance of continuous *ijtihad*.

For Ibrahim, the concept of Jihad is one that has been abused by not only those claiming to wage it, but also by those preaching it. A preponderance of preachers, as well as individuals who have no right to be prescribing actions, preach about the importance of Jihad yet fail to teach their followers about the pre-conditions for a valid Jihad, its conditions, and its limitations. Ibrahim does not entirely subscribe to the view that Jihad is an individual duty, and speaks of it in a purely defensive form whereby Jihad should be waged only in response to armed aggression, and only when it is prepared for and fought by a regular Muslim army (i.e. under the aegis of a state). In this regard, it is important to stress the differentiation as clarified by Tibi (2012) between classic/traditional and Islamist Jihad. In the former, Jihad is understood as conventional warfare carried out by Muslim armies in the past for the expansion of the religion. Although similarly imperialistic in nature to the Jihad represented by the violent Islamists today, it differs in that it is conventional, and not irregular/terrorist as is the contemporary Jihad. [92]

The consent of the Imam, i.e. the ruler in modern day terminology, is paramount for the decision to wage Jihad. Although this indicates that the state should be involved in the decision, Ibrahim does not make clear whether this and the condition of a regular Islamic army are key to Jihad, or whether the Imam's consent may suffice for a group of individuals to fight on the *ummah's* behalf. In all cases, Ibrahim clearly seeks to delegitimize the highly simplistic, individualized, and irregular nature of Jihad that the world is seeing itself

manifest in non-state global Jihadist movements today, while he stresses a more centralized and controlled version.

What might be most indicative of further ideological deradicalization in Ibrahim's case is the differentiation Ibrahim makes between the politics of a religious *jama'a* and that of the state. For Ibrahim, whereas the *jama'a* has the right to set its own rules, based on its own ideology, and act accordingly, a state cannot do the same. Ibrahim explains that a *jama'a*, like a club, may be built on religious grounds whereby relationships with communities and individuals are built on specific religious doctrines defining the membership of the *jama'a*. [93] This should not be translated into a state's system of governance, however, as the state encompasses several political ideologies, religions, and ethnicities that (theoretically speaking) should prohibit the imposition of a single system of thought or belief as a foundation for governance.

And so, whereas the *jama'a* might refuse to do business with a number of other states and/or entities due to doctrinal reasons, the state should not enjoy the same luxury. This is because all states act first and foremost with their interests in mind, and these interests can only be realized in relation to other countries' interests. It is a very realistic view of politics, and one that does not impose theological constraints on the system of governance; which is in and of itself a step away from the religiously motivated conceptualization of state governance underlying Islamism. [94]

It is precisely this separation between religion and preaching and state governance that poses the strongest argument for ideological deradicalization in Ibrahim's case. Whereas the latter may still be interested in Muslims maintaining strong Islamic identities, his insistence that no one doctrine is sufficient to run a country inhabited by individuals that follow different sets of beliefs, doctrines, and political ideologies, shatters one of the most important foundations of political Islam; the need for Shari'a to be the main source of governance for a real Islamic state. It thus shows ideological shifts on the parameters of political anti-pluralism and fundamentalist interpretations of religion. Furthermore, although Ibrahim does not elaborate on his views regarding democracy, his acceptance of diverse beliefs in society as well as the unsuitability of one doctrine to rule over all suggests, to some extent, pro-democratic behavior. The interview material consulted for this article, however, provides little to work with along these lines.

Ibrahim's views should nevertheless be taken with a grain of salt. Given the fact that most revisions focused on *da'wa* to Islamize society in preparation of a popular mentality needed to create a Jihad-ready majority, it is possible that Ibrahim could simply be paying lip service to democratic ideals to take pressure of the *da'wa* circles. This is suggested in his comments on the permissibility of *jama'as* to maintain their own doctrinal views in preaching. However, on the level of politics, the fact that Ibrahim publicizes his views regarding the separation of religion from state governance is nevertheless a welcome change.

Concluding Note: Rifa'i Taha for a Return to Violence

In the process of writing this article, another spiritual leader of the IG featured in an interview on the Muslim Brotherhood-run TV channel "Al-Sharq TV", broadcasting from Turkey. [95] Rifa'i Taha was a member of the IG's Shura Council, based outside Egypt at the time of the revisions. According to Ashour (2009), Taha was fired by the IG for allegedly signing on with al-Qaeda's International Front for Fighting Jews and Crusaders. [96] Taha then withdrew from the declaration and was supported by select members of the IG who asserted that spoilers of the ceasefire initiative from the EIJ had set him up. [97] Taha is not one of the leaders that took part in the revisions drafting process, and had been off the radar until resurfacing recently.

Despite his absence from the revisions process however, Taha's previous position in the IG suggests that he could still have influence with followers today. In the above-mentioned interview, Taha explicitly calls for a return to violence against the regime of Egyptian president Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi. According to Taha, the violent transgression of the current Egyptian regime against the sovereignty of the formerly elected Brotherhood government is not one that can successfully be fought using peaceful means. Because there does not appear to be another mechanism with which to bring al-Sisi to charge for these transgressions, the taking up of arms appears to be the only option. Such justifications for violence heavily echo the conditions set by the Zumur cousins in their own revisions. This should also come as no surprise as violence in response to Sisi's actions against the Brotherhood, representative of the "Islamic current", has already materialized; albeit not in response to any specific directives of former militants that remain inside Egypt today. Given his role as one of the former militant leaders of the IG, it will be interesting to see how the nature of terrorism will develop in the near future in Egypt.

Conclusion

Using case studies of former Egyptian militant groups, this article provided an analysis of the alleged deradicalization claims of select former militant leaders.

First, the article expanded the definition of deradicalization, arguing that any appreciation of deradicalization must take into account two things:

- i. The justification and reasons given for the delegitimization of violence and,
- ii. Shifts in the worldview itself, and thus also non-violent elements of the Islamist ideology.

Building on the second point, key ideological constructs inherent to extremist political ideologies, of which Islamism is one, were used to develop rough parameters for the assessment of ideological moderation for each of the militants studied. These included a shift in views tending towards more pluralistic and democratic attitudes, and a less fundamentalist view of Islam in general. These parameters, along with the study of speech acts and/or written material of former Islamist militants, attempted to provide a method by which to assess moderation on ideological constructs that would better point to ideological deradicalization. By gauging militants' views on specific topics as they fall under each of these parameters, I aimed at drawing attention to non-violent ideological elements and their implications for studying deradicalization.

Finally, the former militants' positions on violence were also analyzed to determine whether they represented an absolute/unconditional or conditional rejection of violence. Only the former was deemed a real indicator of ideological moderation, in addition to changes on one or more of the previously mentioned parameters. Although each of these parameters alone could be expanded to include several others for a more nuanced "measurement" of deradicalization, the ones developed here were intended as a starting point from which further research could be dedicated to creating a more in-depth framework of metrics.

It is obvious from the overview of the initial revisions that the delegitimization of violence, i.e. Jihad, is by no means intended as discouragement of Jihad as a duty of Muslims. Rather, the revisions simply aim at clarifying conditions needed for a *successful* and "just" Jihad – a Jihad that fully complies with the rules of warfare as dictated in Islamic *fiqh*. While this clearly amounts to a form of disengagement from violence, the fact that there exist conditions under which violence should be recommenced in the pursuit of future Islamist goals challenges conclusions regarding the deradicalization of the militants discussed here.

Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, whose work has influenced both Egyptian as well as global Jihadist ideologies, has reneged on his earlier recantations while also suggesting that these may have been doctored. Al-Sharif's continuing delegitimization of Jihad is based on his belief that the armed struggle is useless and counterproductive due to a lack of capability. Yet he nevertheless encourages the pursuit of a Taliban-like state, should the capability arise. Given the current successes of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria at the time of writing, it is worrying that one of the most ideological Jihadist influencers continues to promote the struggle when the capability is suddenly presenting itself in neighboring theaters of Jihad.

Similarly, EIJ leader Abbud al-Zumur shows little change in his adherence to Islamist ideology. Although his discursive style is softer than al-Sharif's, his reasons for abandoning the armed struggle bear strong resemblances to al-Sharif's. Armed struggle is futile in the face of regimes that are capable and willing to defeat Islamist activists. Because violence is seen as counterproductive to the *da'wa* efforts of Islamists, it is heavily discouraged, as its result is the weakening of these efforts in Egypt. Zumur is an example of an Islamist that has disengaged, yet continues to pursue the vision of an Islamist-led state through the development of constituencies whose numbers could in the future be significant enough to vote for and sustain an Islamist government.

It is also worth noting that many of the conditions noted in the Zumurs' treatise for the prevention of violent resurgence are no longer satisfied under the current Egyptian regime. [98] Indeed, it appears that some within Islamist groups are acting according to such conditions and arguing for a renewed struggle, as demonstrated by Rifa'i Taha's latest interview.

Nagih Ibrahim arguably represents the only case where an ideological shift has occurred. Out of all three former militants studied, he is the only one that has provided an argument for the decoupling of religion and governance; implying a shift from the core Islamist requirement of Shari'a-based governance. His views on the permissibility of renewed *ijtihad* and its necessity for the modern day and age also indicate a relaxation of the fundamentalist interpretations that underpin Islamist ideology. To this end, Ibrahim shows a moderation on both the "pluralism" and "fundamentalism" parameters.

It is, however, difficult to accurately assess the extent to which his views are genuine. In many of the revisions, the ideologues go as far as to contend that concealing one's Islamic beliefs is permissible for the sake of continuing the proliferation of the religion via alternative means. Because Islamists generally see the establishment of Islamist states and the Caliphate as a duty enshrined in their Islamic beliefs, Ibrahim could simply be practicing his own interpretation of *taqiyya*. [99] Nevertheless, even if it is lip service, it is arguably still useful for countering the extremist ideology that many of his former peers still openly adhere to.

Finally, this paper aimed at demonstrating how claims to non-violence by no means indicate accompanying shifts in extremist worldviews. There can be moderation even within extremist ideologies, where ideological exceptions are made for the sake of political expediency and/or survival. This is most apparent in the former militants' cost-benefit analyses on the utility of waging Jihad, as well as the excuses made for rulers not governing according to the Shari'a, for the sake of survival and continued proselytizing in the pursuit of their Islamist goals. This hardly entails an ideological shift as much as it does a strategic one. It is a strategy that advocates tolerance of "others" in society, whilst building support through the indoctrination of the masses. For both militant groups studied, the basic implication was that Islamists should focus on creating both the populations and conditions deemed necessary to carry out a "just" Jihad. In none of the written materials provided did I find indications that Jihad is no longer a duty for the eventual restoration of Islamic governance to states.

The overall picture painted is not optimistic. ISIS, at the time of writing, arguably presents Jihadists with some of the conditions necessary for Jihad as cited by some of the lead ideologues covered in this article. Combined with a renewed call to violence in the face of oppressive measures adopted by the current Egyptian regime against Islamists, Jihadists could seek a rapprochement with extremist groups across the region in their fight and answer the call to arms; a grim future scenario for both Egypt and the region as a whole.

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Notes

[1] Most importantly, the conclusions of Omar Ashour's seminal study regarding the deradicalization of armed Islamist movements. See Omar Ashour. *The De-radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*. ((London: Routledge, 2009).

[2] Ibid.

[3] The term "former" is used to denote groups that, at the time of Ashour's study, were no longer active due to imprisonment and/or disbandment within Egypt.

[4] Ibid., 6.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ashour, *The De-radicalization of Jihadists*, 4.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*, 5.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Based on her research on the drivers of disengagement and deradicalization, Dalgaard-Nielsen (2013) finds that, 'Even if the original reason for an exit did not implicate ideology, extremist attitudes might well moderate with time as a consequence of behavioral change--no longer acting out the extremist ideology,' in Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen. "Promoting Exit from Violent Extremism: Themes and Approaches," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 36, no. 2 (2013): 110.

[11] For a good overview on psychological and physical reasons for disengagement, see John Horgan, "Disengaging from Terrorism," in David V. Canter (Ed.) *The Faces of Terrorism: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 257-76.

[12] The remainder of the paper will demonstrate how the delegitimization of violence by the former militants, both in their revisions and their more recent interviews, is based on a cost-benefit analysis that simply argues for delaying armed Jihad as opposed to delegitimizing it as a duty of Muslims that should be carried out in the continued pursuit of Islamist goals. Specifically, Jihad is delayed until conditions are favorable for its successful execution.

[13] For an example of studies providing an overview of the revisions of Sayyid 'Imam al-Sharif see Rohan Gunaratna and Mohamed Bin Ali, "De-Radicalization Initiatives in Egypt: A Preliminary Insight," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 4 (2009): 277-91, and Paul Kamolnick, "Al Qaeda's Sharia Crisis: Sayyid Imam and the Jurisprudence of Lawful Military Jihad," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36, no. 5 (2013): 394-418.

[14] See Alex P. Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review," International Center

for Counter-Terrorism–The Hague: ICCT, March 2013. <http://www.icct.nl/publications/icct-papers/radicalisation-de-radicalisation-counter-radicalisation-a-conceptual-discussion-and-literature-review>.

[15] Ibid.

[16] It is important to take into consideration that Islamism is not only confined to Sunni Islam, but also manifests itself in other Islamic sects such as Shi'ism and even Sufism. This paper focuses solely on Sunni Islamism as the former militant groups studied are Sunni.

[17] The Shari'a "law" as understood by Islamists is one which collects various commandments and judgments pertaining to Islamic conduct in all areas of life as literally found in Islamic scripture and schools of thought, codifies these commandments, and applies them as a distinct form of Islamic common law. According to Islamists, the dictates for proper Islamic governance are found in the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the Sunnah; accounts of the Prophet's life transmitted and documented by his followers and those who knew them. More importantly, many within the Islamist current push a literalist reading of these texts, ignoring centuries of exegesis and interpretations that follow the passing of the first two/three generations succeeding the Islamic Prophet Muhammed. This is likely due to the fact that within the Islamist movement, there is a preponderance of Salafi influence which at its core places heavy emphasis on literal interpretations of the scripture, as well as the first three generations following the death of Muhammad (the Salaf). In reality though, there is no one body of Shari'a laws *per se*, but rather as scholar Khaled M. Abou El Fadl (2005) contends, Shari'a is '...the sum total of technical legal methodologies, precedents, and decisions...' that are combined in a subjective process of interpretation and analogy carried out by Muslim jurists.–See Khaled Abou El Fadl. *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*. (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 2005), 39.

[18] The "ism" essentially explains the morphing of fundamental understandings of religion into a political ideology: agendas that affect the *politik*.

[19] The latter describes the term given to those who place others beside Allah in worship; the former amounts to something similar to excommunication where the Muslim is stripped of his/her faith.

[20] Despite the fact that some Islamist parties at times accept to work within a pluralist system as minority parties, the latter have traditionally exhibited close to zero tolerance as majority parties or else refrained from participation regarding issues they deem contrary to Shari'a. See for example Jillian Schwedler, "Can Islamists Become Moderates? Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis," *World Politics* 63, no. 02 (2011): 347-76.

[21] For more on the influence of Islamist political parties in "Islamizing" society through political participation, see Gehad Auda, "The "Normalization" of the Islamic Movement in Egypt from the 1970s to the Early 1990s"; in: Martin E. Marty and R. Scott (Eds.) *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*. (Appleby. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1994), 374-412.

[22] For an in-depth read on the role of religion in the political ideology of Islamism, as well as the characteristics of secularism, see Leonard Weinberg and Ami Pedahzur, *Religious Fundamentalism and Political Extremism* (London: Frank Cass, 2004).

[23] For an excellent framework on the differences and commonalities of Sunni Islamism, see Christoph Schuck, "A Conceptual Framework of Sunni Islamism," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 14, no. 4 (2013): 485-506.

[24] For example, Patrick Sookhdeo, *Global Jihad: The Future in the Face of Militant Islam* (McLean, VA: Isaac Publishing, 2007); for how it generally relates to Islamism as an ideology, see Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[25] For an in-depth study on the two, see Bassam Tibi, *Islamism and Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

[26] An important caveat to note is that ideological deradicalization could be occurring despite an individual's continued participation in one role or the other in a terrorist organization. Various studies on deradicalization tell us that there are often significant physical constraints on individuals leaving the terrorist organization that force them to remain; despite there being significant disillusionment on the ideological level. However, because this article deals with disbanded militant organizations, this is not a concern relevant to the study of the groups in question. Further, because it is often the group leaders that may exert pressure on individuals in the group to stay together, this particular concern similarly holds little relevance in this case. It is group leaders themselves that initiated the revision processes in the cases of the Egyptian militant groups covered.

[27] See discussion on violent and non-violent extremism in Alex P. Schmid, *Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?*, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism–The Hague. May 2014. <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Violent-Non-Violent-Extremism-May-2014.pdf>.

[28] Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 118.

[29] 'Democracy is like a train: we take a ride in it and we get off when we reach the station of our destination,' said the current president of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of the Islamist AKP party back in 2010, in Von Popp, Maximilian. "Volkstribun Von Anatolien." *Der Spiegel*. November 29, 2010. Accessed December

15, 2014. <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-75376560.html>. As research on Islamism generally finds that this is the case for many Islamists that partake in the political process, the adoption of the electoral process is thus deemed insufficient as a stand-alone indicator for ideological moderation.

[30] Al-Zayat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda*, 28.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists*, 56.

[33] Al-Sayyed Imam Ben Abdulaziz al-Sharif, "The Document for Guiding the Jihad in Egypt and the World," *The University of Melbourne National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies Australia*, November 2007, PDF. <http://nceis.unimelb.edu.au/about/projects/national_imams_consultative_forum/works_and_statements_by_former_extremists>.

[34] For an overview on the topic, see Omar Ashour, "De-Radicalization of Jihad? The Impact of Egyptian Islamist Revisionists on Al-Qaeda," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 5 (2008). <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/36/html>

[35] The term traditionally stands for the "People of the Book", which refers to members of religions that similarly possess "revealed" scripture, i.e. primarily Judaism and Christianity. For more details, see Mahmoud Ayoub, "Dhimma in Qur'an and Hadith," in Robert Hoyland (Ed.) *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society*, (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 25–36.

[36] For example, Al-Sharif, "Documenting the Jihad," 38–40.

[37] Mentioned in Ibid., 35–37.

[38] Al-Sharif gives examples of forbidden financing methods for Jihad, and these include hostage taking, theft, or the transgression against the life and possessions of Muslims. See Ibid., 33–37.

[39] Ibid., 48–52.

[40] As an example in the revisions, the following Sahih Bukhari hadith no.386, narrated by Anas Bin Malik in the "Prayers" (Salat) book is cited: 'Whoever prays like us and faces our Qibla and eats our slaughtered animals is a Muslim and is under Allah's and His Apostle's protection. So do not betray Allah by betraying those who are in His protection.'

[41] For an overview on treatment of the ruler, see Ibid., 64–69.

[42] Ibid., 76–78.

[43] Ibid., 79–86.

[44] For a good overview of the protected categories as per al-Sharif's revisions, see Kamolnick, *Al Qaeda's Sharia Crisis*, 396–402.

[45] Ibid., 24,104,174, and 176 respectively.

[46] Ibid., 203–214.

[47] For an overview of the contents of the revisions, see Nelly Lahoud, "The Forgotten Recantation," *Jihadica: Documenting the Global Jihad* (blog), January 8, 2010. <http://www.jihadica.com/the-forgotten-recantation/>. The link to the original Arabic-language series can also be found at the above link.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Al-Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda*, 81.

[50] Ewan Stein, "An Uncivil Partnership: Egypt's Jama'a Islamiyya and the State after the Jihad," *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 5, 863–881.

[51] Ibid., 874.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Islamic moral policing or the "enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil."

[56] Ibid., 871–872.

[57] Ibid., 875–876.

[58] Ibid., 875.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Hamdi Abd al-Rahman Abd al-Azim, Najih Ibrahim Abdullah, and Ali Muhammad Ali al-Sharif, “Shedding Light on Errors Committed in Jihad (Taslit al-adwa’ ‘ala ma waqa’a fi al-jihad min akhta’) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islami, 2002), 5, “Murajaat.com” .doc http://nceis.unimelb.edu.au/about/projects/national_imams_consultative_forum/works_and_statements_by_former_extremists

[61] Ibid., 5–8.

[62] The three interviews used for constructing al-Sharif’s narrative are *Al Sada Al-Muhtaramoun (“The Respected Gentlemen”): Jihadists in Egypt and the World – Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, Ideologue of the Jihadist Groups*, YouTube Video, 1:37:00, posted by “ONtv”, May 27, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrkhaqwTLHk>, and *Behedou’ (“Quietly”) Complete – 12-4-2013 – Complete Episode*, YouTube Video, 1:23:43, posted by “CBC Egypt”, April 14, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVnMz868uP8>, and *Dr. Fadl, Ideologue of the Jihadis in Egypt on ‘Egypt and the World,’* YouTube Video, 48:13, posted by “Ismail Elsharif”, March 6, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_dejcBW2QA.

[63] Timeframes for select quotations and paraphrased sections of al-Sharif’s actual dialogue are provided for further reference. The narrative itself is constructed according to the translation and paraphrasing of the author, and are subject to the author’s own interpretation and understanding.

[64] Ismail Elsharif, *Dr.Fadl*, 40:26–40:50. Also, on the alleged recantations, al-Sharif clearly states that what he wrote was not a recantation. That word is used by the security services for its own purposes, but what he wrote was simply a document for guiding the Jihad based on his views on Jihad which have not changed as is shown in the context of this and other interviews.. In Ibid., 14:20-14:35.

[65] Al-Sharif attributes the misfortunes and ills of Egyptian society to the introduction of European legislation by Muhammed Ali Pacha the *khedive* of Egypt and Sudan (1769 – 1849), in 1810.

[66] ONtv, *The Respected Gentlemen*, 05:19-06:05.

[67] CBC Egypt, *Behedou’*, 26:00-26:14.

[68] Ibid., 27:50 -28:10. Side note: The Shari’a courts in Somalia, and the former Taliban rule, are given as examples of how Islamic courts helped bring stability to the two countries. Al-Sharif dismisses the host’s comments on the Taliban’s poor track record on economic prosperity, progress, stability, and human rights, by writing them off as ‘mistakes.’

[69] For a discussion on ‘nullifiers’ listen to Ibid., 31:30–34:00.

[70] Ismail Elsharif, *Dr. Fadl*, 16:52–17:45.

[71] CBC Egypt, *Behedou’*, 52:50–53:00.

[72] Ibid., 57:25–57:40.

[73] Ibid., 55:56–57:25.

[74] Ibid., 53:35–54:35.

[75] Ismail Elsharif, *Dr.Fadl*, 35:08–36:10.

[76] CBC Egypt, *Behedou’*, 01:11:35–01:14:40

[77] Ibid., 01:09:16–01:09:43.

[78] The response to Ayman al-Zawahiri can be found in a short documentary at Ismail Elsharif, *Dr. Fadl*, 37:29 -40–21. The five main points addressed were: al-Zawahiri tried to take credit for carrying out attacks in Egypt in 1993. Al-Sharif refutes this, saying it is a lie, al-Sharif claims that, back in 1981 when al-Zawahiri was being held and questioned by the Egyptian authorities, the AQ leader took advantage of al-Sharif not being in the country to pin the blame on him for a number of things i.e. al-Zawahiri is too cowardly to take responsibility for his own actions and stand up for what he believes in. Al-Sharif claims that al-Zawahiri was not trusted enough by bin Laden to be told in advance about the 9/11 attacks i.e. even those he thought were closest to him did not think al-Zawahiri was trustworthy. When escaping from Pakistan from Afghanistan during the US barrage of AQ’s camps, al-Zawahiri and his cohorts were wearing women’s clothing to disguise themselves i.e. al-Zawahiri’s manhood is questionable.

[79] The interview used by the author to construct Abbud al-Zumur's narrative is *Abbud al-Zumur in the '10pm Show with Mona El-Shazly*, YouTube Video, posted by Madgy Abd-Elhalim, March 14, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbOhjVkl4eg&app=desktop>. Other videos consulted also include *Al-Zumur and the Reasons for the Assassination of the Late Anwar el-Sadat*, YouTube video, posted by 'Free Egypt', March 22, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gx-aiFCEyZQ>

[80] *Ibid.*, 24:25–26:06.

[8] *Ibid.*, 29:10–29:50

[82] The religious scholars Zumur refers to are “scholars” within the Islamist current as opposed to official jurists/scholars from Egypt's religious high authority, Al-Azhar. It is worth noting that in the aftermath of the Camp David treaty with Israel, Al-Azhar was tasked by the state with delivering *fatawa* in support of the treaty. Al-Azhar published these *fatawa* in 1979, and details of this can be found in Abdel Azim Ramadan, “Fundamentalist Influence in Egypt: The Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Takfir Groups,” in: Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Eds.) *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies, and Militance*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 169.

[83] *Ibid.*, 14:05–15:20.

[84] *Ibid.*, 33:19–33:35.

[85] *Ibid.*, 42:56–43:53.

[86] *Ibid.*, 56:00–57:06.

[87] *Ibid.*, 58:45–01:02:19.

[88] *Ibid.*, 53:52–54:43.

[89] *Ibid.*, 43:53–44:32.

[90] Primary video used to construct narrative: *Ideologue of al Jama'a al-Islamiyya Dr. Nagih Ibrahim, Guest of Youssef Hussein on 'The Respected Gentlemen'*, YouTube Video, posted by ONtv, April 27, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=switrXk0V5c>. Other videos consulted include 'Anbar al-Ra'ye (Opinion Chamber) – Nagih Ibrahim (Al Jama'a al-Islamiyya) WO Nagih Ibrahim 1|1 2|2, 3|3, 4|4, YouTube videos, posted by misr25channel, August 26, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXwj2UHqB6I>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGiQ18TFpMs>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIWXqQ9dWQ8>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3cWDiQiljkw>

[91] This is a summarized version of what Imam al-Shafi'i is documented to have said on the topic of *ijtihad* and issuing *fatawa*, as cited by Ibrahim.

[92] Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 134–157.

[93] In the interview Ibrahim uses the Salafi concept of *al wala' wa-al bara'* (loyalty to believers, disloyalty to unbelievers), as a possible doctrinal foundation for a *jama'a*. In his view, whereas the *jama'a* can use such a doctrinal foundation to dictate its relationships with individuals and communities, a state cannot do the same due to the diversity of doctrines that it will inevitably comprise.

[94] Ibrahim quotes former Brotherhood General Guide Hassan al-Hudaybi's 'Preachers, not Judges' treatise when stating that preachers are those generally involved in *da'wa* circles and *jama'a*s should refrain from taking part in politics. They should specialize in preaching, and leave the running of states to statesmen and politicians. Al-Hudaybi's treaty was written at a time when the Brotherhood was fracturing, with elements inspired by Sayyid Qutb's more violent prescriptions as found (primarily) in “Milestones”, or *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq*. Many of Sayyid Imam al-Sharif's recent views find many parallels in Qutb's works. Al-Hudaybi's treaty was an attempt to discourage Brotherhood members and other Islamist youth from the violent path, and Ibrahim's views heavily echo al-Hudaybi's work. For a detailed study on the former Supreme Guide's treatise, see” Barbara H. E Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood Hasan Al-Hudaybi and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2009).

[95] “Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyya Leader Refai Taha Calls for Armed Struggle against Egyptian President Al-Sisi ” YouTube video, 4:08, posted by “MEMRITVVideos,” December 4, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSS7uPmKUps>. For the Arabic interview summary, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdZefpE1AB8&app=desktop>

[96] Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists*, 94.

[97] *Ibid.*

[98] See Lahoud, “The Forgotten Recantation”, 2010.

[99] Summarized in Schuck, "A Conceptual Framework", 502–503, the concept of *taqiyya* defines the permissibility of Muslims to feign accommodation of systems of governance or else environments that are hostile to them for the purpose of survival. Further, the strategy '...is only permissible in times of peace when Muslims are too weak to broaden their territory.'—Ibid., 503. Islamists could thus use the same strategy in order to survive within environments they deem hostile to their cause.