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Exploring the Relation between Violence in Islamic Fundamentalism and the Ideas of Ibn Taymiyya and Sayyid Qutb

Mahdi Movahedinia

PhD, Political Thought, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. m.movahedinia@ut.ac.ir

Abstract

The issue of religious fundamentalism and terrorism is a critical and pressing concern for Islamic countries and, indeed, the entire world today. When exploring the roots of these phenomena, attention must be given to the ideological foundations and the specific interpretations of religion and tradition adopted by fundamentalist Islamic groups. These groups consider their particular interpretation of religion to be the only legitimate and valid one, rejecting any opposing views by labeling them as heresy or polytheism and deeming them unjustifiable. According to the majority view, Ibn Taymiyya and Sayyid Qutb are the intellectual fathers and most influential figures shaping Islamic fundamentalist groups, often referred to as "Salafi," "terrorist," or extremist Islamist groups. While the intellectual influence of these two thinkers on Islamic fundamentalism cannot be overlooked, a deeper examination reveals significant differences between their ideas and the militant approaches, as well as certain theoretical aspects, of these groups. The primary aim of this article is to clarify and understand the relationship between the violent actions of Muslim fundamentalists and the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya and Sayyid Qutb. The violence employed by fundamentalist groups can be categorized into three types: reactive violence, in response to restrictive and oppressive government actions; ideological violence, as a strategic approach of radical ideological Islamic groups; and sectarian violence, characterized by widespread violence targeting civilian targets. The violence of the Islamic fundamentalist groups discussed in this article primarily falls within the second and, in particular, the third categories.The main research question is whether the type and extent of violence employed by these groups can be justified by referencing the ideas of the two aforementioned thinkers. The research hypothesis is that the type and extent of violence used by these groups can hardly be justified through the ideas of these two intellectual figures; rather, significant evidence in their works contradicts such violence. The approach of this article is

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text-centered, with consideration of the historical and social context, and the method employed is analytical-interpretive, relying on library documents and sources. Key points of divergence between the ideas of the two thinkers studied in this article and the violent actions of Islamic fundamentalist groups include the avoidance of widespread excommunication (*takfir*) of Muslims, the prohibition of indiscriminate killing, particularly of the People of the Book, the emphasis on preserving Islamic unity, and the necessity of combating external enemies. Therefore, the article's final conclusion supports the research hypothesis.

Keywords

fundamentalism, violence, Ibn Taymiyya, Sayyid Qutb, Muslim Brotherhood.

1. Introduction

Some researchers have labeled Egypt as the "cradle of Islamic fundamentalism"[1] (Dekmejian, 2011, p. 147), and a review of the historical trajectory of radical Islamism supports this claim. Notable examples include groups branching off from Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, such as the Islamic Liberation Organization, Al-Takfir wa al-Hijra, and al-Jihad. These groups emerged in the context of Nasser's prisons in 1954, the widespread arrests of 1965, and particularly after the execution of Sayyid Qutb in 1966. Following severe repression in Egypt, these groups, alongside other Salafi factions from both the eastern and western Islamic world—from Saudi Wahhabis to Algeria's radical Islamists—converged in Afghanistan during the late 1980s and early 1990s. There, they collaborated in the jihad against the Soviets, an event that gave rise to the phenomenon of the so-called "Arab Afghans" and facilitated the integration of diverse ideological and organizational experiences (Ahmadi, 2005, pp. 46–50). The emergence of Al-Qaeda, later led by Ayman al-Zawahiri, head of Egypt's Al-Jihad, and subsequently ISIS, which arose from Al-Qaeda in Iraq, traces the trajectory of fundamentalist Islamic groups from Egypt to Mosul. The violent actions of contemporary Islamic fundamentalist groups and movements can be categorized into three types: (1) Reactive Violence: This type of violence is a response to opposition and restrictive or repressive actions by ruling governments. For example, the assassination of Egypt's Prime Minister, Nuqrashi Pasha, by the Muslim Brotherhood's secret network in late 1948 can be cited. Additionally, the Islamic and Sharia-oriented tendencies of the Brotherhood strained relations with Nasser's regime, leading its secret faction to attempt Nasser's assassination in 1954. (2) Ideological Violence: It is widely believed that this form of violence emerged due to the widespread suppression of Muslim Brotherhood members, including their execution and torture in Nasser's prisons in Egypt after 1964. Influenced by Sayyid Qutb's teachings, armed movements and the assassination of political and military figures became a strategic approach for Egyptian Islamist groups in the 1970s and 1980s, exemplified by the assassination of Anwar Sadat. (3) Sectarian Violence: In this type, not only military and political figures but also civilians and ordinary people are considered legitimate and inevitable targets. Examples include the actions of fundamentalist groups in Egypt during the 1990s. The group

1. The term "fundamentalism" in this article refers to a form of fundamentalism characterized by ideologically driven and particularly sectarian violent actions. Our focus is on Sunni Islamists.

"Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya" attacked tourist buses in the pyramid region between 1992 and 1997, killing dozens to damage Egypt's reputation and tourism revenue. Operations against U.S. embassies in Africa and the September 11, 2001 attacks also fall into this category (Ahmadi, 2005, pp. 39–45). Al-Qaeda's terrorist acts and the massacres by the Islamic State (ISIS) are among the most prominent examples of sectarian violence, targeting not only followers of non-Islamic religions but also adherents of other Islamic sects, particularly Shiites, as legitimate targets.

The prevailing view in most studies of these groups is that they are influenced by two controversial figures, one early and one later—Ibn Taymiyya and Sayyid Qutb—and justify their actions with reference to the teachings of these two figures, both in terms of religious legitimacy and theoretical grounding. However, an analysis of certain theoretical positions, particularly an examination of the actions and behaviors of these groups, reveals significant differences between the ideas of these two figures and those of fundamentalist groups. Although resorting to violent actions, whether deemed legitimate or not, in the form of war and "jihad" has a long history in Islam, the new forms of violence, particularly "ideological" and "sectarian" types, seem to have little place in the religious and theological thought of Muslims, particularly Sunnis, which is the focus of this article. This violence targets not "polytheists" or "infidels" in the traditional sense of Islamic literature and theology, but rather the rulers and governments of Muslim societies, and even ordinary Muslims or other civilians. There is also a distinction between Ibn Taymiyya and Sayyid Qutb in this regard. While justification for "ideological" violence can, to some extent, be found in Qutb's works, there is little evidence in Ibn Taymiyya's writings to support this type of violence. Nevertheless, in the works and views of both thinkers, no reliable evidence can be found to justify "sectarian" violence, such as that perpetrated by extremist fundamentalist groups like Al-Jihad, Al-Takfir wa al-Hijra, Al-Qaeda, and ISIS. This article, adopting a text-centered approach with an analytical-interpretive method and considering historical context, aims to substantiate this claim, which represents the innovative aspect of this study compared to similar works. Initially, to gain a better and more precise understanding of the topic, we will explore those aspects of Ibn Taymiyya's and Sayyid Qutb's thought that have influenced fundamentalist groups. Subsequently, we will address the points of divergence between their ideas and the dominant, particularly violent, practices in Islamic fundamentalism.

2. Muslim Brotherhood and Their Main Goal

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 in Ismailia, Egypt, by Hassan al-Banna. From the outset, al-Banna had little interest in lengthy philosophical or theological debates; rather, he was a pragmatic figure driven by concerns over societal corruption, the fading of Islamic values, and the spread of Western culture, which fueled his desire to revive Islam across all aspects of social life. The ultimate and primary goal of the Brotherhood was to establish an "Islamic government." According to its Islamic convictions, the Brotherhood sought to build a Muslim community and form an Islamic government in Egypt (Dekmejian, 2011, p. 152; Enayat, 2015, pp. 240–241). Consequently, the Brotherhood engaged in political activities and stances, posing a potential threat to the Egyptian government. Following the assassination of al-Banna on February 12, 1949, Hassan Ismail al-Hudaybi was chosen as the General Guide of the Brotherhood. A judge with a background as the head of Egypt's Supreme Court, his appointment sparked opposition from the start. Reasons for this opposition included his lack of membership in the Brotherhood's Constituent Assembly or Central Committee and his relatively conciliatory relationship with King Farouk (Al-Husayni, 2008, pp. 193–198).

Following the 1952 coup by the Free Officers led by General Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Muslim Brotherhood initially supported the movement, viewing it as a starting point for Islamic societal reform and the establishment of an Islamic government. However, the relationship between al-Hudaybi and Nasser was far from amicable. It soon became clear that Nasser did not share the Brotherhood's goals. The assassination attempt on Nasser on October 26, 1954, provided him with the pretext to crack down on the Brotherhood, leading to the arrest of over 4,000 members. In 1964, aiming to counter communists—one of his main domestic opponents—Nasser agreed to release Brotherhood members from prison. However, in 1965, security forces attributed another alleged plot against Nasser's regime to the Brotherhood, triggering another wave of mass arrests. This time, several members, including the prominent figure Sayyid Qutb, were executed (Dekmejian, 2011, pp. 152–154). These widespread repressions fueled a shift toward radicalism among some Brotherhood members. Young members, heavily influenced by Qutb's teachings in prison, grew dissatisfied with the conservative approach of the Brotherhood's traditional leaders. These individuals formed the core of emerging radical groups. In response to Qutb's ideas, Hassan al-Hudaybi wrote the book *Duʿāt, lā quḍāt* (Preachers, Not

Judges), emphasizing that the Brotherhood's role was to invite people to Islam, not to judge or rule over them—a critique of Qutb's advocacy for jihad and decisive action. Despite this, Qutb's influence was so profound that al-Hudaybi's words had limited impact (Ahmadi, 2014, p. 70; Fozi & Hashemi, 2014, pp. 40–42). Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj, the ideological leader of the "Al-Jihad" group, played a significant role in fundamentalism with his treatise *Al-Jihād: al-farīḍat al-ghāʾiba* (Jihad: The Neglected Duty). This work is considered one of the primary and most influential texts among jihadist groups. Faraj portrayed jihad as a forgotten obligation among Muslims, emphasizing its revival in society. Key points from the book include: "…since the laws of Muslim countries are the laws of infidels, true Muslims must declare jihad against their leaders… Muslim leaders who reject Islamic laws are apostates… permanent jihad against an infidel government is the only path for true Muslims… [and] armed struggle is the only acceptable form of jihad" (Dekmejian, 2011, pp. 179–181). Faraj drew a parallel between his era and that of Ibn Taymiyya, likening contemporary Muslim rulers to the Mongols (al-Tatar), who governed according to "Western" laws rather than the Quran and Sunnah, much like the Mongols who superficially adopted Islam but ruled primarily by Genghis Khan's "Yasa" code. Thus, just as Ibn Taymiyya's fatwa deemed fighting the Mongols obligatory, Faraj argued that fighting contemporary Muslim rulers is also obligatory and constitutes jihad (Faraj, n.d., pp. 7–10).

3. Ibn Taymiyya's Views and Thoughts

3-1. Peculiar Jurisprudential and Theological Views

Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-ʿAbbās, Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm, known as Ibn Taymiyya, was born in 661 AH in Harran. His family, fleeing the oppression of the Mongols, settled in Damascus. His father was a Ḥanbalī jurist, and Ibn Taymiyya, still under twenty years old, succeeded him after his father's death. He delivered Quranic exegesis every Friday, and from the outset, his views diverged from those of contemporary scholars, sparking widespread discontent against him (Ḥalabī, 2013, p. 294).

Several examples of Ibn Taymiyya's divergences from the views of prominent Islamic jurists can be noted: (1) He considered "taḥlīl" (a marriage contracted with the intent of divorcing to make a woman lawful for her previous husband) to be forbidden if it is used as a legal stratagem, rejecting all forms of "legal stratagems" outright; (2) he deemed divorce during menstruation invalid; (3) he accepted payments not explicitly mandated by

divine law as fulfilling the obligation of zakat, thereby relieving the payer of further duty; (4) he permitted holding views contrary to scholarly consensus, considering such dissent neither disbelief nor impiety. It is reported that he criticized the second caliph, believing he made errors, and similarly leveled critiques against Ali, the fourth caliph. Although a Ḥanbalī, Ibn Taymiyya did not fully adhere to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's principles, viewing himself as an independent mujtahid in matters of religion (Ḥalabī, 2013, pp. 296–297). It appears that Ibn Taymiyya's opposition to scholarly consensus and certain established Sunni doctrines has influenced Islamic groups in Egypt and other radical and takfiri fundamentalist groups. For instance, despite widespread opposition from the majority of Islamic scholars across various sects to the extremist actions of these groups, they do not view their actions as contrary to the Quran and Sunnah. Instead, they condemn the majority of Muslims and Islamic scholars, labeling them as misguided. Another dimension of Ibn Taymiyya's life that significantly influenced Islamist groups is his emphasis on the concept of "jihad" and his personal participation in jihadist battlefields. He called for jihad against the Mongols, Ismailis, Alawites, and Druze (Dekmejian, 2011, p. 79; Ḥalabī, 2013, p. 294). Another significant aspect of his life is the persecution and harassment he faced from contemporary jurists and rulers. Due to his distinctive and controversial views, he was imprisoned multiple times and condemned by Egyptian scholars. Some Muslim scholars even questioned the validity of his faith; for instance, figures such as Ibn Baṭūṭa, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, and ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn Jamiʿ labeled him a heretic (Ḥalabī, 2013, p. 298). Ibn Taymiyya was a Ḥanbalī scholar, and thus, he was inclined toward a "literal" (*ẓāhirī*) interpretation of Quranic verses. This emphasis on the apparent meaning (*ẓawāhir*) of the text led to distinctive theological and exegetical views, including a tendency toward corporealism (*tajsīm*) and anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) regarding God. The first issue on which Ibn Taymiyya's opinions provoked opposition from major scholars was a theological matter concerning the "narrated attributes" (*ṣifāt khabariyya*). He believed that attributes such as "God's standing on the Throne" (*istiwāʾ ʿalā al-ʿarsh*) should be understood literally according to their apparent meaning, asserting that this was the approach of the "righteous predecessors" (*salaf ṣāliḥ*), including the Prophet, his companions, and their followers. However, he emphasized that these attributes are not like human attributes, and their exact nature remains unknown to us. Remarkably, while he upheld the apparent meaning of certain verses, even considering God as perceivable in a sensory sense, he simultaneously avoided falling into corporealism (attributing

a physical form to God) by stating that the "how" of these attributes is unknown to us (Rabbani Golpayegani, 2012, p. 315).

3-2. Political Views and Governmental Jurisprudence

Regarding Ibn Taymiyya's political and social views, one can refer to his most significant work in this field, *Al-Siyāsat al-sharʿiyya fī iṣlāḥ al-rāʿī wa-l-raʿiyya* (The religious policy for reforming the ruler and the ruled). As the title suggests, Ibn Taymiyya offers advice to both rulers and subjects in this book. In the introduction, he describes it as a treatise essential for both the ruler and the ruled. He considers advising rulers necessary and believes they must govern with justice among the people. He argues that the ruler (*walī al-amr*; literally: authority of the affairs) must appoint the most qualified person for each task, or else, according to a Prophetic hadith, they would be betraying God and His Messenger. Conversely, the people must obey the rulers, referred to as the "ulū al-amr" (those in authority), unless the rulers command disobedience to God, in which case obedience is not obligatory. However, Ibn Taymiyya reflects the conventional caution of Sunni political thought, stating that if rulers do not act according to God's law and the Sunnah, the people should still obey their commands that align with divine rulings (Ibn Taymiyya, 1989, p. 9). In his political perspective, the default is obedience to the ruler, not rebellion or disobedience. He considers the primary goal of governance and authority to be the "reform of people's religion," asserting that failure to achieve this leads to clear loss for the people, rendering worldly blessings futile. Ibn Taymiyya maintains that the strength and stability of religion in society depend on two factors: first, the fair distribution of wealth (from the treasury) to the needy, and second, the punishment of transgressors and offenders (Ibn Taymiyya, 1989, p. 22). A highly significant point in this regard is that Ibn Taymiyya's political thought aligns closely with the prevailing Sunni political framework, as it prioritizes order, unity, and stability in the Islamic society over chaos, disorder, or revolution. While he considers the imam of the community obligated to uphold "consultation" (*shūrā*), he ultimately emphasizes that the duty of the subjects is to obey the ruler, even if they are unjust or sinful, because religion is safeguarded under the protection of the state. From his statements, one might infer, theoretically, that rebellion against the ruler of an Islamic society is permissible only when their actions (in political and social matters, not personal conduct) explicitly contradict the Quran, Sunnah, and the consensus of the Prophet's companions (Ḥalabī, 2013, pp. 301–302).

3-3. Distinctions between Ibn Taymiyya's Doctrines and Violent Actions of Fundamentalist Groups

Despite Ibn Taymiyya's significant influence on extremist fundamentalist groups, the fundamental difference between his thought and their approach can be articulated as follows: In Sunni political thought, any form of chaos or threat to public order is considered a threat to the survival of religion in society, prioritizing the preservation of order and security. As noted, Ibn Taymiyya's political thought aligns with this perspective. He deemed fighting heretics necessary not primarily due to their apostasy but because they threatened societal order (Ḥalabī, 2013, p. 302). According to some contemporary researchers, he was reluctant to engage in "takfīr" (declaring someone an apostate) or excommunicating individuals from the Muslim community, accepting it only as a last resort, unlike radical Islamic groups (Dekmejian, 2011, p. 81). Henri Laoust, author of *The Social and Political Views of Ibn Taymiyya*, asserts that Ibn Taymiyya was highly cautious regarding *takfīr*. He was stringent in declaring *takfīr* against those who professed the *shahāda* (testimony of Islamic faith) and performed prayers, and he considered differences among Muslims in their interpretations of Sharia to be acceptable and valid. The primary conditions for *takfīr* according to Ibn Taymiyya include: denying the existence of God, claiming that God has a partner, wife, or child, attributing falsehood to God or His Prophet, blaspheming God or His Prophet, rejecting any of the prophets or divinely revealed books, or denying essential Islamic beliefs or permitting what is unanimously forbidden by Muslims, provided the individual is aware of these commands and prohibitions (Laoust, 1941, pp. 174–176). On this basis, Ibn Taymiyya criticizes and condemns the Kharijites (Khawārij), arguing that their belief in declaring *takfīr* on those who commit major sins (*al-kabāʾir*) was the first heresy to emerge in Islam, as it deemed the lives and property of Muslims permissible (Ibn Taymiyya, 1996, vol. 13, p. 31).

In contrast to Ibn Taymiyya's views and approach, Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj, in *Al-Jihād: al-farīḍat al-ghaʾiba*, divides the enemies of Islam into two groups: "al-ʿaduww al-qarīb" (the near enemy) and "al-ʿaduww al-baʿīd" (the far enemy). He considers the rulers of contemporary Muslim countries (and possibly Muslims he deems deviant or misguided despite their claim to Islam) as the near enemy, while Zionists and colonialists are the far enemy. For Faraj, jihad against the near enemy takes precedence, as Muslim lands must first be purified of unrighteous rulers and the laws of divine Sharia restored, rather than being deceived by their ploys and engaging in struggles

for the liberation of Jerusalem under their leadership (Faraj, n.d., p. 15). This contrasts with Ibn Taymiyya's struggles, which, during his lifetime, were directed against the Mongols or those collaborating with them, not against the Muslim rulers of Egypt and the Levant. Faraj references a fatwa by Ibn Taymiyya stating that the presence of some Muslims, compelled or coerced, in the Mongol army does not negate or deter the obligation of jihad against the Mongols (Faraj, n.d., pp. 10–11). This might suggest that Faraj seeks to lay the groundwork for justifying terrorist actions that result in the killing of civilians. However, when Ghazan Khan, the Mongol Ilkhan, invaded the Levant to conquer it and defeated the Egyptian Sultan (al-Malik al-Nāṣir Qalāwūn), Ibn Taymiyya, alongside a group of scholars, approached Ghazan to secure a guarantee of safety for the people of Damascus. Notably, Ibn Taymiyya later incited the people to jihad against the Mongols and Ghazan's army, but in that context, he deemed preserving the lives and property of the people—even by appealing to the Mongol Ghazan—necessary and preferable (Zaryab, 1995, vol. 3, pp. 172–175). By deeply examining the aforementioned points, we can discern the fundamental differences between the approach of extremist fundamentalists—whose primary characteristics include actions such as bombing public places, assassinating individuals, and creating an atmosphere of fear and terror in society—and the political-social thought and conduct prevalent in Sunni intellectual circles, including that of scholars like Ibn Taymiyya.

Opposition to Shiites, and declaring them as apostates, is among the beliefs often attributed to Ibn Taymiyya by many Islamic scholars and writers. His most well-known work in opposition to Shiism is *Minhāj al-Sunnat al-Nabawiyya fī naqḍ kalām al-Shīʿa wa-l-Qadariyya*, written in response to *Minhāj al-karāma fī maʿrifat al-Imāma* by Ibn Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī. While Ibn Taymiyya primarily focuses on al-Ḥillī's definition of Shiism, namely Twelver Shiism, he occasionally, like other anti-Shiite polemicists, attacks extremist sects (*ghulāt*) and Ismailis under the banner of Shiism and sometimes criticizes certain popular superstitions as Shiite beliefs (Enayat, 2010, p. 71). Ibn Taymiyya not only asserts that Twelver Shiites—whom he calls "Rāfiḍa"—share commonalities with groups like the Bāṭiniyya and philosophers but even attributes the establishment of Shiism to "heretics" (*zanādiqa*) and "hypocrites" (*munāfiqūn*) (Ibn Taymiyya, 1986, vol. 1, pp. 10–12). In this book, he also raises various critiques of Shiite theological beliefs, including the knowledge of the Imam, his infallibility, and the belief

in a divine text mandating Ali's caliphate and Imamate.[1] Nevertheless, Ibn Taymiyya's stance on the *takfīr* of Shiites is ambiguous, occasionally contradictory, and marked by caution. On one hand, he distinguishes between early Shiites—who, in his view, did not dispute the superiority of Abu Bakr and Umar over Ali and only preferred Ali over Uthman—and the *Rāfiḍa* (Ibn Taymiyya, 1986, vol. 1, pp. 13–15). On the other hand, he does not advocate *takfīr* of the "Shiite Mufaḍḍila" (those who consider Ali superior to the first two caliphs) (Mushʿabī, 1997, vol. 2, pp. 321–324). However, he sets conditions for the *takfīr* of those Rāfiḍa who insult the Prophet's companions, particularly the caliphs. These conditions include instances where the insult is accompanied by beliefs such as attributing divinity to Ali ibn Abi Talib, claiming the apostasy of the companions after the Prophet's death, or alleging eliminations in the Quran and the concealment of certain verses after the Prophet (Mushʿabī, 1997, vol. 2, pp. 448–450; Alikhani & Ghasemi, 2022, pp. 52–54). According to Henri Laoust, *takfīr* in Ibn Taymiyya's thought is less a harsh or exclusionary expulsion from the Islamic community and more a methodological or epistemological condemnation of sects he considers misguided and misleading to the Muslim community (Laoust, 1941, pp. 177–178). It is precisely these considerations that distinguish Ibn Taymiyya as a classical Sunni scholar from Muslim fundamentalists. He permits the killing of "Rāfiḍa" only under the conditions previously mentioned, provided the individual openly "declares" their beliefs, and, more importantly, that such an act does not lead to greater "corruption" (*mafsada*) in the Muslim community. If it does, it should be avoided, just as the Prophet observed similar considerations (Mushʿabī, 1997, vol. 2, pp. 452–453).

4. Sayyid Qutb's Views and Thoughts

Sayyid Qutb was born in 1906 in a village in the Asyut region of Egypt. Throughout his life, he underwent several intellectual phases: a period of possible atheism and skepticism toward religious beliefs, followed by a nationalist and cultural perspective on Islamic-Eastern heritage in contrast to the "West," and ultimately joining the Muslim Brotherhood, where he became its primary and influential thinker (Moradi, 2003, pp. 196–198). In line with the main focus of this article, we will not delve into the various stages of Qutb's intellectual life but will concentrate on the final phase, during which he

1. These criticisms had a particular influence on figures like Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab and Wahhabi thought (Movasaghi, 2007, pp. 162–163).

gained fame and recognition. The foundation of Sayyid Qutb's thought, which frames all other issues, can be summarized in the claim that "Islam is a comprehensive program for life," encompassing political, social, and economic dimensions. The fundamental duty of the government is to implement this program by diligently enforcing Sharia rulings. This central idea is evident in nearly all of Qutb's works. One of the fundamental issues that holds a special place in Sayyid Qutb's political-social thought is the concept of social justice. He considers the goal of reviving Islamic life to be the establishment of "the most complete and humane form of social justice," which materialistic and human ideologies are incapable of achieving (Qutb, 2012 a, p. 29). His most famous work addressing the concept of justice in Islam is al-*ʿAdālat al-ijtimāʿiyya fī al-Islām* (Social Justice in Islam). While emphasizing social justice, Qutb is careful to distinguish Islamic justice from the concept of justice in ideologies like socialism and communism. He deliberately avoids using Western terminology, as he considers ideologies such as socialism and communism to be human, *jāhili* (ignorant) thought systems, deeming their integration with Islam neither possible nor valid. Implicitly, he critiques the Nasserist socialism that was the ideology of the ruling regime at the time (Enayat, 2010, pp. 263–265). For Qutb, social justice in Islam is rooted in the foundational beliefs of Islam, and thus, one cannot understand the nature of social justice in Islam without first grasping Islamic teachings on divinity (e.g., monotheism), life, and humanity (Qutb, 1993, p. 20). Sayyid Qutb accepts individual ownership, viewing it as an indisputable right that forms the basis of Islamic life and economy. However, he does not endorse individual ownership unconditionally or absolutely, subjecting it to the limits and conditions set by Islam. In his view, individual ownership considers both the individual's interests and those of society (Qutb, 1993, pp. 88–90). Qutb believes that Islam encompasses economic laws that can be adapted to contemporary circumstances, including the circulation of wealth among all, which emphasizes wealth distribution rather than its accumulation in the hands of a specific class, as well as the principle of *maṣāliḥ mursala* (public interests), referring to general welfare that Islam entrusts to the Islamic government to determine and act upon in the absence of specific textual precedent. Qutb asserts that if the state's revenues are insufficient for public administration, it may impose taxes on the wealthy to the extent necessary. Another law is the principle of *sadd al-dharāʾiʿ* (blocking the means), which, in Qutb's view, allows the Islamic government to undertake actions that serve the public good and eliminate anything that

causes harm or corruption, provided such actions do not contradict Sharia. Here, Qutb emphasizes social balance, as the lack of equitable wealth distribution leads to various societal corruptions and fosters resentment and animosity among different social strata. He also refers to other Islamic laws, such as the prohibition of usury (*ribā*), hoarding (*iḥtikār*), and the obligation of zakat, among others (Qutb, 2012 b, pp. 213–230).

4-1. Modern Western Civilization as a Civilization of Ignorance (*Jāhilī*)

Sayyid Qutb considers modern civilization a manifestation of "jāhiliyya" (ignorance), condemning both the Western and Eastern blocs and presenting a return to Islam as the only path to humanity's salvation: "Today, the entire world… lives in *jāhiliyya*. This *jāhiliyya* is not diminished by these staggering material comforts or outstanding material innovations. This *jāhiliyya* is rooted in transgressing God's sovereignty on earth and encroaching on the most essential attribute of divinity, namely sovereignty. Today's *jāhiliyya* assigns sovereignty to humans… not in the primitive and simple form of the pre-Islamic *jāhiliyya*, but in the form of claiming the right to establish visions, values, laws, regulations, and systems… while setting aside God's prescribed program for life…" (Qutb, 1999, p. 7). Sayyid Qutb traces the roots of modernism and Europe's disillusionment with religion to European history, citing factors such as the initial deviations in Christianity, various distortions in Judaism, and the violent and irrational actions of the Church and the Papacy during the Middle Ages. In contrast, he argues that Islam is neither the distorted Judaism nor Christianity, nor is the history of Muslims equivalent to Europe's Middle Ages (Qutb, 2007, pp. 37–58). Sayyid Qutb's ultimate aspiration and goal align with that of the Muslim Brotherhood; that is, the establishment of an Islamic government. He views the purpose of this government as the implementation of Islamic law and Sharia. According to Qutb, the primary distinction between a *jāhili* (ignorant) society and an Islamic society lies in the application of Islamic rights and laws within society. A society whose legal system is based on human ideologies and doctrines is a *jāhili*, polytheistic society, and its political system is invalid (Qutb, 1999, pp. 7, 18, 75). However, he emphasizes that this government does not imply rule by a specific class, such as the scholars of Al-Azhar. In his view, Islam, unlike Christianity, does not have a designated class of clergy or spiritual leaders responsible for religious affairs (Qutb, 2012 a, p. 5).

4-2. Jihad, Excommunication, and the Vanguard Group

The concept of "jihad" is one of the most prominent themes in Sayyid

Qutb's thought, leaving a fundamental impact on the actions of Islamic fundamentalist groups. Qutb ultimately concludes that jihad is not merely defensive or passive but entails actively waging war against the enemies of Islam and infidels. However, he does not advocate fighting those who maintain peaceful relations with Muslims or are bound by treaties with them. He believes jihad should remove obstacles hindering people's guidance, as non-divine systems and governments prevent the true message from reaching the masses, subjecting them to intellectual subjugation and compelling them to serve entities other than God. Jihad, in his view, must dismantle these oppressive systems. Thus, according to this perspective, the jihadist force confronts tyrannical, idolatrous regimes, not ordinary people. Addressing the question of the Quranic verse "There is no compulsion in religion," Qutb argues that once all political, military, and oppressive barriers are removed, allowing people to hear Islam's call directly and without intermediaries, they are free to accept or reject it. However, no one has the right to resist or defy Islam's message[1] (Qutb, 1999, pp. 70–77). Qutb sharply criticizes Muslims who limit jihad to its defensive aspect and focus solely on Islam's missionary role, stating: "Establishing God's rule on earth, eliminating human sovereignty, and reclaiming God's dominion from usurping servants… none of these can be achieved through mere preaching and enlightenment" (Qutb, 1999, p. 76). According to Sayyid Qutb, individuals who outwardly profess Islam but whose conduct, behavior, and principles are not rooted in Islamic teachings are not truly Muslims and are instead immersed in *jāhiliyya* and *shirk* (polytheism). In another section of his book *Maʿālim fī al-ṭarīq*, Qutb explicitly states: "In truth, the issue is one of disbelief versus faith, polytheism versus monotheism, and *jāhiliyya* versus Islam… These people, as long as they lead a *jāhili* life, are not Muslims despite their claims… The current call is to return these ignorant ones to Islam and make them Muslims anew" (Qutb, 1999, p. 215). While it appears that Qutb's intent with these statements was not to explicitly declare *takfīr* or permit the killing and shedding of Muslim blood, but rather to emphasize the necessity of practical commitment to Islam, it cannot be denied that such statements carry significant potential for radical interpretations.

1. These ambiguous and dual-natured statements, aside from reflecting intolerance and dogmatism, pave the way for radical interpretations. Notably, Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj, in *al-Jihād: al-farīḍat al-ghāʾiba*, employs a similar argument to justify that jihad is not only defensive but also involves attacking infidels and polytheists, not to impose religion but to remove barriers created by the leaders of disbelief that prevent people from encountering the truth (Faraj, n.d., p. 15).

One of Sayyid Qutb's most famous theories and guidelines for establishing an Islamic government and society is the concept of forming a "vanguard group" (*al-ṭalīʿa*) within the *jāhili* society, akin to the early Muslims living in Mecca. For human societies to become ready to accept true divine sovereignty and transition from a *jāhili* society, a kind of awakening or resurrection (*al-baʿth al-Islāmī*) must occur among them. But how does this process begin? "There must emerge a vanguard group that resolves to undertake this task, sets out on this path, and advances through the vast sea of global *jāhiliyya*. In its journey, it must, on one hand, separate itself to some extent from the prevailing *jāhiliyya*, and on the other, maintain some level of engagement with it" (Qutb, 1999, pp. 8–9; Qutb, 1978, pp. 9–10). Among Sayyid Qutb's followers and those influenced by his thought, disagreements arose over the interpretation of these concepts, particularly regarding the nature of separation from the *jāhili* society and the relationship of the "vanguard group" with believing Muslims living in such societies. For instance, unlike groups such as Jamāʿat al-Muslimīn, later known as Al-Takfīr wa al-Hijra, Qutb does not declare *takfīr* (excommunication) on Muslims living in "jāhili" societies (Dekmejian, 2011, pp. 168–169). Qutb's view on the relationship between the "vanguard group" and Muslims in *jāhili* societies is that their separation "does not mean cutting ties, isolation, or withdrawing from the current *jāhiliyya*… Rather, it involves engaging with it while remaining distinct, interacting with dignity and honor, and conveying the truth with affection and kindness" (Qutb, 1999, p. 219).

4-3. Distinctions between Sayyid Qutb's Doctrines and Violent Actions of Fundamentalist Groups

As discussed above, there are significant core similarities between Sayyid Qutb's views and those of Salafi or fundamentalist groups, ranging from the fundamental goal of establishing an Islamic government and the necessity of implementing Sharia to the belief in the dominance of disbelief and "jāhiliyya" over Islamic societies and the need to form a vanguard group to engage in jihad for the sake of God. However, despite these shared elements, certain important differences between Qutb's teachings and the violent practices and approaches of fundamentalist groups cannot be overlooked. Below, we highlight the most significant of these differences. Peace in Sayyid Qutb's Thought: Sayyid Qutb authored a book titled *Al-Salām al-ʿālamī wa-l-Islām*, translated as *Islam and Global Peace*. According to Qutb, peace is a fundamental principle in Islam, while war is an exceptional and temporary

condition. “In cases where war temporarily and exceptionally arises, its sole purpose is to restore people to a state of unity and to reestablish social cohesion” (Qutb, 2012 b, p. 57). For Qutb, war must be grounded in doctrinal principles, and he condemns “any war driven by racial prejudices or even rigid religious fanaticism in the narrow sense understood by Crusaders and non-Crusaders… because in Islam, there is no place for rigid religious fanaticism that involves enmity or denying the legitimacy of other religions” (Qutb, 2012 b, p. 57). Qutb outlines the conditions for permissible war in Islam as follows: (1) Achieving salvation and the greater good for humanity, not just for a single nation, race, or individual. (2) Realizing the highest standards of human ethical values. (3) Ensuring security for people and delivering them from oppression, fear, and injustice. Establishing absolute justice across the earth (Qutb, 2012 b, p. 67). He refers to the peace treaties of the Prophet with the People of the Book (Jews and Christians), asserting that those who approach Islam with peace and harbor no intent for war or conspiracy should be treated peacefully, as exemplified by the Prophet’s conduct with Christians and Jews in the early Islamic period (Qutb, 2012 b, pp. 69–73).

Sayyid Qutb recognizes the rights of religious minorities (People of the Book) in Islamic societies, asserting: “We seek a system in which adherents of all religious beliefs can live with freedom and equality. It is the duty of the government and Muslim people to uphold freedom of belief and freedom of worship for all individuals. A system in which non-Muslims can act according to their faith in matters pertaining to personal life. A system in which all citizens, without discrimination, enjoy equal rights and responsibilities” (Qutb, 2012 a, p. 31; Qutb, 2001, p. 81). From these lines, it is clear that Qutb frames jihad within specific limits and conditions, viewing it as a struggle against authoritarian regimes and systems that obstruct people’s guidance, not as the slaughter of ordinary people or the persecution of followers of other religions under the guise of labeling them as polytheists or infidels—actions undertaken by some fundamentalist groups.[1] The role of the “people” in Sayyid Qutb’s political thought: In Sayyid Qutb’s thought, the position of the general populace is emphasized through the “absolute desire and free choice of the masses” in accepting the government and its rulers. He considers the satisfaction and trust of the people as a prerequisite for social peace, stresses the importance of consultation, and views one of the fundamental indicators of

1. For example, some of the actions of Egypt’s “Al-Jihad” group targeted anti-Coptic activities (Dekmejian, 2011, p. 76), or one can point to the treatment of Christians and other Islamic sects by ISIS in the territories under its control.

its implementation in society as the participation of the people in their own affairs. He believes that the ruler or caliph of the Muslims must consult with the people (Qutb, 2012 b, pp. 190–191). Although in Qutb's thought, the role, status, and even satisfaction of the people are defined and limited within the framework of Sharia rulings, it appears that even within these bounds, the practices of fundamentalist groups show little regard for the condition or consideration of the general public. Instead, decisions are made and executed by a small, exclusive group of leaders and affiliates, irrespective of the people's consent or the consequences borne by ordinary individuals.

Ijtihad and the demands of the era: Unlike some fundamentalist (Salafi) groups that condemn any innovation as heresy (*bidʿa*), Sayyid Qutb places significant emphasis on the role of time and contemporary circumstances, particularly in matters such as social justice, the methods of establishing it in society, and the practical implementation of consultation in governance. Regarding the relationship between the government and *maṣāliḥ mursala* (public interest), Qutb asserts: "While Islam restricts the ruler's authority in matters pertaining to their personal conduct, it grants them the utmost flexibility in addressing the interests of society—those interests for which no specific textual ruling exists and which, therefore, evolve with the changing conditions of time" (Qutb, 2000, p. 167). Citing the Quranic verse "And He has not placed upon you in the religion any hardship" (al-Hajj, 22:78), Qutb advocates for a degree of juristic flexibility aimed at securing the welfare and interests of the public, within the framework of Sharia (Qutb, 2000, pp. 167–168). He further maintains: "When the Sharia does not prescribe a specific method for consultation, this matter is left to the needs, desires, and ways of life of each era" (Qutb, 2012 b, pp. 191, 215). The concept of Muslim unity: While some fundamentalist groups adopt a radical and violent stance against various Islamic sects, particularly Shiites, Sayyid Qutb, like Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, emphasized the unity of Muslims and avoided sectarianism and division. He was deeply committed to the idea of Muslim unity and had good relationships with certain Shiite scholars and figures. Several pieces of evidence support this claim: Qutb personally dedicated some of his books to Kashif al-Ghita, a prominent contemporary Shiite scholar. Additionally, when Qutb served as the secretary of the Quds Conference in Oman, he invited Navvab Safavi to participate and even requested that he travel to Cairo. During the movement for the nationalization of Iran's oil industry, Qutb wrote a letter to Ayatollah Kashani, expressing support for the movement and emphasizing the need to combat

"imperialism" and unite the Islamic world under one banner. Furthermore, at the time of Qutb's execution, Ayatollah Hakim, a Shiite authority in Iraq, sent a telegram to the Egyptian government requesting a halt to his execution (Khosroshahi, 2014; Sayyid Qutb, n.d.).

5. Conclusion

This article examined the affinities and divergences between the thought of two highly influential Sunni thinkers, Ibn Taymiyya and Sayyid Qutb, and Islamic fundamentalist groups. The central thesis and contribution of the article lie in highlighting the distinctions between the violent approaches, particularly "sectarian violence," of fundamentalist groups and the teachings of these two thinkers. Undoubtedly, the roots of these groups' theoretical and practical approaches can be found to varying degrees in the texts and statements of Ibn Taymiyya and Qutb. However, a comprehensive, in-depth, and holistic approach is necessary when analyzing and interpreting their texts. Ibn Taymiyya's caution regarding *takfīr* (excommunication) and his criticism of the Kharijites for their extremism in this regard, as well as Qutb's views in works such as *Islam and Global Peace*, reveal significant gaps in both theory and practice between these thinkers and fundamentalist or extremist groups. It can be argued that these groups have disregarded one of the core traditional principles of Sunni political thought: the importance of preserving order, security, and stability, or, in a single phrase, preventing the "splitting of the Muslim community's unity." While the thought of Ibn Taymiyya and Qutb cannot be entirely absolved of religious dogmatism and inflexible doctrines, the practices and theoretical justifications put forth by some fundamentalist groups cannot be considered a precise or faithful interpretation of their ideas and works. Indeed, distinctions can be drawn between Ibn Taymiyya and Sayyid Qutb. For instance, while both condemn terrorist actions, mass killings, and the widespread excommunication of Muslim communities, Qutb appears to advocate for forceful and violent confrontation with the political systems ruling Muslim societies, which he deems "jāhili" (ignorant) and contrary to Islam, aiming to overthrow such regimes. In contrast, in Ibn Taymiyya's thought, aligned with the prevailing Sunni political theory, rebellion or uprising against established rulers, which risks destabilizing the order and stability of Islamic societies, holds little place.

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