

Salafi National Politics Between Society & The State

Salafism, Structural Context, and the Shifting Role
of Two Shaykhs Amidst the Failure of Lebanese
Sunnī Power from 2005 to 2014

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By Phillip William Etches, June 2023

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I, Phillip William Etches, confirm that this thesis is entirely my own original work except where citations indicate a reliance on other authors' existing work or existing documentary evidence.

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Abstract

Given the distinction between Salafism as a discourse and Salafī movements as the actors that interpret it in real life, it seems counterintuitive that academic discussions often rely on that discourse as an explanation of those movements' role in national politics. There is good reason to avoid overemphasising the influence of Salafism—besides other issues, it cannot explain the record of Lebanon's Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islam ash-Shahāl and Shaykh Sālim ar-Rāfi'. As this research shows, those two Salafī shaykhs had inherited the prevailing Najdī or "Wahhabi" Salafī tradition. But their role in Lebanon's national Sunnī politics from 2005 to 2014 was easier to understand as a reflection of their local structural context and place relative to the centres of power in it.

This investigation uses documentary evidence to expand on that point by exploring the Najdī Salafī tradition's conceptions of political framing and identity, the shaykhs' shifting political role, and their relationships to authoritarian Sunnī national leaders whose power consolidated then nearly collapsed from 2005 to 2014. And by analysing media and academic sources through a framework of resource mobilisation and contentious politics theories it shows that the shaykhs' roles changed as those relationships did, thanks to shifting "demobilisation" patterns of co-optation or repression from above. Despite the apparent inflexibility of their Salafī religious roots they were still subject to Lebanon's authoritarian political realities, and only survived by working within the boundaries that its authoritarian Sunnī leaders set.

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A Note on Transliteration & Formatting

The transliteration of Arabic words is inconsistent because of a deliberate choice to manage certain problems. For one, there is no single approach for taking words that were spelled with Arabic letters and spelling them with Latin ones, and as such there is no good reason to transliterate every single letter in the same way. Conversely, many Arabic speakers have their own preferred or widely accepted Latin spellings of words. This is especially visible in Lebanon, where the mixed usage of Arabic, English, and French means that transliterations can create more confusion than clarity. As such, there is only a constant transliteration style with words and names that lack widely accepted usage and meaning like *ash-Shahāl*, *ar-Rāfiʿī*, *ʿaqīda*, and so on. That reliance on custom also extends to the inclusion of *ṣalawāt* marks alongside the Prophet Muḥammad’s ﷺ name—as seen just there.

Chapter 1:

Simplistic Solutions to Complex Problems

Historical Questions & a Wider Discussion

While Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islam ash-Shahāl and Shaykh Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī's Salafī religious roots made them stand out in Lebanon's national politics, the extent to which their political role reflected those roots or that context was ambiguous. The role that they played had been significant enough for the former's passing in Turkey and the latter's defence of their religious background and politics to draw media attention. And as the media's attention suggested, it was plausibly a religious phenomenon: they had roots in a distinct Sunnī Islamic trend known as "Salafism" and its dominant Saudi Najdī or "Wahhabi" iteration.¹ In that reading of the issue, they stood out because their politics were based on extremist leanings.² But there was also a plausible structural explanation for their prominence: they had simply filled a space emerged in Sunnī politics for Salafīs to represent the public from 2005 to 2014 as figures in Lebanon's national politics—a landscape filled with major social movements, political parties, government institutions, and special interests.³ It suggested that their rise as national figures reflected the Lebanese Sunnī establishment's declining public credibility during that period,⁴ and the impact of polarising issues like Syria's crisis on the Sunnī public.⁵

Considered alongside some other complications, the ambiguities surrounding the shaykhs' prominence raised separate questions about what shaped the shaykhs' behaviour. One problem was that there were differences between discourse—what people said and thought about things like Salafism—and that behaviour. Ar-Rāfi'ī, for example, argued that Salafīs were mostly apolitical and that ash-Shahāl's political views were moderate compared to radical organisations like "Islamic State," notwithstanding the fact that his own conduct had

¹ Muhammad Abi Samra, *Ṭarābulus Sāhat Allāh wa Mīna' al-Ḥadātha* (Dar al-Saqi, 2017), 83-84; Eli Hanna, "ash-Shaykh Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī: al-Amīr al-Maḥbūb," *al-Akhbar* (15/05/2012 2012). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/69723>.

² Hazem al-Amin, *as-Salafī al-Yatīm: al-Wajh al-Filasṭīnī lil-Jihād al-ʿĀlimī wal-Qāʿida* (Dar al-Saqi, 2011), 8-9.

³ Charles C. Ragin, "Comparative Sociology and the Comparative Method," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 22, no. 1-2 (1981): 105-07; Dieter Rucht, "The Impact of National Contexts on Social Movement Structures: A Cross-Movement and Cross-National Comparison," in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, ed. Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996), 187.

⁴ Daniel Meier and Rosita Di Peri, "The Sunni Community in Lebanon: From "Harirism" to "Sheikhism"," in *Lebanon Facing the Arab Uprisings: Constraints and Adaptation*, ed. Rosita Di Peri and Daniel Meier (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 48-49.

⁵ Geneive Abdo, *The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 82-87; Robert Rabil, *Salafism in Lebanon: From Apoliticism to Transnational Jihadism* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 10-11.

helped force him to leave Lebanon.⁶ And when ash-Shahāl subsequently died in exile in Turkey while ar-Rāfi‘ī continued to publicly sit with Lebanon’s Sunnī politicians,⁷ there were clearly unstated complications that made their relationship to the Lebanese context hard to describe. The closest one could get to simplifying things was instead with a research question: to what extent did the shaykhs’ national political roles reflect their Salafī roots, or the structure of their context and place in it?

That reflected a wider question about Salafism and Salafīs’ role in national politics, as well as some familiar problems. There has been an ongoing general conversation about Salafism’s political implications and Salafīs’ political role since the early post-9/11 era. It initially concentrated on the former as a distinct body of religious thought that might have influenced movements like al-Qā‘ida, and emphasised its Najdī “Wahhabi” currents. But it also considered those currents’ native Saudi Arabia,⁸ resulting in two productive decades of research into related transnational religious currents and the Saudi local context.⁹ And prior

⁶ Jena al-Dahaybi, "ad-Dā‘ī ash-Shahāl: min ‘Adāwat an-Nizām as-Sūrj ilā al-Mawt bi Turkiyā," *al-Modon* (15/11/2020 2020).

<https://www.almodon.com/politics/2020/11/15/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7>

⁷ Sālīm ar-Rāfi‘ī, "Kalima fī Mu’tamar ad-Dhikrā as-Sanawiya at-Thāmina li Tafjīr Masjidī at-Taqwā was-Salām," *YouTube* (25/08/2021 2021). <https://youtu.be/7FwxexRRmfU>.

⁸ Itzhak Weismann, "Conclusion: Salafism in the Twenty-First Century," in *Salafi Social and Political Movements: National and Transnational Contexts*, ed. Masooda Bano (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 273.

⁹ David Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015); David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009); David Commins, *The Mission and the Kingdom: Wahhabi Power Behind the Saudi Throne* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006); Michael Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith: Migration, Education, and the Wahhabi Mission* (Stanford University Press, 2017); Natana Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Raihan Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shī‘a Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Namira Nahouza, *Wahhabism and the Rise of the New Salafists: Theology, Power, and Sunni Islam* (Croydon, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2018); Mohammed Ayoob and Hasan Kosebalaban, eds., *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia: Wahhabism and the State* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008); Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: a Critical Essay* (Oneonta: Islamic Publications International, 2002); Muhammad Al-Atawneh, *Wahhābī Islam Facing the Challenges of Modernity: Dār al-Iftā in the Modern Saudi State* (Brill, 2010); Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists: The Struggle Over Divine Politics in Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, trans. George Holoch (Presses Universitaires de France, 2011); Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*, trans. Ethan S. Rundell (Yale University Press, 2014); Michael Cook, "The Ḥanbalites of Najd," in *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Bernard Haykel,

studies of Lebanon's movements' have mirrored that. In the wider literature, researchers have detailed their adaptation to local circumstances and social forces,¹⁰ as well as their response to aforementioned issues like weakening Sunnī political leadership and growing Sunnī community anxieties over events in Lebanon and Syria—issues that positioned the Salafis as plausible political alternatives.¹¹

What made things even more frustrating was that at the same time, ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfi'ī, and those questions about context also mirrored general challenges that arise when trying to explain Salafis' role in politics. The shaykhs were known to have incendiary personal views despite being publicly compromising,¹² and the apparent contradiction may be normal. While some analysts frame Salafis' religious roots as sources of hostility to wider society and liberal values,¹³ critics have attacked those theories as reductions that ignore Salafis' diversity and actual religious views,¹⁴ reflections of prejudicial assumptions about Muslims and Salafis,¹⁵ or products of demand for simple answers that ignore academic or ethical

Thomas Hegghammer, and Stephane Lacroix, eds., *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change* (Cambridge University Press: 2015).

¹⁰ Tine Gade, *Sunni City: Tripoli from Islamist Utopia to the Lebanese 'Revolution'* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 17, 21-22; Raphaël Lefèvre, *Jihad in the City: Militant Islam and Contentious Politics in Tripoli* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 28-30; Zoltan Pall, *Salafism in Lebanon: Local and Transnational Movements* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 157-58.

¹¹ Rabil, *Salafism in Lebanon*, 4, 46-48, 239-40; Adham Saouli, "Lebanon's Salafis: Opportunities and Constraints in a Divided Society," in *Salafism After the Arab Awakening: Contending with People's Power*, ed. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 59.

¹² Bernard Rougier, *Sunni Tragedy in the Middle East: Northern Lebanon from al-Qaeda to ISIS*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 181-82, 202-04.

¹³ Gilles Kepel and Antoine Jardin, *Terror in France: The Rise of Jihad in the West*, English ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 4; Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* (New York City Policy Department, 2007), 32.

<https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/Justice/20090000.Radicalization.in.the.West-Statement.of.Clarification.pdf>; Cheryl Bernard, *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies*

(Santa Monica: RAND, 2004), xv, 2-3; Alejandro Beutel, William Braniff, and Christopher Lee, *Debates Among Salafi Muslims About Use of Violence: Religious Concepts Central to Arguments For and Against Violence* (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2017), 1-2.

https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_DebatesAmongSalafiMuslimsAboutViolence_SummaryReport_May2017.pdf.

¹⁴ Théo Blanc, "Salafism: Challenged by Radicalization? Violence, Politics, and the Advent of Post-Salafism," in *Salafism: Challenged by Radicalization? Violence, Politics, and the Advent of Post-Salafism*, ed. Théo Blanc and Olivier Roy (European University Institute, 2021), 1-10.

¹⁵ Marc Sageman, "The Stagnation in Terrorism Research," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 4 (2014): 566-67; Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernando, "Rediscovering the "Everyday" Muslim," *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5, no. 2 (2015): 70-71, 82.

standards.¹⁶ But even with emerging research, like that in Bano's recent edited volume which shows how complex Salafī attitudes and behaviour can shift with their local circumstances,¹⁷ the literature has not established the impact and processes of Salafī agency,¹⁸ particularly as Salafīs exercise it when deciding how to orient themselves towards the state institutions that dominate the domestic context.¹⁹ There are links between Salafīs' political role and that context, but "how" and "how much" those defining institutions and those links shape their role remain unclear. And while a study of ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī's cases posed unique challenges like Coronavirus, ash-Shahāl's 2020 passing, and Lebanon's socio-economic collapse,²⁰ those challenges did not make them outliers—if anything, they highlighted data limitations that can arise with unreachable movements or when forecasting future developments. And from an academic standpoint, they were a reminder of the need for accessible approaches to research.

This thesis responds to those questions and challenges with a hypothesis: Salafī actors' role in national politics is best understood as a reflection of their structural context and place relative to the centres of power in it, because those centres of power define the mix of opportunities and constraints which will shape the role of marginal actors like Salafī movements. Lebanon's Sunnī political landscape as a historical test case for that hypothesis. As that national Sunnī order grew increasingly unstable from 2005 to 2014, ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī's roles shifted to reflect the changing structure of their political context and their place relative to its centres of power. That explanation is simpler than what one might find in the historical studies that describe the enmeshment of Lebanon's Salafī and Islamic activist movements in Tripoli's social fabric and their reputations for fundamentalism or

¹⁶ Thomas Hegghammer, "Reviewed Work: Hatred's Kingdom: How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism by Dore Gold," review of *Hatred's Kingdom: How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism*, Dore Gold, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 2 (2007): 231; Sabine Damir-Geilsdorf and Mira Menzfeld, "Methodological and Ethical Challenges in Empirical Approaches to Salafism: Introduction," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 9, no. 2 (2020): 143-44.

¹⁷ Masooda Bano, ed., *Salafi Social and Political Movements: National and Transnational Contexts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 2-3.

¹⁸ Guy Robert Eyre, "Quietist 'Scholastic' Salafism in Morocco since the Arab Spring," in *Salafi Social and Political Movements: National and Transnational Contexts*, ed. Masooda Bano (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 89-90.

¹⁹ Eyre, "Quietist 'Scholastic' Salafism in Morocco since the Arab Spring," 93-94.

²⁰ Adam Gallagher, "Amid Historic Crisis, Has a New Hope Emerged in Lebanon?," *United States Institute of Peace* (23/06/2022). <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/06/amid-historic-crisis-has-new-hope-emerged-lebanon>.

violence.²¹ The ensuing research is also less detailed than studies of intra-Salafī religious disputes,²² the social factors behind key figures' political role,²³ or Salafism's history as a source of identity amidst social forces like secularisation and anti-immigrant sentiment.²⁴ And it will ignore well-studied dynamics like communities' generational divides,²⁵ social forces like the economic pressures on communities,²⁶ or the interpersonal interactions between movements' members and their context.²⁷

Despite their limits, that simple hypothesis and the ensuing research are enough to explain the problems surrounding Salafī figures like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī, as well as the role that they play in a local landscape of national politics. This introduction goes on to show that it pays necessary attention to Salafīs' context and the causal processes behind their behaviour, using a structural explanation based on theories of resource mobilisation and contentious politics. And as shown by later chapters' explorations of the shaykhs' Najdī Salafī tradition and Lebanese context, terms and concepts from the secular academic tradition can produce satisfactory explanations of Salafīs' behaviour, even if understanding the shaykhs as people requires a much deeper grasp of Islam and their relationship to it. And it is possible to do

²¹ Lefèvre, *Jihad in the City*, 11-12, 430-31; Fida Itani, *al-Jihādiyyūn fī Lubnān: min "Quwwāt al-Fajr" ilā "Fataḥ al-Islām"* (Beirut: Dar as-Saqi, 2008), 82-83.

²² See Assaf Moghadam, "The Salafi-Jihad as a Religious Ideology," *CTC Sentinel* 1, no. 3 (2008): 14-15; Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 84-86; Cole Bunzel, "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State," *Brookings Analysis Papers* (March 2015): 7-10. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-ideology-of-the-Islamic-State-1.pdf>.

²³ See Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus'ab Al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 24-27; Thomas Hegghammer, *The Caravan: Abdallah Azzam and the Rise of Global Jihad* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 463-65.

²⁴ Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, "Salafism In France: Ideology, Practices and Contradictions," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (Oxford University Press, 2014), 365-66, 71-72.

²⁵ Olivier Roy, "France's Oedipal Islamist Complex," *Foreign Policy* (07/01/2016 2016). <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/07/frances-oedipal-islamist-complex-charlie-hebdo-islamic-state-isis/>.

²⁶ Mohammad Abu Rumman, *I am a Salafi: A Study of the Actual and Imagined Identities of Salafis* (Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2014), 38-39; Frederic Wehrey and Anouar Boukhars, *Salafism in the Maghreb: Politics, Piety, and Militancy* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 141-42.

²⁷ Anabel Inge, *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman: Paths to Conversion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 222-24; Martijn de Koning, "Changing Worldviews and Friendships: An Exploration of the Life Stories of Two Female Salafis in the Netherlands," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 410-12; Sabine Damir-Geilsdorf and Mira Menzfeld, "Who Are 'The' Salafis? Insights into Lifeworlds of Persons Connected to Salafis(m) in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6 (2017): 34-40; Terje Østebø, *Localising Salafism: Religious Change among Oromo Muslims in Bale, Ethiopia* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 311-12, 20-22; Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, *Salafism Goes Global: From the Gulf to the French Balieues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 3-5; Olivier Roy, *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State*, trans. Cynthia Schoch (London: Hurst, 2017), 3-6.

that with existing documentary evidence that indicates ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī’s role from 2005 to 2014, and a comparative methodology which links that role to their Lebanese context rather than their religious roots. Although that leaves some space for a further discussion at the end, successive chapters show that the political role of Salafīs like the two shaykhs can be understood in structural terms as reflections of their context and place relative to the centres of power in it.

Discourse, Actors, & Conceptual Boundaries Between Them

Salafism as a Discourse

A doctoral thesis is a good format for asking and addressing questions about Salafīs’ role in national politics—the issue, after all, represents a general problem, and simply describing Salafism and Salafīs is not a satisfactory solution on its own. The literature can still explain Salafism in simple terms as a revivalist Sunnī Islamic *discourse*, but that defines a wider transnational Salafī social movement rather than the specific *political actors* that appear to say and do stuff in national politics. And when it comes to what Salafīs will really say and do in that national landscape, the problem is that as political actors they can interpret the discourse and its implications as they like, while being trapped in a local context that pressures them to act on it in certain ways. Taken together, that raises a basic problem when explaining Salafī movements’ role in politics: Salafīs can ignore ideas but not local circumstances, placing a boundary between them and the discourse than made them seem distinct in the first place.

That discourse-actor boundary is not self-evident in a basic description of the Salafī tradition’s core religious ideas. The tradition’s foundational creed (*‘aqīda*) centrally emphasises the issue of *tawhīd*—the unitary nature of God—and the need to avoid acts of disbelief, particularly via accidentally associating things or people with God (*shirk*).²⁸ But Salafīs stand out by stressing their rejection of new religious ideas and actions as corrupting innovations (*bid‘a*), and adopting strict interpretations of Islam’s revelations and original

²⁸ For perspectives on *tawhīd* and *shirk* that fit into the Wahhabi/Najdī tradition, an accessible English example is Yasir Qadhi, *A Critical Study of Shirk: An Explanation of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s Kash al-Shubuhāt* (Birmingham: al-Hidaayah, 2003).

traditions as universal guides.²⁹ And a wider methodology (*manhaj*) turns that ‘*aqīda* into action, stressing the example of the early Muslim community’s first three generations of “righteous predecessors” known as the *salaf as-ṣāliḥ*, hence the name *Salafī*.³⁰

And it is worth admitting that in isolation, expanding on Salafism’s stated roots strengthens its claims as the revival of a pure Islamic tradition. Intellectually, it appears to emulate those first generations and rely on foundational texts, avoiding later Islamic scholarly developments.³¹ Historically, that links the resulting movement and name to the Abbasid-era *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* movement. It also entangles it with Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal’s (d. 855CE) disputes with philosophical or rationalist theologians, and later refinements on related ideas from figures like Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328CE). And contemporary Salafīs present themselves as the authentic inheritors of correct understandings of *tawḥīd* from that historical tradition, unlike deviators like Ṣufīs, Shī‘a, and other Muslims whose theological trends were or became corrupt.³²

But a closer look at Salafīs’ religious lineage and attitudes reveals divisions amongst them instead of a unified tradition. Many Salafīs defer to a more recent Najdī “Wahhabi” tradition of Saudi Arabia and its founder, Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792CE).³³ Besides his

²⁹ Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (Oxford University Press, 2014), 38-39.

³⁰ Joas Wagemakers, *Salafism in Jordan: Political Islam in a Quietist Community* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 27-30, 40-45. Professor Wagemakers was very helpful and happy to answer his emails, which was very real of him.

³¹ Emad Hamdeh, *Salafism and Traditionalism: Scholarly Authority in Modern Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 31-32.

³² Raihan Ismail, *Rethinking Salafism: The Transnational Networks of Salafi ‘Ulama in Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 12-14.

³³ Abu Khadeejah Abdul-Wahid, "Defining Salafiyyah And Its Call (Da’wah): Islam, the Sunnah, the Salaf and the terms: Salafi, Athari, Ahlus-Sunnah and Ahlul-Hadeeth. (Part 1)," *AbuKhadeejah.com* (21/01/2021 2021): 8. <https://abukhadeejah.com/defining-salafiyyah-and-its-call-dawah-islam-the-sunnah-salafi-athari-ahlus-sunnah-ahlul-hadeeth-part-1/>.

writings on *tawhīd*, *shirk*,³⁴ *takfīr* (excommunication),³⁵ and sectarian issues,³⁶ his understandings of figures like Ibn Taymiyyah influence those circles, as do Saudi scholars who can speak on his ideas.³⁷ But while later chapters show that Najdī Salafism is salient for figures like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī, it does not capture movements linked to other figures like Muḥammad ash-Shawkānī (d. 1834CE).³⁸ And Salafis' authority is contested. While popular ideas in Najdī Salafism like *al-walā wal-barā* (loyalty and dissociation) support Salafi denunciations of outsiders,³⁹ Sunnī scholars from other backgrounds similarly embrace ideas of religious revival and purity while disputing Salafism's legitimacy.⁴⁰ And as noted later, there are significant disagreements in the movement about political engagement.

All that is to say that there are ambiguities and discontinuities, which are hard to reconcile with Salafī claims of unique authenticity. Salafis emphasise a pure '*aqīda* and legitimate *manhaj*, but the former is a generic term while directing worship towards God is a foundational Islamic concept, and the latter partly resembles orthodox Islamic law.⁴¹ One might clarify things by emphasising links to Ibn Taymiyyah or Ibn Ḥanbal's thinking,⁴² but that begs questions of why only some of those figures' views were absorbed—Ibn Taymiyyah's views on Sufism, for example, were more nuanced than some Salafis' anti-Ṣufī

³⁴ Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, Yāsir Burhāmī, and Ṭal'at Marzūq, *Kashf ash-Shubuhāt* (Rabat: Dar al-Iman, 2008); Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *al-Uṣūl ath-Thalātha wa Udillatuhā wa Yalīhā al-Qawā'id al-Arba'a* (Riyadh: Dar al-Watan, N.D.); Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb at-Tawhīd*, Modern Reprint ed. (Maktaba 'Ibad ar-Rahman, Maktabat al-'Ulum wal-Hukm, 2008); 'Abd al-Raḥman bin Muḥammad bin Qāsim an-Najdī, *ad-Durar as-Sunniyya fil-Ajūba an-Najdiyya*, Sixth ed. (N.P., 1995). <https://waqfeya.net/book.php?bid=7836>.

³⁵ Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Matan Nawāqid al-Islām* (N.P., N.D.). <https://www.noor-book.com/en/ebook-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85--pdf>.

³⁶ Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Risāla fir-Radd 'alā ar-Rāfiḍa* (Mecca: Dar al-Muamin al-Turath, 2009).

³⁷ Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *The Foundations of Islam*, trans. Abū Rumaysah (Birmingham: Dār as-Sunnah Publishers, 2010), 22-29; AFECC Scotland, "Shaykh Badr Ibn Alee Al-Utaybee | 3 Fundamental Principles (1 of 6)," *YouTube* (26/07/2016 2016). <https://youtu.be/lptCxfDWUjo>.

³⁸ Frank Griffel, "What Do We Mean By 'Salafi'? Connecting Muḥammad 'Abduh with Egypt's Nūr Party in Islam's Contemporary Intellectual History," *Die Welt des Islams* 55, no. 2 (2015): 209.

³⁹ Muḥammad bin Sāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl ath-Thalātha: Li Sharḥ al-Islām Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb* (Alexandria: Dar al-Imān, 2001), 34-36; Abdul-Wahid, "Defining Salafiyyah And Its Call (Da'wah): Islam, the Sunnah, the Salaf and the terms: Salafi, Athari, Ahlus-Sunnah and Ahlul-Hadeeth. (Part 1)," 8.

⁴⁰ Nuh Ha Mim Keller, "Who or What is a Salafi? Is Their Approach Valid?," *Masud.co.uk* (N.D. 1995). <http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/nuh/salafi.htm>.

⁴¹ Philipp Bruckmayr and Jan-Peter Hartung, "Introduction: Challenges from 'The Periphery'? – Salafī Islam Outside the Arab World. Spotlights on Wider Asia," *Die Welt des Islams* 60, no. 2-3 (2020): 147.

⁴² Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," 40; Griffel, "What Do We Mean By 'Salafi'?", 204-05.

hostility,⁴³ and he represented only one branch of Ḥanbalī thought.⁴⁴ Figures like ash-Shawkānī emerged outside the Najdī tradition,⁴⁵ whose founder Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb himself differed from Ibn Taymiyyah.⁴⁶ Salafīs’ interpretive legal approaches (*ijtihād*) like ar-Rāfi‘ī’s are similarly unhelpful, yielding rulings that will reflect context rather than a rigid received tradition.⁴⁷ And “Salafī” also captures some late Ottoman and Colonial era modernist trends.⁴⁸ As such, there seems to only be space for an intellectually cautious explanation of Salafism: given the resistance to generalities like *bid‘a*, it is partly relative and better understood by its opposition to other developments.⁴⁹ Outsiders can describe Salafism generally in absolute religious terms, but it will be difficult to define individual movements and their role in society by looking to the religious generalities alone.

Those ambiguities mean that describing Salafīs’ nonnegotiable views does not really capture how they will all relate to wider society, inviting a cautious view of Salafism as something that outside observers can understand best as a discourse which identifies a broad movement. Salafism and Salafīs do claim authenticity in competitions for Sunnī religious authority, and in the wider dispute about what an Islamic revival resembles, revives, keeps, or discards, that resembles yet another branch in the Islamic “discursive tradition” that defines Muslims’ present-day practice while linking them to Islam’s values, history, future, and community.⁵⁰ But a broad characterisation allows only a broad diagnosis: Salafism is a *discourse* that identifies a contemporary Salafī *social movement* built from identifiable groups with shared ideas, objectives, and behaviour that differ from wider society and the

⁴³ Arjan Post, "A Glimpse of Sufism from the Circle of Ibn Taymiyya: An Edition and Translation of al-Ba‘labakkī’s (d. 734/1333) Epistle on the Spiritual Way (Risālat al-Sulūk)," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 5 (2016): 159-60.

⁴⁴ Abdul Hakim Murad, "Islamic Spirituality: the Forgotten Revolution," *Masud.co.uk* (N.D.). <http://masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/fgtnrevo.htm>.

⁴⁵ Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkani* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 225-26.

⁴⁶ Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 250.

⁴⁷ Sālim ar-Rāfi‘ī, *Aḥkām al-Aḥwāl ash-Shakhṣiyya lil Muslimīn fīl-Gharb* (Beirut: Dar ibn Hazm, 2015), 29-34.

⁴⁸ Griffel, "What Do We Mean By “Salafī”?," 219.

⁴⁹ Jonathan Brown, "Even If It's Not True It's True: Using Unreliable Ḥadīths in Sunni Islam," *Islamic Law and Society* 18, no. 1 (2011): 41; Philipp Bruckmayr, "Salafī Challenge and Māturīdī Response: Contemporary Disputes over the Legitimacy of Māturīdī kalām," *Die Welt des Islams* 60, no. 2-3 (2020): 302-03; Emad Hamdeh, "Qur’ān and Sunna or the “Madhhabs”? A Salafī Polemic Against Islamic Legal Tradition," *Islamic Law and Society* 24, no. 3 (2017): 214-15.

⁵⁰ Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle* 17, no. 2 (2009): 20-21.

institutions of a social environment.⁵¹ And it leaves questions of what role those groups will play in society.

Salafī Actors in Context & a Discourse-Actor Boundary

If Salafism's discourse situates shaykhs like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī in a wider social movement, then one implication is that a boundary separates it and the Salafī actors who form movements with observable political behaviour. That political quality is not some artificial thing that outside observers imagine, even if the literature has struggled to frame it in shared terms or agree on its influence over Salafī movements. Haykel argues that unless one adopts unduly rigid notions of politics that deliberately exclude religious actors and their ideas, Salafism itself informs "a distinctive form of engagement with the world" that will have political implications.⁵² But Lauzière separates that long-running religious discourse from political movements that are not always meaningfully linked to it.⁵³ Going further, Weismann makes a more cautious argument that Salafism evolved with its adherents in their context, forming a diverse tradition with political elements and branches.⁵⁴ And Bishara reinforces those latter two, warning against imagining "a stream of ideas and traditions with its own autonomous history" or ignoring Salafis' active role as people who are responsible for re-imagining it and its sources.⁵⁵

Between those disagreements, there is space to argue that Salafism is a political phenomenon and Salafī movements specifically are political actors. That overlaps with a general idea that Muslim politics covers communities' underlying "rules and discourse,"⁵⁶ which Salafism's idealised "artificial social order" can inform.⁵⁷ And Haykel's position works—discourse, actors, and behaviour can be distinct but entangled, as Meijer indicates

⁵¹ David Snow, Sarah Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, "Mapping the Terrain," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David Snow, Sarah Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 6.

⁵² Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," 34-35.

⁵³ Henri Lauzière, "The Construction of Salafiyya: Reconsidering Salafism from the Perspective of Conceptual History," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 3 (2010): 372, 75.

⁵⁴ Itzhak Weismann, "A Perverted Balance: Modern Salafism between Reform and Jihād," *Die Welt des Islams* 57, no. 1 (2017): 36-37.

⁵⁵ Azmi Bishara, *On Salafism: Concepts and Contexts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022), 2-3, 6-8.

⁵⁶ Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, Second ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 7.

⁵⁷ Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 267.

when discussing Salafism's "doctrine," "appeal," and "relationship with politics and violence."⁵⁸ But their differences make it easier to describe Salafism's core concerns like *tawhīd*, *shirk*, and *bid'ā* as a political issue, while treating the behavioural implications as a separate one.⁵⁹ That separation suggests that Salafī movements are best understood as "political actors" who decide the behaviour that affects the rules and discourses of political life.⁶⁰

When discussing observable political behaviour, that distinction between discourse and actors suggests a conceptual boundary separating Salafism as the former and Salafī movements as the latter. Salafism might resemble a puritanical "great tradition" wherein ideas enjoy more influence than in an informal "little tradition,"⁶¹ or as one of Islam's "programmatic discourses" distinct from "practices of unlettered Muslims."⁶² But non-Salafīs are sceptical: some Islamic scholars question whether adherents' personal concerns like perceived authenticity outweigh religious influences,⁶³ and there are academic arguments that Salafīs embrace Islamic scholarship incoherently to canonise their views.⁶⁴ And Salafism's rigid discourse does not prevent most Salafīs from being flexible. Hostility to Sufism, for example, contrasts with calls for courtesy towards Ṣufīs themselves,⁶⁵ while ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī's Lebanese movement would show a gap between Salafism's intellectual foundations and practical manifestations.⁶⁶ Researchers can argue that Salafism offers "floating" religious discourses about ideal activities and obligations,⁶⁷ or defer to earlier

⁵⁸ Roel Meijer, "Introduction," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

⁵⁹ Joas Wagemakers, "Salafism: Generalisation, Conceptualisation and Categorisation," in *Contextualising Salafism and Salafī Jihadism*, ed. Magnus Ranstorp (Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism, 2020), 22-23; Meijer, "Introduction," 17.

⁶⁰ Frederick W. Frey, "The Problem of Actor Designation in Political Analysis," *Comparative Politics* 17, no. 2 (1985): 127-29.

⁶¹ Ronald Lukens-Bull, "Between Text and Practice: Considerations in the Anthropological Study of Islam," *Marburg Journal of Religion* 4, no. 2 (1999): 4.

⁶² Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," 21.

⁶³ Abdul Hakim Murad, *Travelling Home: Essays on Islam in Europe* (Cambridge: The Quilliam Press, 2020), 137-39.

⁶⁴ Wasim Shiliwala, "Constructing a Textual Tradition: Salafī Commentaries on al-'Aqīda al-ṭahāwiyya," *Die Welt des Islams* 58, no. 4 (2018): 468-69.

⁶⁵ Abu Usamah At-Thahabi, "Hadith 38—Quality Not Quantity," *MuslimCentral.com* (27/07/2022 2022). <https://muslimcentral.com/abu-usamah-at-thahabi-hadith-38-quality-not-quantity/>.

⁶⁶ 'Abd al-Ghānī 'Imād, *as-Salafiyya was-Salafiyyūn, al-Huwiyya wal-Mughāyara: Qirā'a fī at-Tajriba al-Lubnāniyya* (Centre of Civilisation for the Development of Islamic Thought, 2016), 25.

⁶⁷ Roy, *Globalized Islam*, 7.

general theories that the ideals differ from the actors who imposed or accept them within everyday constraints.⁶⁸ But that still leaves a distinct gap between an ideal discourse and actors who shape it, suggesting that the former never truly controls the latter.

A detailed explanation of political behaviour that factors in Salafism as a discourse and Salafīs as actors should either bridge that boundary or make the issue simpler. The boundary reinforces a sense of Salafism and Salafī actors like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī as social movements. But social movement theories offer conflicting views about how to manage it, leaving a causal question: is behaviour discursive—reflecting actors’ underlying views or desires to challenge society’s symbolic norms and values—or do material issues of resources and outside pressure shape it more?⁶⁹ For outsiders, Salafism and Salafīs’ contested religious foundations—and sceptical about their motivations—suggest the latter. While the movement has a “collective consciousness,” its attachment to wider society depends on real people that have their own private thoughts and must balance their subjective conceptions of values against subjective readings of social context.⁷⁰ Stated differently, Salafī actors “are not texts generated by other texts but socio-political phenomena.”⁷¹ With shaykhs like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī and their politics, that invites a polite fiction which concentrates on observable things: Salafism’s fundamentals make it an Islamic religious phenomenon, while Salafī movements are essentially just actors in an observable context who can be understood by their place relative to its key actors or forces.

A Literature of Typologies & Its Issues

The literature has relied heavily on typologies of Salafism to explain Salafīs’ politics, but those leave questions about the causal processes linking discourse to actors and the influence of context, and they also struggle to explain relatively inaccessible cases like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī. The academic discussion began in earnest with Wiktorowicz’s 2006 *Anatomy of the Salafi Movement*—an academic journal article that relied on the logic of

⁶⁸ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff, Fourth ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 34-37, 168-69, 209.

⁶⁹ Fred Kniss and Gene Burns, "Religious Movements," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David Snow, Sarah Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 704-05, 06-07.

⁷⁰ Emile Durkheim and Steven Lukes, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, trans. W.D. Halls, First American ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 35-36, 171.

⁷¹ Bishara, *On Salafism: Concepts and Contexts*, 148.

“new social movements” theories to build typologies of movements based on divisions in Salafism’s discourse. Wiktorowicz’s approach links movements to one of three *manhaj* types,⁷² which manifested themselves in historical Saudi Salafi currents.⁷³ The premise is that Salafis share an ‘*aqīda*’ but each *manhaj* informs different responses to “issues and problems,” producing those three categories. First, “purists” or quietists’ *manhaj* emphasises doctrinal purity and proselytization while opposing political action. Second, the “politico” or *ḥarakī manhaj* advocates protest within and against the established socio-political order. And third, a *jihādī manhaj* supports violence against political orders that deviate from correct belief.⁷⁴ All told, it describes Salafis and Salafism from a distance at which they are nationally visible alongside other social movements, state institutions, and similar actors. And it frames the behaviour of the former as a reflection or product of the latter, rather than establishing how or how much interpretation happens.

Wiktorowicz’s approach and findings are not universally accepted. The issue is not that there is a single fundamental flaw, but rather that it is not a solution to every problem. One sign of that is the fact that some researchers accept it without significant comment.⁷⁵ For them, it offers an imperfect but sensible framework,⁷⁶ or they find that their own findings and resulting distinctions between Salafis mirrored the 2006 article.⁷⁷ There are criticisms: classes based on *manhaj* are more rigid than practicalities allow,⁷⁸ Wiktorowicz made *jihādī*

⁷² Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006): 214.

⁷³ Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 207-08.

⁷⁴ Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 214, 16-17, 21-23, 25-27.

⁷⁵ Fabio Merone, "Between Social Contention and Takfirism: the Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadi Movement in Tunisia," *Mediterranean Politics* 22, no. 1 (2017): 72; Fuad Aliyev, "Situating Salafi Islam in Azerbaijan," *Die Welt des Islams* 60, no. 2-3 (2020): 280, 82-83; Monica Marks, "Youth Politics and Tunisian Salafism: Understanding the Jihadi Current," *Mediterranean Politics* 18, no. 1 (2013): 109-11.

⁷⁶ Nahouza, *Wahhabism and the Rise of the New Salafists*, 78-80; Stefano Torelli, Fabio Merone, and Francesco Cavatorta, "Salafism in Tunisia: Challenges and Opportunities for Democratization," *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 4 (2012): 144-45; Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," 34-35, 48-49.

⁷⁷ Amel Boubekeur, *Salafism and Radical Politics in Postconflict Algeria*, Carnegie Papers, (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008), 3. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/salafism_radical_politics_algeria.pdf; Samir Amghar, "Salafism and Radicalisation of Young European Muslims," in *European Islam: Challenges for Public Policy and Society*, ed. Samir Amghar, Amel Boubekeur, and Michael Emerson (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, 2007), 40-45, 50-51.

⁷⁸ Bruckmayr and Hartung, "Introduction," 160-61, 65-67; Francesco Cavatorta, "The Rise and Fall of Uncivil Society? Salafism in Tunisia After the Fall of Ben Ali," *Middle East Institute* (06/10/2015 2015). <https://www.mei.edu/publications/rise-and-fall-uncivil-society-salafism-tunisia-after-fall-ben-ali>.

thinking seem further from other Salafis than it was,⁷⁹ or he narrowly viewed politics or overemphasised religious movements' political character.⁸⁰ There are also flexibility issues: does it capture cases that fit multiple categories,⁸¹ diverging understandings of *tawhīd*, or differing source interpretations when defining right practice?⁸² And typologies can seem awkward when Salafism is a dynamic discourse and distinctions between movements' approaches to politics can blur as their circumstances and behaviour change.⁸³ For researchers that have limited data that last point will stick out as an issue—they may be working with relatively inaccessible cases like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī, trying to forecast future events, or managing some other data problem.

It should be noted that scholars mostly accept Wiktorowicz's general approach. The reasons are obvious: it is possible to divide people into a typology based on what they observably said and did. Wagemakers refines the categories, adding quietists who are distant or loyal from the state and politicians who embrace or reject party politics,⁸⁴ satisfying more authors.⁸⁵ Pall's study of Lebanese Salafis—including ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī—argues that Wiktorowicz mistakenly frames some Salafis as totally withdrawn from public life,⁸⁶ and responds to that mistake by dividing them according to credal and legal views on rigid

⁷⁹ Joas Wagemakers, "A Purist Jihadi-Salafi: The Ideology of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 2 (2009): 283; Wehrey and Boukhars, *Salafism in the Maghreb*, 12-16.

⁸⁰ Inge, *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman*, 10-11; Jacob Olidort, *The Politics of "Quietist" Salafism* (Brookings, 2015), 5. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Brookings-Analysis-Paper_Jacob-Olidort-Inside_Final_Web.pdf; Laurent Bonnefoy, "How Transnational is Salafism In Yemen?," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (Oxford University Press, 2014), 337-38.

⁸¹ Clemens Holzgruber, "Pierre Vogel's and Bilal Philips's Criticisms of Jihadism," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 9, no. 2 (2020): 169; Sindre Bangstad and Marius Linge, "'Da'wa is Our Identity'—Salafism and IslamNet's Rationales for Action in a Norwegian Context," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 4, no. 2 (2015): 191; Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 9, 10-11; Terje Østebø, "Growth and Fragmentation: The Salafi Movement in Bale, Ethiopia," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 345.

⁸² Martijn de Koning, "The 'Other' Political Islam: Understanding Salafi Politics," in *Whatever Happened to the Islamists?: Salafis, Heavy Metal Muslims, and the Lure of Consumerist Islam*, ed. Olivier Roy and Amel Boubekeur (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 158, 61.

⁸³ Wehrey and Boukhars, *Salafism in the Maghreb*, 17-18.

⁸⁴ Joas Wagemakers, "Revisiting Wiktorowicz: Categorising and Defining the Branches of Salafism," in *Salafism After the Arab Awakening: Contending with People's Power*, ed. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 15-18.

⁸⁵ Amir Sheikhzadegan, "From Rigid to Moderate Salafism: Paths of (Re-)Conversion to Islam among Activists of a Muslim Organisation in Switzerland," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 9, no. 2 (2020): 198.

⁸⁶ Zoltan Pall, *Lebanese Salafis Between the Gulf and Europe: Development, Fractionalization and Transnational Networks of Salafism in Lebanon* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 24-25.

obedience to rulers and the practicality of working in or outside the system.⁸⁷ Hegghammer suggests that religious typologies ignore actors' fluidity, and compares Salafis' rationales for certain courses of action.⁸⁸ And Brachman emphasises perceived religious-legal differences,⁸⁹ drawing criticism that his distinctions are unclear, and questions of how his and others' intended audience of security practitioners informed them.⁹⁰ Of course, it and some other studies' narrow focus is logical—Maher's distinction of "violent rejectionists," for example, really only distinguishes *jihādī* actors from other Salafī movements, but it is also explaining jihadism.⁹¹ And taken together, those other studies show that typologies largely held firm—they, too, are showing that one can reasonably divide and categorise different actors by looking at available evidence of what they said and did.

But those typologies still leave general questions about the discourse-actor boundary and the implications of actors' context. That local context appears especially significant with Wiktorowicz's 2006 study. In it, a focus on Saudi Arabia potentially excluded other cases,⁹² and invited questions about how its pressures shaped Salafis political orientation. It was arguably a more difficult issue to ignore in the case of Saudi Arabia, too. Historically, Saudi authorities co-opted a Najdī Salafī discourse to preserve stability,⁹³ and the resulting social order often aligned with many Salafis' outlook.⁹⁴ For Wiktorowicz's purists, that left an uncertain distinction between religious discourse and pragmatism, especially given the positions that leading figures received through state political accommodations and a social order that they saw little reason to change.⁹⁵ And with *ḥarakī* movements there was a question about the influence of external actors like the Muslim Brotherhood, disruptive modernising forces that coincided with upsurges in *ḥarakī* concerns about state

⁸⁷ Pall, *Lebanese Salafis Between the Gulf and Europe*, 25-28.

⁸⁸ Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries?," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (Oxford University Press, 2014), 259, 62-63.

⁸⁹ Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2009), 26.

⁹⁰ Wagemakers, "Salafism: Generalisation, Conceptualisation and Categorisation," 32-33.

⁹¹ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 10-11.

⁹² Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 207.

⁹³ Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 207-08; Abdulaziz al-Fahad, "Ornamental Constitutionalism: The Saudi Basic Law of Governance," *Yale Journal of International Law* 30, no. 2 (2005): 378, 85.

⁹⁴ Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (Columbia University Press, 2016), 199-200.

⁹⁵ Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, Second ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 120.

responsibilities, and regional shifts.⁹⁶ It all leaves an obvious question that will be familiar to anyone with experience in the social sciences: could things would have been different if the actors' circumstances had been different?

And the similarities to "new social movement" theories present an academic issue: it is difficult to use the logic of typologies with cases where limited data is available, like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī. Those theories legitimised a supposed link between discourse to behaviour by emphasising politics' discursive quality, and assuming that movements find sources of political power, acquiescence to them, or opposition against them symbolically significant.⁹⁷ But that assumes that movements are persuasive actors which coexist rather than competing or reconciling with local sources of power.⁹⁸ Those assumptions work if Muslim politics is, arguably, about language—things people say, and the symbolism of things they do.⁹⁹ And that symbolism was significant for Salafī movements like the Saudi Ṣaḥwā—mentioned in the second chapter—whose members distinguished themselves from wider society with distinct clothing and conduct.¹⁰⁰ But critics suggest that new social movement theories ignored actors' place in context when relying on wealthy middle class movements, which could disregard the material concerns of resource-poor counterparts.¹⁰¹ And in divisions of movements into "waves" that reflect emerging ideas just as Wiktorowicz's typology identifies movements that espoused "purist," "politico," and *jihādī* beliefs, critics see an ignorance of actors' continuous internal debates about how to interpret ideas.¹⁰² No actor automatically responds to context,¹⁰³ and with detailed descriptions of actors'

⁹⁶ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 69; Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 222.

⁹⁷ Alberto Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements," *Social Research* 52, no. 4 (1985): 793-94, 97; Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, ed. John Keane and Paul Mier (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 45-47, 49.

⁹⁸ Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 164-66; Carl Boggs, *Social Movements and Political Power: Emerging Forms of Radicalism in the West* (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1986), 52-54.

⁹⁹ Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 5-6.

¹⁰⁰ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 60-61.

¹⁰¹ Micaela di Leonardo, *Exotics at Home: Anthropologies, Others, and American Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 111-12; Nelson A. Pichardo, "New Social Movements: A Critical Review," *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997): 417-18; Craig Calhoun, ed., *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 22-23.

¹⁰² Marc Edelman, "Social Movements: Changing Paradigms and Forms of Politics," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001): 294, 96-97; Nancy Whittier, *Feminist Generations: The Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 77-79.

¹⁰³ Jon Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 165-68.

observable discourse and behaviour, precise causal processes are not necessarily important.¹⁰⁴ But when there are only limited details about actors' ideas or actions, identifying crucial missing pieces and finding ways to work within those limits becomes important, and it is hard to do that with the new social movement theories that largely overlook questions of cause and context.

A comparison to "process" formulations of social movement theory suggests that those problems are solvable with a "structural explanation" that considers actors' apparent relationship to a describable structure. That ignores Salafis' religious identity, but grounds things in tangible structures of local context—cultural, legal, institutional, and other sources of opportunities for action or constraints that limit it.¹⁰⁵ Salafis' ideals will shape perceptions and responses to that structure,¹⁰⁶ while different Salafi movements can relate to context similarly, resembling each other.¹⁰⁷ And as other research shows, findings can indicate changes in Salafism's discourse of what is right conduct, without necessarily forecasting behaviour.¹⁰⁸ But what matters is that observers with less data can link Salafi actors' tangible political role to their place in that structural context,¹⁰⁹ explaining it with the processes that influence those sorts of actors' place and behaviour therein.¹¹⁰ And it allows a simple hypothesis: ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿs political role reflected the structure of their context and place relative to its centres of power.

¹⁰⁴ Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior*, 33-36.

¹⁰⁵ William Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Homewood: Dorsey Press, 1975), 12.

¹⁰⁶ Hanspeter Kriesi, "Political Context and Opportunity," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David Snow, Sarah Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 69-73.

¹⁰⁷ Doug McAdam, "Beyond Structural Analysis: Toward a More Dynamic Understanding of Social Movements," in *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*, ed. Mario Diani and Doug McAdam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 294-95.

¹⁰⁸ Khalil al-Anani, "Unpacking the Sacred Canopy: Egypt's Salafis Between Religion and Politics," in *Salafism After the Arab Awakening: Contending with People's Power*, ed. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 40-42; Mohammed Masbah, "Salafi Movements and the Political Process in Morocco," in *Salafism After the Arab Awakening: Contending with People's Power*, ed. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 97-98; Judit Kuschnitzki, "The Establishment and Positioning of al-Rashad: A Case Study," in *Salafism After the Arab Awakening: Contending with People's Power*, ed. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 116-17; Roel Meijer, "Conclusion: Salafis and the Acceptance of the Political," in *Salafism After the Arab Awakening: Contending with People's Power*, ed. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 223-27.

¹⁰⁹ McAdam, "Beyond Structural Analysis," 282-83.

¹¹⁰ P.G. Klandermans, "Identity Politics and Politicized Identities: Identity Processes and the Dynamics of Protest," *Political Psychology* 35, no. 1 (2014): 3-4.

Structural Approaches & Social Movement Theory

A structural explanation fills the gaps with a framework of resource mobilisation theory that captures the shaykhs and their national structural context, and contentious politics theory that describes their place relative to its centres of power and the processes—particularly “demobilisation”—behind it and their subsequent role. Resource mobilisation theory helps describe what Salafī actors and their environment are in simpler terms, by framing the former’s behaviour as responses to factors in the latter.¹¹¹ It makes figures like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī significant actors as leaders of movements,¹¹² in which they defined resources, actions, and goals.¹¹³ And rather than describing all of the wider context, it prioritises structures of opportunities to mobilise resources and constraints on actors’ ability to mobilise them.¹¹⁴ Unlike other approaches, it ignores individual details like the social climate or members’ psychological state,¹¹⁵ elements of historical context like circumstances, dynamics, and discourse that other studies describe,¹¹⁶ and the deeper biographies that one finds in studies of Lebanese Sunnī and Shī‘ī leaders like Fathī Yakan,¹¹⁷ Husayn Fadlallah,¹¹⁸

¹¹¹ Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, Second ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 2-3.

¹¹² John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (1977): 1215-17.

¹¹³ Aldon Morris and Suzanne Staggenbord, "Leadership in Social Movements," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* ed. David Snow, Sarah Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Blackwell, 2004), 173.

¹¹⁴ Steven Buechler, "Beyond Resource Mobilization? Emerging Trends in Social Movement Theory," *The Sociological Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1993): 226.

¹¹⁵ McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, 6-7.

¹¹⁶ Bonnefoy, "How Transnational is Salafism in Yemen?," 332-34; Alexander Thurston, "Abubakar Gumi's al-‘Aqīda al-Ṣaḥīḥa bi-Muwāfaqat al-Sharī‘a: Global Salafism and Locally Oriented Polemics in a Northern Nigerian Text," *Islamic Africa* 2, no. 2 (2011): 11-12; Sadek Hamid, "The Attraction of “Authentic Islam”: Salafism and British Muslim Youth," in *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: 2014), 396-401; de Koning, "The 'Other' Political Islam," 172-74; Sadek Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: the Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 118-20, 21-27.

¹¹⁷ See ‘Alā Lāgha, *Fathī Yakan: Rā‘id al-Ḥaraka al-Islāmiyya al-Mu‘āṣira fī Lubnān*, Muassat ar-Risāla, (Beirut, 1994); Sebastian Elsässer, "Between Ideology and Pragmatism: Fathī Yakan's Theory of Islamic Activism," *Die Welt des Islams* 47, no. 3/4 (2007); Robert Rabil, "Fathi Yakan: The Pioneer of Islamic Activism," *Levantine Review* 2, no. 1 (2013).

¹¹⁸ Bianka Speidl, *Islam as Power: Shi‘i Revivalism in the Oeuvre of Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah* (Routledge, 2020); Sami E. Baroudi, "The Islamic Realism of Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi (1926–) and Sayyid Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah (1935–2010)," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 1 (2016/01/02 2016); Rola el-Husseini, "Women, Work, and Political Participation in Lebanese Shia Contemporary Thought: The Writings of Ayatollahs Fadlallah and Shams al-Din," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 28, no. 2 (2008); Michaelle Browsers, "Fadlallah and the Passing of Lebanon’s Last Najafi Generation," *Journal of Shi‘a Islamic Studies* 5, no. 1 (2012); Jamal Sankari, *Fadlallah: the Making of a Radical Shi‘ite Leader* (London: SAQI, 2005).

and Musa Sadr.¹¹⁹ But it also keeps things focused by concentrating on how actors use human or material resources, communicate strategically to access key institutions or constituencies in wider society, and compete or cooperate with their peers.¹²⁰

With that resource mobilisation approach and an added assumption of marginality, the structural explanation of Salafī actors' political role is that it depends on their relationship with centres of power. Theoretically, Salafīs will usually seize perceived opportunities to use resources in ways that advance their interests, or respond to perceived constraints like restrictions on activities or threats of crackdowns.¹²¹ But Salafī movements are marginal—unable to accept or change the political order—and consequently they tend to distance themselves from state institutions,¹²² participated in state-accepted ways, or faced state discouragement or punishment for engagement.¹²³ That is true in Lebanon, too, where researchers describe “mainly a social movement” in a narrower world of religious politicking, which operates within society rather than as a serious contestant for the power held by Lebanon's political elite.¹²⁴ And that marginality lends importance to “centres of power” that can use their own significant material resources and political influence to shape marginal players' opportunities and constraints,¹²⁵ making Salafīs' relationship to those centres of

¹¹⁹ See Majed Halawi, *A Lebanon Defied: Musa al-Sadr and the Shi'a Community* (New York: New York, 1992); Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "Sayyid Musa al-Sadr, the Lebanese State, and the Left," *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2015); Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 1986).

¹²⁰ McCarthy and Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," 1216-17.

¹²¹ Hanspeter Kriesi, "The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements: Its Impact on Their Mobilisation," in *Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements*, ed. J. Craig Jenkins and Bert Klandermans (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 168-69; Christian Davenport, *State Repression and the Domestic Democratic Peace* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 47-49.

¹²² James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 240.

¹²³ Boubekeur, *Salafism and Radical Politics in Postconflict Algeria*, 214-15; Bonnefoy, "How Transnational is Salafism In Yemen?," 326-27; Emmanuel Karagiannis, "The Rise of Electoral Salafism in Egypt and Tunisia: the Use of Democracy as a Master Frame," *The Journal of North African Studies* 24, no. 2 (2019); Masbah, "Salafi Movements and the Political Process in Morocco," 94-96.

¹²⁴ Rola el-Husseini, "The Current Status of Lebanon's Sunni Islamists," *Middle East Institute* (09/12/2014 2014). <https://www.mei.edu/publications/current-status-lebanons-sunni-islamists>; Tine Gade, *Return to Tripoli: Battle Over Minds and Meaning Amongst Religious Leaders Within the Islamist Field in Tripoli (Lebanon)* (Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2009), 9-11. <https://publications.ffi.no/nb/item/asset/dspace:3556/09-00915.pdf>; Lefèvre, *Jihad in the City*, 11-12; 'Abd al-Ghānī 'Imād, *al-Ḥarakāt al-Islāmiyya fī Lubnān: Ishkāliyat ad-Dīn was-Siyāsiyya fī Mujtama' Mutanawwi'* (Beirut: Dar Altalia, 2006), 60-61.

¹²⁵ Charles Tilly, *The Contentious French* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1986), 27-28, 32.

power crucial to their resulting role in politics.¹²⁶ If resource mobilisation theory makes ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī tangible by describing them as actors that depend on a wider structure that offers opportunities to seize and constraints on their ability to do so,¹²⁷ the logical conclusion is what they can and will actually do is a reflection of their relationships with the more powerful actors which shape that structure.

Contentious politics theory explains why Salafis' role in politics will generally appear to reflect that structural context and place relative to those centres of power. Its broad dynamics of influence and control describe the underlying processes of actors' interactions "with elites, authorities, and opponents" amidst similar structures of opportunities and constraints.¹²⁸ There is a caveat: marginal actors have agency but may conflict with others, including powerful ones that set the boundaries of acceptable conduct.¹²⁹ But generally, it links marginal actors' place to elite interests and the political dynamics that shaped them.¹³⁰ As a result, powerful actors' changing circumstances, interests, or perceptions affect marginal actors, as elites become polarised and seek visible distance from marginal players like Salafī movements,¹³¹ or draw them close when collaboration seems beneficial.¹³² That is why in Lebanon, for example, Sunnī elites like the Hariri family's Future Movement shaped ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's opportunities and constraints from 2005 to 2014, drawing the shaykhs close or distant to political power,¹³³ while the shaykhs survived by waiting for those

¹²⁶ McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*; Mario Diani, "Social Movements and Social Capital: A Network Perspective on Movement Outcomes," *Mobilization: An International Journal* 2, no. 2 (1997): 129.

¹²⁷ Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington, United States: Indiana University Press, 2004), 13-14.

¹²⁸ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6.

¹²⁹ Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, Second ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 62-63.

¹³⁰ Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 59-60.

¹³¹ Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 84-85.

¹³² Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 66, 322; Charles Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758-1834*, Paperback ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 137.

¹³³ Sidney Tarrow, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly, *The New Transnational Activism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 74-76; Sidney Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder: Protest and Politics in Italy 1965-1975* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 22-23, 48-49.

actors to provide resources and avoiding rhetoric that attracted constituents but defied elites' boundaries.¹³⁴

Contentious politics theory also defines specific processes—particularly “demobilisation”—by which centres of power shape the place and role of marginal actors. Depending on how elites perceive Salafis as accessories or threats to those interests, the latter actors will face confrontation or repression from above that marginalises them, or facilitation that enables them as partners within society for those elites or assimilation as accessories to elite power.¹³⁵ The resulting pressures may be indirect—they may come as marginal players consider whether they are sending threatening or inviting signals to elites, or receiving warnings from above.¹³⁶ But it generally means that Salafis not only can but must exercise some agency by calculating their political “space”—the limits of acceptable speech and actions—and either shifting accordingly or attracting unwanted attention.¹³⁷ And it lets observers simplify the issue to one of “demobilisation:” various downward pressures and interventions that require marginal actors to perceive and adapt to other actors boundaries, amidst co-optation as elites draw closer to Salafī actors and their behaviour, and repression as they marginalise those actors and limit their influence. It should be noted that the other demobilisation process of “defection”—withdrawal from politics—was arguably absent from ash-Shahāl nor ar-Rāfi‘ī’s experience between 2005 and 2014.¹³⁸ But as the discussion chapter later shows, it is something that the two shaykhs’ Lebanese contemporaries and other Salafī actors from around the region exhibited. So, the point stands: contentious politics theory and demobilisation captured the processes that shaped their place and role in a structural context.

¹³⁴ Peter K. Eisinger, "The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities," *The American Political Science Review* 67, no. 1 (1973): 27; Michael Lipsky, "Protest as a Political Resource," *The American Political Science Review* 62, no. 4 (1968): 1149.

¹³⁵ Kriesi, "The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements," 173-74.

¹³⁶ Davenport, *State Repression and the Domestic Democratic Peace*, 49; Emily Hencken Ritter and Courtenay Conrad, "Preventing and Responding to Dissent: The Observational Challenges of Explaining Strategic Repression," *The American Political Science Review* 110, no. 1 (2016): 88.

¹³⁷ Deborah Massey, "Concepts of Space and Power in Theory and Political Practice," *Documents d'Anàlisi Geogràfica* 55 (2009): 19-20.

¹³⁸ Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, "Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics," in *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, ed. Mark Lichbach and Alan Zuckerman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 275-76.

The need to test that theoretical framework of resource mobilisation and contentious politics theories makes the shaykhs and Lebanon suitable case studies, particularly in the period from 2005 to 2014. Contentious politics theory does admittedly raise questions of whether Lebanon's civil state would constrain its elites and the processes by which they managed the affairs of marginal players.¹³⁹ But that was a weak kind of state—the kind that has long empowered a political class of confessional leaders who preside over confessional blocs like the Sunnī, Shī'ī, and other communities, and compete openly for national power while maintaining authoritarian control over closed confessional power structures that include marginal Sunnī actors like the Salafī movement.¹⁴⁰ The autocratic character of those arrangements and their impacts on actors like the Salafīs would prove especially pronounced after 2005, as the Hariri-dominated Future Movement's consolidated power in Lebanon's Sunnī community and the wider pro-independence March 14 coalition.¹⁴¹ That did not make Salafīs like the two shaykhs into extensions of Sunnī elite power, and worsening instability over issues like Syria drove popular mobilisation after 2011—a resource opportunity for Salafīs to visibly exercise their agency—while the political vacuum following the Hariri government's collapse reduced the constraints on their ability to do so.¹⁴² But it did mean that Lebanon was a place where the contention between Salafīs and the centres of power was an especially visible phenomenon with few confounding variables, especially in the climate of impunity during 2013 and 2014's national gridlock freed elites to use repression and facilitation in increasingly transparent ways.¹⁴³ For privileged observers who could study the situation without living through it from 2005 to 2014, Lebanon was an ideal test case for

¹³⁹ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 176-78.

¹⁴⁰ Michael Suleiman, "The Role of Political Parties in a Confessional Democracy: the Lebanese Case," *Western Political Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (1967/09/01 1967): 689-90.

¹⁴¹ Majid Abu Diyak, "Muslimū Lubnān .. 'Awā'il wa Aḥzāb," *Al Jazeera* (25/05/2005 2005). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2005/5/25/%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A8>.

¹⁴² Meier and Di Peri, "The Sunni Community in Lebanon," 42-43.

¹⁴³ Agencies, "Majlis an-Nuwāb al-Lubnānī Yumaddid Wilāyatuhu 17 Shahrān," *Al Jazeera* (31/05/2013 2013).

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2013/5/31/%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%AF-%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%87-17-%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7>.

a framework of social movement and contentious politics theories that explained the political role of Salafis like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī in structural terms.

Comparative Methodology & Documentary Sources

Within that theoretical framework, a grounded comparative methodology uses documentary evidence to test its core hypothesis: ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's national political roles shifted as a reflection of their changing structural political context and place relative to its centres of power. That methodology recognises a familiar evidence-handling issue in Islamic studies: it is difficult to interpret the intended meaning of Islamic sources on their own terms because those sources come from a fundamentally different philosophical context to the research itself.¹⁴⁴ But it also recognises that in discussions about Islam's relationship to politics, it is possible to describe the symbolism, words, and actions by which people and texts reflect discourse and their context.¹⁴⁵ To that end, the methodology handles evidence in a "grounded" way. It looks for the generalisable processes by which discourses would and actors did articulate a sense of political identity and political framing, and describes the observable symbolism, words, and actions by which they do that.¹⁴⁶ That results in a simple point that can be rationalised by contentious politics theories and the specific demobilisation concept: actors' observable statements, symbolism, and behaviour appear to reflect the Najdī tradition's ideal conceptions of political life less than issues in the shaykhs' structural context and their place relative to the centres of power in it.

That approach makes a study of the two shaykhs viable if not necessarily detailed. It mirrors well-established approaches of comparative history,¹⁴⁷ and much like new social movement theory approaches, it will miss issues like actors' private calculations. But with an emphasis on the necessary causes, processes, and outcomes it is a realistic option,¹⁴⁸ particularly when

¹⁴⁴ Wael B. Hallaq, "The Authenticity of Prophetic Ḥadīth: A Pseudo-Problem," *Studia Islamica*, no. 89 (1999): 76-77, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1596086>, <http://www.jstor.org.virtual.anu.edu.au/stable/1596086>.

¹⁴⁵ Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 5-6.

¹⁴⁶ Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Reprint ed. (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2006), 32-33.

¹⁴⁷ William Sewell, "Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History," *History and Theory* 6, no. 2 (1967): 208-09; Alexander George, "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison," in *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy*, ed. Paul Gordon Lauren (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 48-50.

¹⁴⁸ Susan Hekman, "Weber's Ideal Type: A Contemporary Reassessment," *Polity* 16, no. 1 (1983): 121-22.

it is testing theories that only need evidence of the shaykhs' roles as visible actors and the traceable processes of demobilisation by the visible centres of power that shaped their place in Lebanon.¹⁴⁹ With that limited focus, it makes the Lebanese context accessible for outsiders as a national one populated by the visible representatives of movements like the shaykhs, parties like the Hariris' Sunnī establishment, and the Lebanese state. And it makes ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿ's politics easier to explain by focusing on the political statements and actions that indicated their political role in that national landscape.¹⁵⁰

That comparative approach's grounded nature comes from its focus on two complementary issues in social movement theory: the shaykhs' expressions of "political framing" and of "political identity." Political identity makes it easier to capture Salafism as a discourse by looking for language that distinguishes Salafīs from non-Salafīs, and if or how non-Salafī people and things are reduced to narrow stereotypes that fit into Salafism's framework of belief and disbelief.¹⁵¹ Alongside that, framing is the language in which Najdī Salafī discourse and Salafī actors defined the wider context, diagnosing problems in the social order, describing and prescribing action that can address them, and motivating support for it.¹⁵² It is easier to infer than identity—actors' actual behaviours can be taken as indications of "collective action frames," which can stem from "societal mentalities" based on Salafism's values, or "political culture" based on shared "concern and definitions" of actors' wider context.¹⁵³ But both issues lend themselves to being used in a comparison that gauges the influence of Salafism and Salafīs' environment. Religious discourse can shape conceptions of identity, framing, and resulting political behaviour, yet social context,¹⁵⁴ actors' personal history, and other views can ultimately manifest more clearly in their political identity and

¹⁴⁹ Frank Jackson and Philip Pettit, "Structural Explanation and Social Theory," in *Reduction, Explanation, and Realism*, ed. David Charles and Kathleen Lennon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 102-04.

¹⁵⁰ Ragin, "Comparative Sociology and the Comparative Method," 105-07; Rucht, "The Impact of National Contexts on Social Movement Structures: A Cross-Movement and Cross-National Comparison," 187.

¹⁵¹ Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe, *Discourse and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 25-26.

¹⁵² Robert Benford and David Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 615-17.

¹⁵³ Sidney Tarrow, "Mentalities, Political Cultures, and Collective Action Frames: Constructing Meanings Through Action," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1992), 177.

¹⁵⁴ Mary Bernstein, "Identity Politics," *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 (2005): 63.

framings.¹⁵⁵ And that offers clear language for the case that later chapters make: the Najdī Salafī tradition provided conceptions of identity and framing that *could* inform their political rhetoric and role, but ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī’s own identity and framing described concerns and definitions that reflected their shifting context and place in it.

That grounded comparative approach also makes it easy to find and handle primary evidence that indicates how Najdī Salafī discourse could inform Salafī actors’ political identity and framing. The methodology closely examines primary sources concerning the nonnegotiable core of Najdī Salafism—‘*aqīda*—to establish how the tradition would have actors articulate a sense of political identity by defining who belongs to a community, who does not belong, and why. It also closely studies primary sources concerning issues of law and society—*fatāwā*, social writings, and personal letters—to establish how Najdī Salafism foundational sources framed political problems and their urgency, as well as the solution to those problems and its importance. And it narrows its focus to primary sources from Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, his descendants in the first two Saudi states, and their references like Ibn Taymiyyah, because of their standing in the Najdī tradition.

That grounded comparative methodology also makes it easy to handle primary evidence which illustrates the difference between Salafī actors’ ideal conceptions of political identity and framing, and the indications of identity and framing in their actual rhetoric and behaviour. It uses media reporting, books, and academic materials that describe observable social facts—what people explicitly say, what people visible do, and what things visibly happen—and the forces that seemingly caused them.¹⁵⁶ And it recognises that ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfi‘ī, and other public figures’ personal religious deliberations and behavioural calculations are unobservable,¹⁵⁷ and that the influences and processes by which actors interpret Islamic discourse can be unclear.¹⁵⁸ That makes it possible to engage constructively but cautiously with figures like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī, whose prominence has seen published books, documented public appearances and statements, and extensive reporting

¹⁵⁵ Klandermans, "Identity Politics and Politicized Identities," 2.

¹⁵⁶ Durkheim and Lukes, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 161.

¹⁵⁷ Earl Babbie, *Observing Ourselves: Essays in Social Research* (Long Grove, United States: Waveland Press, 1986), 25-26.

¹⁵⁸ Wael Hallaq, *Sharīa: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 73-76.

on their public activities. And it results in research that mirrors Arsan's study of Lebanese political history,¹⁵⁹ for example, relying heavily on existing English and Arabic academic journals, books, and a combination of international and Lebanese media reporting to capture national actors and context.

Chapter Outline

The thesis lays foundations for that comparison in the next two chapters. The second explores the shaykhs' religious roots and reinforces the original question, while identifying the conceptions of political identity and framing in Najdī Salafism's understandings of belief and disbelief. Concentrating on Najdī "Wahhabi" Salafism and its founder Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb's views, it illustrates Salafism's potentially stark implications. But contextualising it in the history of the first two Saudi States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also highlights the interpretive processes and history that make its political implications uncertain. And the third state's twentieth century history shows how the tradition became an activist force by the time ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī inherited it, but also reinforces the core research question: to what extent were ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī's political roles best understood with reference to their religious roots and Salafism's rigid discourse, or their national structural context and place in it?

The third chapter shows that Lebanon's Tripoli is an ideal place to address that question. For one, it was home to shaykhs like ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfi'ī, and a wider Lebanese Salafī movement that had developed Najdī roots comparable to those of Saudi movements. And like Saudi Arabia it had an authoritarian political structure where power sat with a narrow range of actors—particularly the Hariri family's Sunnī establishment—whose resources and influence marked them as "centres of power." But more importantly, it was easier to observe the processes of resource mobilisation and political contention by which the shaykhs' structural context and place relative to the centres of power shaped their role. And as a place where power sat with a wider political class rather than a single ruling family, it was subject to constant national political instability that would force those centres of power

¹⁵⁹ Andrew Arsan, *Lebanon: A Country in Fragments*, Paperback ed. (London: Hurst & Company, 2018).

to redefine the space for actors like the Salafis, begging the basic question of whether the Salafis' role would shift accordingly.

After that, three chapters prove the basic hypothesis: ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's role reflected the structure of their context and place relative to its centres of power. The fourth shows that ash-Shahāl's national political role from 2005 to 2010 appeared to shift as a resource mobilisation approach suggests. He initially deferred to the Hariri family's Future movement after the Syrian government's 2005's withdrawal from Lebanon, due largely to his limited ability to mobilise resources and resulting dependency on opportunities. But after Lebanon's May 2008 Crisis and the establishment's pivot from partners like ash-Shahāl, the shaykh capitalised on Tripoli's ensuing violence and positioned himself as someone whose framing and identity spoke for the deepening anxieties of an isolated Sunnī public.

Drawing on contentious politics theory, the fourth chapter explains half of why a Salafi shaykh like ash-Shahāl's role reflected that structural context and his place in it. Looking at his and ar-Rāfiʿī's role after the Hariri government's January 2011 collapse and the Sunnī establishment's withdrawal from national public leadership, it shows that ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī exercised more agency in the space that emerged for alternate representation of the Sunnī public amidst Syria's worsening crisis. But it also shows that their agency lacked impact. Their political advocacy for attention and action on certain issues was contentious,¹⁶⁰ as was ar-Rāfiʿī's religious activism in narrow religious spaces where politics was a contest of religious ideas.¹⁶¹ But they remained marginal actors who could not affect political change, religiously grounded or otherwise.¹⁶² From their place at the peripheries of Sunnī national power rather than the centre of it, they would not shape events that were unfolding around them like Tripoli's ongoing violence.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 45-46.

¹⁶¹ Frank Fischer, *Reframing Public Policy: Discursive Politics and Deliberative Practices* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 45.

¹⁶² Kriesi, "The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements," 173.

¹⁶³ Assefa Mehretu, Bruce Wm Pigozzi, and Lawrence M. Sommers, "Concepts in social and spatial marginality," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 82, no. 2 (2000/08/01 2000): 90-91.

The sixth chapter completes that explanation by exploring Sunnī elites' demobilising influence on the shaykhs following the Miqati government's 2013 resignation and the successive national climate of elite impunity. Rather than deliberately working with Sunnī leaders, ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī faced patterns of co-optation from above when their politics legitimised Sunnī leaders' interests or their place in Sunnī society made them accessories in elite resource mobilisation. And instead of deferring to elites' authority ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī faced threatened or actual repression, as Sunnī leaders defined and enforced the shaykhs' acceptable political space. To survive, their role—as indicated by their political identity and framing—had to respect the demobilising boundaries that the centres of power set. And while ar-Rāfi'ī did that and survived as the establishment's indirect partner amidst 2014's crackdowns, ash-Shahāl's inability to adapt forced him to flee Lebanon as a suspected threat.

A final discussion chapter summarises the findings. To that end, it generalises those findings and clarifies their limitations. Looking beyond Lebanon and 2014, it shows that basic questions about the influence of discourse or context were lasting ones, but the opportunity to address them in Lebanon from 2005 to 2014 was passing. And it expands on a structural explanation of Salafīs' political role. For one, it shows that the Lebanese cases illustratively but not exhaustively depicted Salafīs' demobilisation, while other cases showed that another demobilisation outcome—defection from participation in politics—was possible. It also highlights the importance of the centres of power as actors that can reshape Salafīs' political space in whatever arbitrary and extreme ways their interests demand. And it shows that while resource mobilisation theory cannot capture Salafism's political impact, Salafī leaders' emergence, or Salafī actors' internal dynamics, but it is possible to fill the gaps by carefully parsing actors' historical, cultural, and political context. It does not fully describe ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī's life and politics, but it explains their role as a reflection of the Lebanese national structural context and their place relative to its centres of power.

Chapter 2:

Najdī Salafism & Its Ambiguities

Introduction

Ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's religious roots were in a Najdī Salafī tradition that shaped the way that Salafīs talked about the world more than how they behaved in it. While Najdī Salafism offered them clear conceptions of political framing and identity based on distinct understandings of belief and disbelief, it left familiar questions of whether and how context would shape their actual role in politics. It was not an ideological program that inevitably shaped actors' public role in any single way—if anything, hints of an interpretive relationship to sources made the tradition's practical implications unclear, while three centuries of history showed that its adherents' politics had aligned heavily with the realities of their context. And even by the eighties when ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī inherited the tradition in its increasingly activist form after graduating from the Islamic University of Madīnah, there was a familiar question: as actors at the national level, to what extent would their political role reflect religious roots in Najdī Salafism's rigid discourse, or their structural context and their place in it?

Several issues in Najdī Salafism's substance and formative history reinforced that question. First, its creed offered stark conceptions of political identity and framing. But Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's religious roots and role as an enabler of the first Saudi State's (1744-1818) expansion indicated a deeper and possibly pragmatic interpretive process. Second, the tradition's legal foundations described an authoritarian political structure in which Salafī scholars enjoyed an elitist role. But there were still similar signs of interpretation that were only reinforced by Najdī scholars' historical support for the second Saudi State's (1824-1891) authoritarian crackdowns. Thirdly, the twentieth century saw some adherents become increasingly engaged as activists in wider society while illustrating that even state-aligned elites were politically active. But the path of Saudi Arabia's religious institutions and activist movements left questions of whether any apparent quietist-activist distinctions were products of Salafism as a discourse, or the Saudi structural context and actors' place relative to political power in it. There was little question that ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī had inherited a distinct tradition within the wider fold of Islam. But that tradition's substance and history invited a simpler explanation of their role in politics that centred round context rather than creed.

Najdī Creed's Conceptions of Political Rhetoric & Identity

Najdī Salafism's credal roots offered stark conceptions of political identity and framing, but they did not explain Salafis' behaviour on their own. It was still worth considering them—there was a chance to expand on ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's stated general views by situating them in a larger Najdī framework of *ʿaqīda* and law. But on their own they only said so much. The general affirmations of Najdī creed offered community members only a vague sense of personal identity built on shared belief, and there were signs that they were subject to interpretation rather than being transmitted as a clear orthodoxy. And although its negative elements clarified things by identifying outsiders and framing threats in terms of disbelief, they too appeared subjective when considered alongside the tradition's history and that of its founder—Muḥammad bin ʿAbd al-Wahhāb—in the first Saudi State. All told, Najdī creed offered language which could justify a wider political project and hold a community together, but its subjective intellectual foundations and ambiguous history left questions about the influence of its adherents' context.

Ash-Shahāl & ar-Rāfiʿī's Credal Foundations

Najdī Salafism's affirmations of *ʿaqīda* helped expand on the shaykhs' stated views and defined an underlying sense of personal identity, but whether the implications went further than that was unclear. That was not to say that those stated views were shallow—ar-Rāfiʿī's writings, for example, described Muslims' sense of self with indications of what they believed about God and particularly the concept of *tawḥīd*. As an affirmation of the oneness of God, that concept had three pillars. First, *tawḥīd ar-rububiya* recognised God as unique, supreme, and without any partner in Lordship. Second, there was God's singular entitlement, *tawḥīd al-uluhiya*, to receive worship. And third, ar-Rāfiʿī drew meaning from God's names and attributes as affirmations of that—as *ar-Raḥmān* He was supremely merciful, while as *al-Mālik* He was supreme in His lordship.¹⁶⁴ Those affirmations of how to know and worship God did not stand alone, and there were hints of a sense of framing as well as identity. The opposite of *tawḥīd*—*shirk*—framed things like idolatry, seeking

¹⁶⁴ Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī, *al-Ḥadīth al-ʿĀshir: al-Umma al-Wāḥida*, Silsila fī Ṣilāl as-Sunna, (Beirut: Dar ibn Hazm, 2018), 33-34.

intercessors with the Divine,¹⁶⁵ and failures to recognise God's role in worldly affairs as a sign of faulty worship or even disbelief.¹⁶⁶ And the resulting dangers to Muslims' identity made his denunciations of religious innovations—*bid'a*—seem sensible. Citing Ibn Taymiyyah (D.1328), for example, he warned that the slow embrace of praying over graves had been a pathway to *shirk* that destroyed the Prophet Noah's people.¹⁶⁷ Taken together, there was a sense of who believing Muslims were and who they were not.

Those specifics of *tawhīd* that ar-Rāfi'ī described did not offered a comprehensive worldview on their own, though. It was important to avoid overstating their implications. Some issues like the notion of God's names and attributes, for example, were not entirely unique to Salafism or its distinct sources. Scholars with roots in other theological schools, like the Ash'arī tradition, discussed them as well even if their definitions and understandings differed.¹⁶⁸ But the explicit interest in Ibn Taymiyyah helped to situate ar-Rāfi'ī and his other views within the traditionalist theological sphere adopted by figures like Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb,¹⁶⁹ who used the same narration for the same point.¹⁷⁰ And those views illustrated an irreducible part of Salafīs' personal identity: certain views about God, the integrity of one's relationship to Him, and an anxious avoidance of deviation from worshipping him. But alone, it was still unclear what implications ar-Rāfi'ī's expressed views had for his visible behaviour, and more specifically of how he and similar figures expanded on those generic concepts of belief. There was more to the tradition.

Ash-Shahāl's emphasis on the *salaf as-ṣāliḥ* was a tacit indication not just of his own views, but also a broad indication of how the Najdī tradition expanded on its fundamentals of *tawhīd*. In some of his public religious discussions, the shaykh was really covering two issues: how he believed one might best act on those foundational ideas, and that he considered his

¹⁶⁵ Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī, *al-Ḥadīth ath-Thānī: Bashārāt Ahl al-Kitāb bi Nabī Muḥammad Ṣalā Allāh 'alayhi wa Sallim*, vol. 2, *Silsila fī Ṣilāl as-Sīra*, (Beirut: Dar ibn Hazm, 2016), 18-19.

¹⁶⁶ Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī, *Silsila fī Ṣilāl as-Sunna* (Beirut: Dar ibn Hazm, 2013), 108-09.

¹⁶⁷ Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī, *al-Fawā'id al-Ḥasan fī Ḥadīth Harqal wa Abī Sufyān*, *Silsila fī Ṣilāl as-Sīra*, (Beirut: Dar ibn Hazm, 2017), 168.

¹⁶⁸ Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki, "The Ash'ari School," *Masud.co.uk* (29/10/2014 2014). <http://masud.co.uk/the-ashari-school/>. This was originally cited in Nahouza's much better *Wahhabism and the Rise of the New Salafists: Theology, Power and Sunnī Islam* (Bloomsbury, 2018), and an original treatment of the subject can be found in Abu Hanifa's (d.767) *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*.

¹⁶⁹ Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 5.

¹⁷⁰ Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb at-Tawhīd*, 59.

movement distinct from other actors in society. Ash-Shahāl spoke about politics and religion more than he wrote, and linked the fundamentals like *tawḥīd* to an authentic kind of Muslim identity.¹⁷¹ But he also built on that by stressing that the *salaf as-ṣāliḥ* were key role models for two reasons. Personally, following their example would enable sincere worship and correct understandings of the *Qurʾān* and *Sunnah*. And socially, he believed that it marked the community and its members as being from a saved sect,¹⁷² citing a *ḥadīth* interpreted to indicate 73 communities, of whom 72 would be consigned to hellfire.¹⁷³

Ash-Shahāl was not the only figure who lent religious reverence and practical relevance to the *salaf*. Ar-Rāfiʿī cited them when enjoining charity towards others,¹⁷⁴ and as an authority when warning against the creeping acceptance of *shirk*,¹⁷⁵ mirroring the position of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb.¹⁷⁶ It was not the only way that ash-Shahāl mirrored or expanded on ar-Rāfiʿī's views, either: the former referred to terminology that marked him as a Salafī, framing creed as *ʿaqīda* and practice as *manhaj*, while stressing the issues of *bidʿa* and *shirk*.¹⁷⁷ Not all of those ideas were Salafī concepts in isolation—many non-Salafī Islamic scholars embraced the same notions of a saved sect and righteous early generations even if their interpretations slightly differed.¹⁷⁸ But the whole package of understandings about what to affirm and reject—and his insistence on speaking about it—indicated the shaykh's Salafī religious roots and how he generally wanted to act on them.

Still, the shaykhs' basic notions of *tawḥīd* and the *salaf as-ṣāliḥ* were not a comprehensive political outlook on their own. The central problem was that neither said much about where the limits of a community and what its role in wider society would be. Both men were clear

¹⁷¹ al-Maktab al-ʿIlāmī at-Tayyār as-Salafī, "Kalimat Samāḥat ash-Shaykh Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl min Masjid al-Iḥsān 2014 - 5 -13 Masīḥī," *YouTube* (01/06/2014 2014). <https://youtu.be/L8SUzq5iitE>.

¹⁷² al-Maktab al-ʿIlāmī at-Tayyār as-Salafī, "Kalimat Samāḥat ash-Shaykh Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl Mutaḥaddithan min baʿad Ṣalāt al-Jumaʿa min Masjid aṣ-Ṣadiq - Sīr - aḍ-Ḍinniyya," *YouTube* (19/05/2014 2014). <https://youtu.be/oQPj9tZvQMk>.

¹⁷³ Abu Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, vol. Seventh (Beirut: al-Resalah al-ʿAlamiyah, 2009), 6.

¹⁷⁴ Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī, *al-Ḥadīth at-Tāsiʿ: Ṣanāʿ al-Maʿrūf*, *Silsila fī Ṣilāl as-Sunna*, (Beirut: Dar ibn Hazm, 2017), 29-31.

¹⁷⁵ ar-Rāfiʿī, *al-Fawāʿid al-Ḥasan fī Ḥadīth Harqal wa Abī Sufyān*, 169.

¹⁷⁶ Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb at-Tawḥīd*, 61.

¹⁷⁷ al-Maktab al-ʿIlāmī at-Tayyār as-Salafī, "al-Jabha as-Suniyya fī Lubnān," *YouTube* (18/03/2013 2013). https://youtu.be/JokN9v9mi_Q.

¹⁷⁸ Ahmed ibn Muhammad, "Who Are the Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jama'ah?," *Masud.co.uk* (29/10/2014 2014). <http://masud.co.uk/who-are-the-ahl-as-sunnah-wal-jamaah/>.

that the Salafī movement coexisted alongside similar parties but was still a distinct social force. Just as ash-Shahāl said that Salafīs were vulnerable to the same political threats against the wider Sunnī community,¹⁷⁹ ar-Rāfiʿī bemoaned specific slanders against the movement.¹⁸⁰ And in the national politics of Lebanon dominated by state institutions and political parties, ash-Shahāl asserted Salafīs' role as actors in Sunnī political matters that cooperated with others as appropriate.¹⁸¹ But that coexistence did not signal common identity with the wider Sunnī community, and ash-Shahāl was clear that religious matters still set them apart. Unlike others, the Salafī movement was returning to the method of the *salaf as-ṣāliḥ*, and on *as-sirāṭ al-mustaqīm*—the straight path.¹⁸² And it left a question of how exactly the shaykh and the Najdī Salafī tradition had reached that conclusion, how he would frame the outsiders who did not share it, and what that meant for everybody else.

A Vague Personal Identity & Credal Fundamentals

While it was difficult to say how people would behave by describing Najdī Salafism's fundamental affirmations, looking at what other Najdī Salafīs did was not going to clarify things. If anything, Najdī thought's formative intellectual roots and history only added to the problems with hints of personal interpretations rather than a received orthodoxy. There had been hints of that as Muḥammad bin ʿAbd al-Wahhāb formed the tradition, starting with his native context of eighteenth-century Najd where the issues seemed more personal than political. That was not to ignore the sense that the place had invited political disruption, and the signs of underlying political instability were there. For one, there was a political landscape which was disorderly at best and vested power in a few rival families.¹⁸³ And water and grazing land fell under the control of nomads who raided their sedentary neighbours out of necessity or boredom.¹⁸⁴ As such, it was hard to say that there was some

¹⁷⁹ Memowas, "7 / 7 Sāʿat Ḥiwār. As-Sunna fī Lubnān bayna al-Khilāfāt wat-Taḥālufāt," *YouTube* (04/11/2008 2008). <https://youtu.be/H5r3mRUQ6AU>.

¹⁸⁰ Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī, "4 1 2013 Silsilat as-Sīra an-Nabawiyya Ghazwat Badr 13) Nuzūl al-Maṭar," *YouTube* (28/09/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/UrYnIWUgyPQ>.

¹⁸¹ Memowas, "7 / 2 Sāʿat Ḥiwār. As-Sunna fī Lubnān bayna al-Khilāfāt wat-Taḥālufāt," *YouTube* (04/11/2008 2008). <https://youtu.be/DwvAdyolW5w>.

¹⁸² Aljazeera Mubasher AJM, "Mubāshir maʿa Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl. As-Salafiyūn fī Lubnān," *YouTube* (16/12/2009 2009). <https://youtu.be/vnfBFsfjkOU>

¹⁸³ Michael Cook, "The Historians of Pre-Wahhābī Najd," *Studia Islamica*, no. 76 (1992): 171-72, 74-75.

¹⁸⁴ Uwaidah Metaireek Al-Juhany, "The History of Najd Prior to the Wahhabis; A Study of Social, Political and Religious Conditions in Najd During Three Centuries Preceding the Wahhabi Reform Movement" (Ph.D., University of Washington, 1983) (8319382).

kind of stabilising force to keep things in one shape or another. On the contrary, there was no stabilising influence from above thanks to the disinterest of Ottoman authorities, who cared more about the southwestern Hijāz region with Makkah and Madinah, Yemen to the South, and al-Aḥsa to the east at an intersection with the Persian Empire.¹⁸⁵ If Najd was a national context like the Lebanese one in which ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī stood out—alongside other representatives of national parties, social movements, and special interests—then it was ripe for political competition.

But those markers of political instability were only significant when viewing Najd from a distant national perspective, and that perspective overlooked two basic facts: Najdī Salafism's story began as a human one, and the historical catalyst for its emergence was Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb's awkward personal circumstances. There was a mismatch between his potential and Najd's soporific religious landscape. Like contemporaries such as ash-Shawkānī (1759-1839) in Yemen or inheritors like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī,¹⁸⁶ the shaykh's roots—in his case, a lineage in a religious family—might have laid foundations for his rise to political power in that competitive landscape.¹⁸⁷ But that family was part of a religious establishment of mostly Ḥanbalī jurists who worked from specific settlements rather than common institutions, as binding agents for local religious identity more than catalysts of political change.¹⁸⁸ As such, the young man who would become a shaykh was a promising person in a stifling place that offered few opportunities for the religious learning which could build on any potential he had.¹⁸⁹ Fortunately, he was not the first person to have that problem and it was a solvable one. Najd's limited prospects for religious education had seen other prospective students head elsewhere, after all.¹⁹⁰ And Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb would follow that precedent and hit the road, circulating from Najd to Makkah, al-Aḥsa, Madīnah, and Baṣra. It would be the start of a study tour that broadened his horizons and laid foundations for a new Islamic tradition and—for political reasons discussed later—a new Najdī political order.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 47.

¹⁸⁶ Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam*, 18.

¹⁸⁷ Al-Juhany, "The History of Najd Prior to the Wahhabis," 255.

¹⁸⁸ Syed Farid Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldūn: The Recovery of a Lost Tradition in Sociology* (Routledge, 2014), 76.

¹⁸⁹ Cook, "The Historians of Pre-Wahhābī Najd," 173.

¹⁹⁰ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 10-11.

¹⁹¹ Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 52.

That personal context still only explained so much, of course, and the shaykh's own interpretive agency would be key to the Najdī tradition's all-very-human origins. That interpretation was normal, including for his teachers. One of them, Muḥammad Hayyāt al-Sindhī, did not reflect any single mentor and passed through places like Madīnah without settling into a single place or movement.¹⁹² But normal or not, it meant that Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's views would diverge from al-Sindhī,¹⁹³ and from his student contemporaries.¹⁹⁴ Even though they shared his curiosities about scholarly matters like *ijtihād*—legal interpretation—and big-picture issues like a revival of Islam, the shaykh's contemporaries like Shāh Walī Allāh were also more tolerant of other Islamic traditions like Sufism.¹⁹⁵ That was not to ignore the fact that Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb was a curious guy who took interest in others' ideas—he learned about figures such as Ibn Taymiyyah, for example, under al-Sindhī's tutelage in Madīnah.¹⁹⁶ But his journey and the lessons he took from it were still fundamentally personal and sources suggest that the shaykh's views solidified in Baṣra, where he explored the city's ample ḥadīth repositories and encountered Shī'a whose practices he would come to detest.¹⁹⁷ Much like ar-Rāfi'ī he had circulated abroad, encountering various teachers, settings, and ideas.¹⁹⁸ But he was not just an empty vessel for whatever ideas his studies, teachers, or the existing tradition to fill, and by the time of his return he held views that appeared to diverge from the Ḥanbalī-dominated landscape that had been beneath his potential, and from Sunnī Islam's orthodoxy more generally.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹² John Voll, "Muḥammad Ḥayyā al-Sindī and Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab: An Analysis of an Intellectual Group in Eighteenth-Century Madīna," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 38, no. 1 (1975): 33-36.

¹⁹³ Basheer Nafi, "A Teacher of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb: Muḥammad Ḥayyāt al-Sindī and the Revival of Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth's Methodology," *Islamic Law and Society* 13, no. 2 (2006): 209-10.

¹⁹⁴ Ahmad Dallal, "The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750-1850," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 3 (1993): 342.

¹⁹⁵ Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim, "Shaykh Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb and Shāh Walī Allāh: A Preliminary Comparison of Some Aspects of their Lives and Careers," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 34, no. 1 (2006): 104-05, 07.

¹⁹⁶ Charles Allen, "The Hidden Roots of Wahhabism in British India," *World Policy Journal* 22, no. 2 (2005): 88.

¹⁹⁷ Samer Traboulsi, "An Early Refutation of Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's Reformist Views," *Die Welt des Islams* 42, no. 3 (2002): 376-77.

¹⁹⁸ Rougier, *Sunni Tragedy in the Middle East*, 201.

¹⁹⁹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 11-12; James Muhammad Dawud Currie, "Kadizadeli Ottoman Scholarship, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, and the Rise of the Saudi State," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 26, no. 3 (2015): 279.

Those “nuances” did not make Najdī Salafism’s origins incomprehensible for outside observers, and the resulting conceptions of Muslim personal identity would—if only partly—reflect a received tradition within Sunnī Islam. The shaykh’s message was simple: every Muslim needed to learn and act on key principles of their ‘*aqīda*—who they worshipped, what religion they followed, and the identity of their Prophet ﷺ—but the underlying concept was *tawḥīd*.²⁰⁰ And he embraced the same three pillars as his Lebanese inheritors, with an affirmation of God’s singular Lordship in *tawḥīd ar-rububiyya* and His singular right to be worshipped in *tawḥīd al-uluhiyya*. And more importantly, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb accepted all of God’s mentioned names and attributes in his understanding of *tawḥīd al-asmā was-ṣifāt*, separating him from narrower philosophical conceptions like those of the Ash‘arī school.²⁰¹ That aligned him with past thinkers like Ibn Taymiyyah, who articulated similar objections to philosophical theology and its approaches like the *kalām* cosmological argument for God’s existence,²⁰² while generally embracing the same threefold conception of *tawḥīd*. And it would see later Najdī authors laud the shaykh not just as a reviver of Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal and Ibn Taymiyyah’s ideas,²⁰³ but as someone who returned Muslims to the *Qur’ān* and *Sunna* while confronting the corruption of his time.²⁰⁴ There was something to those links—Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal similarly called for an acknowledgement of God’s self-described Self and avoid disbelief,²⁰⁵ and implied that Muslims needed to acknowledge it with all His attributes.²⁰⁶ Yet at the same time, the newer shaykh’s thinking went beyond the basic fundamentals of *tawḥīd* or an unexplained emphasis on the example of the *salaf as-ṣāliḥ*.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁰ Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *al-Uṣūl ath-Thalātha wa Udillatuhā: Shurūṭ aṣ-Ṣalā wa Wājibātuhā wa Arkānuhā, wal-Qawā‘id al-Arba‘a* (Riyadh: Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance, 1999), 6-8.

²⁰¹ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb at-Tawḥīd*, 12-15.

²⁰² Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2 (Madīnah: King Fahd Centre for Printing of the Holy Qur’an, 2004), 7-8, 20-21; Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, Ṣāleḥ al-Fawzān, and Muḥammad bin Ṣāleḥ al-‘Alīqī, *ar-Rasā’il ash-Shakhṣiyya* (2010), 250-51, <https://islamhouse.com/ar/books/264174/>.

²⁰³ J.D.M. Zarabozo, *The Life, Teachings and Influence of Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab* (Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Dawah and Guidance, 2003), 14-15, 20. https://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih_books/single/en_Life_of_Abdul_Wahhaab.pdf.

²⁰⁴ Zarabozo, *The Life, Teachings and Influence of Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab*, 140.

²⁰⁵ Wesley Williams, "Aspects of the Creed of Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal: A Study of Anthropomorphism in Early Islamic Discourse," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 3 (2002): 443.

²⁰⁶ Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb as-Sunna lil-Imām Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal* (Matba’a as-Salafiya wa Maktabaha, 1349), 33-34.

²⁰⁷ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb at-Tawḥīd*, 134; Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, al-Fawzān, and al-‘Alīqī, *ar-Rasā’il ash-Shakhṣiyya*, 263.

Those basic intellectual and historical roots turned Najdī Salafism into a puzzle: as a “discourse” it was a simple issue with obvious sources, but that discourse was the product of a real human story in which the founder’s journey highlighted ambiguities and subjectivities that shaped the implications for society and Salafīs’ place in it. The shaykh had planted himself firmly in the tradition of Ibn Taymiyyah and earlier figures like Ibn Ḥanbal, but there were questions about interpretation that were difficult to answer through a secular philosophical lens. Like Najdī Salafism, that tradition’s basic theology was partly a contextual product. Its theology had originated and matured in response to philosophical alternatives, while its legal history contained disagreements and divergences between members of the Ḥanbalī field. And generally, any attempt to emulate early practice required the investigation and deciphering of the *Salaf*.²⁰⁸ Those ambiguities were not just the results of a deficient secular analysis—they were acknowledged and managed by Ibn Taymiyyah’s *al-‘Aqīda al-Wāsiṭiyya*, for example, which called readers to accept the *Qur’ān*’s apparent indications of things like God’s names and attributes without pretending to always understand them, and resolved uncertainties by referring to the *Sunnah*.²⁰⁹ And they made the definite implications of the Najdī tradition’s foundational affirmations of belief as narrow as the description. While those credal views would give Salafīs like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī a source of shared identity and situate those shaykhs in an emerging Najdī tradition,²¹⁰ processing the further implications for identity and behaviour was a fraught exercise. It was easy to trace the emergence and basic principles of Najdī Salafism, but the broader implications for outsiders in society and politics would result from a deeper interpretive framework.²¹¹

Defining Political Identity & Framing Through Disbelief

Despite those human ambiguities, expanding on Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s credal views was still helpful. The shaykh’s writings about *shirk* and *kufr* offered a source of political identity by framing disbelieving things and people as non-Salafī outsiders which threatened a believing community. The core problem from a Salafī perspective was simple: although that

²⁰⁸ Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, 19-22, 32-33; Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 3 (Madīnah: King Fahd Centre for Printing of the Holy Qur’an, 2004), 3-4.

²⁰⁹ Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-‘Aqīda al-Wāsiṭiyya*, Ninth Reprint ed. (Riyadh: al-Matba‘a as-Salafiyya wa Maktabatuha, 1978), 7-8, 14-15.

²¹⁰ Amy Gutmann, *Identity in Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 16.

²¹¹ Babbie, *Observing Ourselves*, 64-65, 67.

community's foundation came from shared affirmations of *tawḥīd*, *shirk* could negate any value that those affirmations had. Even if people naturally accepted God's Lordship over creation, they could still worship incorrectly and find themselves with *tawḥīd ar-rububiyya* but not *tawḥīd al-uluhiyya*. And the broad range of things that constituted *shirk* made it a broad problem. It could encompass deliberate supplications for help from things besides God and activities that indicated insincerity and mistrust towards Him.²¹² But it could also involve any association of God's names and attributes—things that marked Him as the sole source of true help, among other things—with objects towards which people might pray to or direct their attention like idols, graves, and amulets, making those things a threat to the community.²¹³ Generally, that made *shirk* into an antithesis of *tawḥīd*: one worshipped God by singling Him out, and one failed to worship by establishing partners to Him.²¹⁴ But the shaykh considered it an issue of specific concern and issued distinct warnings that defiant and well-intentioned instances of *shirk* were equally serious,²¹⁵ while dealing with objects and opportunities for *shirk* was as egregious as the act.²¹⁶ While Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's credal foundations described Salafis' personal identity with reference to a certain set of beliefs, his concerns about *shirk* created a sense of political identity by juxtaposing the community of believers against outsiders who harboured or manifested disbelief.²¹⁷

Early controversies demonstrated that Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb's understandings of *shirk* turned Najdī Salafism into a socially relevant force by providing language for political framing. After the shaykh's return to Najd in the 1740s, two incidents showed that it was a practical issue:²¹⁸ he had a woman stoned for adultery and facilitated the demolition of a dome associated with one of the Prophet's ﷺ companions. The reactions were quick and negative. Local political and religious authorities were alarmed, and as the shaykh continued that pattern of behaviour the ensuing pressure forced him to flee three communities and

²¹² Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb at-Tawḥīd*, 43-46.

²¹³ Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, Burhāmī, and Marzūq, *Kashf ash-Shubuhāt*, 28-9.

²¹⁴ Qadhi, *A Critical Study of Shirk*, 14-15; William Chittick, "Worship," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 223.

²¹⁵ Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *al-Uṣūl ath-Thalātha wa Udillatuhā: Shurūṭ aṣ-Ṣalā wa Wājibātuhā wa Arkānuhā, wal-Qawā'id al-Arba'a*, 42-47.

²¹⁶ Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb at-Tawḥīd*, 60-62.

²¹⁷ Richard Ned Lebow, *The Politics of Identity: In Search of Ourselves* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 83.

²¹⁸ Samira Haj, "Reordering Islamic Orthodoxy: Muhammad ibn 'Abdul Wahhāb," *The Muslim World* 92, no. 3-4 (2002): 338.

dissolve a political alliance.²¹⁹ Even his brother, Sulayman, would write an entire book denouncing his credal views on issues like *shirk* and *kufr*.²²⁰ On the whole, there was broad unease about what the shaykh was doing and why he was doing it.

But a cursory reading of the shaykh's views on *shirk* showed that he was at least following an underlying logic, especially with the dome incident. By the standards of his emerging Najdī theology, correct belief anchored in *tawḥīd* mattered because it defined the identity of a Muslim in their community, while the dome's mix of historical and religious significance made it a potential object of undeserved adulation or even worship which threatened that identity. In academic terms, the distinction showed that Najdī Salafism politicised an identity based on belief, by framing the fact or drivers of disbelief—like the dome—as something against which to struggle.²²¹ Or in simpler terms: belief was good, disbelief was bad, and the dome was a symbol of disbelief. Something needed to be done before it drew them away from the belief that marked them as part of the community.

As for the stoning, it reflected a sense of political identity defined by the exclusion of outsiders. That exclusion relied on strict conceptions of disbelief and excommunication—*kufr* and *takfīr*. While common affirmations of belief provided the fundamental solidarity of a Najdī community,²²² *kufr* set that community's limits while *takfīr* gave people license to enforce them. That would see the Najdī tradition's adherents denounce whole communities, be they Shī'a as rejectors of the Prophet ﷺ, his household, and early successors,²²³ or some Ṣūfī communities as perpetrators of *shirk*.²²⁴ And the reasons were intuitively tied to the indications of *shirk* and *kufr*, like a belief or preference for something besides Islam's guidance or establishing intermediaries with God. But some indications were less intuitive or more subjective, like mocking anything from Islam, appearing to aide perpetrators of *shirk*, failing to excommunicate those who warranted excommunication, or appearing not to

²¹⁹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 17-19; M. J. Crawford, "The Da'wa of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb before the Al Sa'ūd," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 1, no. 2 (2011/12/01 2011): 150.

²²⁰ Sulayman Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *aṣ-Ṣawā'iq al-Ilāhiyya fīr-Radd 'alā al-Wahhābiyya* (Beirut: Dār Dhu al-Faqār, 1998), 116-17.

²²¹ Klandermans, "Identity Politics and Politicized Identities," 4.

²²² Mohammad Omar Farooq, "Ibn Khaldūn's Defense of Mu'āwiya: The Dynamics of 'Aṣabīyya, Mulk and the Counter-Revolution According to the Muqaddima," *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 4, no. 1 (2019): 92.

²²³ Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Risāla fīr-Radd 'alā ar-Rāfiḍa*, 7-8, 27.

²²⁴ Qadhi, *A Critical Study of Shirk*, 35-37.

practice according to the laws and customs of the *sharīʿa*.²²⁵ And that explained the stoning: a response to incorrect practice that nullified the offender's Muslim status. Stoning itself was not new to Islamic law—competent jurists like Ibn Qudāmah (d. 1223), for example, allowed it as a response to a crime and result of a legal process.²²⁶ But Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's writings framed the issue in distinctly theological terms: any perception that someone failed to fully follow Islam's guidance was a sign that any claims they made to being Muslim were valueless, and the community needed to shun or kill them.²²⁷

None of those conceptions of political framing and identity could explain how the shaykh interpreted things, and in isolation they still would not indicate the rest of the shaykh's course or that of his tradition's inheritors. As with Najdī Salafism's original affirmations of belief, putting those understandings in a wider intellectual context made the implications seem ambiguous and subjective. The apparent contrast with Ibn Taymiyyah's views was especially challenging. He engaged with *takfīr* as something that might mark Muslims and Muslim communities as deviators,²²⁸ while being wary of excommunicating Muslims for basic sins. And at least in the letter of the issue, there were tensions between Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's argument that failing to denounce *kufṛ* was itself a sign of disbelief, and Ibn Taymiyyah's reiteration of the view that if one Muslim named another a *kāfir*, then the accuser risked being guilty.²²⁹ It was not plausible that Ibn Taymiyyah did not recognise the possibility of disbelief in God's Lordship,²³⁰ names, or attributes.²³¹ Rather, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's personal letters and their assertions that he alone had grasped what it meant to recognise one God begged the question of whether he had formed novel interpretations of the issue.²³² Looking further ahead, that raised questions of why the tradition's inheritors could or would not simply reinterpret things again. But there was also a shorter-term issue of how a project of revival based on those principles would gain momentum when it seemed to be finding more enemies than friends.

²²⁵ Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *Matan Nawāqid al-Islām*, 2-5.

²²⁶ Ibn Qudāmah, *ʿUmdat al-Fiqh fīl-Madhab al-Ḥanbalī* (Beirut: al-Assrya, 2003), 136.

²²⁷ Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, Burhāmī, and Marzūq, *Kashf ash-Shubuhāt*, 45.

²²⁸ Jamileh Kadivar, "Exploring Takfir, Its Origins and Contemporary Use: The Case of Takfiri Approach in Daesh's Media," *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 7, no. 3 (2020/09/01 2020): 5.

²²⁹ Taymiyyah, *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, 3.

²³⁰ Taymiyyah, *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, 2, 79.

²³¹ Taymiyyah, *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, 2, 126.

²³² Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, al-Fawzān, and al-ʿAlīqī, *ar-Rasāʾil ash-Shakhṣiyya*, 186-87.

Framing Political Change

The shaykh's enabling of the first Saudi state's expansion demonstrated that even though Najdī Salafism offered a sense of political identity and framing that legitimised violent political change, its adherents would rely on compromise rather than the tradition's persuasive power. By 1744 Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb arrived in the Najdī town of Dir'iyya and found an interested partner for his work: the Āl Sa'ūd. The interests were mutual. He wanted support for a revivalist project while his Saudi partners wanted to support and validate an expansion of their political control. It was not a religious conversion—his Saudi partners sympathised with his basic views, but they did not share his fervour.²³³ But it was enough to help the Āl Sa'ūd capitalise on Najd's place as a political vacuum to which Ottoman authorities paid little attention, and expand Saudi political authority with the legitimising support of Najdī norms and nomenclature.²³⁴ Besides the political result—the first Saudi state that lasted from 1744 to 1818—it showed that a Najdī outlook was able to frame and justify political change. Drawing on Ḥanbalī and other sources, the shaykh could support struggle against perpetrators of *shirk*,²³⁵ enjoining Muslims to fight those who disbelieved.²³⁶ And the potential scope of the expansion was as vast as the potential expansiveness of the disbelief that the Najdī movement might care to look for—if people did not follow the *sharī'a* in suitable ways and to a suitable extent then they had failed to learn and follow their religion,²³⁷ instead following their personal inclinations.²³⁸ While history showed that the Saudis won the political prize of a new state, Commins describes the social prize for the shaykh: "going to see what people were doing and telling them to stop."²³⁹

It was worth noting that although the generic Islamic language of *jihād* would frame that Saudi expansion, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's conceptions of *shirk* and *takfīr* were still the defining

²³³ Martin Riexinger, "Rendering Muḥammad Human Again: The Prophetology of Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792)," *Numen* 60, no. 1 (2013): 105-07; Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 172.

²³⁴ Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 17-20.

²³⁵ Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Mu'allafāt ash-Shaykh al-Imām Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb*, Muhammad ibn Sa'ud Islamic University, (Riyadh, 1976), 10/238.

²³⁶ Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Mu'allafāt ash-Shaykh al-Imām Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb*, 10/240-41.

²³⁷ Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Matan Nawāqid al-Islām*, 4-5.

²³⁸ Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Faḍl al-Islām* (N.P., N.D.), 291.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikisource/ar/e/e4/%D9%81%D8%B6%D9%84_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85.pdf.

²³⁹ Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, 167.

issues. His idea of *jihād* fit into the same historical line of thought that informed his views of personal and community identity. Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 1292CE) presented *jihād* as an obligation by which to spread Islam,²⁴⁰ and fight tyrants, *bid‘a*, social evils, and other things,²⁴¹ while Ibn Taymiyyah endorsed it as a means of political change—a position that contemporary extremist authors would find convenient.²⁴² But predicating *jihād* on understandings of belief and disbelief made the Najdī approach stick out. Ibn Taymiyyah, for example, counselled readers to consider perceived deviators’ motives carefully rather than assuming a failure or refusal to learn the religion.²⁴³ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s views, on the other hand, turned those outsiders into dangerous enemies that disturbed the peace by threatening the community’s identity and values.²⁴⁴ It was a distinction that manifested itself in the Saudi conquest: the destruction of more domes and tombs—clear symbols of *shirk* in Najdī thought—followed the seizure of Makkah and Madīnah from 1802 to 1803, and the repression of Shī‘a after the 1792 Saudi expansion into al-Aḥsā, as well as the 1801 sacking of the Shī‘a-majority Karbala.²⁴⁵

But that did not make the first Saudi State into a demonstration of Najdī Salafism’s persuasive power or a sign that the tradition was the basis for a new social movement. The expansion was still a real story of real people who did real stuff, and it highlighted the space which the tradition left for them to accommodate the limits of their political context. There were familiar hints of a boundary between the rigid discourse and real adherents’ potential for interpretation and compromise. And that raised a question of whether Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb selectively applied his standards, especially when the Āl Sa‘ūd were not religiously lax but also not as observant as him.²⁴⁶ That invited another question: had the shaykh subordinated himself to secure a partner or at least a patron? His later inheritors would appear to understand that, noting that he could not have grown a movement through

²⁴⁰ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Zad al-Ma‘ād fī Khayr al-‘Ibād* (Beirut: al-Resalah, 2009), 331-33.

²⁴¹ al-Jawziyya, 34-333, زاد المعاد.

²⁴² Hegghammer, "Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries?," 254-55.

²⁴³ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 15 (Madīnah: King Fahd Centre for Printing of the Holy Qur’an, 2004), 89-90, 105.

²⁴⁴ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab and J. Harvey Lomax (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 79.

²⁴⁵ Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shī‘a Islam*, 97. Thanks to Dr Ismail for lending a copy of the book, which may or may not be returned at some point.

²⁴⁶ Riexinger, "Rendering Muḥammad Human Again: The Prophetology of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792)," 105-07; Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, 172.

independent preaching, and needed a partner like the Āl Sa‘ūd to help impose change.²⁴⁷ And even if they still framed the partnership as a mission of purification,²⁴⁸ the tradition’s fundamental substance and formative history were raising questions. The shaykh’s views on belief and disbelief provided a sense of political identity that defined a community and political framing that motivated it to action. And that emerging kind of Najdī Salafism could validate political change. But his project ultimately depended on a partnership with a more capable actor that did not entirely share his views, and the emerging tradition’s intellectual context hinted at patterns of interpretation rather than rigidity. Najdī Salafism’s intellectual roots made political compromise possible, while the tradition’s formative history suggested that it was necessary.

Vocabulary of Conviction & Politics of Compromise

The implications of Najdī Salafism’s credal fundamentals remained unclear well into the modern era. The tradition’s basic language of political framing and identity had not drastically changed by the twentieth century. The issue was not really that it had stagnated. Its inheritors built their own institutions and some Saudi shaykhs like Muḥammad bin al-‘Uthaymīn (1925-2001), for example, rose to prominence among Salafīs in Saudi Arabia and the wider world who subscribed to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s message.²⁴⁹ Figures like Ibn al-‘Uthaymīn would not abandon the basic conceptions of *tawḥīd* that embraced God’s Lordship, worship, and names and attributes,²⁵⁰ or stop denouncing *kufr*,²⁵¹ or become more tolerant of *shirk*.²⁵² That did not mean that they were idolizing Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb—one Saudi Grand Mufti, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz bin Bāz (1912-1999),²⁵³ could and would frame *kufr* and *takfīr* in the same terms, and did not need to cite Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb directly.²⁵⁴ But the

²⁴⁷ Michele Kjørlien and Michele Michele, "State and Religion in Saudi Arabia," *The Arab Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (1994): 36-37.

²⁴⁸ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Ibn Bāz, *al-Imām Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhāb: Da‘watuhu wa Sīratuhu* (Islamic University of Medina, 1965), 17-18.
https://ia800201.us.archive.org/8/items/ar_imam_mohmed_ibn_abdalwhab/ar_imam_mohmed_ibn_abdalwhab.pdf.

²⁴⁹ Uriya Shavit, "Can Muslims Befriend Non-Muslims? Debating al-walā’ wa-al-barā’ (Loyalty and Disavowal) in Theory and Practice," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 25, no. 1 (2014): 70-71.

²⁵⁰ Muḥammad bin Sāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn, *Commentary on Shaikh al-Islam ibn Taymiyyah’s al-‘Aqidah al-Wasitiyyah*, English ed., vol. 1 (Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 2008), 39-44.

²⁵¹ al-‘Uthaymīn, *Commentary on Shaikh al-Islam ibn Taymiyyah’s al-‘Aqidah al-Wasitiyyah*, 1, 133.

²⁵² al-‘Uthaymīn, *Commentary on Shaikh al-Islam ibn Taymiyyah’s al-‘Aqidah al-Wasitiyyah*, 1, 244-45.

²⁵³ Shavit, "Can Muslims Befriend Non-Muslims?," 70-71.

²⁵⁴ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Ibn Bāz, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā wa Muqālāt Mutanawwi‘a* (Riyadh: Dar Qasem, 1999), 1/93.

conceptions of belief and disbelief that made Najdī Salafism a source of political framing and identity remained nonnegotiable in ways that even the tradition's founder arguably was not.

There were still hints that Najdī discourse could be socially compromising. But whether that reflected its inherent flexibility or actors' context was unclear. Another former Saudi Grand Mufti and familial descendant of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, Muḥammad bin Ibrāhīm Āl ash-Shaykh (1890-1969), emphasised that *takfīr* applied to those who abandoned their religion after learning it,²⁵⁵ while still warning against *shirk* and stressing the centrality of *tawḥīd*.²⁵⁶ And slightly later, Qadhi's early-career analysis of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's *Kashf ash-Shubuhāt* stipulated the importance of offenders' awareness and intent when applying *takfīr*.²⁵⁷ But whether that indicated a rejection of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's thinking to some extent was hard to say. Even in personal correspondence, the shaykh had stressed the need to fight disbelief and its impacts,²⁵⁸ and that disbelievers were outside the community and its protection.²⁵⁹ Similarly, his legal writings emphasised *jihād* and disbelief.²⁶⁰ Yet at the same time, the tradition's formative intellectual and political history also pointed to a space and demand for practical compromise. Like with Salafism generally, there were hints of a gap between an idealised discourse and the actors that applied it in a real context.

Najdī Salafism's rigid credal fundamentals and flexible early history therefore showed where actors like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī *could* take its conceptions of political identity and framing, but not necessarily where they *would*. Belief, disbelief, and the actors or things that embodied them were central to their rhetoric. Ash-Shahāl defined Muslim identity through *tawḥīd*,²⁶¹ and threats to the community as "armies of *kufr*,"²⁶² while ar-Rāfi'ī raised

²⁵⁵ Muḥammad bin Ibrāhīm Āl ash-Shaykh, *Fatāwā wa Rasā'il ash-Shaykh Muḥammad bin Ibrāhīm Āl ash-Shaykh*, 13 vols. (Mecca: Matb'at al-Hukuma, 1979), 1/71-72.

²⁵⁶ Muḥammad bin Ibrāhīm Āl ash-Shaykh, *Sharḥ Kitāb Kashf ash-Shubuhāt*, Fourth ed. (Riyadh: King Fahd National Library, 2007), 100.

²⁵⁷ Qadhi, *A Critical Study of Shirk*, 102-03.

²⁵⁸ Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, al-Fawzān, and al-'Alīqī, *ar-Rasā'il ash-Shakhshiyya*, 25.

²⁵⁹ Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, al-Fawzān, and al-'Alīqī, *ar-Rasā'il ash-Shakhshiyya*, 205-06.

²⁶⁰ Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Mu'allafāt ash-Shaykh al-Imām Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb*, 10/238-41.

²⁶¹ Thalāthiyyat as-Sudayrī, "Mudākhalat ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl war-Radd 'Alayhi fī Thalāthiyya as-Sudayrī - al-Kawn min Ḥawlana," *YouTube* (28/05/2015 2015). <https://youtu.be/PV1DkR8ynj4>.

²⁶² al-Maktab al-'Ilāmī at-Tayyār as-Salafī, "Jawlat Samāḥat ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl 'alā Amākin al-Infijār," *YouTube* (27/08/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/JwFi-fQixYY>.

concerns about *bid‘a* and *shirk*.²⁶³ But their wariness of politicising identity the same way when speaking publicly made their politics as ambiguous as their tradition’s history and substance. Ar-Rāfi‘ī warned congregants that identifying *kufṛ* was complicated and required certainty,²⁶⁴ while ash-Shahāl’s statements to the media separated the political identities of outsiders like ‘Alawīs from their identities as nonbelievers in the Najdī sense.²⁶⁵ And while the former would defend Syria’s uprising in the language of *jihād* he stressed that Syrian Sunnīs were fighting proxies of the Iranian government instead of Shī‘a,²⁶⁶ and ash-Shahāl appealed to a “respectable Shī‘a sect” to stabilise Lebanon.²⁶⁷ The resulting question was not whether they freely abandoned their principles. Instead, it was whether they reflected the flexibility of a Najdī tradition that defined political identity and framing starkly, yet had roots and history that allowed for interpretations which reflected adherents’ context and place relative to political power in it.

Najdī Law & Elitist Authoritarian Politics

Beyond that political identity and framing drawn from its credal roots, Najdī Salafism’s Islamic legal principles, sources, and interpretations offered some indication of how the shaykhs defined the ideal structure and role for actors in political life. That became clearer during the nineteenth century, as the Najdī ‘*ulama*’s role in the second Saudi State showed the authoritarian political implications that ash-Shahāl’s elitist framing of Salafīs’ role had hinted at. But while the second state’s consolidation illustrated Najdī Salafism’s authoritarian potential, its failure also reinforced a sense that the real implications depended on adherents’ circumstances. As the state collapsed around them rather than under them, the nineteenth-century ‘*ulama*’s would fall apart, and the lesson was that scholars’ efforts to transform society depended on their place relative to the centres of power. Notwithstanding the leftover question of whether Salafī actors would take the same

²⁶³ ar-Rāfi‘ī, *al-Fawā'id al-Hasān fi Ḥadīth Harqal wa Abī Sufyān*, 168-71.

²⁶⁴ Sālim ar-Rāfi‘ī, "Silsilat as-Sīra an-Nabawiyya Ghazwat Badr 30 Wuṣūl Uṣrā al-Mushrikīn ilā al-Madīna," *YouTube* (23/09/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/DgeHhfpG3w0>.

²⁶⁵ British Broadcasting Corporation BBC, "Bilā Quyūd: ash-Shaykh Dā‘ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl," *YouTube* (06/08/2013 2013). https://youtu.be/tCz2rt34-_8.

²⁶⁶ Al Jazeera AJ, "Mā Warā’ al-Khubr - Da‘wat ash-Shaykh Sālim ar-Rāfi‘ī li Sunnat Lubnān," *YouTube* (24/04/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/s2C5AK9uXt4>.

²⁶⁷ Al Jadeed, "Dā‘ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl Yu‘alliq ‘alā Tafjīrāt Ṭarābulus," *YouTube* (24/08/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/xiEQnCfvjgl>.

elitist approach if they had to work as activists within society, Najdī law's substance and history helped clarify where the tradition could potentially go.

Politics & Legal Principles

The Lebanese shaykhs framed Salafīs' social role in relative structural terms, and the issue appeared to be a legal matter. Ash-Shahāl's deference to Lebanon's Sunnī establishment—the Hariri family's Future Movement—after 2005 reflected an elitist view of their place in national politics.²⁶⁸ His indications of distance from the establishment showed that the relationship was contingent on its recognition of Salafī interests,²⁶⁹ and his vision of politics did not ignore actors outside the Sunnī sphere like Lebanon's Maronite Christians.²⁷⁰ But he positioned Salafīs as religious actors in a broader national structure alongside more powerful political authorities, putting them below the establishment but above the public sphere where ash-Shahāl's concerns were religious and moral. Stable Salafī power would matter less than the community's religious character, which the Salafī movement could support by enjoining good conduct—*al-amr bil-ma'rūf*—and conducting associated general Islamic work.²⁷¹ But it also left questions: how and by what standards was deference to a non-Salafī establishment acceptable, and how could the movement change or preserve society's moral character?

Ar-Rāfi'ī described the structures of politics in the same broad national terms, while accounting for the possibility that Salafīs could be more politically marginal. His writings presented them as religious elites who operated from within society rather than from circles of political power, while taking the definition of a suitable society from sources of Islamic law. And his purpose mirrored ash-Shahāl's: religious actors were distinct but still enmeshed with the public, and their purpose was to encourage appropriate social norms.²⁷² While he had found public immorality in Germany unsettling when living there in the nineties and

²⁶⁸ Memowas, "7 / 5 Sā'at Ḥiwār. As-Sunna fī Lubnān bayna al-Khilāfāt wat-Taḥālufāt," *YouTube* (04/11/2008 2008). <https://youtu.be/LcDamsixh6w>.

²⁶⁹ Bint Jbeil BJ, "Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl: 'Atabnā 'alā Tayyār "al-Mustaqbal" Kabīr Li'annahū Ḥalama as-Salafiyūn," *Bint Jbeil* (06/06/2009 2009). <https://marchive.bintjbeil.org/article/13936>.

²⁷⁰ al-Aluka and Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl, "Ḥiwār Shabakat al-Alūka ma'a Faḍīlat ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl," *Alukah.net* (10/02/2011 2011). https://www.alukah.net/world_muslims/0/29541/.

²⁷¹ as-Salafi, "al-Jabha as-Suniyya fī Lubnān."

²⁷² ar-Rāfi'ī, *al-Ḥadīth ath-Thānī: Bashārāt Ahl al-Kitāb bi Nabī Muḥammad Ṣalā Allāh 'alayhi wa Sallim*, 2, 2.

early twenty-first century, for example, he responded by calling Muslims to reject compromises on their religion rather than pushing for social or political authority.²⁷³ Both he and ash-Shahāl's views suggested a structural understanding of society and Salafīs' place in it—a community below, elites above, and Salafīs as religious actors in the middle. But while ash-Shahāl appeared more interested in working from the top, ar-Rāfi'ī's first concern was with the religious condition of the community of believers and could live with less-than-ideal circumstances ranging from Salafīs' marginal position to the presence of outsiders in the public sphere.²⁷⁴

Regardless of how they conceived of their place in the structures of society, both men saw Salafī movements and particularly leaders as a force for social reform based on sources of Islamic law. Ash-Shahāl spoke in general terms about interlinked goals, methods, and institutions that could preserve society's Islamic character. He described Salafīs as “people of *sharī'a* and religion,”²⁷⁵ and their commitment to the former as an essential objective for Islamic movements that his networks served via Islamic education and outreach.²⁷⁶ The resulting community—or at least the one to which he spoke—was generally of “obedient believers: friends of faith, peace, and piety,” contrasting with “people of hell.”²⁷⁷ Ar-Rāfi'ī, on the other hand, indicated more specifically that the standards of that community lay in Islamic law. He stressed not just believers' correct personal conduct but also the sources that informed it, drawing on aforementioned figures like Ibn al-Qayyim, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Nāṣir ad-Dīn al-Albānī.²⁷⁸ His mission was to convey those sources of law in the *ḥadīth*, normalising public virtues like charity without imposing unnecessary prohibitions and restrictions.²⁷⁹ But the sources themselves hinted at his Najdī background, including figures

²⁷³ ar-Rāfi'ī, *Aḥkām al-Aḥwāl ash-Shakhṣiyya lil Muslimīn fīl-Gharb*, 73-74, 77-80.

²⁷⁴ ar-Rāfi'ī, *Silsila fī Zilāl as-Sunna*, 64-67.

²⁷⁵ Memowas, “7 / 7 Sā'at Ḥiwār. As-Sunna fī Lubnān bayna al-Khilāfāt wat-Taḥālufāt.”

²⁷⁶ Al Aan AA, “al-Ḥuḍūr as-Salafī fī Madīnat Ṭarābulus,” *YouTube* (04/08/2009 2009). https://youtu.be/_qxyVdBb1lg; Memowas, “7 / 6 Sā'at Ḥiwār. As-Sunna fī Lubnān bayna al-Khilāfāt wat-Taḥālufāt,” *YouTube* (04/11/2008 2008). <https://youtu.be/Q8z6HKEDcXE>.

²⁷⁷ al-Maktab al-ʿIlāmī at-Tayyār as-Salafī, “Laḥzā Mu'athira lish-Shaykh ash-Shahāl min Makān Infijār at-Taḥwā was-Salām...Kay La Nansā,” *YouTube* (12/11/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/wCAD28GCfAY>.

²⁷⁸ Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī, “Khuṭbat al-Juma'a min Masjid at-Taḥwā, bi 'Unwān: Qiṣṣat aṣ-Ṣaḥābī al-Jalīl Salmān al-Fārisī Raḍī Allāh 'anhu - Juz 2,” *YouTube* (29/04/2015 2015). <https://youtu.be/AkG3Rd16sGE>.

²⁷⁹ ar-Rāfi'ī, *al-Ḥadīth at-Tāsi': Ṣanā' al-Ma'rūf*, 10.

ranging from Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal,²⁸⁰ to Ibn al-Qayyim,²⁸¹ and Ibn al-‘Uthaymīn.²⁸² And his sermons echoed the Najdī tradition’s strict linkage of correct practice to the authenticity of one’s Muslim identity, as he connected belief to righteous conduct as defined by those sources,²⁸³ specific issues of practice like *hajj*,²⁸⁴ of social structure like the Islamic family unit,²⁸⁵ and specificities of Islamic law—Ibn Qudāmah’s views on farming,²⁸⁶ for example.

The linkages between Islamic law to conceptions of social structure mirrored a more general connection between Najdī Salafism’s legal roots and politics. The shaykhs had touched on issues including the actors that defined and imposed appropriate social relations alongside the definitions and sources of propriety, mirroring the enmeshment of Islamic legal principles, sources, and institutions with the social order.²⁸⁷ And their conceptions of a community, power, and norms mirrored the general contest in Muslim politics over the meanings of symbolic things and behaviours, the institutions that defined them, and the “rules and discourse that bind the community.”²⁸⁸ The issue was not that Salafīs’ religious activities and ideas could have implications for politics as something separate,²⁸⁹ or that “the “political” had different connotations in different contexts.”²⁹⁰ Rather, politics and Islamic law were interlinked while legal sources and interpretations were inherently political. While Najdī Salafism’s foundational conceptions of creed expanded on the shaykhs’ sense of political identity and framing, its legal foundations expanded on their conceptions of the ideal structures, purposes, and roles of actors in politics.

²⁸⁰ Sālim ar-Rāfi‘ī, *al-Ḥadīth ath-Thānī ‘Ashar: Ṣadaqat Allāh ‘alā ‘Ibādihi*, Silsila fi Ṣilāl as-Sunna, (Beirut: Dar ibn Hazm, 2020), 20.

²⁸¹ ar-Rāfi‘ī, *al-Ḥadīth ath-Thānī ‘Ashar: Ṣadaqat Allāh ‘alā ‘Ibādihi*, 29.

²⁸² ar-Rāfi‘ī, *al-Ḥadīth ath-Thānī ‘Ashar: Ṣadaqat Allāh ‘alā ‘Ibādihi*, 32-33.

²⁸³ ar-Rāfi‘ī, "Khuṭbat al-Juma’a min Masjid at-Taqwā, bi ‘Unwān: Qiṣṣat aṣ-Ṣaḥābī al-Jalīl Salmān al-Fārisī Raḍī Allāh ‘anhu - Juz 2."

²⁸⁴ ar-Rāfi‘ī, *al-Ḥadīth al-‘Āshir: al-Umma al-Wāḥida*, 49.

²⁸⁵ ar-Rāfi‘ī, *Aḥkām al-Aḥwāl ash-Shakhṣiyya lil Muslimīn fīl-Gharb*, 188-90.

²⁸⁶ Sālim ar-Rāfi‘ī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Majmū‘ Sharḥ al-Muhadhab*, vol. 9 (Beirut: Dar ibn Hazm, 2004), 2398-99.

²⁸⁷ Hallaq, *Sharī‘a*, 125-26.

²⁸⁸ Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 7-10.

²⁸⁹ Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," 34-35, 48-49.

²⁹⁰ Olidort, *The Politics of “Quietist” Salafism*, 5.

Legal Sources & Elitist Political Structures

Najdī Salafism's legal sources and history expanded on the shaykhs' vague indications of how political life would ideally be structured, suggesting that ash-Shahāl's remarks were closer to the letter of the tradition. Like the shaykh, the precedent of the Najdī *‘ulama* and its role in the second Saudi State hinted at an authoritarian view of politics and society. As in Lebanon after 2005, the first state's collapse and the second one's rise came amidst shifts in the broader political environment that were above Najdī scholars' paygrade. While the first Saudi state satisfied Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb's ambitions for society, Ottoman authorities' had been less enthusiastic about it. Whether for the sake of its reputation or religious obligations, the Ottoman Empire had to protect Makkah, Madīnah, and significant portions of the Arabian Peninsula.²⁹¹ More generally, it had interests in protecting the cities and trade routes just beyond Saudi territory that were coming under increased attack. And in the early nineteenth century its patience finally ran out. By 1811 Ottoman and Egyptian forces had intervened in the Arabian Peninsula, reaching the home of the Āl Sa‘ūd in Dir‘iyya by 1818. But while that marked the end of the first state, a new one started taking shape in the 1820s under Turki bin ‘Abd Allāh (1755-1834). And as the Ottoman-Egyptian presence weakened, the Āl Sa‘ūd were beginning to re-establish themselves. Notwithstanding further clashes with Ottoman and Egyptian forces, the show was back on the road by 1824 as a new state started to emerge.²⁹²

In hindsight, the *‘ulama*'s absence from that political process was telling: whatever it accomplished would ultimately depend on its patrons and their circumstances. The sociological reality was that the new state was emerging in a regional environment where more powerful actors constrained it.²⁹³ The defining political forces would be the Āl Sa‘ūd and their relations with those other actors—Egyptian authorities once arrested and ran off with Fayṣal (r. 1834-1838) for failure to pay tribute, for example.²⁹⁴ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb's descendants would still have a role, and despite scattering after the first state's collapse, Saudi authorities invited them to be part of the new order. But the regional constraints

²⁹¹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 30-33.

²⁹² R. Bayly Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1965), 60-61.

²⁹³ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 39-42.

²⁹⁴ Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 23.

would stop another Saudi expansion and the project would be different. And in the second Saudi State—as in Lebanon after 2005—the *‘ulama’s* new role would depend on how the political authorities answered a key question: what internal problems were the centres of power trying to solve?²⁹⁵

The *‘ulama’s* place in the new order would be relatively comfortable, illustrating a structural relationship that was familiar to Najdī Salafism’s sources and their distinction between political and religious authority. It would ultimately serve a worldly interest—legitimising Saudi political power. But the letter of the Najdī tradition’s preferred legal sources could work with that by defining three general components: political authority, religious authority, and the public sphere. There were traces of that distinction in the early Ḥanbalī tradition which favoured an elitist political order that excluded the wider lay public, on the grounds that politics was not only distinct from religious matters but a potential threat to religious purity.²⁹⁶ And Ibn Taymiyyah’s later writings clarified that above the public within that political structure, the ruler and religious establishment were distinct.²⁹⁷ That thinking did not make religious scholars’ privileged position over the public into an objective in its own right, and society’s Islamic character was the central issue.²⁹⁸ But from a place above the wider public, they would serve as the religious *‘ulama*, who remained credentialed experts on the religious matters that needed to define public life and advised the political *umarā*,²⁹⁹ who actually had the resources and influence needed to affect change.³⁰⁰ That structural conception helped clarify the distinctions that figures like ash-Shahāl drew between Lebanon’s Sunnī establishment, Salafīs, and the Sunnī public.³⁰¹ And it also explained why the Najdī *‘ulama* could legitimise and defer to Saudi political power as religious authorities, notwithstanding the first state’s apparent compromises and the fact that the second one was not going to accomplish the same mission.³⁰²

²⁹⁵ Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 82.

²⁹⁶ Nimrod Hurvitz, *The Formation of Hanbalism: Piety into Power* (Florence: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 12-13.

²⁹⁷ Ibn Taymiyyah, *as-Siyāsa ash-Shar‘iyya fī Iṣlāḥ ar-Rā‘ī war-Ra‘īya* (Dar al-‘Ilm al-Fawa’id, N.D.), 37-38.

²⁹⁸ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Iḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma* (Dammam: Ramadi lil-Nashr, 1997), 88.

²⁹⁹ ‘Abd ar-Raḥman bin Ḥassan Āl ash-Shaykh, *Rasā’il wa Fatāwā* (N.P., N.D.), 4-5.

<https://ia801207.us.archive.org/23/items/WAQ12657/mrmn2-2.pdf>.

³⁰⁰ Muhammad Al-Atawneh, "Authority-Holders (wulat al-umur) in Contemporary Islamic Politics and Governance: The Case of Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Critique* 26, no. 2 (2017): 126-27.

³⁰¹ AJM, "Mubāshir ma‘a Dā‘ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl. As-Salafiyūn fī Lubnān."

³⁰² Al-Atawneh, *Wahhābī Islam Facing the Challenges of Modernity*, 3-5.

In the letter of Najdī Salafism's sources, the logic behind that subordinate relationship was an elitist compromise that maintained stability and an Islamic society. While ash-Shahāl noted the *‘ulama-umarā* distinction and called for coordination between the two, he also pointed to a wider principle of *walī al-amr*.³⁰³ Ibn Taymiyyah's legal writings described the general idea: a body politic delegated authority to a guardian, who was guided by or at least able to follow Islamic principles.³⁰⁴ The transfer of power was significant, granting political rulers a strong role as guardians over the public and the social order,³⁰⁵ but it was not arbitrary. In part, the purpose was to protect against *fitna*—temptations and trials, and political discord, sedition, and strife,³⁰⁶ of a sort that unduly tested or undermined a Muslim community.³⁰⁷ And it was a compromise that the Najdī *‘ulama* claimed to have struck. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān bin Ḥassan (1780-1869)—another familial descendant of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb—would make the arrangement and its purpose clear in his own writings with distinctions between the public, *‘ulama*, and *umarā*, and the assertion that the *walī's* role was to protect against *fitna*.³⁰⁸

Besides stabilising the system, that *‘ulama-umarā* bargain also served Salafis' ambitions for an authoritarian social transformation. In the letter of Najdī Salafism's sources, a stable environment delivered or at least created space for an Islamic order. While the political leadership still needed to be able to resort to measures like war, Ibn Taymiyyah's proposition was that a good leader was also obliged to deliver justice, carry the public from ignorance,³⁰⁹ and impose proper restrictions upon and deliver proper rights for society.³¹⁰ It was not a secular social contract, and its purpose was to defend a social order defined by Islamic norms and address issues that modern secular states relegated to the private

³⁰³ Bernāmā Maj Humūmana, "Barnāmij Humūmunā 4 - al-Ḥalaqa as-Sābi'a - Indifā' ash-Shabāb Naḥw Manāṭiq aṣ-Ṣirā', " *YouTube* (12/03/2014 2014). https://youtu.be/78K-r83k_p0.

³⁰⁴ Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 15, 13-14.

³⁰⁵ Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, Fourth Student ed., ed. J Milton Cowan (Ithaca: Harrassowitz, 1979), 1288-89.

³⁰⁶ Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 815.

³⁰⁷ Evgeny Zelenev and Milana Iliushina, "The "Fitna" Concept within the Context of the Sultan Barquq (1382 – 1399) and the Karamanids Relations," *Iran & the Caucasus* 20, no. 2 (2016): 180-82.

³⁰⁸ Āl ash-Shaykh, *Rasā'il wa Fatāwā*, 4-7.

³⁰⁹ Taymiyyah, *as-Siyāsa ash-Shar'īyya fī Iṣlāḥ ar-Rā'ī war-Ra'īya*, 17-18.

³¹⁰ Taymiyyah, *as-Siyāsa ash-Shar'īyya fī Iṣlāḥ ar-Rā'ī war-Ra'īya*, 83-84.

sphere.³¹¹ It did, however, give a clearer indication of the political structure that ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's Najdī roots idealised, and in which ash-Shahāl's elitist remarks began to make more sense. But while that structure's purpose was clearly to deliver an Islamic social order, there were separate questions about how Najdī thought defined an Islamic society, and how the tradition's adherents and their partners could bring the public along.

Legal Interpretation & Authoritarian Reform

Even as the nineteenth-century entrenchment of Saudi authority illustrated Najdī Salafism's authoritarian potential, the ambiguities and subjectivities of Najdī legal interpretation made it an unreliable precedent. For the Āl Saʿūd the Najdī *ʿulama's* social project would be an easy sell, given how it enabled an authoritarian crackdown at a time when Saudi political dominance lacked any obvious basis. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's religious project lent the first state an outward-looking mission—buttressed by the prospect of distributing the material benefits of raids—but the restrictive regional context made a repeat performance inadvisable. Worse still, other family and tribal groups were strong enough to assert hegemonic control or could claim a special lineage while Saudi rulers could not, making a new religious mission appealing.³¹² Particularly under Fayṣal's tenure, there would not be an expansionist mission but instead a new social structure that naturally subordinated society according to the Najdī *ʿulama's* strict understanding of Islamic law and its sources.³¹³ One consequence was political: the second Saudi state would not expand, but instead homogenise and situate the public under its authority.³¹⁴ And another was a historical: an illustration of where the Najdī *ʿulama's* and the Lebanese shaykhs' vision for society could go.

An important clarification about the ensuing crackdown and Salafism's social outlook more generally was not an exercise in legal literalism. It did not come from "a literal reading of the

³¹¹ Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 13.

³¹² Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 18-19, 22-23, 36.

³¹³ Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 82.

³¹⁴ Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shi'a Islam*, 97-98; Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, 179.

religious texts,”³¹⁵ or as an inevitable consequence of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s native Ḥanbalī legal school. There was something close to legal “literalism” in Islam. But it was a feature of marginal dissenting views like the Ṣāḥirī legal school whose scholars like Ibn Ḥazm denounced Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfi‘ī, and Ḥanbalī thought as “whimsical and arbitrary.”³¹⁶ And that near-literalism was distinct from “strictness”—Ibn Ḥazm’s view of musical instruments, for example, was relatively permissive.³¹⁷ And as for Najdī Salafism’s legal roots, they were less a product of Ḥanbalī law than its new scholars’ interpretations. The Ḥanbalī school was not impulsively illiberal—it took more permissive views on women leading congregational prayer in certain settings, for example, despite characterisations of a “conservative” tradition.³¹⁸ And even later Ḥanbalī scholars with standing in Najdī circles like Ibn Badrān (d. 1927CE) stressed that the school represented the way of the *Salaf*,³¹⁹ while acknowledging Ibn Ḥanbal’s openness to flexible tools like legal analogies.³²⁰

The deliberately revivalist nature of Najdī Salafism meant that instead of literalism or a Ḥanbalī orthodoxy, the second Saudi State’s crackdown appeared hostage to the human factors and principles that shaped the ‘*ulama*’s undisciplined kind of legal textualism. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had framed his tradition as an authentic revival of Sunnī Islam rather than an extension of established legal approaches—its stated intention was to revive what he perceived as Islam’s historical starting point rather than interpret the law in the present.³²¹ That followed the precedent of past figures like Ibn al-Qayyim, who embraced Ibn Ḥanbal’s core ideas while being cautiously sceptical of later scholars’ expansion and clarifications the Ḥanbalī school.³²² But while the intention behind that approach was to avoid the risks of

³¹⁵ Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Blyth Crawford, and Valentin Wutke, *Rise of the Reactionaries: Comparing the Ideologies of Salafi-Jihadism and White Supremacist Extremism* (George Washington University Program on Extremism, 2021), 85.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Rise%20of%20the%20Reactionaries.pdf>.

³¹⁶ Amr Osman, *The Ṣāḥirī Madhhab (3rd/9th-10th/16th Century): A Textualist Theory of Islamic Law* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 174-75, 202-04.

³¹⁷ Lois Ibsen al Faruqi, "Music, Musicians and Muslim Law," *Asian Music* 17, no. 1 (1985): 16.

³¹⁸ Ahmed Elewa and Laury Silvers, "'I Am One of the People': A Survey and Analysis of Legal Arguments on Woman-Led Prayer in Islam," *Journal of Law and Religion* 26, no. 1 (2010): 154; Bernard, *Civil Democratic Islam*, xv.

³¹⁹ ‘Abd al-Qādir bin Badrān al-Dimashqī and ‘Abd Allāh bin ‘Abd al-Muḥsin at-Turkī, *al-Madkhal ilā Madhhab al-Imām Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal* (Beirut: Mu’assasat ar-Risāla, 1981), 30-31, 49-50.

³²⁰ al-Dimashqī and at-Turkī, *al-Madkhal ilā Madhhab al-Imām Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal*, 119.

³²¹ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, al-Fawzān, and al-‘Alīqī, *ar-Rasā’il ash-Shakhshiyya*, 36.

³²² Hallaq, *Sharīa*, 58-59; Abdul-Rahman Mustafa and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *On Taqlid: Ibn Al Qayyim's Critique of Authority in Islamic Law* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 38-39.

over-interpretation and deviation, it came with its own cost. The emerging *‘ulama* who shaped Najdī Salafism were affirming a direct relationship to legal sources,³²³ and replacing orthodox interpretive subtleties with a less precise focus on the letter of the law and their stark personal assumptions of what it had historically meant.³²⁴ And one result was that if the *‘ulama* had a working assumption that strictness and authenticity were linked, then the outcomes would resemble the unadulterated letter of figures like Ibn Taymiyyah. Major offences against public order would be religious transgressions with all the punishments prescribed in the *sharī‘a* but none of the mitigating factors, and political authorities would only be legitimate if they demonstrated a commitment to promoting good conduct and ending social evils.³²⁵ And the principles behind the *‘ulama*’s thinking—acknowledged or otherwise—would become central.

That dependence on interpretation meant that Najdī Salafism’s legal implications were better understood as a reflection of a general governing principle—“*al-amr bil-ma‘rūf wa nahī ‘an al-munkar*”, or the commanding of good and the forbidding of wrong—and the *‘ulama*’s unusual circumstances. Najdī Salafīs could draw on the same legal sources as others, and did so in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like ar-Rāfi‘ī, early Najdī figures engaged with the views of Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal,³²⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim,³²⁷ and Ibn Taymiyyah, while referencing normal *ḥadīth* sources like those of Tirmidhī, Abu Dāwud, Bukhārī,³²⁸ and Muslim.³²⁹ And the principle of *al-amr bil-ma‘rūf wa nahī ‘an al-munkar* was familiar to early figures like Ibn Ḥanbal, who had presented it as a general responsibility for all believers.³³⁰ But he and later figures like Ibn Taymiyyah still recommended passing the issue to the competent authorities,³³¹ and the second Saudi state had placed those

³²³ ‘Abd al-Laṭīf bin ‘Abd ar-Raḥman bin Ḥassan Āl ash-Shaykh, *Miṣbāḥ aḥ-Ḥalāl min Radd min Kadhb ‘alā ash-Shaykh al-Imām* (Riyadh: Dar al-Hedayah, 2008), 20.

³²⁴ Bishara, *On Salafism: Concepts and Contexts*, 6-9.

³²⁵ Taymiyyah, *as-Siyāsa ash-Shar‘iyya fī Islāḥ ar-Rā‘ī war-Ra‘iya*, 125-28.

³²⁶ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb at-Tawḥīd*, 29.

³²⁷ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, al-Fawzān, and al-‘Alīqī, *ar-Rasā’il ash-Shakhṣiyya*, 80; Āl ash-Shaykh, *Rasā’il wa Fatāwā*, 70.

³²⁸ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb at-Tawḥīd*, 17-18.

³²⁹ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *Mu‘allafāt ash-Shaykh al-Imām Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhāb*, 11/3.

³³⁰ Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Amr bil-Ma‘arūf wan-Nahī ‘an al-Munkar min Masā’il al-Imām al-Mubajil Abī ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal wa Yalīhu al-Qirā’a ‘Ind al-Qubūr* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutb al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003), 16-17, 22-23.

³³¹ Ibn Ḥanbal, 29, الأمر بالمعروف; Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Amr bil-Ma‘arūf wan-Nahī ‘an al-Munkar (T: al-Munajjid)* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutb al-Jadeed, 1976), 14-15.

authorities in a consultative relationship with an *‘ulama* that would embrace their responsibilities and those of their partners. Writing to the people of Najd, ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān bin Ḥasan juxtaposed a desirable society against one defined by disbelief,³³² and presented *walī al-amr* as the mechanism by which to protect against public immorality and *fitna*.³³³

The second Saudi State’s authoritarian crackdown reflected that combination of unclear legal principles and the scholars’ unusually privileged position, as authorities aided the *‘ulama* in regulating behaviour according to their religious partners’ standards. Like their predecessors, Turki and Fayṣal were sympathetic to the Najdī *‘ulama*’s religious outlook and called the public to promote right and forbid wrong.³³⁴ And in that public sphere the homes of those who repeatedly missed communal prayer were burned, failures to present oneself according to the *‘ulama*’s definition of Islamic standards were punished, and mocking the enforcers could attract the death penalty.³³⁵ The situation was more severe for those who clearly fell outside the Sunnī community, as the *‘ulama* continued denouncing Shī‘a—particularly Twelver Shī‘a—as being from among the worst of disbelievers,³³⁶ and the state suppressed their role in public life.³³⁷ That was not necessarily new, and minorities had been in a difficult position under the first Saudi state. But even then, it was clear that the nature of the underlying political project had changed, as Saudi authorities shifted from seizing new territory to consolidating control over what they had. And academically, the crackdown no longer illustrated just where Najdī Salafism’s conceptions of political identity and framing could go. Rather, the new project showed how ash-Shahāl’s elitist outlook and cited principle of *al-amr bil-ma‘rūf wa nahī ‘an al-munkar* could shape the implications of the common Islamic sources that Salafīs like ar-Rāfi‘ī cited,³³⁸ and where Najdī Salafism’s emphasis on principles rather than processes in Islamic law could generally take society.

³³² ‘Abd ar-Raḥman bin Ḥasan Āl ash-Shaykh, *Kitāb al-Īmān war-Radd ‘alā Ahl al-Bida‘* (N.P., N.D.), 59. <https://ia801207.us.archive.org/23/items/WAQ12657/mrmn2-1.pdf>.

³³³ Āl ash-Shaykh, *Rasā’il wa Fatāwā*, 7.

³³⁴ Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, 177-79.

³³⁵ Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 82-83; Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*.

³³⁶ Āl ash-Shaykh, *Rasā’il wa Fatāwā*, 69.

³³⁷ Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shī‘a Islam*, 97-98.

³³⁸ Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics and Religion in Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, 2013), 50-51.

The Enmeshment of Political & Legal Context

As the second Saudi State failed, the *‘ulama’s* shifting position confirmed that the social impacts of Najdī law had depended more on its proponents’ political context than its legal substance. There had been limits on the establishment scholars’ power that mirrored those of religious authority generally. It was certainly not absolute. Rather, it depended on complex factors like charisma, trust, recognition, and actors’ social circumstances.³³⁹ The authority which the establishment enjoyed had never been the reason for the partnership—if it had been, the *‘ulama’s* religious character might have legitimised it and allowed it to independently pursue its interests.³⁴⁰ The Najdī establishment still benefited from having some of its building blocks, with many of them being descendants of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and concentrated in the capital of Riyadh where they stayed close to Saudi leaders.³⁴¹ But the same was true of later Najdī Salafī figures like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī—as noted later, the former had roots in Tripoli’s leading Salafī family,³⁴² and circumstances would help the latter build his own connections. And although family, networks, and charisma positioned those later men as religious leaders,³⁴³ they would not have the same impacts. The reality was that their predecessors had enjoyed a comfortable proximity to centres of national power, and it would be difficult for later generations of Najdī scholars to follow that precedent without the same social connections.

Religious issues had still mattered to the nineteenth-century batch of Najdī *‘ulama*, but more as a liability for an establishment that could not stop Najdī law from abandoning whatever orthodoxy the establishment was working to impose. The reality was that even with the help of the second Saudi State’s socio-political crackdown, Najdī law was slowly moving towards diversity rather than uniformity. As the Āl Sa‘ūd and the *‘ulama* struggled to pursue their project in areas like al-Qaṣīm, the limits of their intellectual control became clear. The area was home to orthodox Ḥanbalīs who rejected the establishment’s legitimacy

³³⁹ Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke, "Introduction: Religious Authority and Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies. A Critical Overview," in *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*, ed. Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke (Brill, 2006), 1-2.

³⁴⁰ Kerstin Radde-Antweiler and Hannah Grüenthal, "Introduction: Religious Authority: Ascribing Meaning to a Theoretical Term," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 7, no. 3 (2018): 371-72.

³⁴¹ Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 82.

³⁴² Abi Samra, *Ṭarābulus Sāhat Allāh wa Mīna’ al-Hadātha*, 83-84.

³⁴³ Joy McCriston, "Pastoralism and Pilgrimage: Ibn Khaldūn’s Bayt-State Model and the Rise of Arabian Kingdoms," *Current Anthropology* 54, no. 5 (2013): 617.

and strictness, eventually triggering an intervention by the Āl Saʿūd and their partners that erased undesirable polemics and implanted new religious educators.³⁴⁴ But as was typically the case when scholars were fired, there were real problems that the management had ignored, and a few staff changes here and there would not erase the toxic dynamics of power and influence. Public attitudes would ultimately reflect the same tribal loyalties, commercial interests, and other incentives that gave the Najdī *ʿulama* religious authority with the Āl Saʿūd,³⁴⁵ making any gains easily reversible in areas at intersection of regional trade, travel, and other outlooks.³⁴⁶ Even if Najdī scholars established their general theology as a new orthodoxy, the ambiguous and subjective nature of legal interpretation meant that there would only be a Najdī Salafī legal orthodoxy where scholars had the influence needed to normalise their views or partners who helped impose them. In the absence of that, people would start forming their own ideas about how to live and Najdī law would become marked by diversity rather than uniformity.

That slow legal diversification—or at least its causes—also mirrored an emerging political problem: Najdī elites’ religious authority could not influence or preserve the political structures that made them influential. While the establishment could envision and promote an Islamic society towards which the Āl Saʿūd might work,³⁴⁷ its project had always depended on its political partners cohesion and stability. That would make the aftermath of Fayṣal’s 1865 death into a problem. Rather than smoothly transitioning to new leadership, the Āl Saʿūd fractured amidst a chaotic succession that initially left his son Saʿūd (1833-1875) in power. Instead of accepting that, more contenders emerged and triggered brotherly disputes lasting into the 1880s.³⁴⁸ And in addition to the opportunities that the dispute created for local enemies like the ar-Rashīd and Shammar,³⁴⁹ one enterprising Saudi figure—ʿAbd Allāh (1831-1889)—had also sought out support from Ottoman authorities.³⁵⁰ Viewed

³⁴⁴ Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 84-86, 90.

³⁴⁵ Madawi Al-Rasheed and Loulouwa Al-Rasheed, "The Politics of Encapsulation: Saudi Policy Towards Tribal and Religious Opposition," *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 1 (1996): 101-02.

³⁴⁶ Tarik Firro, "The Political Context of Early Wahhabi Discourse of Takfir," *Middle Eastern Studies* 49, no. 5 (2013/09/01 2013): 772; Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 54-58.

³⁴⁷ Hellmut Ritter, "Irrational Solidarity Groups: A Socio-Psychological Study in Connection with Ibn Khaldūn," *Oriens* 1, no. 1 (1948): 31-32.

³⁴⁸ Ramon Knauerhase, "Saudi Arabia: A Brief History," *Current History* 68, no. 402 (1975): 75.

³⁴⁹ M. Talha Çiçek, "The Tribal Partners of Empire in Arabia: the Ottomans and the Rashidis of Najd, 1880–1918," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 56 (2017): 111-12.

³⁵⁰ Çiçek, "The Tribal Partners of Empire in Arabia," 109.

with some historical distance, the Āl Sa‘ūd’s problems were the kind of issues that were normal in any family. But from the perspective of the Najdī ‘*ulama* at the time, they were political problems which threatened the entire system and its religious project.

As the second Saudi State collapsed, the ‘*ulama*’s discursive contribution suggested that they and their views had depended on their relationship to Saudi power. Those outside Najd and the religious establishment welcomed ‘Abd Allāh’s Ottoman outreach, drawing comparisons to Ibn Taymiyyah’s alliances against the Mongol Empire. Conversely, the Najdī establishment deemed it illegal, hinting at reasonable anxieties about a takeover by the Empire that they had previously attacked as a beacon of disbelief.³⁵¹ That would not affect the direction of the dispute—the religious establishment could not assert religious legitimacy or suppress other voices, and at most its role was instead to denounce competing claims while defending the incumbents’ authority on Islamic grounds.³⁵² Worse still, the state’s collapse by 1891 showed that the Āl Sa‘ūd would simply ignore their partners where necessary: despite religious rulings against allying with nonbelievers,³⁵³ the last leader—‘Abd al-Raḥman bin Fayṣal (1850-1928)—left for Kuwait with Ottoman facilitation.³⁵⁴ And in the successive Rashīdī emirate where the new authorities shunned the Najdī religious establishment, there was not going to be a similar relationship.³⁵⁵ While the second Saudi State’s ruthless consolidation had shown where the ‘*ulama*’s vision and legal principles could take society, its undignified implosion showed that the implications depended heavily on the structures of Saudi power and the place for the ‘*ulama* in it.

The Space for ar-Rāfi‘ī’s Activism

Later developments reinforced the importance of context and interpretation to Najdī law’s practical impacts, while hinting at the space for less authoritarian approaches to politics. The

³⁵¹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 63.

³⁵² Abdulaziz H. Al-Fahad, "From Exclusivism to Accommodation: Doctrinal and Legal Evolution of Wahhabism Commentary," *New York University Law Review* 79, no. 2 (2004): 500-04, 519; Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldūn*, 35-36.

³⁵³ Ḥamad bin ‘Alī bin Muḥammad Ibn ‘Atīq, *Sabīl an-Najā wal-Fakāk* (N.P., 1994), 31-33. <https://www.noor-book.com/en/ebook-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%83--pdf>.

³⁵⁴ Çiçek, "The Tribal Partners of Empire in Arabia," 116.

³⁵⁵ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 66-69.

space for interpretation would widen even if the sources did not markedly change. Ar-Rāfiʿī's references to Ibn al-Qayyim when comparing Islamic models of marriage to western models or specific Shīʿī *mutʿa* practices,³⁵⁶ for example, were unsurprising. They mirrored a solidification of Najdī legal thought in the 1900s, and particularly the Najdī *ʿulama*'s twentieth-century debilitation of dissenting Ḥanbalī institutions like those in al-Qasīm where Ibn al-Qayyim's views had been more marginal.³⁵⁷ But further evolutions like Nāṣir ad-Dīn al-Albānī's re-engagement with *ḥadīth* scholarship showed the lasting flexibility of Najdī Salafism's relationship to legal sources. In sermons and writings from shaykhs like ar-Rāfiʿī, al-Albānī's verification of a *ḥadīth* became a new sign of authoritativeness,³⁵⁸ and embodied the Najdī tradition's willingness to diverge from its Ḥanbalī roots while encouraging further interpretation.

And the thinking from modern scholars like Al-Albānī would illustrate the lasting ambiguities in Najdī Salafism's law and relationship to national politics. His interpretation still gave the same authoritative weight to a *ḥadīth*'s letter and discouraged speculation about its meaning. But he also warned qualified jurists against uncritically imitating established legal traditions (*taqlīd*), while urging Muslims who lacked that expertise to follow competent scholars (*ittibāʿ*).³⁵⁹ Al-Albānī's own politics were similarly ambiguous, with warnings against involvement in politics balanced against a view that Muslims desired some kind of Islamic state even if the methods of achieving it could vary.³⁶⁰ And there would be similar tensions with other ostensibly-apolitical figures—Shaykh Rabīʿ al-Madkhalī advocated both political quietism while becoming open to electoral participation, and his followers fought for control over governing and religious institutions in parts of Libya.³⁶¹ As with Najdī Salafism generally,

³⁵⁶ ar-Rāfiʿī, *Aḥkām al-Aḥwāl ash-Shakhṣiyya lil Muslimīn fīl-Gharb*, 539, 44-45.

³⁵⁷ Birgit Krawietz, Georges Tamer, and Alina Kokoschka, *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya* (Berlin: De Gruyter, Inc., 2013), 161.

³⁵⁸ Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī, "Khuṭbat al-Jumaʿa min Masjid at-Taḳwā, bi ʿUnwān: Saʿat Raḥmat Allāh - Juz 2," *YouTube* (25/12/2014 2014). <https://youtu.be/wVaVYjiOLzs>; ar-Rāfiʿī, *al-Fawāʿid al-Ḥasān fī Ḥadīth Harqal wa Abī Sufyān*, 151.

³⁵⁹ Hamdeh, "Qurʾān and Sunna or the "Madhhabs"?", 218-19.

³⁶⁰ Stéphanie Lacroix, "Between Revolution and Apoliticism: Nasir al-Din al-Albani and His Impact on the Shaping of Contemporary Salafism," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (Oxford University Press, 2014), 68-69.

³⁶¹ ICG International Crisis Group, *Addressing the Rise of Libya's Madkhali-Salafis* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2019), 8, 23. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/addressing-rise-libyas-madkhali-salafis>.

it was difficult to see where a strict relationship to common sources of Islamic law ended and compromising interpretations might begin.

By the time of the third Saudi State (est. 1932) there were further signs that if the Najdī *‘ulama* was to maintain the elite political role that ash-Shahāl described, it would have to compromise with political leaders and institutions. While the new state was ultimately the product of a campaign that the Āl Sa‘ūd launched at the turn of the century,³⁶² renewed ties to the Najdī establishment were key to the story.³⁶³ In the early 1910s, the scholars helped settled and religiously educate nomadic Bedouin tribes, resulting in the *ikhwān* movement which embraced the Najdī establishment’s social vision while serving the military interests of the future king, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ibn Sa‘ūd (1876-1953).³⁶⁴ But the *ikhwān* were disruptive—they threatened economically significant activities like the *Hajj*, and did not answer to emerging Saudi civil institutions that increasingly regulated public life by the late twenties,³⁶⁵ and by 1927 they were out of control.³⁶⁶ In 1928 Ibn Sa‘ūd secured *‘ulama* support for a purge. The lesson was clear: imposing Najdī Salafism’s social vision outside Saudi auspices was unacceptable, and only a cooperative Najdī establishment would enjoy the necessary support.³⁶⁷ The establishment was not totally subordinate and could still contest reforms like the codification of Saudi law,³⁶⁸ while figures mentioned later like Muḥammad bin Ibrāhīm secured roles in emerging institutions from which the *‘ulama* could indirectly pursue their interests.³⁶⁹ But they had to work within the system.

And as a class divide emerged between the elitist insiders like Ibn Ibrāhīm and the disenfranchised outsiders, ar-Rāfi‘ī’s vision of social activism was starting to make sense. Unlike ash-Shahāl and the Najdī establishment in the nineteenth century, he wanted to use social institutions like the mosque and the Friday sermon to influence public behaviour. It

³⁶² Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 67-68.

³⁶³ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 10.

³⁶⁴ Joseph Kostiner, "On Instruments and Their Designers: The Ikhwan of Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State," *Middle Eastern Studies* 21, no. 3 (1985): 298-300.

³⁶⁵ Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, 182-83.

³⁶⁶ Daniel Silverfarb, "Great Britain, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia: The Revolt of the Ikhwan, 1927-1930," *The International History Review* 4, no. 2 (1982): 224-25, 28-30.

³⁶⁷ Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 64-66.

³⁶⁸ Joseph Kechichian, "The Role of the Ulama in the Politics of an Islamic State: the Case of Saudi Arabia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 18, no. 1 (1986): 65.

³⁶⁹ Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 163-64.

was a pragmatic approach that reconciled the tension between a desire for social change and the impossibility of forcing it,³⁷⁰ and was not unique ar-Rāfiʿī—ash-Shahāl stressed his tradition’s intellectual credentials more than the need for social transformation, as well.³⁷¹ But while it was easy to draw ideas of political identity and framing from Najdī creed or ideas of political structure and purpose from its legal roots, it was harder to say what its implications would be for activists working from within society or how they had chosen to work like that in the first place. Treating Najdī Salafism like a subjective social discourse made it easier to understand what its political implications could be, but that also made its interpreters’ history as real people in a real context—like that of twentieth Saudi Arabia—just as important as its basic sources and ideas.

Najdī Activism & Structural Questions

While developments in twentieth-century Saudi Arabia helped position Najdī Salafism as an activist discourse, the record suggested that adherents’ political roles were easier to understand in structural terms. Activism would prove to be a general Salafī phenomenon, and one that was easier to frame in the language of contentious politics theory than a typology of Salafī discourse like Wiktorowicz’s. The Islamic University of Madīnah (IUM) where ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī studied, for example, emerged due to pressure on Saudi authorities from supposedly-quietist Najdī elites rather than agitators in wider society. And places like IUM helped normalise distinct new understandings of Najdī Salafism that embraced activism from within society, while building a generation of activist leaders who led their own movement in a wider national context. Taken together, those developments helped explain where ar-Rāfiʿī’s activist ideas fit. But they also showed why it would be hard to say how much those ideas influenced him, ash-Shahāl, or Saudi Arabia’s own activists, especially when their roles and that of the Najdī establishment amidst the late twentieth century’s political tensions appeared to reflect the structure of their context and their place relative to Saudi authority.

³⁷⁰ Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī, *al-Ḥadīth al-Ḥādī ‘Ashar: bayna al-Aqṣā wal-Masjid al-Ḥaram Taḥawwalat Qiyāda al-Bashriyya ilā Ummat al-Islām*, *Silsila fī Ḍilāl as-Sunna*, (Beirut: Dar ibn Hazm, 2019), 6.

³⁷¹ BBC, "Bilā Quyūd."

Elite Activism & Salafī Contentious Politics

IUM's founding showed that despite its privileged place in the system, even the new Najdī establishment was an activist force in contention with the centres of Saudi power. The University itself was a political matter from the very outset, having been part of a broader effort to preserve the Najdī *‘ulama’s* religious authority and political interests when modernising reforms threatened both. The Āl Sa‘ūd had monopolised political authority after the purge of the *ikhwān*, legitimised by a religious establishment built mostly from elite families like the descendants of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb.³⁷² But unlike in the second Saudi state, the Āl Sa‘ūd were consolidating their rule by reforming the Kingdom along modernist lines instead of Islamic ones. At best, they were usurping religious authority—the Āl Sa‘ūd still cared about public morality, for example, but had started vesting the responsibility in state institutions by the late twenties.³⁷³ At worst, the changes rejected the very notion of that authority in favour of modernisation. Legal reforms, for example, were codifying the law and regulating judges' relationship to its Islamic sources, while diminishing the Najdī religious establishment's judicial influence.³⁷⁴ And to top it all off, Saudi Arabia was becoming entangled in the wider global environment while Saudi society was increasingly open to foreign people and influences.³⁷⁵ That left the religious establishment broke and single: it lacked the power to impose another authoritarian crackdown that followed Najdī legal principles, while the partners that might have helped it do that were courting the very outsiders that the tradition's credal roots framed as threats.

Notwithstanding the threats to Saudi society's religious character, the establishment found the emerging political order manageable. Najdī religious elites' political identity and framing were positioning them as status quo actors. To preserve the community's religious character, the message to the public was that the system was essentially Islamic while any agitation against it would be religiously unsound, just as there was no significant change to Najdī Salafism's credal fundamentals. And figures like Ibn Bāz and Ibn al-‘Uthaymīn would

³⁷² Joseph Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia, 1916-1936: From Chieftaincy to Monarchical State* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 136-37.

³⁷³ Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 208-09.

³⁷⁴ George Sfeir, "The Saudi Approach to Law Reform," *American Journal of Comparative Law* 36, no. 4 (1988): 732-34.

³⁷⁵ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 108-09.

present the same basic credal views of *tawḥīd*—*tawḥīd ar-rububiyya*, *tawḥīd al-uluhiyya*, and *tawḥīd al-asmā was-ṣifāt*—and disbelief.³⁷⁶ But the *ʿulama* were being careful about how they framed ideas that could politicise identity in the wrong ways or validate revolt. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb’s pronouncement that failing to name a disbeliever would nullify an observer’s Muslim status, for example, remained applicable.³⁷⁷ But his inheritors in the modern religious establishment were careful to note that Saudi subjects were not going to become disbelievers by obeying political authorities that appeared to implement un-Islamic rulings.³⁷⁸ And legally, open opposition was framed as Islamically plausible but discouraged on more practical grounds,³⁷⁹ while the *ʿulama* framed new models of governance and revolutionary political change as manifestations of disbelief, declaring that any prayer made behind political agitators like socialists and communists was invalid.³⁸⁰

The *ʿulama* had not become totally subordinate to the new system and still had to confront threats to their interests, but they would find it easier to do that by framing their activism as an extension of the Āl Saʿūd’s needs. By the mid-century there were certainly two big emerging issues that it could attach itself to: a threat to the Saudi political order and its religious legitimacy from republican ideas that were spreading via circuits like al-Azhar University in Cairo, and the destabilising impacts of domestic reform within Saudi Arabia itself. And the religious establishment was in a position to make itself part of any resulting solution. By the sixties, then-Prince Fayṣal (1906-1975) understood that modernisation required religious legitimacy from a Najdī establishment dominated by strong personalities like Muḥammad bin Ibrahīm (1893-1969),³⁸¹ who was uncomfortable with the kinds of structural reforms and institutions that could turn Saudi Arabia into an un-Islamic kind of place.³⁸² Rather than entirely resisting change, Ibn Ibrahīm’s pressure secured a place for the

³⁷⁶ Ibn Bāz, *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā wa Muqālāt Mutanawwiʿa*, 1/34-43.

³⁷⁷ Ibn Bāz, *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā wa Muqālāt Mutanawwiʿa*, 1/93.

³⁷⁸ Muḥammad bin Sāliḥ al-ʿUthaymīn, *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2 (Riyadh: Dar al-Watan Lil-Nashar, 1992), 197-98.

³⁷⁹ "Man Yashraʿ al-Ḥukm bi Ghayr Mā Anzal Allāh Hal Yashtaraf Iqāmat al-Ḥujja ʿAlayhi li Takfīr?," 2021, accessed 08/09/2021, <https://binothaimeen.net/content/2995>.

³⁸⁰ Ibn Bāz, *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā wa Muqālāt Mutanawwiʿa*, 1/268.

³⁸¹ Al-Atawneh, *Wahhābī Islam Facing the Challenges of Modernity*, 6, 9-10.

³⁸² Michael Farquhar, "The Islamic University of Medina Since 1961: The Politics of Religious Mission and the Making of a Modern Salafi Pedagogy," in *Shaping Global Islamic Discourses: The Role of Al-Azhar, Al-Madinah and Al-Mustafa*, ed. Masooda Bano and Keiko Sakurai (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 22-24.

Najdī *‘ulama* and its mission in the emerging Saudi institutions, and for Najdī Salafī ideals and values as their guiding principles.³⁸³

One specific result of *‘ulama* activism in the face of those threats would be the crop of new Saudi religious education institutions—places like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī’s *alma mater*, IUM. The University’s value was partly symbolic, as a place that legitimised Saudi rule in clearly Islamic terms.³⁸⁴ But it was also a solution to other problems: IUM gave prospective students a new source of Islamic religious education from the moment that it opened in 1961, while its recruitment and scholarship programs would create new transnational circuits in which Najdī religious values circulated instead of destabilising republican ideas.³⁸⁵ And it was not the only institution which did that. Imām Muḥammad bin Sa‘ūd University would emerge in Riyadh, Ibn Ibrahīm secured *‘ulama* roles in other state institutions,³⁸⁶ and *‘ulama* support for projects like legal reform remained contingent on the continuing centrality of Najdī principles.³⁸⁷ Rather than securing one token concession, the Najdī *‘ulama* had found a way to resist the transnational political currents that it framed as forces of disbelief, and secure its conceptions of Muslim identity in Saudi society against encroaching religious ones.³⁸⁸ It was not just a product of *naṣīḥa*—“sincere advice” that Saudi authorities could take or leave—but an activist use of political leverage that reflected the Najdī establishment’s privileged place in the new Saudi Arabia. There would also be some unforeseen consequences, though. One of them was that at an intersection of regional currents, the new Saudi institutions would make Saudi Arabia into both an importer *and* exporter of ideas, and some of those would broaden the Najdī Salafī tradition to include activist outlooks like the one that ar-Rāfi‘ī espoused.

³⁸³ Nabil Mouline, "Enforcing and Reinforcing the State's Islam," in *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change*, ed. Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer, and Stephane Lacroix (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 53.

³⁸⁴ Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith*, 70-73.

³⁸⁵ Michael Farquhar, "Saudi Petrodollars, Spiritual Capital, and the Islamic University of Medina: A Wahhabi Missionary Project in Transnational Perspective," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47, no. 4 (2015): 702.

³⁸⁶ Tawfiq Alsaif, "Relationship Between State and Religion in Saudi Arabia: the Role of Wahabism in Governance," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 6, no. 3 (2013).

³⁸⁷ Aharon Layish, "Saudi Arabian Legal Reform as a Mechanism to Moderate Wahhabi Doctrine," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107, no. 2 (1987): 287-92.

³⁸⁸ Ibn Bāz, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā wa Muqālāt Mutanawwi‘a*, 1/385-86.

Discourse & Actor's Historical Context

IUM and similar institutions helped change the local context where the Najdī tradition was interpreted as well as its interpreters themselves, while laying historical foundations for its embrace of activism by marginal actors that worked from within society. Najdī Salafism's place amidst transnational activist currents was well established, and it had been circulating beyond the Arabian Peninsula well before the sixties. Outsiders like Rashīd Riḍa had sympathised with the Saudi project in the early twentieth century, and worked to validate the emerging state and its revival of Sunnī Islam.³⁸⁹ And their works, like Riḍa's *al-Manār* magazine, had introduced the Najdī tradition and establishment to figures outside the Kingdom. That would see the tradition spread beyond Saudi Arabia—including Lebanon—and figures like ash-Shahāl's father, Sālim ash-Shahāl, who travelled to Saudi Arabia and became acquainted with figures like Ibn Bāz and Ibn al-ʿUthaymīn.³⁹⁰

But IUM was also making Saudi Arabia into a major destination for activists and their political ideas, particularly the kind that were associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. After the University's establishment in 1961 the flow of outsiders towards the Kingdom accelerated, and the new arrivals' political backgrounds stood out. The establishment *ʿulama* had played some role in this. Establishment elites like Ibn Bāz invited outsiders to teach or generally work, resulting in a long list of foreigners in Saudi Arabia who largely shared the establishment's basic credal and legal views.³⁹¹ But the Kingdom was also becoming a haven for regional exiles, notably but not exclusively from the Brotherhood.³⁹² That was partly a political issue—Brotherhood members faced repression in places like Syria and Egypt, while the Āl Saʿūd saw them as potential partners in the fight against growing Arab republicanism.³⁹³ But it would become a religious matter, too, as those Brotherhood exiles helped grow institutions like IUM and left their own activist imprint on the students' understandings of Najdī Salafism. And by the time figures like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī

³⁸⁹ David Commins, "From Wahhabi to Salafi," in *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change*, ed. Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer, and Stephane Lacroix (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 155-56.

³⁹⁰ Saud Mawla, "as-Salafiyūn fī Lubnān: at-Taʿarjah bayna ad-Daʿwa was-Silāh," *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies* (15/11/2012 2012). <https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/reports/2012/11/2012111593541563647.html>.

³⁹¹ Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 192-95.

³⁹² Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith*, 96-99.

³⁹³ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 40-42.

graduated from the University in the eighties, figures from the Brotherhood and similar movements would be well-established in it.³⁹⁴

The University's curriculum and faculty hinted at the flexibility of Najdī Salafī discourse and a growing space in it for activism in society. The establishment still controlled teachings of *‘aqīda* while the distinct understandings of *tawḥīd* would remain,³⁹⁵ and the resulting sense of political identity still juxtaposed Sunnī Muslims with Twelver Shī‘a, Ṣūfīs, Jews, and Christians, but the confrontational views of other credal outlooks like Ash‘arī theology were no longer as firm. And the curriculum would embrace the tradition's interpretive tendencies, with a comparative view of the four main Sunnī legal schools that manifested itself in the comparative approach of graduates like ar-Rāfi‘ī,³⁹⁶ and were reinforced by iconoclastic figures like Nāṣir ad-Dīn al-Albānī who had taught at IUM.³⁹⁷ That did not mark Najdī Salafism as a new or novel Sunnī tradition—Ibn Taymiyyah accepted the legitimacy of the four schools while still forming his own judgments and Ibn al-Qayyim considered context rather than applying law literally.³⁹⁸ Similarly, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had reflected a wider eighteenth- and nineteenth-century trend of revivalists that claimed to be reviving *ijtihād*, while the notion that any legal school's orthodoxy had ever really erased it from the Islamic tradition was not self-evident.³⁹⁹ But it still signalled Najdī Salafism's continued drift from implicit Ḥanbalī roots towards a flexible tradition.⁴⁰⁰ And considered alongside the activist roots of the faculty that helped build IUM and other institutions in the fifties and sixties, it hinted at an increasing openness to activism in society that would survive through to the eighties when ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī's generation passed through.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁴ Farquhar, "Saudi Petrodollars, Spiritual Capital, and the Islamic University of Medina," 708-10.

³⁹⁵ Farquhar, "Saudi Petrodollars, Spiritual Capital, and the Islamic University of Medina," 707.

³⁹⁶ Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith*, 134, 48-49; ar-Rāfi‘ī, *Aḥkām al-Aḥwāl ash-Shakhṣiyya lil Muslimīn fīl-Gharb*, 25-34.

³⁹⁷ Lacroix, "Between Revolution and Apoliticism: Nasir al-Din al-Albani and His Impact on the Shaping of Contemporary Salafism," 66.

³⁹⁸ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 5 (Madīnah: King Fahd Centre for Printing of the Holy Qur‘an, 2004), 256-57; Baber Johansen, "Signs as Evidence: The Doctrine of Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (D. 1351) on Proof," *Islamic Law and Society* 9, no. 2 (2002): 187-88.

³⁹⁹ Wael Hallaq, "Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 1 (1984): 32.

⁴⁰⁰ Rudolf Peters, "Idjtihād and Taqlīd in 18th and 19th Century Islam," *Die Welt Des Islams* 20, no. 3/4 (1980): 143.

⁴⁰¹ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 43-45.

Movement Leaders & Discursive Shifts

The broad changes and abstract new ideas still centred round real people, and the emerging class of activist leaders were central to the changes in Najdī discourse's conceptions of political framing and identity. Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (1938-2016) was a good example of what those new leaders would look like: people that did not challenge Najdī Salafism's fundamentals but helped normalise new modes of social activism. As one of many Muslim Brotherhood exiles who fled political pressure in Syria,⁴⁰² Surūr arrived in Saudi Arabia in the mid 1960s. As an educator and activist there, he embraced the Najdī tradition's credal and legal foundations at the expense of any firm connections to the Brotherhood, without abandoning public activism in the style of Brotherhood figures like Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966). More importantly, he rejected the *ʿulama-umara* partnership as a key pillar of Islamic society, and favoured activism that was not only directed at the public sphere but also pursued within it. That would not necessarily lead to the overthrow of the state or even opposition to the establishment—Surūr echoed concerns like those of Ibn al-ʿUthaymīn or al-Albānī about political revolt's costs and feasibility. But alongside contemporaries like Muḥammad Qutb (1919-2014) he still inspired a new generation of activists with his Najdī credal and legal foundations and broader conceptions of how to participate in politics.⁴⁰³ One result of that would be a stream of prominent activists like Safar al-Ḥawālī and Salmān al-ʿAwda—two figures with whom students like ash-Shahāl would become familiar.⁴⁰⁴ But the more general impact of figures like Surūr was the normalisation of participation in politics by activists who operated from within Saudi society despite sharing the basic ideas of their establishment counterparts who seemingly sat above it.⁴⁰⁵

As shown by the writings of another foreigner, Abū Bakr al-Jazāʾirī, that synthesis of Najdī Salafī principles with Brotherhood activism would change Salafīs' framing of the state, society, and the relationship between the two. Originally Algerian, al-Jazāʾirī had dabbled in activism and party politics at home before migrating to Saudi Arabia. There, he graduated

⁴⁰² Raphaël Lefèvre, *Ashes of Hama: the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 96.

⁴⁰³ Rabil, *Salafism in Lebanon*, 54-55; Roel Meijer, ed., *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 435-36.

⁴⁰⁴ Gade, *Return to Tripoli*, 55, 61-61.

⁴⁰⁵ Wagemakers, *Salafism in Jordan*, 110-11.

from the Shari‘a college in 1961 at Riyadh University—now King Saud University—and served at IUM until 1986.⁴⁰⁶ He had at least some exposure to the two Lebanese shaykhs—ar-Rāfi‘ī acknowledged him as “my shaykh,” and cited him when discussing politically salient issues of religious identity.⁴⁰⁷ And like Surūr, al-Jazā’irī embraced mainstays of Najdī Salafism including a focus on all of God’s names and attributes,⁴⁰⁸ concerns about *shirk*,⁴⁰⁹ and wariness of Ṣūfī movements.⁴¹⁰ But despite sharing the established Najdī understandings of an ideal Islamic society,⁴¹¹ he framed political authority and legitimacy differently. To al-Jazā’irī, the *‘ulama-umarā* relationship was more than symbolic and needed to influence major decisions on issues like *jihād*, for example.⁴¹² Religious authorities would defer to political ones within reason,⁴¹³ but political legitimacy depended on the state’s satisfaction of its duties in an Islamic constitutional framework.⁴¹⁴ None of that abrogated the basic credal and legal foundations of Najdī thought, and if ash-Shahāl’s views were a mirror of it then it demanded coordination between religious and political authorities—it was not just a license for laypeople to assume the state was illegitimate.⁴¹⁵ But it gave a generation of Salafīs like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī license to protest against society’s condition, the political order that was responsible for it, and the state’s failure to meet obligations that activists framed in almost secular constitutional terms.

And new ideas from figures like Safar al-Ḥawālī and Salmān al-‘Awda showed the broadening Najdī conceptions of political identity. Al-Ḥawālī was a Saudi and a product of the education system,⁴¹⁶ as was al-‘Awda, and after studying with figures like Surūr both men offered the

⁴⁰⁶ Al Jazeera AJ and Electronic Sites, “Abū Bakr al-Jazā’irī...Mu’allaf Kitāb “Minhāj al-Muslim,” *Al Jazeera* (23/10/2016 2016). <https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/icons/2016/10/23/%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%88-%D8%A8%D9%83%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%A4%D9%84%D9%81-%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%85%D9%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AC>.

⁴⁰⁷ ar-Rāfi‘ī, *al-Ḥadīth al-‘Āshir: al-Umma al-Wāḥida*, 61-62.

⁴⁰⁸ Abu Bakr al-Jazā’irī, *Aysar at-Tafāsī li Kalām al-‘Alī al-Kabīr*, Third ed., vol. 5 (Jeddah: Racem, 1990), 628-29.

⁴⁰⁹ Abu Bakr al-Jazā’irī, *Aysar at-Tafāsī li Kalām al-‘Alī al-Kabīr*, Third ed., vol. 1 (Jeddah: Racem, 1990), 80-82, 542-44.

⁴¹⁰ Abu Bakr al-Jazā’irī, *‘Aqīdat al-Mu’min - Yashtamal ‘alā Uṣūl ‘Aqīdat al-Mu’min Jāmi‘ li Furū‘uhā* (Cairo: Maktab al-Kuliyat al-Azhariyya, 1978), 95-98.

⁴¹¹ Abu Bakr al-Jazā’irī, *ad-Dawla al-Islāmiyya*, Second ed. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1982), 27-30.

⁴¹² al-Jazā’irī, *ad-Dawla al-Islāmiyya*, 77-79.

⁴¹³ al-Jazā’irī, *ad-Dawla al-Islāmiyya*, 39.

⁴¹⁴ al-Jazā’irī, *ad-Dawla al-Islāmiyya*, 44-45.

⁴¹⁵ Humūmana, “Barnāmij Humūmunā 4 - al-Ḥalaqa as-Sābi‘a - Indifā‘ ash-Shabāb Naḥw Manāṭiq aṣ-Ṣirā‘.”

⁴¹⁶ R. Hrair Dekmejian, “The Rise of Political Islamism in Saudi Arabia,” *Middle East Journal* 48, no. 4 (1994): 636.

expected mix of traditional Najdī Salafism and contemporary activism.⁴¹⁷ Like their mentors and other figures like al-Jazā'irī, their political fundamentals mirrored the Najdī imperative to preserve society from corruption and improper Islamic practice,⁴¹⁸ while similarly contrasting society's believing insiders against outsiders like Shī'a.⁴¹⁹ But they also embodied a broadening sense of political identity that went beyond basic standards of belief and disbelief. Al-Ḥawālī's writings anxiously described a transnational context filled with threats ranging from Western conspiracies to international Jewish plots,⁴²⁰ and situated Muslims generally in it as targets of those perceived threats.⁴²¹ And in the domestic landscape al-ʿAwda defined Muslim communities by their contention with the centres of political power, drawing on theorists like Karl Marx to define a relationship with the state or in opposition to un-Islamic political forces like capitalism.⁴²² The basic logic was familiar—the early Najdī tradition defined political identity in similarly oppositional terms by contrasting a community of believers against a wider world of disbelievers. And the two men still defined the fundamentals of personal and group identity in the same terms of belief and disbelief. But their conception of political identity was broadening, as they redefined Muslims' place in politics with reference to more worldly things.⁴²³

Political Activism & Structural Questions

While that evolving discourse would inform the rhetoric of Saudi Arabia's late twentieth-century activist movements, it would be hard to conclusively say that it shaped those movements' role more than the structures of Saudi power and their place in them. The activists had emerged outside the structure of the *ʿulama-umara* partnership by the eighties, but did not represent a democratising or liberalising trend. Instead, they constituted a parallel class of religious elites who mirrored the Najdī establishment's religious principles while operating from within society. Like their institutionalised counterparts, the new

⁴¹⁷ Al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists*, 77.

⁴¹⁸ Safar bin ʿAbd ar-Raḥman al-Ḥawālī, *Kashf al-Ghamma ʿan al-ʿUlamāʾ al-Umma* (N.P., 1991), 60-61. <https://ar.islamway.net/book/1774/%D9%83%D8%B4%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%BA%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%A9>.

⁴¹⁹ Al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists*, 85-86.

⁴²⁰ Safar bin ʿAbd ar-Raḥman al-Ḥawālī, *al-Muslimūn wal-Ḥaḍāra al-Gharbiya lil-Muʿallaf Safar al-Ḥawālī* (N.P., 2018), 435-36.

⁴²¹ al-Ḥawālī, *al-Muslimūn wal-Ḥaḍāra al-Gharbiya lil-Muʿallaf Safar al-Ḥawālī*, 301-02.

⁴²² Salmān al-ʿAwda, *Asʿilat ath-Thawra* (Beirut: Namaa for Research and Studies Center, 2012), 23-24.

⁴²³ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 146-47.

activists owed their position to circumstances. They had gained their religious authority outside of a ruling partnership with varying combinations of charisma, low-ranking positions within the religious bureaucracy,⁴²⁴ or history with social institutions like study groups and summer camps that had emerged outside the establishment's auspices. But unlike the religious elite, their message reflected the evolving discourse's mix of early Najdī thought with the newer activist tendencies that had flowed through new institutions like IUM.⁴²⁵

The resulting movement largely fell under the umbrella of *aṣ-Ṣahwā*—the awakening—and represented the parallel activist current that was emerging within the larger Najdī fold. They and their fellow activists shared the same conception of Muslim identity as their establishment counterparts: common understandings of *ʿaqīda* and especially *tawḥīd*, a common reference point in the example of the *salaf as-ṣāliḥ*, and common ambition for a society defined by the resulting conceptions of Muslim identity and strict interpretations of the sources of Islamic law. Where they differed from the establishment, though, was their relative independence from the Āl Saʿūd and a clear willingness to participate in politics outside of an elitist partnership with the centres of political power.⁴²⁶ That was not to say that the Najdī establishment had never experimented with public activism—another movement had advocated a return to the Najdī tradition's pure fundamentals and enjoyed the support of figures ranging from Ibn Bāz to al-Jazā'irī.⁴²⁷ But that had been largely crushed after it escalated to the point of seizing Makkah's Grand Mosque in 1979, provoking a crackdown like the overreach of the *ikhwān* had.⁴²⁸ With more independence and clearer roots in the fabric of society rather than support from within the structures of power, the *Ṣahwā* would be different.

⁴²⁴ Frederic Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings* (Columbia University Press, 2014), 124.

⁴²⁵ Stéphane Lacroix, "Understanding Stability and Dissent in the Kingdom: The Double-Edged Role of the jama'at in Saudi Politics," in *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change*, ed. Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer, and Stéphane Lacroix (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 169-70.

⁴²⁶ Madawi Al-Rasheed et al., *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices From a New Generation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 67-69.

⁴²⁷ Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix, "Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman Al-'Utaybi Revisited," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, no. 1 (2007): 107-09.

⁴²⁸ Hegghammer and Lacroix, "Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia," 104-06.

The distinguishing features of the *Ṣaḥwā* were partly discursive, and that discourse reflected movement leaders' formative context to some extent. With a curriculum that bred intellectual flexibility, an activist faculty, and colleagues with experiences from well outside Saudi Arabia, places like IUM invited broader senses of Sunnī rather than purely Najdī Salafī identity,⁴²⁹ and framings of political grievance that reflected politicisation by outside actors and forces rather than the threat of disbelief.⁴³⁰ The early grievances of the *Ṣaḥwā* reflected that, sympathising with those that it perceived as victims of repression like the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood—notwithstanding credal differences that had driven figures like Surūr to leave it. And some movement leaders like Safar al-Ḥawālī would build more elaborate conspiracy theories: Muslims were subject to a range of American cultural and political projects, which sought to control Muslim countries and peoples.⁴³¹ But while those were expansive, they also drew on tangible grievances with the state and a weakening social contract. Even though many activists shared the establishment *ʿulama* and Saudi bureaucracy's views, they still came from a class that the government had failed to insulate from the recessions of the eighties, and would have little incentive to overlook religiously-awkward concessions like government approvals for American military deployments to the Kingdom.⁴³²

At face value, the clearer break from the Najdī establishment was in the *Ṣaḥwā* movements' use of political protest from a marginal position within society. The discursive differences between them and the Najdī elite were not obvious—establishment figures like Ibn Bāz had previously aired grievances about the condition of Muslim communities abroad like Palestinians,⁴³³ while al-Ḥawālī's principal anxiety was still the integrity of Muslims' religious identity.⁴³⁴ But their stated relationship to the political order was becoming visibly strained by the early nineties. One issue arose after the government requested support from the United States following the Iraqi government's invasion of Kuwait, and the Board of Senior

⁴²⁹ James Piscatori and Amin Saikal, *Islam Beyond Borders: The Umma in World Politics* (Cornwall: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 4.

⁴³⁰ Klandermans, "Identity Politics and Politicized Identities," 3-4.

⁴³¹ al-Ḥawālī, *Kashf al-Ghamma ʿan al-ʿUlamāʾ al-Umma*, 17-18.

⁴³² Jonathan Hoffman, "Religion, the State and Politics In Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Policy* 26, no. 3 (2019): 47.

⁴³³ Ibn Bāz, *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā wa Muqālāt Mutanawwiʿa*, 1/277.

⁴³⁴ Mamoun Fandy, "Safar al-Hawali: Saudi Islamist or Saudi nationalist?," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 9, no. 1 (1998): 6-7.

‘*Ulama*, led by Ibn Bāz, issued a *fatwā* to support it. There was precedent for that in the 1979 authorisation of foreign support during the Grand Mosque seizure,⁴³⁵ and it would happen again with Ibn Bāz’s 1991 *fatwā* that authorised war against Iraq and the mass arrival of United States military personnel in Saudi Arabia. And there were other strains on the social contract, especially amidst the economic slowdown of the eighties that weakened social services,⁴³⁶ and the religious tensions over social issues like the status of women. Those were enough for the activists to question the state’s credibility and legitimacy. *Ṣahwī* figures including al-Ḥawālī and al-‘Awda challenged the political order in new terms,⁴³⁷ condemning what they deemed corrupt in the Saudi state’s domestic machinery and unprincipled in its foreign policy.⁴³⁸ And they used their religious authority to frame those grievances as a violation of new standards of legitimacy that combined emerging principles of civil liberties with established ones of Islamic legitimacy.⁴³⁹

But it was difficult to establish whether the differences between the establishment and the *Ṣahwā* mirrored their contrasting view of Najdī Salafism as a discourse, or their place relative to Saudi power in the Saudi context. To some extent, activists and elites wanted similar things. Some *Ṣahwā* demands mirrored an activist orientation, like calls for the ‘*ulama* to have a stronger and deregulated public role, and for *Ṣahwā* movements to enjoy more access to political power and a stronger, institutionalised role in state decision-making.⁴⁴⁰ But that overlapped with the Najdī establishment’s interests, too. Besides the general traces of Muḥammad bin Ibrahīm’s efforts to slow earlier legal and social changes in the activists’ demands, Ibn Bāz had issued and endorsed calls for similar reforms that would increase ‘*ulama* access to the state.⁴⁴¹ Saudi Arabia’s *Ṣahwā* movements still represented an activist evolution in Najdī Salafism, and it had clear roots in the circumstances and actors that

⁴³⁵ Muhammad Al-Atawneh, "Is Saudi Arabia a Theocracy? Religion and Governance in Contemporary Saudi Arabia," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 5 (2009): 732-33.

⁴³⁶ Faysal Abou Zaki, "Tough Times Ahead," *The Banker* 145, no. 830 (1995): 70.

⁴³⁷ Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 160-63.

⁴³⁸ Mansoor Jassem Alshamsi, *Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia: The Quest for Political Change and Reform* (New York: Tayloy & Francis, 2010), 86-87.

⁴³⁹ Various Authors, "Khitāb al-Muṭālīb - aṣ-Ṣahwa [Sa‘ad al-Fiqīh]," *Archive.org* (19/02/2020 1991). https://archive.org/details/docx_20200219.

⁴⁴⁰ Salmān al-‘Awda and Other Signatories, *Madhkarat an-Naṣīḥa* (N.P., 1992), 4. <https://islah.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/%D9%85%D8%B0%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%AD%D8%A9.pdf>.

⁴⁴¹ Kjørlien and Michele, "State and Religion in Saudi Arabia," 41-42.

shaped it. But there was an unresolved question of the extent to which the corresponding movements' politics reflected that discourse, or the structures of Saudi power and their place in it.

Unaddressed Issues & Problems

Confirming Problems & Their Boundaries

Describing Najdī Salafism was not enough to answer those questions. The basics of Najdī Salafī creed highlighted stark conceptions of political identity and framing, but a more expansive look at Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s intellectual roots had suggested an underlying process of interpretation, and his seemingly pragmatic enabling of the first Saudi State’s expansion only reinforced that. Najdī Salafism’s legal roots showed that the tradition imagined an ideally authoritarian structure and elitist role for Salafis in political life, but there were similar textual and historical signs of interpretation in context. And the twentieth-century political evolutions showed Najdī Salafīs’ general openness to contentious politics and eventual normalisation of social activism, yet the historical record left questions of whether structural explanations were a better way of understanding actors’ roles. Describing the Najdī Salafī tradition’s substance and history helped expand on ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī’s religious roots, but also highlighted the boundary that the introduction described between Salafism as a discourse and Salafīs as the actors who interpreted and acted on it. That reinforced the core question: to what extent did Salafīs like the two Lebanese shaykhs respond to their religious roots, or the structure of their context and place in it?

Between that and wider developments, it was likely impossible to capture the interpretive process which bridged that boundary. The religious connection that Wiktorowicz’s approach emphasised—a *manhaj* that defined correct practice—was unhelpful when its origins and meaning were unclear.⁴⁴² Lauzière notes that Naṣir ad-Dīn al-Albānī helped popularise it while noting the role of an Egyptian scholar, Muṣṭafā Ḥilmī in promoting it in and after the

⁴⁴² Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 219.

seventies.⁴⁴³ That was plausible—Ḥilmī's writings touched on the issue,⁴⁴⁴ and his work had enjoyed praise from Najdī establishment figures.⁴⁴⁵ And it was hard to be certain of whether its relevance was just symbolic. Some scholars would argue that it was, framing it as a marker of Salafī identity and ownership over sources rather than a meaningful concept.⁴⁴⁶ And it was easy to make that inference with—for example—a commentary on Ibn Qudāmah's earlier Ḥanbalī legal writings by a Shaykh who circulated through Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Sha'bān Muḥammad Ismā'īl, which stressed Ibn Qudāmah's commitment to a proper '*aqīda* and *manhaj* while rejecting the concepts and methods of philosophical theology.⁴⁴⁷ But for researchers that asked or answered questions with academic methods and secular first principles, the issue would be difficult to resolve. The *manhaj* could rationalise actors' political role and be part of their vocabulary, but not explain the causal process that bridged the discourse-actor boundary.

And a detailed look at Salafīs' record in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere would only strengthen the case for a simpler explanation that managed apparent contradictions. Closely looking at ostensibly "quietist" figures in the establishment like Ibn Bāz or with history in the education system like al-Albānī and al-Madkhalī showed that they were still politically engaged,⁴⁴⁸ as was evident in Ibn Bāz's noted interest in causes like that of Palestine and Madkhalī movements' violent forays in Libya. And as the circumstances of IUM's establishment suggested, there appeared to be an unstated but constant dynamic of political contention between marginal religious actors and the centres of political power, even if Saudi quietists publicly appeared to passively withdraw from political life as the Āl Sa'ūd asserted their control from a political order they could accept just as later Yemeni movements actively distanced themselves from a political landscape that threatened them.⁴⁴⁹ More generally, it

⁴⁴³ Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 201-02.

⁴⁴⁴ Muṣṭafā Ḥilmī, *Qawā'id al-Manhaj as-Salafī fīl-Fakr al-Islāmī*, Reprint ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2005), 176-78.

⁴⁴⁵ King Faisal Prize Website, "Press Release: The King Faisal International Prize for Islamic Studies for 1985," (N.D. 1985). <https://kingfaisalprize.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Islamic-Studies-1985-Farouk-Al-Desouki-Mohammad-Salim-Mustafa-Hilmi-Suliman.pdf>.

⁴⁴⁶ Bruckmayr and Hartung, "Introduction," 147.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibn Qudāmah and Sha'bān Muḥammad Ismā'īl, *Rawḍat at-Nāzir wa Jannat al-Manāz fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh 'alā Madhhab al-Imām Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal*, vol. 1 (Beirut: al-Rayan, 1998), 26-27.

⁴⁴⁸ Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith*, 106-07.

⁴⁴⁹ Bonnefoy, "How Transnational is Salafism In Yemen?," 326-27.

supported the observation that theoretical categories like Wiktorowicz's captured certain actors' behaviour,⁴⁵⁰ but were essentially just an artificial framework.⁴⁵¹

A Lebanese Case?

The two Lebanese shaykhs' cases reinforced those problems, inviting a simpler structural explanation of their political roles. Together with his brothers, Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl would circulate into Saudi Arabia and the Najdī Salafī tradition in the eighties,⁴⁵² and blur the conceptual lines between apolitical quietism and political activism after leaving. Ash-Shahāl was from religious stock and would enjoy ties to notables like Ibn Bāz, a contact of his father, and became acquainted with Salmān al-ʿAwda and Safar al-Ḥawālī. There were indications that he was open to the activist trend that those figures represented: in 1996, he found himself in legal troubles in Lebanon after broadcasting one of al-Ḥawālī's cassettes, and subsequent pressure from Lebanese—and possibly Saudi—authorities.⁴⁵³ But whether there was even a distinct activist kind of Najdī Salafism for his behaviour to embody was unclear, especially when the figures who supposedly pioneered that kind of thinking like al-Ḥawālī and al-ʿAwda had made calls for greater *ʿulama* political influence that were hard to distinguish from the demands that establishment figures made for more state-*ʿulama* consultation.⁴⁵⁴ It was difficult to conceptually distinguish a specific line of discourse from the pressures of the shaykh's context, much less the interpretive process reconciling the two.

And ar-Rāfiʿi's background suggested that comprehensively gathering evidence of the shaykhs' activities without context would only highlight more contradictions and reinforce more ambiguities. The shaykh studied further after graduating in the eighties, securing a master's degree from Pakistan and a PhD from Sudan.⁴⁵⁵ But forewords in his books from major Najdī *ʿulama* like Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān also suggested a relationship to Saudi "quietist"

⁴⁵⁰ Nahouza, *Wahhabism and the Rise of the New Salafists*, 78-80.

⁴⁵¹ Torelli, Merone, and Cavatorta, "Salafism in Tunisia," 144-45; Inge, *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman*, 10-11.

⁴⁵² Abi Samra, *Ṭarābulus Sāhat Allāh wa Mīna' al-Ḥadātha*, 83-84.

⁴⁵³ Gade, *Return to Tripoli*, 55, 61-61.

⁴⁵⁴ Rashed Aba-Namay, "The Recent Constitutional Reforms in Saudi Arabia," *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (1993): 298-301.

⁴⁵⁵ Rougier, *Sunni Tragedy in the Middle East*, 201.

institutions,⁴⁵⁶ and he would sit at a vague intersection of Saudi Arabia, Europe, Lebanon, and elsewhere. He described travels to America and Europe, particularly Germany,⁴⁵⁷ where his public statements as an imām saw him denied naturalisation in 2002, and his personal connections helped trigger a terrorism investigation in 2004.⁴⁵⁸ It is not clear that he ever lost his Saudi ties—the King Faisal Foundation’s journal indicated someone by the same name who spoke in 1998 for the foundation about a British Islamic centre,⁴⁵⁹ while Tripoli’s Jinan University newsletter indicated a visit by ar-Rāfi‘ī around 2006 for an unnamed Saudi foundation.⁴⁶⁰ That demonstrated what ash-Shahāl’s history suggested: the shaykhs had not absorbed a single perspective at IUM that aligned them with or against the Saudi establishment. It also invited the simpler observation that IUM was a university rather than a cult, and some graduates would reject its outlook entirely.⁴⁶¹ But at the same time, ar-Rāfi‘ī’s condemnations of the Muslim *Ummah*’s abandonment by *Rawāfiḍ*—a derogatory term for Twelver Shī‘a—suggested that the shaykh had not embraced the most accommodating worldview, just as his writings suggested an ongoing interest in politics despite any connections to the politically-acquiescent Najdī establishment.⁴⁶² As with ash-Shahāl, the ambiguities invited a simpler explanation based on something besides the complex views that the shaykh appeared to have.

Unfortunately, Saudi Arabia was not the best place to test that explanation. There were signs of contentious political dynamics and particularly demobilisation in 1994, as authorities arrested activists following their demands for reform—demands that the Najdī establishment also notably supported.⁴⁶³ And it was clear that Salafīs were welcome to legitimise the political order with narratives of political identity and framing,⁴⁶⁴ while the Āl

⁴⁵⁶ Sālim ar-Rāfi‘ī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Majmū‘ Sharḥ al-Muhadhab*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar ibn Hazm, 2004), 7.

⁴⁵⁷ ar-Rāfi‘ī, *Aḥkām al-Aḥwāl ash-Shakhṣiyya lil Muslimīn fil-Gharb*, 7.

⁴⁵⁸ Anne Winter, „Ich Sage, Sei Vorsichtig!“, *Taz* (24/11/2004 2004). <https://taz.de/Ich-sage-sei-vorsichtig!/670498/>.

⁴⁵⁹ Faisal Magazine, „al-Ḥaraka ath-Thaqāfiya fīsh-Shahr“, *Faisal Magazine* 263, no. September (1997): 112.

⁴⁶⁰ al-Jinan University AJU, „University Newsletter“, *al-Jinan University News Archive* (10/02/2007 2007). <http://archive.jinan.edu.lb/News/News-2006/news-2006-11.htm>.

⁴⁶¹ Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith*, 165-66.

⁴⁶² ar-Rāfi‘ī, *al-Ḥadīth al-Ḥādī ‘Ashar: bayna al-Aqṣā wal-Masjid al-Ḥaram Taḥawwalat Qiyāda al-Bashriyya ilā Ummat al-Islām*, 168-69.

⁴⁶³ Youssef Ibrahim, „Saudi Arabia Cracks Down on Islamic Militants, Seizing Many“, *New York Times* (22/09/1994 1994). <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/09/22/world/saudi-arabia-cracks-down-on-islamic-militants-seizing-many.html>.

⁴⁶⁴ Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldūn*, 35-36.

Sa‘ūd were the centres of power that defined the structures of Saudi politics and marginal actors’ position.⁴⁶⁵ But that was also unlikely to change at any point, and neither Saudi power nor the state’s engagement with those marginal actors was going to shift in ways that tested Najdī Salafīs’ politics. Fortunately, there were other places to look. Najdī Salafism had spread beyond Najd, including to places like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī’s northern Lebanese home of Tripoli. But that raised its own question: why were the Lebanese shaykhs and their context better test cases?

⁴⁶⁵ Lawrence Rosen, "Theorizing From Within: Ibn Khaldun and His Political Culture," *Contemporary Sociology* 34, no. 6 (2005): 597.

Chapter 3:

Islamic Movements & the Context of Tripoli

Introduction

As representatives of a comparable movement in Lebanon's comparable national context, ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's stories could address the questions that the Najdī tradition's substance and formative history had raised. Tripoli's Salafī and Islamic activist movements were still distinct, having evolved separately from Saudi Arabia's Najdī establishment and *Saḥwā*. But by the twenty-first century they had common intellectual roots. The intellectual similarities were not accidental—ash-Shahāl's father Sālim (1922-2008) had worked to normalise a generic kind of Islamic revival in the city since the forties, while building connections that would see his sons' generation study in Saudi Arabia where they gained firmer Najdī roots by the eighties. But Sālim ash-Shahāl's work was also only one part of the story. His original movement would stagnate by the fifties, leaving space for Muslim Brotherhood-inspired figures like Faṭḥī Yakan—an activist theorist who described the Lebanese system in structural terms that mirrored the Saudi political environment, with religious activists in a marginal place between the centres of power above and the public below. And as that structure and Najdī Salafism survived into Tripoli's twenty-first century, there was room to ask a familiar question: to what extent would ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's roles in politics reflect their religious roots or the structure of their context and place in it?

Tripoli was also a better place to answer that question, thanks to the processes governing the Lebanese context and its actors that had historically been easier to observe. Attempts by another Brotherhood-inspired activist, Saʿīd Shaʿbān, to form an emirate in the eighties showed actors' resource mobilisation with a clarity that the Saudi context lacked, while its subsequent destruction by the Syrian regime similarly illustrated the relevant dynamics of contentious politics and particularly demobilisation. And while the authoritarian parallels between Lebanon and Saudi Arabia lasted and even solidified with the Hariri family's rise to Sunnī power in the nineties, domestic and foreign pressure made their position and interests liable to shift. For the Salafī movement that would be a significant issue: notwithstanding what figures like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī did, the centres of Lebanese Sunnī power had their own problems, perceptions, and priorities, and the ways in which they demobilised the Salafī movement were liable to shift. And it meant that in the twenty-first century their stories would illustrate a central point: the shaykhs' political roles depended on their place relative

to centres of Sunnī power like the Hariris, not the letter of Najdī Salafism or the methodology by which some movements appeared to act on it.

Comparable Movements & Divergent Roots

Ottoman Decline & the Re-emergence of Religious Revival

Dā‘ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl and Sālim ar-Rāfi‘ī’s education gave them religious roots in Najdī Salafism, but their personal roots were in the early Trabelsi Salafī movements of Sālim ash-Shahāl, whose stalled attempts at Islamic reform created space and pathways for the Najdī tradition in Tripoli. Shaykh Sālim reflected a distinct post-Ottoman context, in which the Trabelsi movement traced its intellectual heritage to the revivalist discourse of thinkers like Rashīd Riḍa (1865-1935) who had emerged as the Ottoman Empire declined. Like with Najdī Salafism, that discourse was a product of people and their societal context. Before the Empire’s 1922 dissolution, religious authority nominally supported the status quo, and ideas of social reform centred more round political autonomy and modernisation. Outside its Turkish core, the Ottoman Sultanate benefitted from a sense that revolt against its authority was Islamically unacceptable. But there were signs of undiagnosed irregularities—demands for increased autonomy in the Empire’s provinces,⁴⁶⁶ and a Turkish elite from which there was growing opposition to the political order in civil circles, military ranks, and emerging social movements.⁴⁶⁷ While Ottoman reformers asserted that the Empire could manage its problems without compromising on its Islamic foundations, they had more support for a transformation along European modernist lines.⁴⁶⁸ Unlike the Āl Sa‘ūd in the Arabian Peninsula, there was no pressure on Ottoman authorities for an Islamic transformation in the wider Empire, much less Lebanon.

While the late-Ottoman discourse could fit some contemporary interpretations of the name *Salafī*, the prevailing narrative prior to the collapse was that the Empire needed to reinvigorate itself according to standards of European-style modernity rather than a

⁴⁶⁶ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939*, Reissued ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 286-88.

⁴⁶⁷ Florian Riedler, *Opposition and Legitimacy in the Ottoman Empire: Conspiracies and Political Cultures* (Taylor & Francis, 2011), 12-13, 26-27.

⁴⁶⁸ Roderic Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 66.

doctrinal revival. There were well-travelled “Islamic modernists” like Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-1897) and Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905), who were eager to diagnose the Ottoman malaise. But their solution was the reconciliation of Islam with modernist values that would have been unrecognisable in a place like Najd or a revivalist discourse like that of Najdī Salafism.⁴⁶⁹ That would mark them as *Salafī* in some academic interpretations, which associated the term with the late-Ottoman modernism that they espoused. But their “modernist” intellectual exercise was not accompanied by the sort of challenge to the political and social order that Najdī Salafism’s letter—and history—had legitimised in the Arabian Peninsula.⁴⁷⁰

The situation was similar in late-Ottoman Lebanon, where an Islamic revival like the Najdī one was equally unlikely. Religious authority would remain a stabilising force for local confessional political establishments, which used their religious partners instrumentally to reinforce Druze and Maronite political power. And for Lebanon’s Sunnīs, Ottoman authority remained meaningful. Sultans could selectively point to their authority as Caliph and the institution of the Caliphate without always relying on it as an explicit political tool.⁴⁷¹ They were transparently pragmatic administrators who could use the principles and values of their institution cynically, framing the established order and their control as sacred despite any shortcomings.⁴⁷² But that appearance of pragmatism or cynicism would not weaken their political control, and late Ottoman Lebanon reflected the Empire as a whole. While it might have had space for modernisation and structural reform, Sunnī Islam and its institutions were pillars of the political order rather than challenges to it.

But while that modernising discourse had mirrored the late-Ottoman social and political climate, it was going to make less sense in the unstable post-imperial landscape. As the Empire had collapsed in 1922, revivalists’ social and religious context was going to dramatically change. The Ottoman collapse would impose a two-dimensional problem on

⁴⁶⁹ Mansoor Moaddel, *Islamic Modernism, Nationalism, and Fundamentalism: Episode and Discourse* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 92-93.

⁴⁷⁰ Lauzière, “The Construction of Salafiyya,” 370.

⁴⁷¹ Caesar Farah, “Great Britain, Germany and the Ottoman Caliphate,” *Der Islam* 66, no. 2 (1989): 264-65.

⁴⁷² Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2000), 39-40, 46-47. Professor Kirill Nourzhanov deserves thanks as the source this book, in addition to large amounts of coffee and baked goods.

the revivalists and the wider Middle East. Politically, the disintegration of the Imperial bureaucracy dislocated imperial provinces from what was left of centralised Ottoman control. And Islamically, the Caliphate's disappearance dislocated those provinces' Muslim majorities from the centralised religious authority of the Ottoman Sultan.⁴⁷³ Taken together, the situation was precisely the opposite of what religious activists or leaders would want. With a political failure that could potentially trigger a social disaster and a religious failure that threatened an Islamic one, the Ottoman Empire's failure was nothing short of a disaster.

That complex post-Ottoman instability left more space for Islamic revivalists like Rashīd Riḍa. Besides the obvious problems, there was also a sense that more space for religious revitalisation had appeared and admirers of the Saudi project like Rashīd Riḍa—were eager to use it. Much of the post-Ottoman Middle East was falling under colonial rule by non-Muslim powers, while Arab republican and nationalist ideas were beginning to circulate. And as that happened, intellectuals like Riḍa saw increasing reason to talk about a post-caliphate Islamic revival. A child of al-Qalamūn—just south of Tripoli—who studied further in Egypt,⁴⁷⁴ he stood out with a reformist vision that was sympathetic to the Najdī model. That did not necessarily make him an adherent to the tradition—he shared its general reformist ideas without fully embracing its credal foundations. But while his call to revive Islam in a post-Ottoman world by a restoring the caliphate was more politically specific,⁴⁷⁵ he still looked to the Āl Sa'ūd and the Najdī 'ulama's project in the Arabian Peninsula as a model. His magazine, *al-Manār*, focused on credal and legal fundamentals that echoed Najdī Salafism's concerns, with concerns about *bid'a*, Muslims' spiritual welfare, the thought of earlier figures like Ibn al-Qayyim, and the example of the *salaf as-ṣāliḥ*. Without necessarily deferring to Najd's religious authorities or centring the discussion entirely around Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's specific concerns, he was advocating some kind a revival of Islam along similar lines to the Najdī one as a promising general idea.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷³ Fareed Sabri, "The Caliphate as Nostalgia: the Case of the Iraqi Muslim Brotherhood," in *Demystifying the Caliphate: Historical Memory and Contemporary Contexts*, ed. Madawi Al-Rasheed (Oxford University Press, 2012), 135-37.

⁴⁷⁴ Emad El-Din Shahin, *Through Muslim Eyes: M. Rashīd Riḍa's and the West* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1991), 4-7.

⁴⁷⁵ John Willis, "Debating the Caliphate: Islam and Nation in the Work of Rashid Rida and Abul Kalam Azad," *The International History Review* 32, no. 4 (2010): 712.

⁴⁷⁶ Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍa, "al-Wahhābiyūn wal-Ḥijāz Ṭā'ifa min Maqālāt Nasharat fil-Manār wal-Ahrām," *al-Manār* 1 (1925): 3-6.

Riḍa's work and views were a demonstration of how the Najdī Salafism would emerge in Tripoli. First, he represented a larger trend of revivalists who were sympathetic if not deferential to the Najdī tradition. Other contemporaries like Taqī ad-Dīn al-Hilālī (1893-1987), for example, initially courted Sufi thought before eventually becoming a promoter of the Najdī establishment's basic themes.⁴⁷⁷ Second, Riḍa's interest in Najdī Salafism was only one indication of its spread outside of the Arabian Peninsula and a convenient mix of circumstances. The tradition had circulated longer than he spoke about it and further than his travels took him, reaching places such as Mali and Senegal via established trade routes and circuits of scholarly education.⁴⁷⁸ Third, the fact that someone like him had a sympathetic view of Najdī Salafism was an indication of how it would spread. The tradition did not need to be transmitted or received in whichever exact ways that the Najdī religious establishment articulated it, and the people who conveyed it did not need to fully understand its principles or accept its logic. Instead, revivalists like Riḍa could embrace its nonnegotiable but ambiguous values in ways that reflected developments like the post-Ottoman sense of religious malaise, as could figures like Tripoli's own Sālim ash-Shahāl who read Riḍa's work.

Postcolonial Islamic Revival & the Najdī Tradition in Tripoli

While Riḍa's Najdī-adjacent activism and writings helped inspire figures like Sālim ash-Shahāl, Sālim's legacy included two distinct quirks that allowed the Najdī tradition to become central to Trabelsi Salafism by the eighties. One of those was that ash-Shahāl's early activism helped normalise an assertive sort of Islamic revival, showing that there was space for it in Tripoli. He founded Tripoli's first Salafī movement in 1947, operating it under changing names including *al-Jamā'at al-Muslimūn* (JM) and *Shabāb Muḥammad*, and embracing general principles of social revival like Riḍa had. Its mission was not just to serve society through philanthropy but to change it through a program of *al-amr bil-ma'rūf wa*

⁴⁷⁷ Umar Ryad, "A Salafi Student, Orientalist Scholarship, and Radio Berlin in Nazi Germany: Taqi al-Din al-Hilali and His Experiences in the West," in *Transnational Islam in Interwar Europe: Muslim Activists and Thinkers*, ed. Götz Nordbruch and Umar Ryad (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 110.

⁴⁷⁸ Ousman Kobo, *Unveiling Modernity in Twentieth-Century West African Islamic Reforms* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 121-22.

nahī ‘an al-munkar,⁴⁷⁹ targeting signs of general social deviancy through attempted crackdowns on things like cinemas, and making issues from matters of faith that led to conflicts with the city’s Sufis.⁴⁸⁰ JM’s early work was not of the scale or intensity of Sālim’s counterparts in Najd—it was grassroots social activism rather than a complex religious project enmeshed with a political partner. But Sālim was still drawn to a radical reformation of faith and of the people who were meant to have it, and the initial emergence and survival of his movement showed that there was at least some space for that sort of thing in Northern Lebanon.

Sālim’s revivalist movement would not normalise Najdī Salafism on its own—if anything, the legacy of his sources and ideas would be a general precedent rather than specific principles. Worse still, Sālim himself was often erased from his own story. It was only half-true that Najdī Salafism in Lebanon began with him,⁴⁸¹ while it was easy to find Lebanese sources that remembered his son, Dā‘ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl, as the contemporary movement’s founder.⁴⁸² That was partly because of the older shaykh’s unusual religious roots. His links to the tradition were indirect and his revivalism was idiosyncratic by comparison, reflecting his self-taught background and learning from voices in the transnational discourse like *al-Manār*. While he shared some of the same anxieties as the Najdī establishment about things like *bid‘a*,⁴⁸³ his initial exposure was to Riḍa’s interpretation and transmission rather than the tradition itself.⁴⁸⁴ As in reformist circles elsewhere like the Malay Peninsula, for example, the shaykh embraced Riḍa’s religious authority and general reformism, but his links to the details of Najdī creed were limited.⁴⁸⁵ And that was to say nothing of the fact that even if he

⁴⁷⁹ Abi Samra, *Ṭarābulus Sāhat Allāh wa Mīna’ al-Ḥadātha*, 82-83.

⁴⁸⁰ Itani, *al-Jihādiyyūn fī Lubnān*, 45-46.

⁴⁸¹ Garrett Nada, "Lebanon’s Sheikhs Take on Assad and Hezbollah," *The Islamists* (11/05/2013 2013). <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/lebanons-sheikhs-take-assad-and-hezbollah>.

⁴⁸² al-Dahaybi, "ad-Dā‘ī ash-Shahāl: min ‘Adāwat an-Nizām as-Sūrj ilā al-Mawt bi Turkiyā."; Janoubia, "Tuwuffī wa Dufn fī Turkiyā..Dā‘ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl Qaḍā Nahbah bi”Kūrūna”,” *Janoubia* (15/11/2020 2020). <https://janoubia.com/2020/11/15/%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%81%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84/>.

⁴⁸³ ‘Imād, *as-Salafiyya was-Salafiyyūn, al-Huwiyya wal-Mughāyara: Qirā’a fī at-Tajriba al-Lubnāniyya*, 146-47.

⁴⁸⁴ Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 10.

⁴⁸⁵ Mohammad Redzuan Othman and Abu Hanifah Haris, "The Role of Egyptian Influences on the Religious Dynamics and the Idea of Progress of Malaya’s Kaum Muda (Young Faction) before the Second World War," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 4 (2015): 468-69, 72-73.

had been a student of Najdī Salafism, contemporaries described him as “not a man of organisational thoughts” who could start a wider or lasting movement with JM that propelled his own views into the future.⁴⁸⁶ One lesson was that the earlier shaykh probably needed more supportive friends. But the other was that he would not be the conduit for the Najdī establishment’s message in Tripoli.

But Sālim was still a significant figure. The bridges he was building to the Najdī establishment would be foundations for Najdī influence over Tripoli’s revivalist landscape by the eighties. Even in the city itself, his movement was a formative social experience for people that shared his revivalist outlook. JM provided the religious activist roots of many future notables in the Lebanese Islamic activist scene like Sa‘īd Sha‘bān (1928-1998) and Faṭḥī Yakan (1933-2009), even if they quickly moved on from the organisation and helped introduced other lines of thought like that of the Muslim Brotherhood—discussed later.⁴⁸⁷ But by the sixties, Sālim was matching his increasing intellectual curiosity about the writings of figures like al-Albānī, Ibn Bāz and Ibn al-‘Uthaymīn with increasingly frequent travel to Saudi Arabia that introduced him to those figures and their circles.⁴⁸⁸ While Riḍa had helped bring post-Ottoman revivalist ideas to Lebanon, the resulting connections to the Saudi establishment had the potential to bring not just clearer religious ideas, but patronage for the movements that could spread them.

Those Saudi connections would deepen the Najdī ‘*ulama*’s transnational influence and the Shahāls’ local stature in Tripoli. The Najdī establishment was not just a general source of patronage for whatever movement Sālim ran and the Saudi establishment could be bothered to fund, but a pathway for his sons to ground themselves in the Najdī tradition. All three of them—Dā‘ī al-Islām, Abu Bakr, and Rāḍī al-Islām—went on to study at the Islamic University of Madīnah in the eighties, returning with a direct education in the tradition and

⁴⁸⁶ Gade, *Return to Tripoli*, 37-38.

⁴⁸⁷ ‘Imād, *as-Salafiyya was-Salafiyyūn, al-Huwiyya wal-Mughāyara: Qirā’a fī at-Tajriba al-Lubnāniyya*, 147-48.

⁴⁸⁸ Saud Mawla, "al-Ḥaraka as-Salafiyya fī Ṭarābulus: al-Bidāyāt," *al-Jumhouria* (15/02/2013 2013). <https://www.aljournhouria.com/ar/news/56038/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA>.

its associated conceptions of creed, law, framing, and identity.⁴⁸⁹ It was not a deliberate Saudi “export” of Wahhabism to Lebanon via the Najdī establishment,⁴⁹⁰ and Saudi interest was political as much as anything else—among other things, the Saudi government had tense relations with Egyptian authorities and drawing students towards Madīnah could help undermine Egypt’s prestigious al-Azhar University. The religious impetus lay with people like the Shahāls, who sought opportunities for religious learning, and in the process gained access to the largesse that the Najdī establishment offered partners abroad.⁴⁹¹ The resulting religious links would thus draw Najdī thought into Tripoli, where Sālim ash-Shahāl had laid foundations for it by normalising an aggressive religious revival under the influence of intellectuals like Riḍa. That would take time, though, and Sālim’s influence would not survive the gap between when Sālim had started building ties to Saudi Arabia around the sixties, and the graduation of his sons like Dā‘ī ash-Shahāl—alongside others who studied in Madīnah at the same time, like Sālim ar-Rāfi‘—in the eighties.

Political Stagnation & Structural Questions

The stagnation of Sālim ash-Shahāl’s early movement helped ensure that by the time of his sons’ formative religious education in the eighties, the Najdī tradition faced minimal competition in the marketplace of revivalist ideas. By the seventies and eighties, JM was obviously stalling. It would not propel Tripoli’s society towards widespread Islamic reform despite becoming more engaged in society and politics, nor would it gain the political power needed to impose it.⁴⁹² Sālim’s movement had built some influence around Northern Lebanon and attracted many of its future Islamic notables. And while the state ultimately suppressed his efforts to impose social reform by force, he was open to political activities that might help secure it indirectly. But none of that went very far. In the 1972 elections he ran unsuccessfully as a candidate for the Islamic activist party, *Hizb at-Taḥrīr*,⁴⁹³ while after the Civil War broke out in 1975, the Shahāls and their movement also inched towards

⁴⁸⁹ Abi Samra, *Ṭarābulus Sāhat Allāh wa Mīna’ al-Ḥadātha*, 83-84.

⁴⁹⁰ Bano, *Salafi Social and Political Movements: National and Transnational Contexts*, 6-7.

⁴⁹¹ Gade, *Return to Tripoli*, 51, 55.

⁴⁹² Abdo, *The New Sectarianism*, 56.

⁴⁹³ ‘Imād, *as-Salafiyya was-Salafiyyūn, al-Huwiyya wal-Mughāyara: Qirā’a fī at-Tajriba al-Lubnāniyya*, 147-49, 51. For context, *Hizb at-Taḥrīr* refers to the transnational Islamic activist organisation and its affiliates in Lebanon, which advocate a post-Ottoman revival of a single global Islamic Caliphate.

militancy with *al-Jaysh al-Islāmī*, but its actual military role was as limited as their electoral success.⁴⁹⁴ Neither his connections nor drive were enough to make him into a political force.

To be fair, Shaykh Sālim and JM were only partly responsible for their poor prospects, and their context mattered as well. As Pall's work notes, there were issues that stood out about the movements character. One was the limited appeal of its brand of Islamic revival amidst competition from other political currents and the Sunnī religious establishment. It also did not help that Sālim was willing to coexist with those competitors rather than challenge them. And Pall also notes that JM received only limited support from sources like Saudi Arabia.⁴⁹⁵ Sālim and his movement had made certain choices, but there were other factors—and particularly centres of power—that influenced what resources they could mobilise in the Lebanese context and how they could use them.

Considered more closely, that context was one of the secrets to Sālim ash-Shahāl's success—or lack thereof. Much like in Najd, he had had to contend with a class of entrenched elites that had dominated its politics since the Ottoman era, including some that were particular to Tripoli.⁴⁹⁶ And like in Najd, there was a class of religious elites that had enjoyed cooperative relations with the political authorities since that late Ottoman era. Unfortunately, he was not one of those people, and the Lebanese parliament had instead legislated the official status of a principal Sunnī religious entity—Dār al-Fatwā—in 1955.⁴⁹⁷ Instead, the Shahāls were outsiders, and the closest Sālim came to political influence was in his occasional work for Tripoli's Karami family as an advisor, although the strength of even that relationship was unclear.⁴⁹⁸ Taken together, there were hints that the structural environment mirrored the Najdī one with a mix of political and religious insiders and outsiders, and that it was possible to describe the ways in which circumstances seemed to constrain movements' opportunities, behaviour, and prospects. But it would be the early JM members who had outgrown the Shahāls' early movement and formed new ideas, not Sālim, that initially set

⁴⁹⁴ Abi Samra, *Ṭarābulus Sāhat Allāh wa Mīna' al-Ḥadātha*, 84.

⁴⁹⁵ Pall, *Salafism in Lebanon*, 64-65.

⁴⁹⁶ William Harris, *Lebanon: A History, 600 - 2011* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 172.

⁴⁹⁷ Morgan Clarke, *Islam and Law in Lebanon: Sharia Within and Without the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 44-45.

⁴⁹⁸ Pall, *Salafism in Lebanon*, 63; 'Imād, *as-Salafiyya was-Salafiyyūn, al-Huwiyya wal-Mughāyara: Qirā'a fī at-Tajriba al-Lubnāniyya*, 148.

the direction of revivalist discourse in Tripoli and highlighted the comparable structure of Lebanon's politics.

The Comparable Structure of *Al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyya's* Activism

Sālim ash-Shahāl's early movement left space for the Muslim Brotherhood's ideas to emerge in Tripoli by the fifties before Najdī Salafism became more prominent in the eighties, and the associated movements would tease out Lebanon's political structures and processes. The resulting parallels to Saudi Arabia would manifest partly in the evolving activist discourse: like in the Arabian Peninsula, new lines of thinking emerged thanks to activists who had moved on from Shaykh Sālim's movement like Faṭḥī Yakan and Sa'īd Sha'bān. And as in Saudi Arabia, new activist movements appeared like Yakan's *al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyya* (JI) and Sha'bān's *Ḥarakat at-Tawḥīd al-Islāmī* (HTI). That itself gave rise to Yakan's activist theories that offered an insight into the similar Lebanese structural context, and to JI which survived by working within its boundaries. And more generally, it put Tripoli's Salafīs like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī in a comparable movement with a comparable context by the time the twenty-first century came around.

Discourse's Transnational Evolution & Local Adaptation

Faṭḥī Yakan and Sa'īd Sha'bān's politics ultimately differed, but their shifting intellectual roots in the fifties and sixties combined Sālim's reading of post-Ottoman discourse with a direct reading of the Muslim Brotherhood's activist discourse and the indirect influence of its Levantine offshoots. The Brotherhood's views did not necessarily challenge Sālim or Riḍa's post-Ottoman vision, or the Najdī-adjacent elements. But they offered a complementary response to a more specific political malaise. Like Najdī Salafism, its origins reflected specific people and their circumstances, appearing first in 1928 via the "Society of Muslim Brothers" and the initiative of an Egyptian schoolteacher named Ḥassan al-Banā (1906-1949). But unlike Najdī thought, the Brotherhood understood the Arab world's malaise and its sources in structural terms rather than religious ones. Rather than framing issues in the language of belief and disbelief that lacked clear political implications, al-Banā's message was direct and unambiguous: post-Ottoman Egypt and its society faced economic inequality, foreign

domination, and moral corruption caused by the failures of Egypt's political establishment and the transnational threat of Western domination and subversion.⁴⁹⁹

The Brotherhood's proposed response to the post-Ottoman malaise had the same revivalist inclination. As with the scholars in the Arabian Peninsula and specific figures like Riḍa, they envisioned an Islamic revival that returned society to the ways of the *salaf as-ṣāliḥ*, while confronting Western domination and Muslim decline through social activism and political participation.⁵⁰⁰ That would be distinct from the Najdī prescription despite the similar vocabulary. Instead of rooting out threats to belief like *bid'a* as Najdī Salafism did, it proposed a modernist reconciliation of new developments with Islam's fundamental values, resulting in an ideal Islamic order which aimed to reap the benefits of secular programs like democracy and socialism without the deficits. And even if it did not start in Lebanon the Brotherhood's formative years suggested that such a message had strong prospects in any society marred by a sense of deprivation, with branches spreading rapidly throughout Egypt in the thirties.⁵⁰¹ That was not to ignore the fact that the real implications for activism outside of Egypt were slightly uncertain. With vague organisational principles and internal disagreements about issues like electoral participation, the status of non-members and non-Muslims, and forming a political party, the movement's specific program was not totally clear.⁵⁰² But for impatient revivalists like Yakan and Sha'bān, the Brotherhood's general discourse of "political Islam" was still an accessibly simplistic explanation to the complex problems of the day, and it proposed an Islamic solution to society's malaise more directly than Najdī thinking or at least Sālim's take on it.

Despite offering a clear set of ideas and example, the Muslim Brotherhood's founders and early movement's discourse would influence and complement the Najdī-aligned Salafism of Riḍa and Sālim more than the actual Brotherhood organisation did. But that was normal and the movement's affiliates in the Levant were unlikely to be extensions of the original

⁴⁹⁹ Khalīl al-'Anānī, *Inside the Muslim Brotherhood: Religion, Identity, and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 54; Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement*, Revised ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 21-22.

⁵⁰⁰ Lefèvre, *Ashes of Hama*, 21-22.

⁵⁰¹ Richard Paul Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 233, 328.

⁵⁰² Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, 24-25.

Egyptian networks. The core organisation was interested in propagating its message and building transnational ties with a focus on the Arab Middle East, forming liaison committees that reflected the movement's emphasis on the region and its passing interest in the rest of the Muslim world.⁵⁰³ But it was difficult to see what inspiration the original branch might offer. Its priorities were particular to Egypt during the forties and its divided leadership split their attention between civil politics and reckless political violence. The results of that approach were uninspiring: the activists' campaign escalated to the point where they assassinated a judge in 1948, and the government responded by killing al-Banā.⁵⁰⁴ And that record made it difficult to see if or how other movements could or should have built on the Brotherhood's work, except by taking the fungible elements of its political discourse and adapting it to local circumstances.

The Brotherhood's influence on Lebanon was therefore indirect, and entrenched itself in the same localised way that it did elsewhere outside of Egypt. When early Brotherhood affiliates emerged around the Levant in 1945, they emerged like Sālim's movement did: as indigenous actors that adapted a foreign discourse to a new movement. A Syrian Brotherhood emerged under the leadership of figures like Muṣṭafā as-Sibā'ī (1915-1964) and their existing religious and activist circle, taking inspiration from the original Egyptian movement while being more tolerant of outsiders and the Syrian political order generally.⁵⁰⁵ And a Jordanian Brotherhood appeared under the leadership of 'Abd al-Laṭīf Abu Qūra (d.1967) and embraced al-Banā's religious message but operated with the ulterior motive of fighting Zionist movements in Palestine—something that the political establishment valued as a tool against left-wing agitation at the time.⁵⁰⁶ Both movements had taken on elements of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideas, which were transnational in their scope. But they also showed that there could and would be a synthesis of new activist thought from the Brotherhood's model and local influences, rather than a blind imitation the former and a heedless erasure of the latter.

⁵⁰³ Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 172-73.

⁵⁰⁴ Barbara Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2008), 11-14.

⁵⁰⁵ Dara Conduit, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 21, 25-27.

⁵⁰⁶ Joas Wagemakers, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 86-87.

Lebanon's first Brotherhood movement—*al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyya*—would follow those other regional affiliates' example over the fifties and sixties under Fathī Yakan's leadership. Yakan's first contribution was a vision: he perceived a gap in the activist landscape and proposed a means of filling it. While the Brotherhood's ideology informed its message, JI came about as young activists grew dissatisfied with the scale and scope of Islamic reform in Lebanon. Its formal founding—as Pall notes—was in 1964,⁵⁰⁷ but its underlying networks had emerged in the late fifties under Fathī Yakan's leadership. That was a welcome response to a market gap at the time: while nationalist thought had inspired other new political movements, politically engaged Islamic activism was absent outside the curated auspices of elites like Tripoli's Karami and Salām families. It was a gap that the Shahāls' movement had only highlighted, with its occasional protests against things like secular judicial reform that contrasted awkwardly with their aforementioned connections to elite players like the Karamis.⁵⁰⁸ But for the disillusioned or ambitious like Yakan, the initial alternatives had been networks like those led by Muḥammad ad-Dā'ūq's (1910-2006), which he had joined by 1953.⁵⁰⁹ That would be a good formative experience that helped Yakan build a reputation and relationships, while exposing him to Muḥammad Qutb's works and the influence of Muṣṭafā as-Sibā'ī who had become more active in Lebanon amidst worsening repression in Syria. But it was also stifling, and Yakan would recall that ad-Dā'ūq's avoidance of political activism was a point of disagreement.⁵¹⁰ With motivation and ideas on the one hand but no opportunities on the other, the situation would drive him and other dissenting figures to found JI in 1957.⁵¹¹

JI and Yakan quickly transformed from informal to formal fixtures of Lebanon's activist landscape as the domestic and international context shifted. The movement received a helpful jolt in 1958 after Lebanon's President Camille Chamoun sparked a political crisis by attempting to extend his term and align Lebanon with Western powers, validating the anti-Western anxieties that ran deep in Brotherhood thought. And by the time they formally

⁵⁰⁷ Pall, *Salafism in Lebanon*, 9.

⁵⁰⁸ Amal Itani, 'Abd al-Qādr 'Alī, and Mu'īn Mannā', *al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyya fī Lubnān Mundhu an-Nashā'a Ḥatā 1975* (Beirut: Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2009), 11-14, 18-19.

⁵⁰⁹ Lāgha, *Fathī Yakan: Rā'id al-Ḥaraka al-Islāmiyya al-Mu'āṣira fī Lubnān*, 23-25.

⁵¹⁰ al-Hiwar, "Murāja'āt ma'a Duktūr Fathī Yakan | al-Ḥalaqa 1," *YouTube* (30/05/2009 2009).

https://youtu.be/0wZrhHkQJ_w.

⁵¹¹ 'Imād, *al-Ḥarakāt al-Islāmiyya fī Lubnān: Ishkāliyat ad-Dīn was-Siyāsiyya fī Mujtama' Mutanawwi'*, 33-36.

established the movement in the sixties, it was working with Islamic groups abroad and conducting its own publishing and outreach,⁵¹² while Yakan's domestic and international profile was growing as he led the movement from its offices and a mosque in Tripoli's Abi Samra neighbourhood.⁵¹³ None of that was a repudiation of Sālim ash-Shahāl's *al-Jamā'a al-Muslimūn*—Sālim's movement was an inseparable part of Salafī and Islamic activism's history in Tripoli, and the shaykh had played a pivotal role in laying foundations for the Najdī tradition in the city. But for figures like Yakan who had activist leanings that JM had not addressed and who aligned more closely with the Brotherhood's message, JI was a necessary development that reconciled the vague revivalism of figures like Riḍa with the Egyptian movement's emphasis on social transformation.

Fathī Yakan Describes a Comparable Political Structure

Yakan's movement survived the seventies and Lebanon's Civil War by working within the limits of the Lebanese social and political context which his writings described. Above all, his legacy was practical. His contributions to Lebanese activist thought would frame political identity in more transparently political and philosophical terms, distinguishing a Muslim community against the Western actors and forces that had concerned Brotherhood founders. Like the movement's original Egyptian thinkers, Yakan's foundational concerns were political rather than credal, and the foremost issue was the Muslim world's post-Ottoman decline in the face of repeated instances of Western duplicity and attacks like the Sykes-Picot and Balfour agreements.⁵¹⁴ But besides those attacks, he also claimed that more subtle plots by Western actors and forces were afoot, including schemes by great powers like the United States or the Vatican as a representative of Christendom, and an unspecified spread of Jewish plots to undermine the Islamic world.⁵¹⁵ And those in turn were accompanied by less specific patterns of subversion by transnational ideological forces like Marxism and historical materialism, capitalism and the resulting social models, and

⁵¹² 'Imād, *al-Ḥarakāt al-Islāmiyya fī Lubnān: Ishkāliyat ad-Dīn was-Siyāsiyya fī Mujtama' Mutanawwi'*, 33-36.

⁵¹³ Lāgha, *Fathī Yakan: Rā'id al-Ḥaraka al-Islāmiyya al-Mu'āṣira fī Lubnān*, 27, 29.

⁵¹⁴ Fathī Yakan, *al-Ālim al-Islām wal-Makā'id ad-Dawliya Khilāl al-Qurn ar-Rābi' al-Ashir al-Hijrī* (ar-Risala, 1983), 52-55.

⁵¹⁵ Yakan, *al-Ālim al-Islām wal-Makā'id ad-Dawliya Khilāl al-Qurn ar-Rābi' al-Ashir al-Hijrī*, 64-65, 69.

Freemasonry.⁵¹⁶ With a firmer grounding in current issues and an elaborate imagination of the forces behind them, Yakan's politics bore the imprint of the Brotherhood.

That did not mean Yakan had become an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood's influence at the expense of earlier or later iterations of Lebanese Salafism. For him, the Brotherhood's ideology was a tool that explained Lebanon and its wider context. He found proof of the movement's philosophical concerns about Islam in the Levant, condemning the Syrian Ba'ath Party as a materialist enterprise with its Marxist overtones, and Syrian nationalists as desecrators of Islamic civilisation with their pre-Islamic tribalism.⁵¹⁷ And while his work echoed the general concerns that lay at the root of al-Banā's message, its ideas would not alienate him from the Salafī sphere. The same anxieties that Yakan expressed about Marxism, Jews, and Freemasons—alongside more tangible problems like Western ambitions for the Middle East—would have parallels in later Saudi writings from figures like Safar al-Ḥawālī,⁵¹⁸ to say nothing of Dā'ī ash-Shahāl and Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī's rhetoric in the twenty first century. While taking inspiration from the Brotherhood's ideology, Yakan was still fundamentally a product of Lebanon's own political and intellectual climate.

Yakan's program for activism reflected those Lebanese roots. He accommodated a structural context where activists sat above a Lebanese public that would reject a sudden and widespread Islamic transformation, and below an elite-dominated political system that would not tolerate disruptions or competitors. Mirroring Saudi Arabia's *Ṣaḥwā* movements, he saw the wider public arena as activists' home and cautioned them to mobilise resources carefully within it. To that end, he encouraged gradualism that accommodated not just the Sunnī community's possible reticence towards drastic social transformation, but the need for amicable relations between Lebanon's Sunnīs and other confessional communities.⁵¹⁹ He expanded on the Brotherhood's principles of organisation and education, emphasising the development of movement leaders whose capacities as preachers with a strong "Islamic personality" and good religious understandings that allowed them to apply Islam to all

⁵¹⁶ Fathī Yakan, *Ḥarakāt wa Madhāhib fī Mīzān al-Islām* (Beirut: ar-Risala, 1979), 11-15, 41-43, 53-56.

⁵¹⁷ Yakan, *Ḥarakāt wa Madhāhib fī Mīzān al-Islām*, 78-80.

⁵¹⁸ al-Ḥawālī, *al-Muslimūn wal-Ḥaḍāra al-Gharbiyya lil-Mu'allaf Safar al-Ḥawālī*, 39-40, 95-98, 301-02.

⁵¹⁹ Fathī Yakan, *al-Mas'ala al-Lubnāniyya min Manẓūr Islāmiyya* (Beirut: al-Mu'asasa al-Islamiyya lil-Taba'a wal-Suhafa wal-Nashr, 1979), 127.

aspects of society,⁵²⁰ while discouraging radical or coercive revolutionary tendencies. It was a style of social reform that Yakan presented as a pragmatic course, drawing parallels to the practice of medicine by calling activists to respond to diagnosable problems and their symptoms in Muslim society with religiously-sound treatments, rather than imposing a predefined vision on the public without consideration of its own sensitivities.⁵²¹ And through such work that he believed activist leaders could be a vanguard to a wider party that gradually dislodged religious ignorance in society through religious education and outreach that paved the way towards an Islamic state.⁵²²

The other side of Yakan's pragmatic activist vision was an accommodation of Lebanon's domestic political environment and its structures, in which centres of power shaped opportunities and threats from above like Saudi authorities did. As his writings about Lebanese politics and society in *al-Mas'ala al-Lubnāniyya* put it, Yakan saw JI as an outsider party in that wider system, where political power sat with established political parties and leaders of Lebanon's confessional communities. That system was something that he expected Islamic movements would have to live with when unreasonable sacrifices would be required to transform the Lebanese system, and foreign powers were guarantors for Lebanese elites.⁵²³ It was an expression of resignation rather than satisfaction—Yakan blamed that system for imposing permanent marginal status on Lebanese Muslims by assigning political power and roles in government according to quotas that favoured Christians.⁵²⁴ Moreover, he would hold the mix of domestic and foreign interests partly responsible for the Lebanese Civil War that lasted from 1975 to 1989, assigning blame for the crisis to attempts by Palestinian movements, Christian nationalists, and others to secure their interests, or their role as conduits for the transnational forces that destabilised Lebanon.⁵²⁵ Notwithstanding his views about where they needed to take society, Yakan

⁵²⁰ Fathī Yakan, *Mushkilāt ad-Da'wa wad-Dā'iyya* (Beirut: ar-Risala, 1996), 108-09.

⁵²¹ Yakan, *Mushkilāt ad-Da'wa wad-Dā'iyya*, 118-19.

⁵²² Yakan, *Mushkilāt ad-Da'wa wad-Dā'iyya*, 144-47.

⁵²³ Yakan, *al-Mas'ala al-Lubnāniyya min Manẓūr Islāmiyya*, 20-23.

⁵²⁴ Yakan, *al-Mas'ala al-Lubnāniyya min Manẓūr Islāmiyya*, 39-42.

⁵²⁵ Yakan, *al-Mas'ala al-Lubnāniyya min Manẓūr Islāmiyya*, 28-36.

acknowledged that like in Saudi Arabia, activists had a marginal place in the Lebanese political order which they would need to accommodate rather than change.

That grounded view of politics did not mean Yakan lacked any ambition for structural reform, but he accommodated the marginalising forces that he described rather than challenging them. He called for the abolition of the confessional system, the end of Maronite Christian political dominance, and the formation of a new Islamic society without abolishing the institution or the community itself. The presidency, for example, would shift from Lebanon's Christians to its Muslims on majoritarian grounds, while he asserted that the new Islamic order would secure Christians' rights.⁵²⁶ On the one hand, that was stark, and satisfied Yakan's desire to abolish the established order and end the effects of Lebanon's political class on Muslims. But it was also a concession that both those things were permanent parts of Lebanon's political landscape, if only because of American and European support for Lebanon's system and especially its Christians.⁵²⁷ And taken together, it struck a balance between his ambitions for an ideal outcome based on the discourse of Islamic reform, and the marginal realities of the actors who had to interpret it within the structures of their local context.

That pragmatism allowed JI to survive the seventies and eighties by engaging with the public and operating within the constraints that Yakan described. His conciliatory approach to activism helped JI spread in Lebanon's wider society even as it built a distinct party apparatus.⁵²⁸ Rather than attempting to replace the existing social order it worked within it, establishing itself as a moderate movement by using preaching and education networks to expand geographically into the Beqā' valley and Sidon, and socially beyond the Lebanese majority into the Palestinian camps.⁵²⁹ And where it did operate as a political actor, JI worked within the Lebanese system's boundaries and availed itself to whatever was an established political process at the time. Before the Civil War, that included participation in

⁵²⁶ Yakan, *al-Mas'ala al-Lubnāniyya min Manẓūr Islāmiyya*, 132-35.

⁵²⁷ Yakan, *al-Mas'ala al-Lubnāniyya min Manẓūr Islāmiyya*, 57-58.

⁵²⁸ 'Imād, *al-Harakāt al-Islāmiyya fī Lubnān: Ishkāliyat ad-Dīn was-Siyāsiyya fī Mujtama' Mutanawwi'*, 58.

⁵²⁹ Dilshod Achilov, "Revisiting Political Islam: Explaining the Nexus Between Political Islam and Contentious Politics in the Arab World," *Social Science Quarterly* 97, no. 2 (2016): 253.

the electoral process that saw the movement run candidates in the 1972 polls.⁵³⁰ And after the war broke out in 1975, it mobilised as an armed actor but positioned itself as a defender of Lebanon's Sunnīs alongside Lebanese and Palestinian nationalist groups,⁵³¹ in parallel with actors from other confessional communities like the 'Alawī Arab Democratic Party in Tripoli.⁵³² None of those accommodations signalled an abandonment of Yakan's wider ambitions—many of the books outlining his vision came out after 1975, after all. But it signalled an awareness that like in Saudi Arabia, there were political forces which shaped the operating context from above, and movements ultimately needed to operate in a way that accommodated them.

From an academic perspective, JI and Fathī Yakan's legacy was an illustration of a Lebanese social environment that encouraged the emergence of Tripoli's Salafī movements and a test case of the political structure that would constrain them. Historically, it was a further evolution in the history of Lebanese Salafism and Islamic activism in Tripoli that filled the gaps left by JM. And intellectually, its underlying discourse had expanded on Sālim ash-Shahāl's appropriation of Rashīd Riḍa's Najdī-adjacent revivalism. As Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl would note, Yakan and his contemporaries like Sa'īd Sha'bān were historically important figures in Lebanon's Islamic and particularly Salafī movements, even if he thought that their links to the Muslim Brotherhood stood out.⁵³³ But Yakan's own ideas were also an insight into the structure of Lebanese politics and marginal actors' place in it: a system that resource mobilisation theory might make comprehensible by positioning activists at an intersection of the public sphere in which they could mobilise resources and elites that shaped their opportunities and constraints. But while that invited comparisons to the Saudi context it was also not the whole story. Looking further ahead, figures like Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī would acknowledge Yakan and JI's influence on activist Salafism in Tripoli. But ar-Rāfi'ī's history also highlighted another movement—that of Yakan's colleague Sa'īd Sha'bān, who

⁵³⁰ Amal Khalil, "al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyya Khasarat: Ayna Jumhūrī?," *al-Akhbar* (07/06/2018 2018). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/251645>.

⁵³¹ 'Imād, *al-Ḥarakāt al-Islāmiyya fī Lubnān: Ishkāliyat ad-Dīn was-Siyāsiyya fī Mujtama' Mutanawwi'*, 60-61.

⁵³² Michael Kerr and Craig Larkin, *The Alawis of Syria: War, Faith and Politics in the Levant*, Kindle ed. (Oxford University Press, 2015), 186-87.

⁵³³ Khalijīyya, "ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl Ḍayf Liqā' al-Jum'a ma'a 'Abd Allā al-Mudayfir - al-Mashrū' al-Īrānī fī Lubnān," *YouTube* (04/04/2015 2015). <https://youtu.be/71inq3QyYrQ>.

founded *Harakat at-Tawḥīd al-Islāmī* (HTI).⁵³⁴ While JI's cautious discourse and history had highlighted the comparable structure of Lebanon's politics, HTI's history as a more radical movement helped tease out the observable processes by which the centres of power regulated marginal actors' place in it.

The Clearer Processes of *Harakat at-Tawḥīd al-Islāmī*'s Failure

While Yakan and JI illustrated structural parallels between the Lebanese and Saudi contexts, the mobilisation and demobilisation of *Harakat at-Tawḥīd al-Islāmī* under Yakan's colleague—Sa'īd Sha'bān—illustrated the processes behind Salafī movements' structural position with a clarity that the Saudi context lacked. While Saudi activists' activities had been hard to describe in detail, Sha'bān visibly established HTI as an authoritarian actor that loomed over the Trabelsi public in the early eighties by co-opting disparate armed groups—a visible pattern of behaviour described simply by resource mobilisation theory. And while events in Saudi Arabia hinted at clearer structural explanations, the Syrian regime's ensuing crackdown in the middle of the eighties reflected processes of contentious politics theory, particularly demobilisation. That theoretical account overlooked meaningful details—the ensuing massacres had a real human cost that was easy to miss from the national perspective. But it was enough to show that although Lebanon's Salafīs like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī movements had a political context that was comparable to that of Saudi Arabia, it was also one where the processes behind their place in it were easier to track.

HTI's Resource Mobilisation

Sa'īd Sha'bān built HTI into a fragile organisation during the early eighties by co-opting Tripoli's existing armed actors—a pattern of resource mobilisation that was necessary for him to impose a new social order in the city. That pragmatic approach could not change the fact that he was still an ideological and even radical figure. On the one hand, he was a colleague of the more cautious Faṭḥī Yakan, whom he had met during their shared time in Sālīm ash-Shahāl's JM. And he had spent some time as part of the more sustainable JI. On the other hand, though, Sha'bān opportunistically led HTI to power by capitalising on the short term benefits of political disruptions, and its unusual composition would hint at his

⁵³⁴ Rabil, *Salafism in Lebanon*, 6, 65; Pall, *Salafism in Lebanon*, 101.

radicalism.⁵³⁵ That radicalism was not an inevitable product of his religious roots—like Yakan, he harboured concerns about correct belief and Muslims' mutual obligations,⁵³⁶ while in politics he described the same tangible threats from great powers like the United States and Israel and called for an Islamic revival in response.⁵³⁷ But it would be difficult to miss the fact that he carved out a powerful position for HTI in Tripoli and used it to coerce the Trabelsi public, setting himself against the people and the system in ways that Yakan had warned against.

HTI's founding showed that Sha'bān's priority was speed rather than sustainability, and was relying on resource mobilisation to build a movement. Rather than working with the people, he engaged in elite brokerage that mobilised other actors as partners in a disparate organisation instead of social activism that built it from the ground up. He had not really disproven Yakan's observations about how movements needed to work with the Lebanese public, and JI's original movement would outlast JM's by putting down roots in wider Lebanese society. Instead, HTI emerged after Sha'bān cut deals that allowed him to cobble a piecemeal organisation together. That brokerage had paid off by August of 1982, after a series of closed meetings that named Sha'bān leader of a new movement in Tripoli and he accepted loyalty pledges from group leaders in the city's at-Tawba Mosque, while HTI's members displayed their weapons openly.⁵³⁸ And the new organisation's appearance was unsurprising given the Trabelsi social climate of the eighties—a time when the Civil War had created a political vacuum and the 1982 Israeli invasion had fuelled wider anxieties about the community's security. But the movement's disparate founding membership and leadership also suggested that there was little holding the movement together. The shaykh had linked the more politically cautious Islamic activist *Jund Allāh* movement led by Kan'ān Nājī,⁵³⁹ the Palestinian nationalist *al-Muqāwama ash-Sha'abiyya* movement under Khalīl

⁵³⁵ Itani, *al-Jihādiyyūn fī Lubnān*, 46-48.

⁵³⁶ Qanāt al-Shaykh Sa'īd Sha'bān Raḥimahu Allāh Qanāt, "Min Khuṭbat Juma'a al-'Alāmat ash-Shaykh Sa'īd Sha'bān Raḥimahu Allāh - Ṭarābulus 1985," *YouTube* (16/10/2017 2017). https://youtu.be/E3bzfkC4_Q.

⁵³⁷ Qanāt al-Shaykh Sa'īd Sha'bān Raḥimahu Allāh Qanāt, "Min Kalima lil-'Alāmat al-Mujāhid ash-Shaykh Sa'īd Sha'bān Raḥimahu Allāh Ṭarābulus 1985," *YouTube* (03/11/2017 2017). <https://youtu.be/o8hzA1PPx7Q>.

⁵³⁸ Itani, *al-Jihādiyyūn fī Lubnān*, 79-80.

⁵³⁹ an-Nahar, "Man Hum Jund Allāh fī Ṭarābulus?," *an-Nahar* (19/04/2013 2013). <https://www.annahar.com/arabic/article/28334-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3>.

‘Akāwī,⁵⁴⁰ and *Harakat Lubnān al-‘Arabī*,⁵⁴¹ another Palestinian nationalist movement led by ‘Iṣmat al-Murād.⁵⁴² In isolation, it was not clear what—if anything—was keeping the band together.

That pragmatic pattern of resource mobilisation was telling: HTI had a distinct agenda for society, but the organisation was fragile. Rather than building his authority on a solid social foundation, resource mobilisation theory suggested that Sha‘bān had stumbled into a fundamental organisational problem: “supporters—those who provide[d] money, facilities, and even labor—may have [had] no commitment to the values that underlie specific movements.”⁵⁴³ There was good reason to take that approach when the shaykh’s ideological orientation made it difficult to just persuade anyone to work with him. Even if he had the same religious and political roots as Yakan, he saw the sort of preaching and education that helped build JI as secondary concerns,⁵⁴⁴ and HTI was not going to spend time on the cautious style of Brotherhood-inspired activism that Yakan proposed. But that also meant that he would be appealing to his partners as an ally of convenience who supported shared interests, and there would be no common social foundation to unite the various HTI leaders who did not really share Sha‘bān’s politics or religious views.⁵⁴⁵ And it also meant that HTI’s survival would only last as long as he could continue brokering agreements and shared understandings between the elites who have given him access to the resources that they controlled. Without that, there was no way to preserve an organisation that had never really had its own resources and impose a social agenda that lacked public consent.⁵⁴⁶

But while that fragility was an inevitable problem when mobilising resources in that fashion, it was worth the cost for someone who wanted to impose reform from above like Sha‘bān. His pragmatism served an authoritarian agenda for social reform in Tripoli, and appeared to

⁵⁴⁰ Nasri Hajaj, “Khalīl ‘Akāwī,” *The New Arab* (02/10/2015 2015).

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A-1>.

⁵⁴¹ Jihād ‘Awda, *Suqūṭ Dawlat al-Ikhwān* (Cairo: Knooz Publishers, 2014), 378.

⁵⁴² Muhammad Abi Samra, “al-Islām wal-Ḥarb wa “Ḥarakat at-Tawḥīd al-Islāmiyya” fī Ṭarābulus Thamāniyāt al-Qurn al-‘Ashrīn [2],” *Lebanese Center for Research and Consulting* (15/08/2010 2010). <http://www.center-lcrc.com/index.php?s=4&id=2120>.

⁵⁴³ McCarthy and Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory,” 1216.

⁵⁴⁴ Itani, *al-Jihādīyyūn fī Lubnān*, 76-77, 79-83.

⁵⁴⁵ Central Intelligence Agency CIA, *Directory of Lebanese Militias* (United States Government, 1984), 15.

<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00314R000100070001-4.pdf>.

⁵⁴⁶ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 44, 116.

pay off after HTI's declared that it had founded an Islamic emirate in the city in 1983.⁵⁴⁷ It was a familiar project that echoed the attempts at coercive social reform that had been part of Sālim ash-Shahāl's early activism—and the second Saudi state's crackdown—more than Yakan's attempts to work with the public. And it also aligned with regional activist trends in the eighties that had reached Tripoli. Just as JM had drawn on Riḍā's Najdī-adjacent revivalism and JI had taken from the Muslim Brotherhood's ideas about activism from within the public sphere, HTI's emergence mirrored the 1979 Iranian revolution that had inspired Islamic reformers with a dramatic transformation of society from above.⁵⁴⁸ The shaykh's public statements reflected a mix of all those trends, with an artisanal blend of anxieties about *tawḥīd* that echoed the early revival of Sālim ash-Shahāl, the Brotherhood and JI's political realism, and a commitment to an Islamic political vocabulary which made even a recitation of the *Qur'ān* into a defiant commitment to action "even if the polytheists dislike it."⁵⁴⁹ It was a message that lacked a single set of roots—it reflected Sa'īd Sha'bān's agency as someone who curated overlapping influences. But it also sent a clear signal that HTI's core priority was the imposition of social change, not a popular base or a warm public image.

HTI's coercive approach to Islamic reform was not sustainable, and its short-term successes did not change its long-term structural problems. Its authoritarian nature was unmistakable as it consolidated its control in Tripoli from 1983 to 1985. Rather than social outreach, the movement pursued a campaign of coercive reform that banned things it deemed un-Islamic—businesses like cafes and theatres, sports like tennis, and hobbies like golf.⁵⁵⁰ By nature, that was not a campaign of soft persuasion. HTI was positioning itself as a radical actor by using violence to impose its vision,⁵⁵¹ and taking an approach that would alienate Sha'bān from the same society that Yakan had urged activists to co-opt.⁵⁵² Framing a violent social crackdown with religious language and values would not overcome any resulting public unease—as was the case elsewhere, a radical discourse that co-opted Islam to

⁵⁴⁷ Mawla, "as-Salafiyūn fī Lubnān: at-Ta'arjah bayna ad-Da'wa was-Silāh."

⁵⁴⁸ Abi Samra, *Ṭarābulus Sāhat Allāh wa Mīna' al-Ḥadātha*, 11-12.

⁵⁴⁹ Safir ash-Shamāl 2, "Sa'īd Sha'bān," *YouTube* (06/01/2021 2021). <https://youtu.be/HC0GqSI20F4>. The complete letter of Sha'bān's recitation is found in the *Qur'ān* 61:9, but conclusions about its political substance reflect his wider views and the context of his speech.

⁵⁵⁰ Hilal Khashan, "Lebanon's Islamist Stronghold," *Middle East Quarterly* Spring (2011): 86-87.

⁵⁵¹ Achilov, "Revisiting Political Islam," 253.

⁵⁵² Seth Jones, *Waging Insurgent Warfare: Lessons From the Vietcong to the Islamic State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 169-70.

validate militancy was more offensive than reassuring to a wider Muslim public.⁵⁵³ Instead, HTI's continued organisational recruitment would depend on economically marginalised people that benefitted from membership more than the religiously motivated.⁵⁵⁴ But that pool of human capital would eventually run dry, and by setting the movement against the same public that could have staffed it, Sha'bān had created a problem: without clear public support, HTI's survival depended heavily on his brokerage of a working relationship with the other actors that had helped build it.⁵⁵⁵ Movements like his could still replace shared anxieties or interests with a sense of shared identity and values,⁵⁵⁶ but if he continued to rely on pragmatic brokerage as a means of mobilising resources, then his movement was not secure.

Even if the shaykh could ignore those problems during HTI's rise to power in 1982 and 1983, he owed his success to a run of good luck and things were going to end badly. In Tripoli itself, disruptive circumstances had initially conspired to secure HTI's dominance over the public and its position against competitors. Notwithstanding its radical orientation, it found itself in an alliance with parts of the Palestinian national movement under Yāsir 'Arafāt's leadership, which had been forced to flee to Tripoli in 1982 amidst pressure from the Israeli and Syrian governments.⁵⁵⁷ The relationship was not a reflection of 'Arafāt's politics or religious background, and served his interests some extent while constraining HTI and the threat that its radical approach might have posed to them. He used Sha'bān's organisation to eliminate challengers in the Palestinian movement,⁵⁵⁸ while also working to maintain amicable relations between it and the un-Islamic outsiders that it wanted to attack.⁵⁵⁹ The relationship

⁵⁵³ Ahmad el-Muhammady, "The Ideological Formulation of Jamā'ah Islāmiyyah and Malaysia's Rehabilitative Approach in Negotiating Jamā'ah Islāmiyyah Discourse, 1993-2012" (Doctoral Thesis Submitted at International Islamic University Malaysia, 2019), 2-5.

⁵⁵⁴ Central Intelligence Agency CIA, "Shaykh Shaban—Lebanon's Radical Sunni Cleric," *Near East and South Asia Review* 18 January (1985): 8-10.

⁵⁵⁵ Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse*, Illustrated, Reprint ed. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014), 45.

⁵⁵⁶ Randy Stoecker, "Community, Movement, Organization: The Problem of Identity Convergence in Collective Action," *The Sociological Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1995): 122-23.

⁵⁵⁷ Farid el Khazen, "Political Parties in Postwar Lebanon: Parties in Search of Partisans," *Middle East Journal* 57, no. 4 (2003): 611; Herbert Denton, "Arafat and Troops Prepare for Second Exit From Lebanon," *Washington Post* (04/12/1983 1983). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1983/12/04/arafat-and-troops-prepare-for-second-exit-from-lebanon/d04102e7-a0a3-426f-a714-11fc50879718/>.

⁵⁵⁸ CIA, *Directory of Lebanese Militias*, 15.

⁵⁵⁹ Emile Chahine, *at-Takwīn at-Tārīkhī li Nizām Lubnān as-Siyāsī at-Ṭā'ifi: Lubnān as-Sulaṭa wa Lubnān ash-Sha'ab* (Beirut: al-Manhal, 2015), 295.

was also not totally one-sided—HTI was doing work for ‘Arafāt but his material support helped arm it, while manipulating his conflicts offered a pretext on which to eliminate Sa‘īd Sha‘bān’s rivals in Tripoli.⁵⁶⁰ But it was not a permanent solution to Sha‘bān’s long-term problems. From the outset, Sha‘bān had depended on elite brokerage to mobilise the resources that he needed to impose his brand of social reform from above, and the resulting movement was inherently fragile. That begged an obvious question of what would happen to HTI’s fragile coalition if those resources disappeared. And it suggested a less obvious but much more dangerous question: would the resources that enabled authoritarian control over the public be sufficient to resist intervention from the centres of power that observers like Yakan had described?

HTI’s Contentious Politics & Demobilisation

While Sha‘bān’s haphazard movement showed how activists could mobilise resources to impose social change, the Syrian regime’s ensuing crackdown on his emirate illustrated the processes of contentious politics—particularly “demobilisation”—by which a centre of power could use co-optation and repression to shape their place and role. The emirate was the beneficiary of a political vacuum, and it would only be so long before Damascus imposed itself. That should not have been surprising when the Syrian regime was precisely the kind of foreign power that Yakan had warned of in the Lebanese system, and it had never really disengaged from Tripoli or the north during the war.⁵⁶¹ Still, Syrian interest had seemingly shifted away from the city after the 1982 Israeli invasion of South Lebanon created other priorities,⁵⁶² giving HTI and their partners an opportunity to capitalise on weakened Syrian control.⁵⁶³ But that was not a victory for HTI or the Palestinians, and after Damascus returned its attention to the city in 1983, they would have a problem.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶⁰ CIA, "Shaykh Shaban—Lebanon’s Radical Sunni Cleric," 7-10.

⁵⁶¹ Ra‘fat Fahd Morra, *al-Ḥarakāt wal-Quwā al-Islāmiyya fīl-Mujtama‘ al-Filasṭīnī fī Lubnān: an-Nashā’a - al-Ahdāf - al-Injāzāt* (Beirut: Zaytouna Center, 2010), 99-100.

⁵⁶² David Hirst, *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East* (Croydon: Faber and Faber, 2010), 146.

⁵⁶³ Raphaël Lefèvre, *The Roots of Crisis in Northern Lebanon* (Carnegie Middle East Center, 2014), 16. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/crisis_northern_lebanon.pdf.

⁵⁶⁴ Haytham al-Jaroo, "Ḥīna Ṭarada al-Asad Yāsir ‘Arafāt min Ṭarābulus," *Al Jazeera* (29/03/2019 2019). <https://www.aljazeera.net/blogs/2019/3/29/%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%AF->

At the outset, it may have appeared that the Syrian regime's intervention was enabling Sha'bān's project rather than threatening it. In 1983 Damascus seemed to be targeting 'Arafāt as a Palestinian player outside its control,⁵⁶⁵ and its moves against him would serve HTI by letting it enjoy the lingering material benefits of its ties to 'Arafāt while freeing it of any earlier political obligations. As Sha'bān's Palestinian partners left Tripoli, their abandoned guns and heavy weapons were a windfall for his movement,⁵⁶⁶ and with the resulting combination of resources and independence he was free to proclaim an emirate in the city. Unfortunately, Damascus had not actively facilitated Sha'bān as a partner or his emirate as a proxy for Syrian rule. Rather, it had moved against one actor while leaving another largely alone, leaving some temporary space for the shaykh to consolidate his position.⁵⁶⁷ And it would only be so long before the political realities behind that distinction started to impose themselves.

By 1984, Damascus had predictably started to reassert its authority while HTI was increasingly in contention with Syrian interests, marking the beginning of the end for the organisation. The problem was not Sa'īd Sha'bān's political ambitions in themselves—at face value, they were as contentious as those of Yakan and JI's. But the crackdown on 'Arafāt should have been a warning sign that any challenge from him or his partners to Syrian authority was at least a potential problem. And after driving most of its enemies from Tripoli by 1984,⁵⁶⁸ there were warning signs that HTI's position was inherently secure. Internally, Sha'bān and his partners still comprised a diverse movement, and still ranged from secular

%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AF-%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3.

⁵⁶⁵ David Korn, "Syria and Lebanon: A Fateful Entanglement," *The World Today* 42, no. 8/9 (1986): 139; Olmert Yossi, "A False Dilemma? Syria and Lebanon's Independence during the Mandatory Period," *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 3 (1996): 41-42; Kamal Dib, *Umarā' al-Harb wa Tijār al-Haykal* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 2015), 344-45.

⁵⁶⁶ Jonathan Randal, "Syria Abruptly Ousts Arafat As PLO Rebellion Mounts," *Washington Post* (25/06/1983 1983). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1983/06/25/syria-abruptly-ousts-arafat-as-plo-rebellion-mounts/9d72332b-b76a-4b5c-83d8-d737f5dbaa28/>.

⁵⁶⁷ Tine Gade, "Sunni Islamists in Tripoli and the Asad Regime, 1966–2014," *Syria Studies* 7, no. 2 (2015): 41-42.

⁵⁶⁸ Marie Kortam, "Des Leaders Religieux Musulmans au Liban," *Journal des Anthropologues* 146-147 (2016).

figures who sometimes intervened to protect people from the organisation itself,⁵⁶⁹ and others who combined apparent zeal with criminal opportunism.⁵⁷⁰ But by 1984 the more serious problem was that HTI had gone to war against one of Damascus's remaining partners in Tripoli, the 'Alawī Arab Democratic Party (ADP). Within HTI itself the reasons varied, ranging from some leaders' religious disdain for 'Alawīs themselves to the hostility amongst HTI's Palestinian nationalist members towards Damascus and proxies like the ADP. But for the Syrian government it was a simple matter of contentious politics: Sha'bān's partners wanted to force its remaining allies from Tripoli, at a time when it was beginning to reassert its presence in Lebanon and facing pressure from the ADP to intervene.⁵⁷¹ And given the power imbalance relative to Damascus, the question was simple: had HTI's leaders perceived an ongoing opportunity where it no longer existed,⁵⁷² or did they not care?

In the ensuing Syrian government crackdown, HTI faced demobilising pressure rather than outright destruction. It was becoming clear that like Yakan suggested, Islamic actors had to accept a position in Lebanon's political structure that was subordinate to the political establishment. The Syrian government was not necessarily out to destroy HTI, and in its initial negotiations had backed an ultimatum that would allow the partners that HTI had previously expelled backed into Tripoli. As that failed and the resulting fighting overwhelmed HTI, Sha'bān had a choice between continuing the fight or deferring to the Syrian regime.⁵⁷³ He chose the latter and split from his partners, heading to Damascus for negotiations in October 1985 with facilitation from Iranian government officials.⁵⁷⁴ And the fact that he could do so spoke to the dynamics behind the Syrian regime's crackdown. It was not an all-

⁵⁶⁹ Itani, *al-Jihādiyyūn fī Lubnān*, 76-77; Augustus Richard Norton, "Estrangement and Fragmentation in Lebanon," *Current History* 85, no. 508 (1986): 82; Subhi Amhaz, "'Arabī Khalīl 'Akāwī Wahīdan,'" *al-Modon* (27/05/2016 2016). <https://www.almodon.com/politics/2016/5/27/%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A7>.

⁵⁷⁰ Lefèvre, *Jihad in the City*, 347-50, 58-60; Marline Wehbe, "Saqat Minqāra...wa Saqat al-Imāra," *al-Joumhouria* (31/08/2013 2013). <https://www.aljoumhouria.com/ar/news/91906/%D8%B3%D9%82%D8%B7-%D9%85%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9>.

⁵⁷¹ Lefèvre, *Jihad in the City*, 425-28; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 5.

⁵⁷² Charles Kurzman, "Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social-Movement Theory: The Iranian Revolution of 1979," *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 1 (1996): 154, 64-65.

⁵⁷³ Gade, "Sunni Islamists in Tripoli and the Asad Regime, 1966–2014," 41-42.

⁵⁷⁴ United Press International UPI, "A Cease-Fire That Allowed the Leader of Besieged Moslem..." *United Press International* (02/10/1985 1985). <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1985/10/02/A-cease-fire-that-allowed-the-leader-of-besieged-Moslem/7413497073600/>.

out war against Tripoli that would see Damascus and its local allies destroy every trace of resistance to Syrian control—something that common sense and general theory suggested was possible for the regime.⁵⁷⁵ Rather, it was a process of demobilisation, by which Syrian authorities sought to end perceived challenges to their interests, whether by co-opting challengers as active partners, pushing them to withdraw or “defect” from politics, or repressing them.⁵⁷⁶

The outcomes of that demobilisation were a reminder that marginal actors’ survival ultimately depended on how a centre of power perceived them relative to its interests. That distinction would see some HTI members, leaders, and associated communities suffer the worst of the Syrian crackdown of 1985 and 1986. While Sha‘bān had cut a deal for himself and the parts of HTI that answered to him by October 1985, the Syrian regime was intent on killing anything that it associated—correctly or otherwise—with the defiant parts of the movement. As Syrian personnel returned to Tripoli,⁵⁷⁷ survival depended on whether they believed people and communities had subordinated themselves. Sha‘bān’s faction—which would become aligned with the Syrian regime—would survive the massacres,⁵⁷⁸ but others would not. Some of the ensuing violence was relatively discriminate. February 1986 saw the assassination of Khalīl ‘Akāwī, for example, whose overlapping roles in HTI’s formation, a splinter faction within the HTI, and anti-Syrian Palestinian nationalism had set him against Damascus.⁵⁷⁹ But most of it was indiscriminate. Syrian personnel and local partners from the ADP’s militia elements, local criminal figures, and others overwhelmed Tripoli, using massacres—particularly in the Bab al-Tabbaneh neighbourhood—to purge remaining suspected HTI holdouts.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁵ Davenport, *State Repression and the Domestic Democratic Peace*, 49.

⁵⁷⁶ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, “Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics,” 276.

⁵⁷⁷ Nora Boustany, “Syrian Troops Enforcing Tripoli Truce,” *Washington Post* (07/10/1985 1985). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/10/07/syrian-troops-enforcing-tripoli-truce/ec772ea0-0ba1-42b4-8419-6f89228331c1/>.

⁵⁷⁸ A. Nizar Hamzeh, “Islamism in Lebanon: A Guide to the Groups,” *Middle East Quarterly* (September 1997). <https://www.meforum.org/362/islamism-in-lebanon-a-guide-to-the-groups>.

⁵⁷⁹ Safir al-Chamal, “Abū ‘Arabī .. al-Ḥāḍir al-Akbar fī at-Tabbāna...Ghasān Rīfī,” *Safir al-Chamal* (10/02/2018 2018). <https://safiralchamal.com/2018/02/10/17511/>.

⁵⁸⁰ Amal Itani, Rana Sa’ada, and Fatima Itani, *al-Jamā‘a al-Islāmiyya fī Lubnān: 1975 - 2005* (Beirut: Zaytouna Centre, 2017), 140-41; Los Angeles Times, “Pro-Syrian Militiamen Blamed: Massacre Ends Fundamentalist Surge in Tripoli,” *LA Times* (08/02/1987 1987). <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-02-08-mn-1241-story.html>.

That crackdown highlighted a general point: while Tripoli's Salafis and activists had a structural context resembling that of their Saudi counterparts, the demobilising processes behind their place and role in it were more transparent. Academic language did not capture the seriousness of the issue. The massacres would become an entrenched issue in local historical memory, resurface as an issue amidst the tensions and violence of the 2010s,⁵⁸¹ and dissuade figures like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī from operating directly out of Tripoli after graduating from Madīnah in the eighties.⁵⁸² But for academic observers who could ignore the human realities, the wreckage of Sa'īd Sha'bān's project represented a critical inflection point in the history of Lebanese Salafism, and a transparent illustration of the processes behind the associated movements' place in Tripoli. The structure that HTI inhabited had not been the central issue. As Fathī Yakan's observations and resource mobilisation theory would suggest, Sha'bān could harness resources that helped HTI rise as an actor which then imposed itself on society below, placing the movement at the same intersection of the public and the centres of power that Saudi Arabia's *Saḥwā* movements had appeared to inhabit. But the processes that shaped HTI's place in that context—best captured in the language of contentious politics theories and simplified in a general principle of demobilisation—were also clearer. Damascus was positioned like the Āl Sa'ūd and could facilitate those who submitted to its authority while repressing those who challenged it.⁵⁸³ HTI's destruction showed those processes with a transparency that the Saudi setting lacked, giving an insight into how the centres of power in the comparable Lebanese setting shaped a marginal movement's context and place in it.

⁵⁸¹ Pierre-André Chabrier, "La « Guerre des Pauvres » à Tripoli (Liban). 'Asabiyyat Urbaines à l'Épreuve de la Crise Syrienne," *Confluences Méditerranée* 85, no. 2 (2013): 91-92.

⁵⁸² Rougier, *Sunni Tragedy in the Middle East*, 201; Miṣbāh al-'Alī, "al-Kharīṭa as-Salafiyya al-Lubnaniyya wal-Junūh Naḥw al-'Unf Taḥta Musamayyāt al-Jihād," *Al-Jaml* (09/06/2007 2007).

<https://www.aljaml.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D9%88%D8%AD%20%D9%86%D8%AD%D9%88%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%81%20%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AA%20%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF>.

⁵⁸³ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 7-8, 66.

Salafīs' Place in Post-War Sunnī Politics

The crackdown on HTI was not going to be the last time that centres of Lebanese power intervened in marginal Islamic actors' affairs, especially when a new Sunnī order was emerging in the nineties that was structurally like the Saudi one but less stable. After the settlement of Lebanon's Civil War, a class of elites would continue looming over the Salafī movement and wider Lebanese society, vesting authority in actors like the Sunnī Hariri family that could muster substantial material resources and political influence that made them into confessional centres of power. But those actors faced domestic competition and foreign pressure that could shift made their position and interests. And while the Salafīs had matured into a movement with firmer Najdī roots, ash-Shahāl's troubles in the nineties showed that their survival still depended on whether they worked within Lebanese elites' preferred boundaries. Rather than pursuing a rigid authoritarian vision like HTI had, they had to ensure that their role reflected the sensitivities and structure of their context, and operate from a place that the centres of power could tolerate.

Strong Authoritarian Structures & Weak Authoritarian Power

Lebanon's post-War environment stuck the Salafīs in an authoritarian structure that was like Saudi Arabia's, but governed by a more insecure class of elites whose interests were more likely to shift. The formal settlement of Lebanon's Civil War might have seemed like a new start, as the surviving members of Lebanon's 1972 parliament signed the 1989 Taif Agreement.⁵⁸⁴ But the deal was an instrument of continuity rather than change. It mainly served the Lebanese elite, by guaranteeing confessional representation in the legislature without detaching it from the established parties, and ensuring that they and their representatives would occupy roles in executive government. That left Lebanon's system unchanged even as the text of the Taif Agreement acknowledged the need to change it,⁵⁸⁵ and while confessional communities nominally had more room to compete on the national level, the political representatives who did that would represent each community's ruling interests more than the wider public. That placed actors like the Salafīs in as limiting a place as ever: marginal players in a system that subjected them to political authority which they

⁵⁸⁴ Rola el-Husseini, *Pax Syriana: Elite Politics in Postwar Lebanon* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 27; United Nations UN, "Taif Accords," (22/10/1989 1989). <https://peacemaker.un.org/lebanon-taifaccords89>.

⁵⁸⁵ Imad Salamey, *The Government and Politics of Lebanon* (London: Routledge, 2013), 57-59.

could never access.⁵⁸⁶ The problem was not quite that things were the same as ever. Rather, it was that the post-war settlement had shifted and entrenched political power in Lebanon instead of restructuring it, and those marginal players would have to treat the system and their place in it as a fixed thing.

That post-war settlement did not preclude further shifts in power at the top—something that happened with Rafiq Hariri's emergence as a new centre of power atop the Sunnī confessional order. Personally, Hariri had been born in 1944, about a half hour's drive south from Beirut in Sidon, and professionally he was a businessman. And while his political focus would be in Lebanon, he would build the influence and resource base that made him into a centre of Sunnī political power while working as an expatriate in Saudi Arabia.⁵⁸⁷ By the eighties he had started cultivating political relationships in Lebanon, ingratiating himself either as an acquaintance of political notables and the Syrian government, or as a mediator between them.⁵⁸⁸ By the nineties that began translating into a more tangible kind of political influence with his assumption of Lebanon's Prime Ministership from 1992 to 1998 and from 2000 to 2005, and management of much of its post-war reconstruction.⁵⁸⁹ Taken together, it was a story of self-invention that spoke to the nature of political power and its shifts in post-War Lebanon: by making the right contacts and enough money, anyone could become part of the country's national elite.

The instability of elite power would mean little for the Salafī movement. It was technically in contention with actors like Rafiq Hariri's emerging Sunnī establishment but—more realistically—stuck in an authoritarian system like their Saudi counterparts. Hariri's authority was confessional as well as formal, having established himself as the hegemonic leader of Lebanon's Sunnī community. And that authority was not just a reflection of personal charisma. He formed patronage networks that drew on large parts of the Lebanese economy to buy off or marginalise competitors and enable loyalists, establishing a dynasty that

⁵⁸⁶ Arsan, *Lebanon*, 13-14.

⁵⁸⁷ Tilly, *The Contentious French*, 396.

⁵⁸⁸ el-Husseini, *Pax Syriana*, 94-95.

⁵⁸⁹ Haleh Afshar, "Rafik Hariri," *The Guardian* (15/02/1992 2005).

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/feb/15/guardianobituaries.syria>.

bequeathed power in the community to his son, Saad, after his 2005 assassination.⁵⁹⁰ That did not guarantee that the position of actors like the Salafī movement would be completely marginal—in hindsight, it was telling that while Rafiq Hariri suppressed them in the nineties when he needed to consolidate his authority, Saad Hariri would try to build closer ties to the movement after 2006 when trying to burnish his credentials as a unifying Sunnī figure.⁵⁹¹ But in the language of contentious politics, the differences highlighted an arrangement in which the Hariris would create new opportunities for the Salafīs and other marginal actors when doing so helped manage new challenges or emerging opportunities.⁵⁹² And like in Saudi Arabia, it pointed to an arrangement where a ruling elite could leverage religious actors as partners who reinforced the community's solidarity and the Hariris' authority over it.⁵⁹³

But while the resulting system left the Salafīs at the bottom of that authoritarian structure, the complex pressures on Lebanon meant that the position and interests of actors like the Hariris were liable to change. While nominally independent, Lebanese politics faced pervasive international interference. The United States, French, and Saudi governments had chosen Rafiq Hariri as their preferred partner and intervened to maintain his political and physical security,⁵⁹⁴ while the Taif Agreement that laid foundations for the wider system was itself a result of Saudi and Syrian facilitation.⁵⁹⁵ Lebanon's executive government was similarly compromised. Damascus had secured domestic political backing from pro-Syrian elites and legal grounding with the 1999 Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and

⁵⁹⁰ Ward Vloeberghs, "The Hariri Political Dynasty after the Arab Spring," *Mediterranean Politics* 17, no. 2 (2012/07/01 2012): 243-44.

⁵⁹¹ Bilal Saab, "Salafīs' Social Networking in Lebanon," *Brookings* (19/02/2009 2009).
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/salafis-social-networking-in-lebanon/>; Rola el-Husseini, "What a Garbage Crisis Tells us About Lebanese Politics," *Washington Post* (04/08/2015 2015).
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/08/04/what-a-garbage-crisis-tells-us-about-lebanese-politics/>.

⁵⁹² Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 22.

⁵⁹³ Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldūn*, 35-36.

⁵⁹⁴ Talal Nizameddin, "The Political Economy of Lebanon under Rafiq Hariri: An Interpretation," *The Middle East Journal* 60, no. Winter (2006): 99, 101.

⁵⁹⁵ Tom Najem, *Lebanon: the Politics of a Penetrated Society* (London: Routledge, 2012), 52; Imad Salamey and Rhys Payne, "Parliamentary Consociationalism in Lebanon: Equal Citizenry vs. Quotated Confessionalism," *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 14, no. 4 (2008/12/01 2008): 456.

Coordination,⁵⁹⁶ and approved officials in critical roles including the president,⁵⁹⁷ signalling its lasting control in Lebanon.⁵⁹⁸ And outside the routinised structures of politics and the formalised ones of executive government, the Iranian state's roots in Lebanese society were maturing. While Tehran's influence in the country was not new, its relationship with the Shī'ī party Hizbullah was deepening thanks in part to the latter's ideological sympathies towards the Iranian government's revolutionary stance, and to recent friction with Damascus that had encouraged the Party to shop around for new backers.⁵⁹⁹

And so it was that Lebanon's Salafī movements faced a structurally stable but politically unpredictable system where the opportunities and threats would change over time. The political environment would always be slightly unstable at the top when Lebanon's confessional elites would always be slightly disloyal to the national system. When there was a mess of conflicting interests and priorities that made it difficult to solve national political problems and pressures from abroad that could cause them,⁶⁰⁰ political shocks—like those that subsequent chapters discuss in 2005, 2008, 2011, and 2013—were a constant possibility. As those shocks came, power could weaken and decentralise. And more importantly, the interests that shaped Sunnī elites' intervention in the affairs of marginal players like the Salafī movement could shift,⁶⁰¹ reshaping the structure of their political context and their place relative to Sunnī power in it.

Salafis in the Post-War Order

Ash-Shahāl's insecure place in the new order was a reminder that Lebanon's Salafī movements could not ignore the perceptions and interests of the country's insecure elites.

⁵⁹⁶ Husām 'Abd al-Hamīd, "al-Wujūd as-Sūrī fī Lubnān.. Shar'ī am lḥtilāl?," *Al Jazeera* (26/10/2004 2004). <https://www.aljazeera.net/knowledge/specialcoverage/2004/10/26/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84#0>.

⁵⁹⁷ Sarkis Naoum, "Thiqqat Ḥulafā' "Ra'asat" Laḥūd wa Thiqqat al-Asad Maddaddat Lahu," *an-Nahar* (13/05/2021 2021). <https://www.annahar.com/arabic/authors/12052021085101959>.

⁵⁹⁸ Aurélie Daher, "Parrainages Régionaux et Polarisation Belligères: la Rivalité Entre l'Iran et l'Arabie Saoudite au Liban," *Critique Internationale* 80, no. 3 (2018): 163-64.

⁵⁹⁹ Abbas William Samii, "A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands: Assessing the Hizbullah-Iran-Syria Relationship," *Middle East Journal* 61, no. 1 (2008): 37-42.

⁶⁰⁰ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: a Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 80-81.

⁶⁰¹ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 176-78.

After returning to Lebanon from his travels in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere,⁶⁰² the shaykh helped normalise Najdī Salafism in Tripoli, but not a deference to political authority. Some of the credit still went to his father, Sālim, of course. The elder ash-Shahāl had helped normalise Islamic reform in Tripoli and build the bridges that enabled his sons' formative education in the Najdī tradition. But Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl's sermons and statements over coming years would indicate a Salafī orientation with Najdī roots. And the new organisation that he became associated with—*Jam'iyat al-Hidāya wal-Iḥsān* (JHI)—had direct ties to Saudi and Gulf institutions that shared a Najdī outlook, like the Saudi *al-Ḥaramayn* charity and the Kuwaiti Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage (RIHS). With that support, JHI had grown independent and far-reaching in its religious and social work. It had overlapping programs of proselytising, education, and social welfare outside establishment auspices in Tripoli and elsewhere,⁶⁰³ notwithstanding the fact that the HTI massacres of the eighties had forced it to move its offices to Beirut and Sidon until the Civil War ended.⁶⁰⁴ Tripoli's Islamic revivalist discourse had complex roots in Sālim ash-Shahāl and Rashīd Riḍa's Najdī-adjacent ideas. By the eighties, though, a distinctly-Najdī brand of Salafism had become part of the landscape and Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl was positioned to be one of its most prominent voices.

Ash-Shahāl's prominence in society would not give him independence from the political class that ruled it. There were signs that he still had to contend with the same demobilising forces that had concerned Yakan in theory and wrecked HTI in practice. JHI was politically disengaged, and not necessarily by choice. Lebanese Salafīs' had nominally rejected the political process in the post-war order, contrasting them with Faṭḥī Yakan and JI. For its part, JI remained politically active and participated openly in 1992's elections,⁶⁰⁵ and Yakan would continue to espouse the legitimacy of participation.⁶⁰⁶ That mirrored the organisations' doctrinal differences and roots—JI was from a time when the Muslim Brotherhood's activist ideals had been central while JHI had come as Najdī thought entrenched itself in Tripoli. But

⁶⁰² al-ʿAlī, "al-Kharīṭa as-Salafiyya al-Lubnaniyya wal-Junūḥ Naḥw al-ʿUnf Taḥta Musamayyāt al-Jihād."

⁶⁰³ Americal Foreign Policy Council AFPC, *The World Almanac of Islamism 2017* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 235.

⁶⁰⁴ Abdo, *The New Sectarianism*, 65, 83.

⁶⁰⁵ Itani, Sa'ada, and Itani, *al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyya fī Lubnān: 1975 - 2005*, 95.

⁶⁰⁶ al-Hiwar, "Murāja'āt ma'a Duktūr Faṭḥī Yakan | al-Ḥalaqa 1."

it was difficult to ignore the influence of those actors' different positions relative to key centres of power. Yakan had planted himself in Lebanon's pro-Syrian bloc and benefited from a relationship to Damascus, insulating him from the influence of an establishment controlled by Rafiq Hariri,⁶⁰⁷ while Salafī actors like JHI that remained within the structures of Sunnī confessional power were subject to Hariri's efforts to sideline them.⁶⁰⁸ They were both marginal and demobilised, but subordinate to different centres of power that had different interests and boundaries of acceptable political conduct.

Ash-Shahāl's escalating legal troubles in the mid-nineties offered a demonstration of how much his and other shaykhs' place in the wider order of stuff would depend on Lebanon's insecure Sunnī elites. Although the government had unambiguously ordered JHI's closure in 1996, it was hard to say if the reason lay with foreign interests or those actors' religious views. One explanation was that JHI irritated the Sunnī establishment's foreign backers by broadcasting sermons from activist Saudi clerics. While the situation was unclear, the alignment of interests made it reasonable to argue that Riyadh had pressured the Lebanese government and particularly Rafiq Hariri.⁶⁰⁹ And that was plausible—JHI's activist character caused RIHS to withdraw support in the nineties,⁶¹⁰ after a management change made the Kuwaiti organisation less interested in politics.⁶¹¹ But there was also the Lebanese state's rationale which overlapped with the Syrian government's interests: JHI's teaching materials incited sectarian tensions,⁶¹² framing the 'Alāwī minority as collaborators with the Syrian regime and Damascus as a collaborator with the Israeli government.⁶¹³ That was equally plausible, and ash-Shahāl's own reading of the issue which blamed the Syrian regime

⁶⁰⁷ NOW Media and Sofres Liban, *Road to Ruin; Aoun's Popularity: History or Myth* (NOW Media, N.D.), 3. <http://www.10452lccc.com/aoun%20excerpts/aoun.scandles17.6.09.pdf>.

⁶⁰⁸ el-Husseini, "What a Garbage Crisis Tells us About Lebanese Politics."

⁶⁰⁹ Rougier, *Sunni Tragedy in the Middle East*, 62-64.

⁶¹⁰ Zoltan Pall, "Kuwaiti Salafism and Its Growing Influence in the Levant," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (07/05/2014 2014). <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=55514>.

⁶¹¹ 'Imād, *as-Salafiyya was-Salafiyyūn, al-Huwiyya wal-Mughāyara: Qirā'a fī at-Tajriba al-Lubnāniyya*, 179-80.

⁶¹² Council of Ministers, "'Arḍ Wuzārat ad-Dākhiliyya wal-Baladiyāt Mawḍū' Ibṭāl Qarār Majlis al-Wuzāra' Raqm 2 Tārīkh 1/1/1996 al-Qāḍī bi Saḥab al-'Ilm wal-Khabr al-Mu'tā bi Ta'sīs al-Jam'iyya al-Musammā "Jam'iyyat al-Hidāya wal-Iḥsān al-Islāmiyya", *Lebanese University Center for Research and Studies in Legal Informatics* (20/02/2007 2007).

<http://legallaw.ul.edu.lb/LawArticles.aspx?LawArticleID=878163&LawID=216170&language=ar>.

⁶¹³ Gade, "Sunni Islamists in Tripoli and the Asad Regime, 1966–2014," 47.

alongside other actors like the Sufi al-Aḥbāsh movement.⁶¹⁴ But JHI had also grown under the Syrian government's shadow as a counterbalance against the Hariris' social clout, while ash-Shahāl's claims to victimhood fostered his credibility in the Sunnī community.⁶¹⁵ And in the more serious circles of political power, then-interior minister Michel Murr had Syrian ties while serving in a Saudi-backed Hariri cabinet.⁶¹⁶ The patterns of facilitation and repression were familiar to theories of contentious politics and particularly the conceptual shorthand of demobilisation, but in the nineties the motives behind them were hard to read.

And similarly, the shaykh's eventual departure amidst the Ḍinniyeh incident showed that his and other Salafīs' positions were not going to shift until Sunnī elites saw a reason to change the political space in which they operated as marginal players. Late 1999 saw figures—including ash-Shahāl from the Salafī movement and Bilāl Sha'bān from a rehabilitated HTI—position themselves as mediators in violence between the Lebanese Army and militants in the Ḍinniyeh region near Tripoli. The problem was obvious: authorities believed the militants were responsible for a series of attacks in October and November. But the shaykhs' intervention was not going to be much of a solution, and late December saw further attacks on the Lebanese Army which triggered a more substantial military intervention in the first days of January 2000.⁶¹⁷ The clashes themselves ended with the arrest of many of the people involved,⁶¹⁸ and regardless of his view that he and his contemporaries had played a helpful role,⁶¹⁹ ash-Shahāl also fled the country after his name appeared in the ensuing indictments.⁶²⁰ He would remain abroad until 2005, when Lebanese elites' interests shifted and the government issued a set of general amnesties for various figures including ash-

⁶¹⁴ Muhammad Mustafa Alloush, "ash-Shahāl: Hakadha Bada'a as-Salafī fī Lubnān," *al-Bainah* (26/02/2007 2007). The article's text can be found at <https://www.saowt.com/index.php/t-20261996c.html?s=f9e50178a13b694d3c3bfaba5f9ae6b5>.

⁶¹⁵ Gade, "Sunni Islamists in Tripoli and the Asad Regime, 1966–2014," 49–52.

⁶¹⁶ ash-Sharq al-Awsat, "Raḥīl Mīshāl al-Murr "Ṣāni' ar-Ru'asā'," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (01/02/2021 2021). <https://aawsat.com/home/article/2777161/%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1-%C2%AB%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A4%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A1%C2%BB>.

⁶¹⁷ ash-Shahriyya, "Shahar Kānūn ath-Thānī - Aḥdāth Jurūd aḍ-Ḍinniya: Irhābiyyūn am Mu'minūn?," *ash-Shahriyya* (15/01/2015 2015). https://monthlymagazine.com/ar-article-desc_3594_.

⁶¹⁸ Itani, *al-Jihādiyyūn fī Lubnān*, 120–22.

⁶¹⁹ Kamal Shayya et al., *Islamic Movements in Lebanon*, trans. Husni Zeineh (Masar Association, 2009), 87–91. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/beirut/06882.pdf>.

⁶²⁰ Gade, "Sunni Islamists in Tripoli and the Asad Regime, 1966–2014," 49–50.

Shahāl.⁶²¹ But for the time being, he appeared to have reached an understandable conclusion that Lebanon was not secure. Until he was confident of another shift in the perceptions and interests of the elites that controlled Lebanon's Sunnī political order, he could not reasonably assume that there was a safe space for him in it.

Conclusions & Questions

Ash-Shahāl's departure raised the same question that Saudi Arabia's Saḥwā movement did: was the absence of any tenable role in politics a result of his religious roots and Najdī Salafism's rigid discourse, or a reflection of his national structural context and place in it? That was a reasonable question, given the importance of local historical context and Najdī intellectual roots to Tripoli's Salafī movement. Reformers like Sālim ash-Shahāl had helped normalise an Islamic revival in and after the forties, but had drawn on the post-Ottoman revivalism of people like Rashīd Riḍa. Part of why Najdī Salafism superseded that early discourse in Tripoli was the stagnation of Sālim's early movement and the bridges he built to Saudi Arabia—the kind that enabled his sons and others like ar-Rāfiʿī to study in Madīnah, gaining Najdī roots and Saudi institutional connections. And before that generation started assuming leadership in the eighties, other activist developments showed that actors' interpretation and context mattered. Like elsewhere, Tripoli's activist discourse absorbed other conceptions of political identity and framing over time from its transnational and local environments,⁶²² and it was not just a cultural export from the Arabian Peninsula. But ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's Najdī roots would still stick out, and they would represent a movement that was at least comparable if not identical to those in Saudi Arabia.

Given the structural similarities to Saudi Arabia, ash-Shahāl's initial departure also invited a similar hypothesis: his changing role reflected the structure of his national political context, and more specifically his place relative to the prevailing centres of power in it. As Faṭḥī Yakan's writings suggested, the shaykh had occupied a structurally comparable context and sat at an intersection of wider society and political power. There were signs that he could

⁶²¹ Ziad Itani, "Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl: Lam Yakun Irhābiyan.. bal Sunniyyan," *Asas Media* (19/11/2020 2020). <https://www.asasmedia.com/news/387437>; Fida Itani, "Bidāyat an-Niyāya 'Fataḥ al-Islām'...wal-Aṭrāf ar-Radīfa," *al-Akhbar* (14/11/2008 2008). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/151680>.

⁶²² Østebø, "Growth and Fragmentation," 345; Adraoui, "Salafism In France," 366-67.

make his own choices—the contrast between his departure after becoming involved in a sensitive security matter and JI's survival by working within the boundaries of political acceptability reflected differing readings and choices about how to act. And as contributors to a wider transnational discourse, Salafī movements and thinkers like him and ar-Rāfiʿ could articulate a broad range of ideas that answered various questions.⁶²³ There were still hints of agency but not impact and a need to navigate boundaries set from above, which would remain difficult to explore until the Hariri government's 2011 resignation and the Miqati government's 2013 one. In isolation, the history of Tripoli's Salafī and Islamic activist movements showed that there was at least a comparable movement in Lebanon and a comparable structural context in which it operated.

And thanks to the clearer processes by which Lebanon's centres of Sunnī national power shaped Salafīs' place in that context, it would be easier to explain ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿs future role. The mix of resource mobilisation and contentious politics theories helped simplify the history of Tripoli's activist movements, particularly HTI. For one, it framed Sha'bān as someone whose authority made him a representative of HTI in the wider structural environment, mobilising resources on the movement's behalf. Conversely, it framed Damascus as a centre of power in that context, which responded to unacceptable behaviour by demobilising actors like Sha'bān through a mix of repression and co-optation. That was not a detailed explanation of the historical record, and other research captured the traumas and dynamics of Damascus' crackdown on *Ḥarakat at-Tawḥīd al-Islāmī*.⁶²⁴ But it captured the structural processes of Lebanese politics with a transparency that was impossible in Saudi Arabia. And those could help build a simple explanation of the roles played by marginal Lebanese figures like ash-Shahāl after the Syrian government's 2005 withdrawal from Lebanon.

⁶²³ Ismail, *Rethinking Salafism: The Transnational Networks of Salafi 'Ulama in Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia* 2-3; Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith*, 4-5; Hamdeh, *Salafism and Traditionalism: Scholarly Authority in Modern Islam*, 1-3; Roy, *Globalized Islam*, 7.

⁶²⁴ Lefèvre, *Jihad in the City*, 11-12, 430-31; Itani, *al-Jihādiyyūn fī Lubnān*, 82-83.

Chapter 4:

Salafīs in Lebanon's Domestic Context After 2005

Introduction

In the national context of Lebanon's social movements, political parties, and state institutions after the 2005 Syrian withdrawal,⁶²⁵ ash-Shahāl's role generally shifted as his relationship to Sunnī leaders did. It was hard to ignore the shaykh's transition from being a deferential partner—albeit a duplicitous one—of the Hariri family's Sunnī establishment to a populist representative of a vulnerable Sunnī public, or the way that his circumstances appeared to influence it. Even if it was difficult to capture the full details of ash-Shahāl's personal situation, mindset, and religious roots in Najdī Salafism, his role shifted as his place in the wider context did. There were deeper questions about the underlying processes which made that happen, and it would remain difficult to answer them until the Hariri government's 2011 resignation and the Miqati government's 2013 one. But even on its own, the shaykh's 2005-2010 trajectory raised a basic point: as a Salafī figure in national politics his role reflected the structure of that shifting context and his place relative to its centres of power.

Considered through a framework of resource mobilisation and contentious politics theories, the alignment between that personal trajectory and ash-Shahāl's context was unsurprising. After the Syrian withdrawal of 2005, he was mostly deferential to a Sunnī establishment that was consolidating its political power and keeping figures like him under tight control. That would be an obstruction to any political ambitions that the shaykh had, and only partly because his inability to mobilise Lebanon's Salafī movement as a personal asset made him dependent on resource opportunities. It was also because the Sunnī establishment used its place as the centre of national Sunnī power to regulate those opportunities and his ability to use them. And the establishment's influence on the shaykh's populist transformation after 2008's May Crisis would reinforce that. Amidst a national challenge from Hizbullah and the need to manage Tripoli's outbreak of violence, the Future Movement's interests and partnerships shifted, polarising it from the shaykh. The resulting distance freed him to speak as a leader of Lebanon's Salafīs in limited contention with the establishment, and as a national figure whose narratives of political identity framed the Sunnī public as a vulnerable

⁶²⁵ Ragin, "Comparative Sociology and the Comparative Method," 105-07; Rucht, "The Impact of National Contexts on Social Movement Structures: A Cross-Movement and Cross-National Comparison," 187.

community in the wider region and the Sunnī establishment as a negligent enabler of that vulnerability.

Ash-Shahāl & the Consolidation of Sunnī Domestic Power

Ash-Shahāl was publicly deferential to Sunnī leaders after the Syrian occupation ended and Lebanese national elites started renegotiating power amongst themselves. In the wake of 2005's Cedar Revolution and the elections that followed it, that was not totally by choice. The shaykh remained stuck in the narrow order of Sunnī confessional politics where he was a marginal actor, and he depended on incidental opportunities to access resources rather than his own initiative. And that was only the start of his problems. Politically he still benefitted from a family and history that positioned him as a prominent national figure, and he spoke in grand terms for Lebanon's Sunnīs as a vulnerable community in a dangerous regional context. But his actions would be local and limited. Even if opportunities appeared at home and abroad, the Hariris' Sunnī establishment still constrained his ability to use them. And even if his rhetoric's political identity and framing had a transnational scope, demobilising pressures in his domestic context would prevent his duplicitous relationship to the Sunnī establishment from escalating into a revolt against its interests.

The New Possibilities of 2005's Cedar Revolution

Some kind of shock had seemed likely since the nineties and eventually came in the form of Rafiq Hariri's February 14th assassination—a truck bombing that upset the interests of Lebanon's centres of power without restructuring Lebanon's national or confessional politics.⁶²⁶ Domestic and international observers cast early blame at the Syrian government and its partners in Lebanon's state,⁶²⁷ and their view was understandable. The killing had come after Hariri's resignation from office in October 2004, Bashar al-Assad's 2000 inheritance of power and an aggressive turn in Syrian foreign policy, and resistance to Syrian

⁶²⁶ Le Monde, "L'ancien Premier Ministre Libanais Rafic Hariri est Mort dans un Attentat à Beyrouth," *Le Monde* (14/02/2005 2005). https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2005/02/14/l-ancien-premier-ministre-libanais-rafic-hariri-est-mort-dans-un-attentat-a-beyrouth_397993_1819218.html.

⁶²⁷ Muḥammad ash-Shāfi'ī, "'al-Qā'ida" Tanfī Mas'ūliyatuhā 'an Ightiyāl al-Ḥarīrī wa Khubarā' Aman Maṣriyūn wa Brīṭāniyūn Yarjaḥūn Tanfidh Mukhābarāt Dawla lil-'Amaliyya," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (16/02/2005 2005). <https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=283314&issueno=9577>.

intervention by Hariri for nearly fifteen years.⁶²⁸ More importantly, it was as politically destabilising as one might expect. Hariri's initial successor, Omar Karami, would resign by February 28th, while efforts by pro-Syrian elements in Lebanon's political class to form a new government were unsuccessful, and domestic protests against the killing and calls for Syrian military withdrawal were transparent signals of Lebanese public anger.⁶²⁹ Unlike Syrian intervention generally or dramatic incidents like the crackdown on HTI, the assassination was a shock to the Lebanese system, and it was going to weaken Syrian control. But given the way that it mobilised not just the Lebanese confessional elites under the Syrian regime's auspices but also the Lebanese public itself, the emerging political pressures were complex and so were the questions of how political power in Lebanon would shift.⁶³⁰

One consequence was unmistakable: between the assassination and the ensuing "Cedar Revolution," the overt Syrian intervention in Lebanon was over. Damascus faced overlapping pressures beyond those from an outraged public. Internationally, the killing had intensified longstanding pressure from global and regional powers for a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon,⁶³¹ and domestically there was a significant if not universal response from the Lebanese public and elites. A rally by pro-Syrian elements would be part of that response—some domestic Lebanese actors worked to frame the issue as one of American intervention

⁶²⁸ Hazem al-Amin, "Tafāṣīl Aswa l-jtimā' 'Aqdah ar-Ra'īs ash-Shahīd fī Ḥayātihi," *Ya Beyrouth* (12/05/2005 2005). <https://www.yabeyrouth.com/6887-%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%A3-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%B9%D9%82%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%AF>.

⁶²⁹ Agence France-Presse AFP, "Kutalat Amal wa Ḥizb Allāh Turashshuḥān Karāmī li Rī'āsat al-Ḥukūma al-Muqbila fī Lubnān," *Al Arabiya* (09/03/2005 2005). <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2005%2F03%2F09%2F11068>.

⁶³⁰ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 80-81.

⁶³¹ United Nations Security Council UNSC, *Resolution 1559 (2004)* (United Nations, 16/06/2021, 2004). <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/529421?ln=en>; The Irish Times, "France Urges Syria to Pull Troops Out of Lebanon," *The Irish Times* (30/04/2003 2003). <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/france-urges-syria-to-pull-troops-out-of-lebanon-1.474661>; al-Amin, "Tafāṣīl Aswa l-jtimā' 'Aqdah ar-Ra'īs ash-Shahīd fī Ḥayātihi."; Agencies, "Ittifaq Sa'ūdī Sūrī 'alā Insihāb al-Quwwāt as-Sūriya min Lubnān," *al-Rai* (03/03/2005 2005). <https://alrai.com/article/92188/%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%20%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A/%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86>.

and mobilised protests on March 8 in support of an ongoing Syrian presence.⁶³² But that message would be a tough sell and was matched by similar, larger demonstrations on March 14 for independence from Syrian authority.⁶³³ And just as importantly, pro-independence figures in Lebanon's political class were capitalising on a chance to expel or at least weaken Damascus's partners in Lebanon's parliamentary and executive government. All told, Damascus had killed Hariri in an attempt to get rid of a toxic political asset but instead created a new set of unmanageable political liabilities. While decades of control over Lebanon's state, politics, and society were a clear indication of how much it valued a *de facto* occupation of the country, the cost of preserving the occupation were going to become unmanageable for Damascus.⁶³⁴

That political change was not the same thing as political closure, and the Syrian withdrawal was an inflection point rather than a full indication of what Hariri's death meant for the structures of Lebanese power. The departure of the last visible Syrian personnel in April marked the end of its direct control over Lebanon,⁶³⁵ but further aftershocks would come. A chain of events had started that could have led Lebanon towards a "social revolution," beginning with Hariri's assassination and followed by Damascus's loss of support or at least patience, a public backlash, and a loss of structural dominance in Lebanon's national politics. Theoretically, that suggested that things could develop further. There was a risk that pressures on the political system would displace the Lebanese elites that enjoyed political authority over their respective confessional communities in it, in a wider structural shift.⁶³⁶

⁶³² Scott Wilson, "Syria Supporters Rally in Lebanon," *Washington Post* (09/03/2005 2005).
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A16165-2005Mar8.html>.

⁶³³ Al Jazeera AJ and Agencies, "Taẓāhira Milyūniya lil-Mu'āraḍa al-Lubnāniyya Tuṭālib bi Iqālat Qādat al-Aman," *Al Jazeera* (14/03/2005 2005).

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2005/3/14/%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9>.

⁶³⁴ William Harris, "Bashar al-Assad's Lebanon Gamble," *Middle East Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (Summer 2005 2005).
<https://www.meforum.org/730/bashar-al-assads-lebanon-gamble>.

⁶³⁵ Associated Press AP, "Assad Announces Lebanon Troop Withdrawal," *The Guardian* (06/03/2005 2005).
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/mar/05/syria.lebanon>; New York Times, "Syrian Troops Leave Lebanon After 29-Year Occupation," *New York Times* (26/04/2005 2005).

<https://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/26/international/middleeast/syrian-troops-leave-lebanon-after-29year-occupation.html>.

⁶³⁶ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 111.

A popular revolution did not appear to be on the way, though. The Cedar Revolution was still symbolically significant, and life became easier for some marginal elements like the Salafī movement. If nothing else, it would lend a sense of symbolic meaning to the public unrest and political currents that had become obvious after the assassination, as Lebanon's principle political blocs took names from the protest movements under the pro-independence "March 14" label and opposite "March 8" one.⁶³⁷ And Damascus's efforts to thwart public participation had lessened. And the end of Syrian rule was also a relief to Lebanon's Islamic movements. Just as HTI's experience in the eighties illustrated the risks that Damascus posed while ash-Shahāl later described Syrian rule as a repressive period,⁶³⁸ Salafīs returned "in droves" to the northern reaches of Tripoli and Akkar as Damascus's role shrunk.⁶³⁹

And the further implications of the Syrian departure were ambiguous, inviting a cynical view that little would change when the ultimate outcome depended on the centres of power who set Lebanon's course from atop its political order. Things were promising for figures like ash-Shahāl. He was still out of the country following the 1999 clashes in Ḍinniyyeh,⁶⁴⁰ remaining in exile to Saudi Arabia.⁶⁴¹ But while the shaykh could reasonably hope that the power shifts would see a rollback of marginalising restrictions or consequences for past behaviour, Damascus' withdrawal was not a structural shock to the Lebanese elite. Structurally speaking, the Syrian regime had played a relatively small role. It had never formally enmeshed itself in Lebanon's political structure, and its weakened influence simply meant that Lebanese confessional elites would not have to consult with it to the same extent when otherwise operating as they had before.⁶⁴² That would not stop actors like ash-Shahāl from framing the Syrian government as the key driver behind Lebanese society's circumstances.⁶⁴³

⁶³⁷ Lena Rafai, "ʿAsharāth al-Alāf min al-Lubnāniyyīn Yaḥyūyūn adh-Dhikrā al-Khāsima li Igḥtiyāl Rafīq al-Ḥarīrī," *France24* (14/02/2010 2010). <https://www.france24.com/ar/20100214-lebanon-hariri-rafiq-memory-assassination>.

⁶³⁸ AJM, "Mubāshir maʿa Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl. As-Salafiyūn fī Lubnān."

⁶³⁹ Saoud el-Mawla, *Salafis in Lebanon: New Manifestations of a Movement* (Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies: Doha, 2015), 5. https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/Salafis_in_Lebanon_New_Manifestations_of_a_Phenomenon.pdf.

⁶⁴⁰ Itani, *al-Jihādiyyūn fī Lubnān*, 120-22.

⁶⁴¹ Pall, "Kuwaiti Salafism and Its Growing Influence in the Levant."

⁶⁴² Eric V. Thompson, "Will Syria Have to Withdraw from Lebanon?," *Middle East Journal* 56, no. 1 (2002): 90-92.

⁶⁴³ Memowas, "7 / 5 Sāʿat Ḥiwār. As-Sunna fī Lubnān bayna al-Khilāfāt wat-Taḥālufāt."

But it also had not left a vacuum in the actual structures of Lebanese power for popular or elite influence to fill.

But there was not fundamental change in how the system worked, and 2005's Cedar Revolution instead entrenched the Lebanese system and its problems—including the risks to Lebanon's political class. It was unlikely to create opportunities for actors like ash-Shahāl or a civil state that protected him from the Sunnī establishment, which would continue to exert control over his constraints and opportunities within the structures of Sunnī confessional politics. That did not mean that there was nothing promising about the situation. To external observers of Lebanon's national politics like the United Nations, securing Lebanon against further intervention in its politics and executive government was an established priority,⁶⁴⁴ and there was a possibility of structural change that empowered the democratic process and a constitutional state that preserved it. But that sort of hypothetical change would have empowered the state and the public, while posing a problem for established elites. Any members of the political class who were altruistic enough to cede power would quickly find themselves vulnerable to their counterparts who were cynical enough not to,⁶⁴⁵ while actors like Hizbullah who valued the status quo could thwart or hijack any process of structural change once it started.⁶⁴⁶ And for the political class as a whole, empowering the public required a carefully coordinated project of reform, to avoid changes based on simple factors like confessional communities' population which then destabilised a Lebanese system that survived thanks to its imbalances.⁶⁴⁷

Without any realistic way of managing those risks, Lebanon's elites would put their political security ahead of any public interest in structural reform. Trusting the constitutional state to guarantee peaceful political processes would prove unrealistic amidst a wave of post-

⁶⁴⁴ UNSC, *Resolution 1559 (2004)*; United Nations Security Council UNSC, *Second Semi-Annual Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the Implementation of Resolution 1559 (2004)* (United Nations, 2005), 2-4. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Lebanon%20S2005673.pdf>.

⁶⁴⁵ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 161-62.

⁶⁴⁶ Agencies, "Naṣr Allāh: Naʿam Lil-Muqāwama wa Lā lil-Qarār 1559," *al-Wasat* (08/03/2005 2005). <http://www.alwasatnews.com/news/452698.html>.

⁶⁴⁷ Ghasān Rūbīz, "Rasm Mustaqbal Lubnān," *al-Rai* (20/06/2005 2005). <https://alrai.com/article/108342/%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%82/%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86---%D8%BA%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B2>.

independence assassinations of anti-Syrian figures. And there were wider domestic and international concerns about the state's ability to provide secure Lebanon from ongoing foreign interference, particularly from Syria.⁶⁴⁸ In those circumstances, it was safer for the Lebanese elites to misuse state resources to secure their confessional power, and co-opt whichever popular movements shared their concerns.⁶⁴⁹ While Hariri's death and the Cedar Revolution raised the possibility of wider structural change that empowered actors like ash-Shahāl, Lebanon's future had fallen into the hands of confessional elites that would limit it.

Political Games in a Rigged System

As the Lebanese political class secured its position in 2005, marginal Sunnī actors like ash-Shahāl were stuck in a confessional order where their opportunities, constraints, and subsequent behaviour were subject to a Sunnī establishment that needed to consolidate its power. May and June's elections confirmed that Lebanon had constitutional mechanisms and political incentives to change the ways in which elites and the public operated. And in the international context, the polls and their purpose were assertions of growing Lebanese independence from Damascus, which had used the country's past elections to reward loyalists and punish dissidents.⁶⁵⁰ The timing reinforced the sense of a formal break from Syrian authority and that of the Syrian government's partners in Lebanon. Despite attempted delays and legal changes by the pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud, domestic leaders were able to make them go ahead on schedule.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁸ Agencies, "Ḥawādith al-Ightiyālāt fī Lubnān Mundhu Maqtal Rafīq al-Ḥarīrī," *Al Jazeera* (22/11/2006 2006). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2006/11/22/%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%AB-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B0-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84>; UNSC, *Second Semi-Annual Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the Implementation of Resolution 1559 (2004)*, 2-6; 'Alī Bardā, "Ightiyāl Rābi' Yahizz Lubnān wa Mīlīs Yaḍiyyiq 'alā Sūriya," *al-Bayan* (13/12/2005 2005). <https://www.albayan.ae/across-the-uae/2005-12-13-1.989822>.

⁶⁴⁹ Jack Goldstone, "Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4, no. 1 (2001): 147.

⁶⁵⁰ Bassel Salloukh, "The Limits of Electoral Engineering in Divided Societies: Elections in Postwar Lebanon," *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique* 39, no. 3 (2006): 642, 46-47.

⁶⁵¹ Al Jazeera AJ and Agencies, "Al-Alāf Yastaqbilūn 'Awn wa an-Nawāb Yuraddūn Iqtirāḥ Lahūd," *Al Jazeera* (07/05/2005 2005). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2005/5/7/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A2%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81-%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%86>.

But the elections entrenched the confessional order which constrained interests like the Salafī movement, sending a clear signal that power in Lebanon still sat in narrow centres. The results were proof that the political class had integrated the new popular currents of March 14 and March 8 into confessional elites' own networks. In the Sunnī landscape, the Hariris' Future Movement secured its role as the confessional establishment and headed off competitors like the pro-Syrian Karami family, while asserting its dominance over the March 14 current generally.⁶⁵² Conversely, a Hizbullah-Amal partnership triumphed in the Shī'ī community and March 8 by capitalising on the symbolism of resistance to foreign pressure. And while neither March 14 nor March 8 had a clear program beyond a pro-independence or pro-resistance message, the lack of a clear political direction was far from abnormal. In the Christian community, Michel Aoun could easily position himself as the defender of Lebanon's Maronites when one of the clearest distinctions between him and his key Christian competitor, Samir Geagea, was that Aoun merely faced unsettled criminal charges while Geagea had already been convicted and jailed over his.⁶⁵³ And as Walid Jumblatt remained the default leader of Lebanon's Druze community,⁶⁵⁴ it became clear that despite the Syrian withdrawal, Lebanon's political order was unchanged. Notwithstanding any early promise of structural reform, Lebanon's confessional elites had reinforced their control,⁶⁵⁵ and would continue to exclude marginal actors like the Salafī movement from confessional power.

The Salafis' position had still slightly improved, even if the extent of the change was uncertain. They enjoyed some independence as the new order formalised itself and the Future Movement valued them. Seeking to entrench their Sunnī legitimacy and avert

⁶⁵² Abu Diyak, "Muslimū Lubnān .. 'Awā'il wa Aḥzāb."

⁶⁵³ Agencies, "'Awn Ya'ūd lil-Lubnān wa Karāmī Ya'lan al-Ḥukūma al-lithnayn," *Al Jazeera* (10/04/2005 2005).

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2005/4/11/%D8%B9%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9>; Al Jazeera AJ and Agencies, "Geagea Released from Jail," *Al Jazeera* (26/07/2005 2005). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2005/7/26/geagea-released-from-jail>.

⁶⁵⁴ Nasr Jebara, "Lubnān: al-Jinarāl 'Awn Yaktasiḥ Aṣwāt al-Masīḥiyyīn wa Yakhlaṭ Awrāq al-Munāfisīn," *Deutsche Welle* (13/06/2005 2005). <https://p.dw.com/p/6lml>.

⁶⁵⁵ Bassel Salloukh et al., eds., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon* (Pluto Press, 2015), 97.

challenges at the ballot box, the Hariris' had needed partners and deputised the Salafis,⁶⁵⁶ as part of a wider strategy to secure all 28 of North Lebanon's parliamentary seats.⁶⁵⁷

Considered in isolation, that hinted at the structures of Sunnī confessional power and Salafis' place in it: the Sunnī establishment had assumed political leadership,⁶⁵⁸ and used Salafī movements to rally support in the elections. It would instrumentalise them as an accessory to political power as the Āl Sa'ūd had instrumentalised the Najdī 'ulama.⁶⁵⁹ But it was not initially clear that the relationship was best understood as an issue of structure and power imbalances. It was still entirely plausible that the new partnership was based on shared values. Najdī Salafism's strict conceptions of political identity made it inherently hostile to non-Sunnī outsiders, while the Sunnī establishment was relying on shared sectarian concerns about a Syrian government dominated by the 'Alawī minority and Hizbullah that was firmly associated with Lebanon's Shī'ī community.⁶⁶⁰ But that also was not an entirely compelling argument, especially when the Najdī tradition's formative history showed that there was also more to the interests of Salafī actors and their partners than the fundamentals of religious identity.

And extra-legal—or at least abnormal—efforts by Lebanon's political elite to tie up loose ends from the Syrian occupation were an indication that Sunnī leaders were a fundamentally different class of actor. With its overlapping roles as the Future Movement at the head of the Sunnī confessional order and the March 14 government at the head of the Lebanese state, the Sunnī establishment could create constraints and opportunities for actors like ash-Shahāl, beginning with the general amnesty that allowed him to return to public life. The amnesty was one of several illustrations of how the Hariris and other confessional elites could work outside of normal conventions and the law—the national dialogue process, for example, similarly brought Lebanon's confessional elites together for discussions that

⁶⁵⁶ Patrick Coy and Timothy Hedeem, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation: Community Mediation in the United States," *The Sociological Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (2005): 412, 16.

⁶⁵⁷ Omayma Abdellatif, "Questions Abound on Hariri's Relation to Radical Salafist Backers," *The Arab American News* (20/06/2008 2008). <https://www.arabamericannews.com/2008/06/20/Questions-abound-on-Hariris-relation-to-radical-Salafist-backers/>.

⁶⁵⁸ Rosen, "Theorizing From Within," 597.

⁶⁵⁹ Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldūn*, 35-36.

⁶⁶⁰ International Crisis Group ICG, *Lebanon's Politics: The Sunni Community and Hariri's Future Current* (International Crisis Group, 2010), 10-11, 25. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/lebanon/lebanon-s-politics-sunni-community-and-hariri-s-future-current>.

excluded the public and operated outside the legal confines of the Lebanese state.⁶⁶¹ And the controversy surrounding the release of Samir Geagea—a distinctly anti-Syrian figure—said a lot about the rules by which they did so. Geagea had been involved in incidents like wartime massacres and the 1987 assassination of Minister Rashīd Karami, and between Hezbollah lawmakers' parliamentary walkouts and the violence following the respective votes, his release clearly displeased some key actors in the Lebanese system.⁶⁶² But as part of the same political class, the Hariris had a distinct interest in securing Geagea as a partner in the national March 14 coalition, and could afford to ignore the political risks and legal problems which would have made his release impossible for more marginal players in the Lebanese system.

Rather than marking a new start, 2005's elections and things like July's general amnesty were a final reminder that the structures of Lebanese power would survive the Cedar Revolution, as would the top-down power dynamics that shaped ash-Shahāl's place in them. While marginal actors' role could shift, it would do so as the centres of power secured more important interests in ways that preserved polite national fictions of legality and normality. That was why Geagea's pardon, for example, had fit into July's general amnesty while also benefitting seemingly-minor players: it maintained appearances of non-sectarianism by pardoning other actors including some persons accused of involvement in the Ḍinniyyeh clashes like ash-Shahāl.⁶⁶³ For the shaykh, the deal was fortuitous and would allow him to return to public life, but it was also an early warning of the Sunnī establishment's structural role and its implications for actors like him. Notwithstanding any common interests, that ability to create constraints and opportunities after the Cedar Revolution meant that for all practical purposes, the structures and interests of political power would inevitably impose themselves on the Salafīs.⁶⁶⁴ As had been the case for him in the nineties and for HTI during

⁶⁶¹ Martin Wählisch, *The Lebanese National Dialogue: Past and Present Experience of Consensus-Building* (Berghof Foundation, 2017), 7-9.

⁶⁶² Al Jazeera AJ and Agencies, "Beirut Clashes Follow Geagea Amnesty," *Al Jazeera* (18/06/2005 2005). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2005/7/18/beirut-clashes-follow-geagea-amnesty>.

⁶⁶³ Joel Peter, "Qānūn al-ʿAfū ʿĀm 2005: al-Maṣāliḥ as-Siyāsiya waṭ-Ṭāʿifiyya ʿalā Ḥisāb al-Maṣālaḥa al-Ḥaqīqa," *Legal-Agenda.com* (10/04/2018 2018). <https://legal-agenda.com/%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%81%D9%88-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85-2005-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84/>.

⁶⁶⁴ Itani, "Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl: Lam Yakun Irhābiyan.. bal Sunniyyan."

the eighties, the post-Syrian system was still dominated by a narrow class of elites that could and would exercise a demobilising influence on figures like ash-Shahāl.

A Big Religious Name, Small Political Potential

The Sunnī establishment's control was not necessarily ash-Shahāl's first problem. Even without its intervention, he would struggle to mobilise Lebanon's increasingly diverse Salafī movements as a personal resource and depended on existing opportunities. His prominence among Lebanon's Salafīs was not a valuable political currency in its own right when the movement itself lacked political weight—in part due to his family's past choices. The Shahāls had mustered tens of thousands of voters in elections during the nineties.⁶⁶⁵ But their political impact had been limited not just by that constituency's relatively small size, but also by the damage that some Shahāls' early withdrawals did to their candidacy and the conflicting religious messaging which discouraged political participation.⁶⁶⁶ That made it a weak political foundation, and in theory the shaykh had three options by 2006. One was to unite and coordinate Lebanon's Salafīs as a social movement under his leadership,⁶⁶⁷ expanding its religious or at least political reach to mobilise the manpower and resources of a wider constituency.⁶⁶⁸ A second was to use his religious stature to position himself as a leader independent of any organisational structure,⁶⁶⁹ and leverage the charisma that came from his networks and credentials to mobilise a new constituency around him. And in the absence of those other opportunities, the shaykh faced the same third choice as many other disenfranchised figures in public life: withdraw to spend more time with other pursuits, or hope that whatever incidental roots he had were enough to secure a position of significance.

Historical circumstances ensured that the shaykh's options were even more limited than academic theory suggested. By 2005, it was unrealistic for him to treat Lebanon's

⁶⁶⁵ Fida Itani, "Ḥizb Allāh was-Salafiyyūn: al-Masīra aṣ-Ṣa'aba li Tafāhum "Wād al-Fitna", *al-Akhbar* (19/08/2008 2008). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/160098>.

⁶⁶⁶ as-Safir, "as-Salafiyyūn.. Naḥw Nuqla Naw'iya lil-Mushāraka fil-Ḥaya as-Siyāsiyya," *Lebanese Forces News* (08/04/2009 2009). <https://www.lebanese-forces.com/2009/04/08/43083/>.

⁶⁶⁷ Bob Edwards and John D. McCarthy, "Resources and Social Movement Mobilization," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David Snow, Sarah Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 116.

⁶⁶⁸ Edwards and McCarthy, "Resources and Social Movement Mobilization," 124-25.

⁶⁶⁹ Göran Ahrne and Nils Brunsson, "Organization Outside Organizations: The Significance of Partial Organization," *Organization* 18, no. 1 (2011): 86.

increasingly diverse Salafī movements as a basket of resources to be mobilised. Despite his complaints that Damascus had suppressed Lebanon's Salafīs, the movement had thrived during his leave of absence and expanded not just beyond Tripoli but beyond his networks and views. With its resulting organisational and intellectual diversity, it was unlikely that the shaykh would ever control and unify the movement.⁶⁷⁰ Building a grassroots organisation from scratch was similarly implausible when the growing membership's motives and loyalty had proven uncertain. Ash-Shahāl's brother Abu Bakr distinguished the Salafī circles within that clearly embraced Salafism's conceptions of *'aqīda* and *manhaj* from the wider circles that included the lay public,⁶⁷¹ and there were some figures whose unclear credentials and authority raised questions about their commitment to the movement or its values.⁶⁷² In those circumstances, that made it hard to distinguish between the growing pool of members that identified with it and its representatives instinctively because of their religious commitment, and those with more complex motives who might "speak in the name of Salafism...but they do not pray and they do not fast," as some scholars complained.⁶⁷³ And it also meant that for shaykhs like ash-Shahāl, the prospects of mobilising a grassroots Salafī social movement as a personal political vehicle were limited at best.

The shaykh was not going to be able to independently position himself as an elite figure at the head of a social movement, at least if Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī's comparable experience was anything to go by. The similarities of the two shaykhs' religious status and authority made ar-Rāfiʿī's experience informative, but his limited profile after the Cedar Revolution suggested that neither of those translated into political significance. At least on paper, his qualifications were comparable or greater than ash-Shahāl's—as had come up before in discussions of Najdī Salafism's history and substance, he had secured further master's and doctoral level

⁶⁷⁰ Saoud el-Mawla, "Mā Muddā Intishār as-Salafiyya fī Lubnān?," *al-Joumhouria* (03/04/2013 2013). <https://www.aljoumhouria.com/ar/news/64790/%D9%85%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86;> 'Imād, *as-Salafiyya was-Salafiyyūn, al-Huwiyya wal-Mughāyara: Qirā'a fī at-Tajriba al-Lubnāniyya*, 191-92.

⁶⁷¹ Al Aan AA, "2009-3-28 as-Salafiyya fī Lubnān - Wujūh wa Quṣuṣ al-Malaf," *YouTube* (29/03/2009 2009). <https://youtu.be/4y6ejsugV6c>.

⁶⁷² Al Jadeed, "Man Huwa ash-Shaykh Bilāl Daqmāq - Yumnah Fawāz," *YouTube* (01/11/2014 2014). https://youtu.be/X6G1v_4CERk.

⁶⁷³ Fida Itani, "at-Taqrīb as-Sūrī as-Sa'ūdī Yabda'u bit-Tawāfiq 'alā al-Malaf al-Jihādī," *al-Akhbar* (14/10/2008 2008). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/154098>.

qualifications after departing Lebanon amidst the 1985-1986 HTI crackdown.⁶⁷⁴ And like ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfiʿī maintained significant connections in Saudi Arabia. Some of those were to institutions like the one he represented when visiting Tripoli's Jinan University—possibly the King Faisal Foundation,⁶⁷⁵ whose newsletter mentioned an associate by the same name performing similar duties in Europe.⁶⁷⁶ And other connections were direct or at least reputational, including to prominent Najdī ʿulama figures like Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān who wrote complimentary forewords for his books.⁶⁷⁷ He may have lacked religious prominence and historical pedigree in Tripoli, but ar-Rāfiʿī had still built credentials, connections, and credibility as a scholar in the Najdī tradition that made him comparable to ash-Shahāl.

If ar-Rāfiʿī was a good test case, then ash-Shahāl's religious stature did not matter as much as his existing place and connections in the community. The basic problem was that scholarly religious qualifications and connections only had as much importance as other people cared to recognise, and outside of Lebanon's Salafī circles their religious authority lacked significant social or political value.⁶⁷⁸ With strong religious credentials but limited local foundations, ar-Rāfiʿī's own profile was low: he was Lebanese but his roots at home were limited, having settled overseas in Germany where he worked as an Imam in Berlin,⁶⁷⁹ and eventually sought naturalisation and settlement.⁶⁸⁰ When he did return to Lebanon it was accidental: he started to visit Tripoli again in 2000 but permanently resettled in 2005 after the German government denied his re-entry to Europe,⁶⁸¹ due at least partly to sermons in Berlin that addressed social and political issues in ways that German authorities found incendiary.⁶⁸² And that low local profile would correspond to a low political or religious one. With the right credentials, transnational connections, and experience as a religious figure,

⁶⁷⁴ Rougier, *Sunni Tragedy in the Middle East*, 201.

⁶⁷⁵ AJU, "University Newsletter."

⁶⁷⁶ Magazine, "al-Ḥaraka ath-Thaqāfiya fīsh-Shahr," 112.

⁶⁷⁷ ar-Rāfiʿī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Majmūʿ Sharḥ al-Muhadhab*, 1, 7.

⁶⁷⁸ Radde-Antweiler and Grünenthal, "Introduction: Religious Authority: Ascribing Meaning to a Theoretical Term," 371-72.

⁶⁷⁹ Gerhard Piper, *Al-Qaida und ihr Umfeld in Deutschland - Who's Who?* (Berlin: Unknown Publisher, 2008), 54. http://www.bits.de/public/pdf/Al-Qaida_und_ihr_Umfeld_in_Deutschland.pdf.

⁶⁸⁰ Winter, "„Ich Sage, Sei Vorsichtig!“."

⁶⁸¹ F.W. Horst, *Salafist Jihadism in Germany* (International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2011), 51. <https://www.ict.org.il/UserFiles/Salafist%20Jihadism%20in%20Germany.pdf>.

⁶⁸² Synnøve Bendixsen, *The Religious Identity of Young Muslim Women in Berlin: An Ethnographic Study*, Reprint ed. (Brill, 2013), 297-98.

but not the kind of domestic roots that made ash-Shahāl stick out, his role would be modest. Rather than stepping onto the national stage he would step into the pulpit of Tripoli's *at-Taqwā* Mosque, where his core focus was preaching and teaching.⁶⁸³ Ultimately, his story was different to ash-Shahāl's, but the similarities offered a simple lesson: religious authority was not going to propel either man to political prominence.

The Accidental Shaykh

The impediments to resource mobilisation would not consign ash-Shahāl to irrelevance, and by 2006 his unusual roots and resources in Lebanon made him an incidental national representative of the Salafī movement who spoke for the wider Sunnī community. His family's history and institutions were indispensable, positioning him as a figure of influence by default. He would not have to mobilise them or their resources himself—they had grown with help from foreign institutions like the Saudi al-Ḥaramayn charity and survived his difficulties in the nineties and the Syrian withdrawal in 2005,⁶⁸⁴ aided partly by relatives' role in them and their division amongst the family. That family's name carried its own weight, too, as the Shahāls' reputation as religious authorities survived alongside their networks into the twenty-first century.⁶⁸⁵ And within the family, the shaykh's personal reputation had its own value. It was not just an issue of religious credentials—his brother Abu Bakr was more inclined towards formal scholarship and secured his PhD by 2012,⁶⁸⁶ but ar-Rafi'ī's experience showed that their political value was limited. Whether because of other *ijāzāt*—credentials certifying his learning—from outside the university system that certified his Islamic scholarly competencies or simply inherited credibility, the shaykh had a personal stature as a pivotal figure in the Lebanese Salafī movement and was willing to assert it.⁶⁸⁷ Like Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb and the Najdī establishment, ash-Shahāl's birth into a prominent religious family and institutions could help him assert social and religious authority in ways that others could not. And like some figures in Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's family

⁶⁸³ Ya Sour, "ar-Rāfi'ī: aṣ-Ṣa'ūd al-Islāmī Nātij 'an Taqṣīr "al-Mustaqbal", " *Ya Sour* (N.D.). <https://www.yasour.org/2012/news.php?go=fullnews&newsid=6204>.

⁶⁸⁴ Saoud el-Mawla, "Bajath Muta'addida 'an al-Ḥarakāt al-Islāmiyya," *Lebanese Center for Research and Consulting* (06/03/2013 2013). <http://center-lcrc.net/index.php?s=4&id=7453>.

⁶⁸⁵ Abū Bakr ash-Shahāl, "Haqīqat Waqf Āl ash-Shahāl," *YouTube* (09/02/2020 2020). <https://youtu.be/Rexy9zPQCfO>.

⁶⁸⁶ See Abū Bakr ash-Shahāl, "Al-Āthār al-'Aqīda al-Wārida 'an as-Salaf fī Kitāb at-Tamhīd li Ibn 'Abd al-Barr: Jama'an wa Dirāsa" (PhD Dissertation, Islamic University of Madīnah, 2012).

⁶⁸⁷ AJM, "Mubāshir ma'a Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl. As-Salafiyūn fī Lubnān."

such as Muḥammad bin Ibrahīm, ash-Shahāl was a product of those circumstances and the charisma, history, and institutional roots that they let him borrow.

And even if the shaykh did not always exaggerate his position, he would not necessarily downplay his authority or influence when speaking publicly on issues like Hizbullah and the Israeli Government's War in July and August of 2006. As a serious political problem that threatened Lebanon's Sunnī community and the balance of Lebanese confessional power more generally, the War was a test of ash-Shahāl's role. For a community's political leaders, it was the kind of thing that required them to frame and advocate a meaningful response.⁶⁸⁸ For more marginal figures, on the other hand, it was just another chance to offer a narrative of political identity that reflected the circumstances.⁶⁸⁹ But as the conflict stressed Lebanon's Sunnī community and tensions worsened around Hizbullah's armed status,⁶⁹⁰ the media's interest in ash-Shahāl suggested that he was the latter. *Al-Jazeera's* anchors were willing to acknowledge the shaykh's personal standing by welcoming him as the founder of Lebanon's Salafī movement and the head of the reopened JHI, without any probing questions about his father's work or the extent to which the shaykh owed his role to family or overseas connections. And ash-Shahāl acted on the opportunity to assert himself as an independent Lebanese Sunnī figure, identifying his movement as a local domestic that was free from foreign influence.⁶⁹¹ He was not going to accept political irrelevance.

But ash-Shahāl's cautious response to the 2006 War indicated a discursive role as a marginal player, who presumed to speak for the Sunnī public without necessarily leading it.

Notwithstanding any freedom of action that he had, the shaykh's message was limited in scope and mostly hinted at Lebanese Sunnīs vulnerability to strife, thanks to the national

⁶⁸⁸ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 43.

⁶⁸⁹ Holly McCammon et al., "Movement Framing and Discursive Opportunity Structures: The Political Successes of the U.S. Women's Jury Movements," *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 5 (2007): 745.

⁶⁹⁰ United Press International UPI, Agence France-Presse AFP, and Deutsche Presse-Agentur DPA, "Barri Yarfah Ḥulūl Raīs Li'anhā' al-'Adawān 'alā Lubnān," *al-Wasat* (24/07/2006 2006). <http://www.alwasatnews.com/news/672515.html>.

⁶⁹¹ Al Jazeera AJ, "Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl.. at-Tayyār as-Salafī fī Lubnān," *Al Jazeera* (20/11/2006 2006). <https://www.aljazeera.net/programs/today-interview/2006/11/20/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A>.

imbalance of confessional power and particularly Hizbullah's armed status after the War.⁶⁹² Viewed critically, the shaykh was speaking as a representative of the community who acknowledged the threat to the Sunnī public and the confessional balance in which it existed.⁶⁹³ But the identification of that perceived threat was not accompanied by a clear call for action against it—the kind of thing that would mark him as an actual or at least aspiring leader.⁶⁹⁴ Rather than positioning himself as an independent figure who could affect political change, ash-Shahāl had returned to Lebanese public life on the back of an inherited position, and his limited contribution reflected it.

That discursive contribution also raised its own questions of whether the shaykh—marginal or not—was really a national or transnational figure. Taken in isolation, it said little about whether he was emerging as a domestic figure who represented Lebanon's Sunnī community or a transnational representative of Sunnīs in the wider region. Despite any assertions of the movement's domestic character, he and his rhetoric had a broader regional context. Neither he nor his religious foundations were confined to Lebanon—something evident in the foreign support that he downplayed, and in his appearances on Saudi television that indicated a presence in transnational circuits where Salafī thought circulated.⁶⁹⁵ The 2006 Hizbullah-Israeli War that spurred his comments about Sunnī vulnerability was also a similarly transnational issue that attracted religious denunciations and legal rulings from further afield in Saudi Arabia's Najdī establishment and the Kingdom's Islamic activist circles alike,⁶⁹⁶ which attracted their own international media attention in turn.⁶⁹⁷ Ash-Shahāl's re-emergence as a marginal national figure in 2006 had ultimately

⁶⁹² AJ, "Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl.. at-Tayyār as-Salafī fī Lubnān."

⁶⁹³ Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements," 615-17.

⁶⁹⁴ McAdam, "Beyond Structural Analysis," 291-93.

⁶⁹⁵ Al-Majd TV Network, "Usra Wāhida - Ma'a Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl," *Islamaway* (29/10/2006 2006).

[https://ar.islamway.net/lesson/56651/%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-](https://ar.islamway.net/lesson/56651/%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84)

[-D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84](https://ar.islamway.net/lesson/56651/%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84).

⁶⁹⁶ 'Abdullah ar-Rashīd, "Ta'āmul al-Islāmiyīn fīl-Khalīj ma'a Ḥizb Allāh.. Qirā'a fī Awraq Ḥarb 2006," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (02/07/2013 2013).

<https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=39&article=734662&issueno=12635>; Dunya al-Waṭan, "Fatwā li 'Ālim Sa'ūdī Taḥarrim 'alā al-Muslimīn Nuṣrat Ḥizb Allāh al-Lubnānī Li'annahū Shī'ī Tuthīr Jadalan," *al-Watan Voice* (04/08/2006 2006). <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2006/08/04/52350.html>.

⁶⁹⁷ Al Jazeera AJ and Agencies, "Du'āt Muslimūn Yarfaḍūn Fatāwa Sa'ūdiyya Didd Ḥizb Allāh," *Al Jazeera* (29/07/2006 2006). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2006/7/30/%D8%AF%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6%D9%88%D9%86->

depended on the opportunities and constraints of the Lebanese national context and his place in it, particularly relative to the Hariris' central power. But even as a marginal figure, there was an open question of whether his real operating context was a wider transnational environment where the centres of Sunnī power had far less control.

Transnational Interests, National Influences

Despite any apparent signs of a transnational role, the shaykh's politics after the Syrian withdrawal were still a domestic phenomenon and his role reflected the Lebanese national context. Transnational centres of power beyond Lebanon were still relevant and could create resource opportunities that facilitated actors like him. Saudi and Emirati institutions had historically supported the Shahāls and their networks,⁶⁹⁸ Kuwait's RIHS backed less politically-active scholars like Şufwān az-Za'abī,⁶⁹⁹ Qatar's Shaykh 'Aīd Charity Foundation later aided politically vocal Lebanese Salafis including the Shahāls,⁷⁰⁰ and Syria's government had supported extremist fighters' travel to fight in Iraq.⁷⁰¹ Similarly, Syrian and Iranian interference favoured the Hizbullah-dominated March 8 bloc,⁷⁰² and the March 14 coalition and Hariri family received Saudi support.⁷⁰³

Those patterns of transnational intervention were of the sort that could affect the political role and outlook of figures like ash-Shahāl, but it was not clear that they really would.

Resource-rich partners in an unequal relationship were well placed to influence the shaykh.

%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%89-%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B6%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8.

⁶⁹⁸ Qassimy.com, "Ba'aḍ al-Ḥaqā'iq 'an (Wathīqat al-Tafāhum) bayna (Ḥizb al-Lāt) wa(Ad'iyā' as-Salafiyya) fi Lubnān," *Qassimy.com* (08/08/2008 2008). <http://qassimy.com/vb///showthread.php?t=202659>.

⁶⁹⁹ al-'Alī, "al-Kharīṭa as-Salafiyya al-Lubnaniyya wal-Junūḥ Naḥw al-'Unf Taḥta Musamayyāt al-Jihād."; 'Alī al-'āl, "Salafiyya Lubnān.. Şirā' Iqlīmī fi Qalb Ḥadat Ṭā'ifi," *Maganin* (06/09/2008 2008). <https://www.maganin.com/Content.asp?ContentID=12291>.

⁷⁰⁰ Abd al-Kafi al-Samad, "Ṭarīq as-Salafiyya Tamurr fi Qaṭar," *al-Akhbar* (21/07/2012 2012). https://al-akhbar.com/Media_Tv/72854.

⁷⁰¹ Saoud el-Mawla, "Ahamm al-Mudāris as-Salafiyya," *al-Joumhouria* (20/02/2013 2013).

<https://www.aljoumhouria.com/ar/news/57007/%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9>.

⁷⁰² United Nations Security Council UNSC, *Fifth Semi-Annual Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559* (United Nations, 2007), 8. <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Lebanon%20S2007262.pdf>.

⁷⁰³ Reuters, "The Assassination of Lebanon's Hariri and Its Aftermath," *Reuters* (17/08/2020 2020). <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-lebanon-tribunal-hariri-assassination-idUKKCN25D1M9>.

And foreign support to actors like Hizbullah invited rhetoric from him that attributed threats against an isolated Lebanese Sunnī community to the Iranian and Syrian governments via their Lebanese partners. But without proving that the shaykh depended on those transnational networks, it was hard to argue that they irresistibly influenced him.⁷⁰⁴ And the influence of transnational actors on his rhetoric would depend heavily on whether he personally chose to prioritise domestic or transnational threats.⁷⁰⁵

The transnational elements of ash-Shahāl's rhetoric did stand out, especially compared to the messaging of Sunnī elites that centred mostly on Lebanon. His framing of Lebanon's problems was distinct from the Future Movement's Saad Hariri, who raised the issue of Hizbullah and its weapons as a symptom of imbalanced confessional power at home,⁷⁰⁶ and from March 14's Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, who cared more about Hizbullah's potential role in Lebanon's national defence.⁷⁰⁷ And while the Sunnī establishment's focus was on a Sunnī community in the shadow of Lebanon's confessional system and civil state, the shaykh's remarks played on a wider sense of political identity that mirrored Najdī Salafism's contrast between believing Sunnīs and disbelieving outsiders. There were hints that he saw the fundamental problem in sectarian terms as a threat from Lebanese Shī'a and Shiism generally, and he drew broader transnational links to religious outsiders beyond Lebanon, warning of an Iranian-Syrian effort to suppress Sunnī power in the Middle East which was only magnified by the absence of Western protection that Lebanon's Maronites enjoyed.⁷⁰⁸ The distinctions pointed to a general issue: the shaykh's sense of political identity fit into that borderless context where Salafī discourse circulated, enabling a "global framing" that attributed Sunnīs' local circumstances to non-Sunnī actors and forces beyond Lebanon. But that did not make his meaningful role in Lebanon's national politics into a transnational phenomenon. Even if his sense of framing and identity was far reaching, it was also separate

⁷⁰⁴ Sidney Tarrow, "Transnational Politics: Contention and Institutions in International Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4, no. 1 (2001/06/01 2001): 13-15; Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, 207.

⁷⁰⁵ Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements," 616, 18.

⁷⁰⁶ Alia Mansour, "Sa'ad al-Ḥarīrī Yakshaf li "al-Bayān" 'an Ittiṣālāt ma'a Ḥizb Allāh wa Yubasshir bi Ḥall Qarīb," *al-Bayan* (11/12/2006 2006). <https://www.albayan.ae/one-world/2006-12-11-1.964954>.

⁷⁰⁷ ash-Sharq al-Awsat, "as-Siniyūra: Lā Naṭrah Naza' Silāḥ "Ḥizb Allāh" bal Damajahu fil-Jaysh," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (27/08/2006 2006).

[https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=10134&article=379879&feature=.](https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=10134&article=379879&feature=)

⁷⁰⁸ Alloush, "ash-Shahāl: Hakadha Bada'a as-Salafī fī Lubnān."

from his political behaviour and the extent to which the transnational context shaped his national role within Lebanon was unclear.⁷⁰⁹

Looking at shaykhs like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī in isolation would say little about the extent or influence of any transnational partners. As el-Mawla notes, some Lebanese Salafīs had their own convictions about political activism or apolitical quietism.⁷¹⁰ And while other Salafi scholars like Ṣufwān az-Zaʿabī presented themselves as apolitical, it was unclear whether that sort of position reflected personal principles, foreign backers' preferences, or the pragmatic interest that the shaykh expressed in avoiding co-optation by Lebanon's own confessional elites.⁷¹¹ Moreover, ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's experience suggested that losing foreign support by having the wrong views would not necessarily be a problem. Both men had benefited from relationships with the Saudi *al-Ḥaramayn* foundation in the 1990s, for example,⁷¹² yet even after its 2004 closure and restructuring were still able to re-establish themselves in Lebanon after 2005.⁷¹³ It was plausible that new or covert ties could see a transnational actor assert its authority over them and other Lebanese shaykhs. But the unresolvable questions about personal motivations, connections, and dependencies meant that any picture of the issue that concentrated on them alone would be ambiguous at most.

When viewed in structural terms, the transnational influences on the shaykhs' national role began to look even weaker. There was a simple difference between the centres of domestic Lebanese power that had a way of imposing themselves on marginal national actors, and transnational partners for which the shaykhs could "shop around" for a partner that they liked, to some extent. Preferences for apolitical quietism and political activism could, of course, make foreign patrons selective about who they backed. In the 1990s, RIHS's

⁷⁰⁹ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 252.

⁷¹⁰ el-Mawla, "Aḥamm al-Mudāris as-Salafiyya."

⁷¹¹ al-Mayadeen, "15-09-2015 | as-Salafiyyūn bayna | Islāmiyyūn wa Baʿad," *YouTube* (16/09/2015 2015). <https://youtu.be/e9Nze3uurZE>.

⁷¹² AFPC, *The World Almanac of Islamism 2017*, 235; Bendixsen, *The Religious Identity of Young Muslim Women in Berlin*, 297-98.

⁷¹³ Agence France-Presse AFP, "Ḥalla Mu'assasat al-Ḥaramayn fis-Saʿūdiyya," *al-Qabas* (06/10/2004 2004). <https://alqabas.com/article/135498-%D8%AD%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B3%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%80%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%80%D8%B9%D9%80%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9>; Bandar Nasr, "Āl ash-Shaykh: Ighlāq Mu'assasat al-Ḥaramayn Li l-jrāʾāt Tanzīmiyya wa Laysa Li ʿAlāqa bil-Irhāb," *al-Riyadh* (29/05/2005 2005). <https://www.alriyadh.com/68137>.

relationship with ash-Shahāl broke down after internal disputes made it disinterested in activist partners,⁷¹⁴ preferring scholars like az-Za‘abī who prioritised social issues over politics.⁷¹⁵ Conversely, after 2005 the Qatari Shaykh ‘Aīd foundation was happier to work with shaykhs whose activist political and religious views mirrored ash-Shahāl’s, like Khālīd Za‘arūr.⁷¹⁶ Among those foreign benefactors, that diversity of views made it difficult for any one of them to build a relationship of dependency which made local partners easy to control. The transnational actors could still apply limited pressure to the shaykhs and their networks, and their Lebanese partners could compete for foreign support.⁷¹⁷ But that pressure would not shape or constrain the shaykhs with the same forcefulness that facilitation or repression by the local centres of power did—there was a common-sense distinction, for example, between a Gulf donor deciding not to send money and the Syrian government’s crackdown on HTI in the eighties.

The lack of clear transnational relationships did not mean that ash-Shahāl had avoided becoming enmeshed in any wider networks where he was a junior partner, but where he did it would be in local arrangements like *al-Liqā al-Mustaqīl al-Islāmī* (LMI), where he found partners with shared local political anxieties and resources. LMI responded to the same foundational concerns about Hizbullah and regional threats that ash-Shahāl and other Sunni Islamic actors had harboured since Rafiq Hariri’s 2005 assassination,⁷¹⁸ and had emerged after the 2006 Hizbullah-Israeli war. There were signs that its activities were more tangible than ash-Shahāl’s largely discursive political contributions, too, like security forces’ arrests of LMI members for involvement with militant organisations like *Fataḥ al-Islām*—discussed

⁷¹⁴ ‘Alī Zamī, "al-Ḥarakāth al-Islāmiyya as-Sunniyya wash-Shī‘iyya fī Kuwayt (1981-2019m) (18-10)," *al-Jarida* (02/06/2021 2021). <http://m.aljarida.com/articles/1622555848660129700/>; ‘Imād, *as-Salafiyya was-Salafiyyūn, al-Huwiyya wal-Mughāyara: Qirā’a fī at-Tajriba al-Lubnāniyya*, 180.

⁷¹⁵ Fawaz al-Hassan, "Lubnān: Zāhira Ma‘āhid at-Ta‘līm ad-Dīnī fī Ṭarābulus Khārij Ishrāf Dār al-Fatwā wa Lakin...Thama Raqāba Amniyya," *al-Hayat* (18/02/2011 2011). <https://www.sauress.com/alhayat/235394>.

⁷¹⁶ MTV Lebanon MTV, "Prime Time News - 08 Jan 2014 - ash-Shaykh Khālīd Za‘arūr," *YouTube* (09/01/2014 2014). <https://youtu.be/CNUy79Jek2M>; Al Jadeed, "Lin-Nashar: Kalām ash-Shaykh al-Fitnawī bi Rasm al-Qaḍā’," *YouTube* (22/12/2015 2015). <https://youtu.be/uP7jL2GRJ7s>.

⁷¹⁷ Donatella Della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, "Interactive Diffusion: The Coevolution of Police and Protest Behavior With an Application to Transnational Contention," *Comparative Political Studies* 45, no. 1 (2012/01/01 2011): 790-93.

⁷¹⁸ Qasim Kassir, "Tastashrif al-Wāqī‘ al-Islāmī al-Ḥarakī fī Ḍill al-Mutaghiyarāt al-Istrātiyya (2)," *al-Mustaqbal* (11/05/2005 2005). Available at https://tripolilebanon.blogspot.com/2005/05/blog-post_111590687659555667.html?m=0.

later.⁷¹⁹ But as in the national context, ash-Shahāl and other Salafīs like Zakariyā al-Maṣrī appeared to have opportunistic rather than central roles in LMI, which had emerged thanks to mobilisation by other political interests that included former HTI militants and Sunnī politicians.⁷²⁰ Ash-Shahāl was not working to change that perception—he stated that he was invited to LMI rather than forming it, and deferred to the publicly-acknowledged leader, former Sunnī parliamentarian Khāled Ḍāher.⁷²¹ And that concession hinted at two issues. One was that in Lebanon’s authoritarian Sunnī order he only had so much power and space outside the Future Movement’s demobilising auspices—another issue that would become abundantly clear in 2007. But that and his weak membership also spoke to the nature of his domestic operating context: a setting that offered opportunities and constraints which the shaykhs’ partners abroad did not.

The Sunnī Establishment Asserts Itself

The Sunnī establishment had taken steps to reinforce its confessional power by 2007, demonstrating that it was better-placed to demobilise and shape ash-Shahāl’s national role with a calculated mix of repression and facilitation. It was nothing personal—the Future Movement was looking to manage its evolving needs and challenges by consolidating power, not settle any issue with the shaykh. He could not cause problems for Saad Hariri and the Future Movement, who benefitted from a name and resources, charisma, international ties, and domestic networks. From its position, the establishment had leverage,⁷²² legitimacy,⁷²³ and an ability to impose their interests over Lebanon’s Sunnī community that left the shaykh unable to realistically challenge it.⁷²⁴

⁷¹⁹ Hassan 'Aliq, "al-Maḥkama al-‘Askariyya: “al-Liqā’ al-Islāmī al-Mustaḳill” Tanẓīm Musallih,” *al-Akhbar* (02/07/2007 2007). https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_Justice/185619.

⁷²⁰ Ghassan Saoud, "Islāmiyyūn Qad Yakurrarūn ma‘a al-Ḥarīrī Sīnāriyū ma‘a al-Katā’ib,” *al-Akhbar* (15/11/2008 2008). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/151779>.

⁷²¹ Alloush, "ash-Shahāl: Hakadha Bada’a as-Salafī fi Lubnān.”; Awab al-Masri, "Aḥdāth Ṭarābulus al-Amniyya Turbuk as-Sāḥa al-Islāmiyya fi Lubnān,” *Al Jazeera* (20/10/2008 2008). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2008/10/20/%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%83-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A9>.

⁷²² Agence France-Presse AFP, "Tycoon Saad Learns to Play Politics,” *Al Jazeera* (29/05/2005 2005). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2005/5/29/tycoon-saad-learns-to-play-politics>; US Government USG, "MGLE01: Information on Sa’ad Hariri,” *Wikileaks* (13/06/2006 2006). https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BEIRUT1915_a.html.

⁷²³ McCorriston, "Pastoralism and Pilgrimage,” 617.

⁷²⁴ Rosen, "Theorizing From Within,” 597.

The establishment's power relative to the shaykh meant that it would shape its relationship with him by asking what problems he might help solve or create. It was a situation that certainly made him a potential partner. The March 14 government faced threats to its national credibility from the March 8 opposition, and that would make the shaykh an asset if not a necessity.⁷²⁵ Some threats were direct, like boycotts of the government and demands for a veto over its decisions.⁷²⁶ Others were indirect—clashes between March 14 and March 8 supporters in Beirut,⁷²⁷ Hizbullah supporters' general strikes and accompanying violence across Lebanon,⁷²⁸ and further assassinations of March 14 figures.⁷²⁹ But they would all magnify the challenges to the establishment in the narrower context of Sunnī politics where it needed the community's support or at least compliance.⁷³⁰ And that made marginal actors into partners or problems. The alignment of some figures like Faṭḥī Yakan with Hizbullah showed that loyalty was not guaranteed,⁷³¹ and ash-Shahāl's concerns about security were a tacit warning that support from below was conditional.⁷³² In those circumstances, the religious authority of someone like the shaykh was potentially a legitimising force for the

⁷²⁵ AlMoslim, "Lubnān: al-Hurūb min wa ilā al-Ḥarb al-Ahliyya?," *al-Moslim* (01/02/2007 2007). <https://almoslim.net/node/85866>.

⁷²⁶ Agencies, "France Urges Lebanese to Talk," *Al Jazeera* (28/07/2007 2007). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2007/7/28/france-urges-lebanese-to-talk>.

⁷²⁷ The Guardian and Agencies, "'Four Killed' in Beirut University Clash," *The Guardian* (26/01/2007 2007). <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2007/jan/25/internationaleducationnews.highereducation>.

⁷²⁸ Nada Bakri and Hassan Fattah, "Hezbollah Strike Brings Beirut to a Virtual Halt," *New York Times* (23/01/2007 2007). <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/23/world/middleeast/23cnd-lebanon.html>.

⁷²⁹ ICG, *Lebanon's Politics*, 12-13.

⁷³⁰ Al Jazeera AJ and Agencies, "Kutalat al-Ḥarīrī Tusayṭir 'alā al-Barlimān wa 'Awn Awwal Mu'āridīhā," *Al Jazeera* (20/06/2005 2005). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2005/6/21/%D9%83%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%B9%D9%88%D9%86>.

⁷³¹ Hussein Awad, "Ra'īs Jabhat al-'Amal al-Islāmī ad-Dā'iya Faṭḥī Yakan li "al-Intiqād": Man Yaḥmal as-Silāḥ al-Madhabī Laysa min Ahl as-Sunna," *al-Ahed News* (23/03/2007 2007). <https://archive.alahednews.com.lb/details.php?id=337230>.

⁷³² al-Hayat, "'Salafist Trend" Founder Interviewed on Lebanon Fighting," *BBC Monitoring Middle East* (24/05/2007 2007). <https://search.proquest.com/docview/458633557?accountid=8330>
http://JN8SF5HK5V.search.serialssolutions.com?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx_enc=info:ofi/enc:UTF-8&rft_id=info:sid/ProQ%3Aabidateline&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:journal&rft.genre=article&rft.jtitle=BC+Monitoring+Middle+East&rft.atitle=%22Salafist+trend%22+founder+interviewed+on+Lebanon+fighting&rft.au=&rft.aualast=&rft.aufirst=&rft.date=2007-05-24&rft.volume=&rft.issue=&rft.spage=1&rft.isbn=&rft.btitle=&rft.title=BBC+Monitoring+Middle+East&rft.issn=&rft_id=info:doi/.

Hariri-dominated system,⁷³³ and a backstop against its disintegration.⁷³⁴ But that also raised its own questions of how the Hariris would secure it.

As part of the Lebanese political class rather than a marginal domestic player or foreign outsider, the Sunnī establishment's extra-legal manoeuvrings showed that it was well-placed to manage those threats. At least in Lebanon itself, it enjoyed power and impunity that transnational and marginal players lacked. While those transnational forces could influence actors like the Salafī movement from afar, the resulting behaviour was subject to the approval of the elites that dominated the local setting—one of which was the Future Movement itself.⁷³⁵ With access to power and influence over how it could be acceptably used, the Hariris' could be legally flexible. And they used every inch of that flexibility, mobilising paramilitary networks via private security companies and militias that balanced a visible presence—especially in Tripoli—against the need for plausible deniability.⁷³⁶ Whether the resulting regiments, or *afwāj*, were really a solution would be a separate question. The inability to work effectively and safely limited their usefulness for things besides minor activities like supporting sit-ins,⁷³⁷ and they were not entirely fooling March 8 actors like Hizbullah and Faṭḥī Yakan who condemned them as a destabilising force.⁷³⁸ But they signalled an intent and at least some ability to confront threats from national competitors, and their plausible deniability meant that even if they worsened tensions they would not give those competitors a valid pretext for open conflict.⁷³⁹

⁷³³ Ritter, "Irrational Solidarity Groups," 31-32.

⁷³⁴ M. Akif Kayapinar, "Ibn Khaldun's Concept of 'Assabiyya': An Alternative Tool for Understanding Long Term Politics?," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 36, no. 3/4 (2008): 393-94.

⁷³⁵ Tarrow, McAdam, and Tilly, *The New Transnational Activism*, 118-19, 94-95.

⁷³⁶ Nicola Tohme, "Lubnān was-Silāḥ Şinwān La Yaftariqān," *Al Jazeera* (11/11/2007 2007).

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2007/11/11/%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D8%B5%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86>.

⁷³⁷ Saida Online, "Ishtibāk bayna 'Tawḥīd' wa'al-Afwāj'," *Saida Online* (N.D.).

<https://www.saidaonline.com/news.php?go=fullnews&newsid=3506>; Muhammad Mustafa Alloush, "Ṭarābulus wa Ḥawādithuhā ilā al-Wājiha Mujaddadan," *al-Akhbar* (29/11/2007 2007). https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_Local_News/181053.

⁷³⁸ Abd al-Kafi al-Samad, "al-Ittiṣālāt al-Majhūla Tuthīr Balbila fī Ṭarābulus," *al-Akhbar* (17/11/2007 2007).

https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_Local_News/180321.

⁷³⁹ al-Jarida, "Ṭarābulus 'alā Jamar Ḥādith Abī Samrā Mulāmiḥ Fitna Sunniyya - Sunniyya wa Ittiḥāmāt li Ḥizb Allāh wal-Mustaqbal bi Qiyādat al-Ūrkastrā," *al-Jarida* (02/12/2007 2007).

<https://www.aljarida.com/ext/articles/print/1461249015934745600/>.

For the more marginal parts of Lebanon's Sunnī political landscape, those extra-legal measures signalled that power flowed from the top. While the *afwāj* appeared to address the potential grievance that the Future Movement could or would not protect the Sunnī community, they also signalled that the establishment could repress any contentious mobilisation against its authority by marginal actors like Salafīs.⁷⁴⁰ That did not make it something besides what a more candid Future Movement would have claimed that it was: an armed capability ostensibly in service of Sunnīs' national interests, which tacitly asserted the political legitimacy of its power at the expense of weaker competitors like ash-Shahāl.⁷⁴¹ But there was nevertheless a tacit warning that the Future Movement indirectly constrain any revolt against the hierarchical Sunnī order that it controlled. Even if actors like ash-Shahāl did not face an imminent threat of intervention from above, they faced a clear choice between working within the boundaries of political acceptability that the Hariris set or being repressed as an example to others.⁷⁴²

There was more to the situation than threats—besides the possibility of extra-legal repression, the Sunnī establishment could work through the law to create constraints and opportunities for marginal actors. That was partly a reflection of Lebanon's weak state, which had limited influence on elites and in which formal processes like elections served ulterior purposes. More specifically, though, it spoke to the establishment's place as one of the centres of national power that constrained each other through a mixture of convention and power politics more than the law did. So long as the Future Movement and the March 14 coalition held government, that meant that the limits on how it used the state for partisan ends were more political than legal.⁷⁴³ And that allowed March 14 officials like the Minister of Interior and Municipalities Aḥmad Fatfat, for example, to use the powers of state office to address Hizbullah's growing social prominence. He could not proscribe the Party and anything else associated with March 8 as an organisation without triggering a political backlash, but he could still direct his ministry to monitor and enable Islamic movements in

⁷⁴⁰ Mehdi Shadmehr, "Mobilization, Repression, and Revolution: Grievances and Opportunities in Contentious Politics," *The Journal of Politics* 76, no. 3 (2014/07/01 2014): 631-32.

⁷⁴¹ Ritter, "Irrational Solidarity Groups," 31-32.

⁷⁴² Davenport, *State Repression and the Domestic Democratic Peace*, 47.

⁷⁴³ George Tsebelis, *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 76-78.

Sunnī society. And the resulting strategy of social balancing would be opportune for marginal Sunnī actors like *Ḥizb ut-Taḥrīr* and ash-Shahāl's own JHI, which had previously been proscribed for their radical views, and received legal standing to operate freely and openly once again.⁷⁴⁴

But that facilitation was not a gift and the Future Movement's efforts fit into a broader pattern of demobilisation from above. As with the *afwāj*, the largesse conveyed a tacit repressive threat: if the benefactors believed that the beneficiaries had done something stupid then the support would disappear.⁷⁴⁵ In its national capacity as the March 14 government and its confessional one as the Future Movement, the Sunnī establishment had seemingly eased the circumstances of ash-Shahāl and other marginal actors by providing legal standing and largesse. But when dealing with Salafī movements like ash-Shahāl's that it had viewed in uncertain terms as potential political partners or competitors since 2005,⁷⁴⁶ the Future Movement would be better served by offering ease that came with the implicit threat of hardship. And support from transnational actors like the Saudi government might seemingly have solved that problem for Sunnī networks like ash-Shahāl's, the Future Movement's position in Lebanon's domestic political structures positioned it as an intermediary that could control the flow of Saudi resources and incentivise politically-convenient rhetoric and teachings.⁷⁴⁷ While the shaykh would still benefit from those arrangements, that depended on his subordination to the Sunnī establishment as a religious actor that supported its political authority, rather than an activist who challenged it.⁷⁴⁸

Fataḥ al-Islām & the Implications of ash-Shahāl's Marginal Status

The Sunnī establishment's demobilising influence meant that even if opportunities emerged for ash-Shahāl to mobilise resources under his authority, it could still restrict his use of

⁷⁴⁴ Ministers, "'Arḍ Wuzārat ad-Dākhiliyya wal-Baladiyāt Mawḍū' Ibṭāl Qarār Majlis al-Wuzāra' Raqm 2 Tārīkh 1/1/1996 al-Qāḍī bi Saḥab al-'Ilm wal-Khabr al-Mu'tā bi Ta'sīs al-Jam'iyya al-Musammā "Jam'iyyat al-Hidāya wal-Iḥsān al-Islāmiyya".'; Salloukh et al., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*, 62.

⁷⁴⁵ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, "Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics," 276.

⁷⁴⁶ Adnan el-Ghoul, "Sunnis and Shiites Promote Unity," *The Daily Star* (14/09/2005 2005). <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/ArticlePrint.aspx?id=5754&mode=print>.

⁷⁴⁷ Frederic Wehrey et al., *Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam: Rivalry, Cooperation, and Implications for U.S. Policy* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2009), 83. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA495436.pdf>; ICG, *Lebanon's Politics*, 25.

⁷⁴⁸ Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldūn*, 35-36.

them—something that became abundantly clear during 2007's crackdown on a militant group, *Fataḥ al-Islām*. The group's origins highlighted the unclear distinctions between ash-Shahāl's transnational and domestic context. It had appeared by October 2006 under the leadership of a militant figure, Shākir al-ʿAbsī, and with origins in the Bedāwī and later the Naher al-Bārid Palestinian refugee camps it was possible to frame the movement's motivations in the context of Palestinians' relative deprivation in Lebanon. But given its origins as an offshoot of the Damascus-based *Fataḥ al-Intifāḍa*,⁷⁴⁹ the Lebanese Palestinian communities' views of many members as "strangers," and the inability of al-ʿAbsī's contemporaries to explain his actions amidst his group's attacks on the Lebanese security forces, there was an open question of what other pressures were involved.⁷⁵⁰ Al-ʿAbsī himself did not offer much clarity—with vague and unreliable assertions about a relationship with the transnational al-Qāʿida movement,⁷⁵¹ it was difficult to characterise *Fataḥ al-Islām* as a product of the transnational extremist wave that had gained some Lebanese presence amidst regional tensions like the Iraq war.⁷⁵² The most to be said was that his movement had some domestic Lebanese roots, and sources including Syrian state television rightly noted his links to Salafī movements and particularly ash-Shahāl,⁷⁵³ but it benefited from transnational enabling and support.⁷⁵⁴ Like the Lebanese context generally, it was not immediately clear where foreign and domestic influences began or ended.

⁷⁴⁹ Muhammad Mustafa Alloush, "Qirā'a Mughāyara li Aḥdāth Fataḥ al-Islām," *Al Jazeera* (23/05/2007 2007). <https://www.aljazeera.net/opinions/2007/5/23/%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-2>.

⁷⁵⁰ al-Amin, 16-113; السلفي اليتيم; Muhammad an-Najar, "Shākir al-ʿAbsī.. Ḥikāyat Lāji'i Filasṭīnī Assasa Fataḥ al-Islām," *Al Jazeera* (23/05/2007 2007).

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2007/5/24/%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D8%AD%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A6-%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%B3-%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%AD>.

⁷⁵¹ Itani, *al-Jihādiyyūn fī Lubnān*, 226; Mālik Qaʿqūr, "Qā'id "Fataḥ al-Islām" Akhtalas Amwāl as-Saʿūdiyyīn," *al-Watan* (06/08/2012 2012). <https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/147367>.

⁷⁵² Itani, *al-Jihādiyyūn fī Lubnān*, 218.

⁷⁵³ Saida Online, "Tafjīr Dimashq: al-Mufakhakh Lubnānī wal-Intihārī Saʿūdī....ar-Riwāya al-Kāmila," *Saida Online* (N.D.). <https://www.saidaonline.com/news.php?go=fullnews&newsid=25341>.

⁷⁵⁴ United Nations Security Council UNSC, *Sixth Semi-Annual Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559* (United Nations, 2007), 3-4. <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Lebanon%20S2007629.pdf>.

Fatah al-Islām's religious and political character made it a source of potential resources for an actor like ash-Shahāl to mobilise, and a test of his role in politics. It was not the shaykh's movement and its membership would not necessarily share all his views. But parts of *Fatah al-Islām* had roots in the same Salafī and Sunnī activist landscape, and had been involved in the Ḍinniyyeh clashes that saw the shaykh exiled in 1999 and HTI before then.⁷⁵⁵ And those common roots made a relationship to the movement possible. From a position in Sunnī society, ash-Shahāl could coordinate between it and groups united by Sunnī identity or provide brokerage that resolved its differences with other marginal actors. But that posed its own question of whether he would serve the interests of a resulting movement in Sunnī society or those of the Sunnī establishment,⁷⁵⁶ or potentially even mobilise the former as a challenge to the authority of the latter.⁷⁵⁷ Ash-Shahāl was not responsible for *Fatah al-Islām's* emergence and the movement answered to al-ʿAbsī, but it was an opportunity for him to become politically engaged outside of the Future Movement's confessional auspices. That would make it the first real test after 2005 of his political role, and particularly the extent to which it reflected the structures that defined his political context and the place that he had within them.

Ash-Shahāl recognised *Fatah al-Islām* as a potential resource to be mobilised and the room for him to do it. He owed that space to a Sunnī establishment that had decided to wait and see if events served its interests. Rather than proactively confronting al-ʿAbsī's movement, the establishment's March 14 government had restrained the parts of the Lebanese security apparatus that were closely aligned with Saad Hariri like Lebanon's Internal Security Forces (ISF),⁷⁵⁸ giving ash-Shahāl space and time to work as a mediator. But although the shaykh presented himself as a representative of the Sunnī community's interests who could moderate its behaviour, his public comments suggested that he was looking to cooperate with it for his own reasons. Framing the issue in the context of a historically disempowered

⁷⁵⁵ Simon Haddad, "Fatah al-Islam in Lebanon: Anatomy of a Terrorist Organization," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 6 (2010): 557.

⁷⁵⁶ Roger Gould and Roberto Fernandez, "Structures of Mediation: A Formal Approach to Brokerage in Transaction Networks," *Sociological Methodology* 19 (1989): 92-3; Ion Vasi, "Brokerage, Miscibility, and the Spread of Contention," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (2011): 14-15.

⁷⁵⁷ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 33.

⁷⁵⁸ International Crisis Group ICG, *Lebanon's Palestinian Dilemma: The Struggle Over Nahr al-Bared* (International Crisis Group, 2012), 12. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/lebanon/lebanon-s-palestinian-dilemma-struggle-over-nahr-al-bared>.

Sunnī community that needed to confront sectarian threats like Hizbullah, he implied that *Fataḥ al-Islām* was a potential opportunity for the Sunnī community to assert itself.⁷⁵⁹

Rather than presenting himself as a destabilising problem, the shaykh appeared to be suggesting that he had found a chance to bring balance to Lebanon's national order.

But the Sunnī establishment understood that *Fataḥ al-Islām* was becoming a resource for ash-Shahāl and his contemporaries, and the ensuing crackdown would secure its overlapping interests in national stability and confessional dominance. The shaykh's activities had presented the Future Movement with the prospect of a supposed subordinate that operated outside of its authoritarian control. Left unchecked, there was a real possibility that he would create an armed force beyond the Hariris' auspices, balancing the establishment's coercive power and allowing the Salafīs to position themselves as serious rivals.⁷⁶⁰ As violence from the movement escalated, there were few reasons left for the establishment to let the issue sit. By May 2007 *Fataḥ al-Islām* had provoked a security response and a resulting battle in the Naher al-Bārid camp that lasted into September.⁷⁶¹

The crackdown looked like a security measure because it fundamentally was one. By allowing security operations to go ahead, the March 14 government dispersed most of the movement, and many militants were rounded up and charged in following years.⁷⁶² But for the Sunnī establishment it served another overlapping priority: reinforcing an authoritarian Future Movement's confessional power in the face of threats from below. The establishment had room to say that it had defended the Sunnī community from extremists and Lebanon's independence against Syrian interference,⁷⁶³ but there was also room to argue that it had

⁷⁵⁹ Diana Moukalled, "Documentary 'Fath Al Islam' 2008 'Wathā'iq Fath al-Islām: Masīra al-Ghurabā'", *YouTube* (16/06/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/5hKZ1t4AMM8>; Itani, *al-Jihādiyyūn fī Lubnān*, 210-11.

⁷⁶⁰ Jean Lachapelle et al., "Social Revolution and Authoritarian Durability," *World Politics* 72, no. 4 (2020): 558.

⁷⁶¹ Bint Jbeil BJ, "Fataḥ al-Islām Mujaddadan: Tafāṣīl Jadīda 'an Tarkibatuhā wa Tawāzanātuhā wa Afkār al-Qā'ida," *Bint Jbeil* (28/09/2007 2007). <https://archive.bintjbeil.org/article/3760>.

⁷⁶² Al Arabiya AA, "Tafāṣīl Jadīda 'an as-Sa'ūdiyyīn al-Muttahimīn bil-Intimā' li 'Fataḥ al-Islām'," *Al Arabiya* (05/04/2008 2008). <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2008%2F04%2F05%2F47879>.

⁷⁶³ al-Mustaqbal, "'al-Mustaqbal' Tan shar wathā'iq Tu'akkad Takhtīt 'Fataḥ al-Islām' wan-Niẓām as-Sūrī li Ihghtiyāl al-Baṭriyark Ṣafir wan-Nā'ib Sa'ad al-Ḥarīrī," *Lebanese Forces News* (15/11/2008 2008). <https://www.lebanese-forces.com/2008/11/15/25063/>; ash-Sharq al-Awsat, "Ja'ja': 'Fataḥ al-Islām' Irhābiyya Tajib Mulāḥaqatuhā wal-Ḥall Lan Yakūn fī Iqtihām Mukhayyam Nahar al-Bārid," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (24/05/2007 2007). <https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=420551&issueno=10404>.

defended its own position against enterprising figures like ash-Shahāl who might seek to exploit opportunities which placed them outside the control of more powerful interests.

The Sunnī establishment's crackdown illustrated its demobilising influence on the shaykh and his role in Lebanon's Sunnī politics. That did not mean that his political engagement was purely domestic, or that he had to consult with the Future Movement on everything. He could still frame things in almost any terms that he liked, and while the establishment described it as an issue of Lebanon's security and independence, he described *Fataḥ al-Islām* as an issue with origins in the transnational context—a wider regional conspiracy against Lebanon's Sunnī community with links to Hizbullah.⁷⁶⁴ But with no way to mobilise outside the demobilising auspices of Sunnī confessional power, he could not realistically mark himself as anything besides a deferential partner to the ruling elite. The shaykh's public signals of his political identity would still signal his solidarity with the Future Movement, and in 2008, for example, ash-Shahāl reached out to ISF chief Ashraf Rifi after the assassination of an ISF official involved in the investigation of Hariri's death, Wisam Eid.⁷⁶⁵ While he was not entirely at peace with the Sunnī confessional order and there were worsening threats that might have demanded action, *Fataḥ al-Islām's* experience showed that he was not in a position to challenge the system.

Considered more broadly, the crackdown on *Fataḥ al-Islām* also painted a larger picture with several connected parts: ash-Shahāl's domestic structural context, the centres of power that shaped it, and his resulting place and role in it after 2005. Notwithstanding the interests of Sunnī elites, the shaykh's limited ability to mobilise a movement put him in a weak position, and he owed his social stature to his existing opportunities. But his ability to use those opportunities ultimately depended on constraints from above. And at a time when something like *Fataḥ al-Islām* was a national political liability for Sunnī leaders that were trying to consolidate their confessional power after the Syrian withdrawal, those constraints on actors like him and their opportunities were tight. That left him space to serve as a religious figure who validated the Sunnī establishment's political authority, in a social order

⁷⁶⁴ al-Aluka and ash-Shahāl, "Ḥiwār Shabakat al-Alūka ma'a Faḍīlat ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl."

⁷⁶⁵ Lebanon Files, "al-Liwā' Rifi Talqī Ittiṣālāt Ta'ziya min Barrī was-Siniyūra wal-Jamīl wal-'Imād Sulaymām wa Shakhṣiyyāt wa Hay'iat," *Lebanon Files* (15/01/2008 2008). <https://www.lebanonfiles.com/news/53904/>.

that placed him between the centres of power and the public.⁷⁶⁶ Given his ambitious attempts to court al-‘Absī’s organisation and the crackdown that followed, there was no reason to think that ash-Shahāl was satisfied with the outcome, or that there was more that could be done to advance the interests of the community. But in a structural context where the centres of Sunnī power expected him to stay close to their authority he had little choice. If he wanted to survive the entrenchment of the Hariris’ power, then he would have to limit his ambitions and choose his words carefully within the space that he had.

Ash-Shahāl & Shifting Elite Interests

The shaykh’s national role would shift in the aftermath of Lebanon’s May 2008 Crisis, which forced the establishment to reconsider its relationship to marginal actors like the shaykh. Like 2005’s Syrian withdrawal, the Crisis and Tripoli’s ensuing violence were a structural shock. But the shaykh’s weak agency mattered less than the contentious political dynamic between him and the Future Movement. The fundamental problem was simple: as the establishment’s interests and attention shifted, it became polarised from ash-Shahāl whose concerns remained largely the same. And as it managed the violence without ash-Shahāl’s support or engagement, it left the shaykh at a distance from Sunnī power. But he was not going to withdraw from Lebanon’s national politics. As a leading Salafī figure he would be in cautious but noticeable contention with the Hariris’ interests, and between that distance from their power and the opportunities that Tripoli’s surge of public mobilisation offered, he could position himself as a populist representative of an increasingly isolated Sunnī public. Even if the overall structure of his context was unchanged, his place relative to its centres of power had shifted and his national role would shift as well.

The 2008 Crisis & Its Consequences

May 2008’s Crisis was generally serious, but posed specific questions for the Sunnī establishment: how would it manage its national political interests, and how did it need to adjust its relationships with marginal partners in the Sunnī confessional order that it controlled? Those questions mirrored the Crisis itself—something which had seemingly started from minor roots but quickly grown into a problem. In hindsight, its momentum had

⁷⁶⁶ Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldūn*, 35-36.

come from the March 14 government's decision to outlaw Hizbullah's secure communications networks and from the judiciary's allegations that the Party and its partners had installed cameras at Beirut's airport.⁷⁶⁷ While Hizbullah had demanded more influence in parliament for nearly two years, in interpreted those actions as attempts to curtail its stated mission of "resistance,"⁷⁶⁸ and on May eighth its Secretary-General Ḥasan Naṣrallāh condemned them as an attack on his Party.⁷⁶⁹ After a series of initial demonstrations and confrontations between March 14 and March 8 supporters before Naṣrallāh's announcement, the issue evolved into a violent confrontation between Lebanon's confessional elite as Hizbullah fighters seized control of significant parts of Beirut—including buildings belonging to the Future Movement—and March 14 leaders condemned its "armed coup."⁷⁷⁰ And by May twelfth it had become a crisis for Lebanese society. Violence had spread beyond Beirut and clashes occurred from Tripoli to the Druze communities of the Chouf mountains. From Tripoli, Ash-Shahāl condemned a "deep injury" to the safety and honour of Sunnīs whom he called to mobilise.⁷⁷¹ And by the time regional actors like the Saudi government started voicing concerns about the violence and called for international

⁷⁶⁷ Agencies, "al-Ḥukūma al-Lubnāniyya Tuhājim Shabakat Ittaṣālāt Hizb Allāh," *Al Jazeera* (06/05/2008 2008). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2008/5/6/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%85-%D8%B4%D8%A8%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA>.

⁷⁶⁸ Agencies, "Tajaddud al-Ishtabākāt fī Jabal Lubnān," *Elaph.com* (11/05/2008 2008). <https://elaph.com/Web/Politics/2008/5/329415.html>.

⁷⁶⁹ Moqawama.org, "Mu'tamar Ṣuḥufī lis-Sayyid Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh bi Khuṣūṣ Qarār al-Ḥukūma bi Mulāḥaqa al-Hātif at-Tābi'a lil-Muqāwama 2008-5-8," *Moqawama.org* (08/05/2008 2008). <https://video.moqawama.org/details.php?cid=1&linkid=469>.

⁷⁷⁰ al-Ittihad, "14 Qatīlān bi Ishtibākat Shamāl Lubnān wa Qatīlān bi Istihdāf Janāza fī Bayrūt," *al-Ittihad* (11/05/2008 2008). <https://www.alittihad.ae/article/20998/2008/14-%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AA;> al-Jazeera AJ, "14 Adhār Tattaham Hizb Allāh Yantaqid "Inqilāb Musallah" ƒidd Lubnān," *Al Jazeera* (10/05/2008 2008). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2008/5/10/14-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B0-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD>.

⁷⁷¹ Tareq al-Hameed, "Ya Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh.. Tafaddal," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (14/05/2008 2008). <https://archive.aawsat.com/leader.asp?article=470707&issueno=10760>.

meetings to stop it,⁷⁷² May 2008 Crisis's was a political shock to every interest in or intersecting with Lebanon.

For the Sunnī establishment May 2008 was a disaster. While Rafiq Hariri's 2005 assassination was a shock to the whole country, the May Crisis would be an unwelcome reminder that despite their extensive influence, even Lebanon's political class were subject to certain limits. Hizbullah had paralysed the Lebanese system instead of overthrowing it, in an attempt to force Christian, Druze, and Sunnī confessional competitors to compromise or capitulate.⁷⁷³ And notwithstanding any superficial impression that they outnumbered Hizbullah, those competitors were about to have a bad time. They would not find shelter in the Lebanese legal system or state, and despite calls from March 14's parliamentary allies and marginal figures like ash-Shahāl for it to intervene,⁷⁷⁴ the Lebanese Army lacked the capacity necessary to end the violence between confessional leaders' supporters and private militias.⁷⁷⁵ The situation was not a failure of the system—if anything, it was a cautionary reminder that a weak state which made it easy for one major party to flout the law was a weak state that allowed every major party to flout the law. And while the Hariris' March 14 government and Future Movement had benefitted from impunity that allowed them to circumvent and misuse Lebanon's institutions to manage marginal partners while balancing national competitors, Hizbullah was from the same class of actors and could use its position to impose on checks on perceived misuses of power. But as Hizbullah lost its momentum and

⁷⁷² Dunya al-Waṭan, "Tawaqquf al-Ishtabākāt ba'ad Sayṭara Hizb Allāh 'alā Kāmil Bayrūt al-Gharbiya," *al-Watan Voice* (09/05/2008 2008). <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2008/05/09/128333.html>.

⁷⁷³ al-Jarida, "Khalaf al-Awrāq A'ād Rasm al-Jughrāfiyā as-Siyāsiyya al-Lubnāniyya: Sitta Manāṭiq Tabqī 'Arḍa lil-Mutaghayyirāt Ḥattā al-Ḥall an-Nihā'i," *al-Jarida* (13/05/2008 2008). <https://www.aljarida.com/articles/1461735051234797700/>.

⁷⁷⁴ al-Bawaba, "Ma'ārik Dāriya fil-Jabal wa Junblāt Yaḥdhar min Ḥarb bayna ash-Shī'a wad-Drūz," *al-Bawaba* (11/05/2008 2008). <https://www.albawaba.com/ar/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%83-%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D9%8A%D8%AD%D8%B0%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2; Piper, Al-Qaida und ihr Umfeld in Deutschland - Who's Who?>

⁷⁷⁵ Aram Nerguizian, *The Lebanese Armed Forces: Challenges and Opportunities in a Post-Syria Lebanon* (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2009), 19-20. https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/090210_lafsecurity.pdf.

its takeover stalled and came to a halt, a stalemate would settle in and May 2008's Crisis would go unsolved until a third party sided with one of Lebanon's two national blocs.⁷⁷⁶

Foreign pressure would help prevent nightmare scenarios like a total collapse or a Hizbullah takeover, but it could not help March 14 maintain its national position. Regional governments of the Arab League convened emergency meetings and signalled their investment in Lebanon's confessional leaders. The Syrian regime put its weight behind Hizbullah as part of its own competition with Israel, while Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and most Gulf countries backed the March 14 government. And Lebanon's wider national political order would survive, too. Regional foreign ministers warned against further escalation by Hizbullah while—at least in hindsight—2009's Saudi-Syrian rapprochement showed that the Party's foreign support was limited and its foreign partners had their own interests in preserving the Lebanese system.⁷⁷⁷ But things still had to move in one direction or another and Nasrallah would not abandon the progress that he had made. Although his confessional rivals were unlikely to thank him for keeping their lives interesting, they still had to choose between compromising with Hizbullah or accepting a national gridlock. The negotiations in Doha that finally resolved the crisis would reflect that, forcing the Sunnī establishment to reckon with its relative weakness and vulnerability to Hizbullah,⁷⁷⁸ and reconsider its priorities in the Lebanese national context.

By the time the actual Doha Agreement came around and officially resolved the Crisis later in May, the Sunnī establishment was vocally optimistic but the damage to its national position was hard to miss. International support helped preserve the structure of Lebanese politics with a deal that Saad Hariri hailed as “a new page...in Lebanon's history.” But

⁷⁷⁶ David Cunningham, "Veto Players and Civil War Duration," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (2006): 891.

⁷⁷⁷ Susan Abu Hassan, "Wuzarā' al-Khārijīya al-‘Arab Yukallifūn Lajna Wuzāriyya Sabā’iyya bis-Safar Fawran ilā Lubnān," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (12/05/2008 2008).
<https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=470394&issueno=10758>; Robert Worth, "With Isolation Over, Syria Is Happy to Talk," *New York Times* (26/03/2009 2009).
<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/27/world/middleeast/27syria.html>.

⁷⁷⁸ Al Jazeera AJ and Agencies, "Ifititāḥ Jalasāt al-Ḥiwār al-Lubnānī bi ad-Dūḥa," *Al Jazeera* (17/05/2008 2008).
<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2008/5/17/%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A9>.

pressure from Hizbullah had forced the Sunnī establishment to a compromise, weakening its national power as Lebanon's March 14 government and its confessional power as the Sunnī community's Future Movement.⁷⁷⁹ Besides appointing the independent Michel Suleiman as President and calling for dialogue,⁷⁸⁰ the Agreement conceded to Hizbullah's longstanding demand for a veto right over the decisions of the Lebanese cabinet,⁷⁸¹ while halting discussions about its armed status and calling for normalisation in Syria-Lebanon relations.⁷⁸² In the national context, those concessions meant that even if the March 14 government gained a popular mandate to regulate Hizbullah's power,⁷⁸³ Hizbullah would insist that its independence protected Lebanon from reprisals and use its veto.⁷⁸⁴ And in the confessional context it weakened the Sunnī establishment's ability to facilitate and constrain marginal actors like ash-Shahāl, by decentralising control in Lebanon's executive government and ending its ability to unreservedly use that power of the state for instrumental reasons.⁷⁸⁵

None of that was just a big-picture problem for Lebanon's elites—the consequences would make their way down to actors like ash-Shahāl, albeit indirectly. Even if it had not created new centres of power or opened the Sunnī political order up to marginal actors, the May 2008 Crisis would force members of the political class like the Hariris to reconsider their position and interests. Pressure from Hizbullah had forced the establishment to compromise

⁷⁷⁹ Al Jazeera AJ, "Ittifāq ad-Dūḥa Yaqrab bayna al-Aṭyāf as-Siyāsiyya bi Lubnān," *YouTube* (22/05/2008 2008). <https://youtu.be/4lhCywz88hY>.

⁷⁸⁰ United Nations Security Council UNSC, "Letter Dated 22 May 2008 From the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations Addressed to the President of the Security Council " (10/06/2008 2008). <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Lebanon%20S2008392.pdf>.

⁷⁸¹ Al Jazeera AJ and Agencies, "as-Siniyūra Yuhājim Naṣr Allāh wa Yattahim bi Bath ash-Shiqāq wal-Firqa," *Al Jazeera* (09/12/2006 2006). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2006/12/9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%85-%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A8%D8%AB>.

⁷⁸² Bashir Nafi', "Ittifāq ad-Dūḥa wa Mutaghayyarāt at-Tarkība al-Lubnāniyya," *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies* (20/11/2008 2008). <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/node/2929>.

⁷⁸³ Raghida Bahnam, "al-Ḥarīrī li "ash-Sharq al-Awsat": Aṭaynāhum al-Thulth al-Mu'aṭal Liananā Lam Na'ud Nakhāf min an Ya'rqiḷū al-Maḥakama ad-Dawliya," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (22/05/2008 2008). [https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=10768&article=471727&feature=](https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=10768&article=471727&feature=;); Lebanese Forces.com, "al-Istrāṭijīyya ad-Difā'iyya al-Muqaddima min Qabl ad-Duktūr Samīr Ja'ja' 'alā Tāwīlat al-Ḥiwār," *Lebanese Forces News* (22/12/2008 2008). <https://www.lebanese-forces.com/2008/12/22/28778/>.

⁷⁸⁴ Muhammad Noon, "Lubnān: Hay'at al-Ḥiwār Naqashat al-Istrāṭijīyya ad-Difā'iyya wa Akkadat Istimrār at-Taḥdī'a," *BBC* (19/08/2010 2010). https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2010/08/100819_bk_noun_hiwār.

⁷⁸⁵ Hanspeter Kriesi et al., *New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1995), 28.

in ways that destabilised the political arrangements which informed its relationship with actors like ash-Shahāl since 2005, worsened the national threat from Hizbullah, and damaged the establishment's credibility as the defender of Lebanon's Sunnīs. The Agreement had also weakened the establishment's capacity to confront that national threat, by limiting its access to state power as a tool by which to repress or facilitate challengers in Sunnī politics. And for marginal actors like ash-Shahāl whose role in Lebanon reflected demobilising influence from above, those sorts of changes would be serious. Even if the May 2008 Crisis was not directly his problem, the Sunnī establishment would change the ways in which it shaped his opportunities and constraints as its position and interests did, reshaping his place in Lebanon's Sunnī politics and his subsequent role as a figure in its national landscape.⁷⁸⁶

The Polarisation of the Sunnī Establishment & ash-Shahāl in 2008

While the Doha Agreement had weakened the Sunnī establishment's national position, there was also the local matter of violence in Tripoli that would polarise it from the shaykh. The polarisation was to be expected. The violence was an apparently simple problem that invited different responses when considered from the national level above Sunnī society or from a local perspective in it. And the origins of that simple problem were reasonably easy to see. After fighting spread from Beirut to the Shahāls' home of Tripoli, it became clear that the Sunnī establishment's preparations for conflict had demonstrably failed,⁷⁸⁷ as the Lebanese Army and the Future Movement's own *afwāj* paramilitaries proved insufficient to contain the violence or defend the Party's assets and constituency.⁷⁸⁸ Given how the Doha Agreement weakened the Future Movement and March 14 government, it was unlikely that the establishment could just reinforce existing arrangements. Instead, the Hariris would need a new way to manage the threats to their national position and confessional authority over Sunnī society,⁷⁸⁹ which balanced the distinct national political problems that the Crisis and the Doha Agreement had created with the emerging need to secure Tripoli and Lebanon more generally. But those national problems would also be unlike anything that marginal

⁷⁸⁶ Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 59-60.

⁷⁸⁷ al-Ittihad, "14 Qatīlān bi Ishtibākat Shamāl Lubnān wa Qatīlān bi Istihdāf Janāza fī Bayrūt."

⁷⁸⁸ Agencies, "al-Mu'āraḍa Ta'lan Istimrār Hiṣār al-ʿĀšima al-Lubnāniyya Ḥattā Ījād Hall lil-Azma," *al-Arabiya* (09/05/2008 2008). <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2008%2F05%2F09%2F49584>.

⁷⁸⁹ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 81.

social actors like ash-Shahāl had to consider, and as differences of opinion emerged about how to address a shared issue, gaps began to appear between the Sunnī establishment and actors in Sunnī society. Or to put it in academic language: the issue would polarise the Future Movement from the shaykh.⁷⁹⁰

That polarisation was virtually inevitable when Tripoli's violence was not an issue that the establishment could ignore. The indications of escalation tension suggested if left unchecked, the problem would spiral out of control. As the violence spread to Tripoli, residents quickly drew parallels to Sunnī-ʿAlawī clashes during the Civil War, and fighters in Bab al-Tabbaneh—the site of the 1986 Syrian government's massacres during its crackdown on HTI—found themselves in a new war with counterparts in the ʿAlawī-majority Jabel Mohsen neighbourhood.⁷⁹¹ And people with links to Tripoli's Salafī movements became involved, too, trading valuables for weapons that let them join in a new conflict that they framed in sectarian terms as a defence of Sunnīs against Hizbullah and the ʿAlawī Arab Democratic Party (ADP).⁷⁹² But it was not just an issue in local Trabelsi society and the Lebanese political class had a say in how things went. ADP chief Rifʿat ʿAīd expressed concerns that national political operatives were involved,⁷⁹³ and between the Future Movement's *afwāj*, Hizbullah's role in triggering May's crisis, and Lebanese elites' history more generally, it was hard to dismiss them.

From his more marginal position in Sunnī society, ash-Shahāl's role in that polarisation would be passive. The shaykh's interests had not significantly changed. He supported that wider public action on sectarian grounds even if he did not lead it, having called for a general Sunnī

⁷⁹⁰ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 322.

⁷⁹¹ Susan al-Abtah and Sana Alak, "'Bāb at-Tabbāna" wa Ḥadath Zuʿamāt as-Sunna.. wa ʿAlawiyūn Yalqūn bil-Masʿūliyya ʿalā "Ghurabā", " *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (27/06/2008 2008).

<https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?issueno=10626&article=476578>.

⁷⁹² al-Bawaba, "as-Salafiyūn fi Ṭarābulus Yataḥaddḥarūn li Muwājjihat Ḥulafāʾ Sūriya," *al-Bawaba* (15/05/2008 2008).

<https://www.albawaba.com/ar/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B6%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9>.

⁷⁹³ al-Jarida, "Bayna Jabal Muḥsin al-ʿAlawī wa Bāb at-Tabbāna as-Sunnī...Fatīl Azmat Dāʿima fi Intizār ash-Sharāra Yajmaʿuhum al-Fiqr .. wa Yufarriqhum Walāʾuhum wa Madhhabuhum wa Majzarat Sūriya min ath-Thamānināt," *al-Jarida* (21/05/2008 2008). <https://www.aljarida.com/articles/1461720404197650800/>.

mobilisation in Lebanon.⁷⁹⁴ That was not a sign that his views had evolved—he had seen *Fataḥ al-Islām* as a potential partner in the defence of the Sunnī community before 2008 as well, contrary to the Sunnī establishment's wishes. And while his interest in an open-ended sort of mobilisation and his general sectarian tendencies would be one half of the polarisation between him and the Hariris, those attitudes were also established parts of the shaykh's politico-religious identity. He was, after all, a Salafi shaykh with political roots in Tripoli. There was enough to create a gap between him and the establishment as the May Crisis's consequences played out and violence in Tripoli dragged on. But it was not a sign of changing priorities that would actively polarise him from the Hariris and their interests.⁷⁹⁵

It was instead the establishment's position and priorities that actively differed from ash-Shahāl's. As both a national actor and confessional centre of power, it had to strike an awkward balance between the emerging value of violent competition within society against the need for national stability. The Future Movement represented a national Sunnī elite that could largely ignore the consequences in Tripoli. For it, limited proxy violence—particularly with 'Alawīs—was a reasonable way to challenge Hizbullah and Damascus, and it was essential when disarming those rivals' partners like the ADP would cause the very provocation it aimed to avoid.⁷⁹⁶ Common sense and decency invited valid questions of whether that was a respectable practice, but it was certainly an established one. The Hariris' partners in March 14 like Samir Geagea and in government like ISF chief Ashraf Rifi had armed their own militias and those of their other partners, to say nothing of Hizbullah's own armed status.⁷⁹⁷ Yet at the same time, the insecurity undermined the Hariris' credibility and enabled radical actors that might undermine their confessional power. The establishment could not stop the fighting immediately, but it would have to carefully manage and eventually end it.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁴ Al-Hayat, "Lubnān fī Nafaq al-Miḥna - Hudū' Yaḡṡa' 'Unf ... wa Tashyī' Ḍaḡāya," *Sauress* (13/05/2008 2007). <https://www.sauress.com/alhayat/31382249>.

⁷⁹⁵ Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 130.

⁷⁹⁶ International Crisis Group ICG, *Nouvelle Crise, Vieux Démons au Liban: Les Leçons Oubliées de Bab Tebbaneh/Jabal Mohsen* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2010), 12, 14. <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b29-new-crisis-old-demons-in-lebanon-the-forgotten-lessons-of-bab-tebbaneh-jabal-mohsen-french.pdf>.

⁷⁹⁷ Wikileaks, "Lebanon: Geagea Drops By Again," *Wikileaks* (12/05/2008 2008). https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BEIRUT669_a.html.

⁷⁹⁸ Wikileaks, "Lebanon: Tension Prevails Following More Tripoli Clashes," *Wikileaks* (28/07/2008 2008). https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BEIRUT1104_a.html.

Actively managing those shifting priorities would polarise the Future Movement from figures like the shaykh. Any new or reinforced proxies would have to address three core issues. First, the *afwāj* were insufficient to secure the city. Second, the Doha Agreement's provisions limited the March 14 government's use of the state to regulate sectarian partners like Salafis and *Fataḥ al-Islām*. And third, Hizbullah's growing power and Syria's potential re-engagement in Lebanon made the destabilising impacts of overt military mobilisation into a significant risk. But actors in Sunnī society like ash-Shahāl would not be much help with that sort of three-dimensional problem, and the Future Movement would reject the Salafis' requests for weapons.⁷⁹⁹ That invited an obvious inference: the establishment had a different view of what problems the fighting in Tripoli represented and how best to manage them. And it had an obvious implication: polarisation between the Hariris and ash-Shahāl. As a key centre of power that defined the political opportunities and constraints of marginal players like the shaykh, Lebanon's Sunnī establishment would be easily able to consciously uncouple from him, find new ways and partners by which to address its priorities, and cause his relative place in the structures of Sunnī power to shift.⁸⁰⁰

Ash-Shahāl's Structural Shift in a Polarised Environment

As the Sunnī establishment tried to manage Tripoli's violence rather than end it, the polarisation from the shaykh would see it create facilitative opportunities for new partners and repressively exclude actors like him. The core change was organisational. The Future Movement was not going to trust its existing partners or the government, and instead formed new paramilitary networks through professional intermediaries like 'Amīd Ḥammūd. That was a sign of its shifting priorities: while ash-Shahāl was a Salafī shaykh who could support the Future Movement's confessional authority, Ḥammūd had quit Lebanon's security establishment after the May Crisis and brought his own expertise to the Future Movement as its new paramilitary coordinator.⁸⁰¹ It was not an easy hiring process and Ḥammūd would reject Saad Hariri's initial job offers. But once aboard, he started working to

⁷⁹⁹ Abdellatif, "Questions Abound on Hariri's Relation to Radical Salafist Backers."

⁸⁰⁰ Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 130.

⁸⁰¹ Sami Nader, "Concerns Rise in Lebanon as Another Soldier Defects," *Al-Monitor* (23/10/2014 2014). <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2014/10/lebanon-army-soldier-defect-concerns.html>.

set up new networks for the establishment that could address the worsening balance of Hizbullah's power in Lebanon's national landscape, particularly in its capacity as a partner for the Iranian and Syrian governments.⁸⁰²

Ḥammūd's efforts had not given the Future Movement a new military force, but they were not supposed to. The simple problem was that the establishment needed to solve complex, emerging problems within equally complex constraints, and the resulting networks reflected that. After 2011 it would become clear that they were not as professional or organised as Ḥammūd was. His occasional subordinates would include figures with roots in Sunnī society rather than Lebanon's military—as noted in later chapters—like Ziyād 'Alūkī,⁸⁰³ a former parsley vendor,⁸⁰⁴ and Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī who helped manage the networks.⁸⁰⁵ But those arrangements were a passable solution to the establishment's problems. The Future Movement could deny any links to what he and they were doing so long as he kept responding to media inquiries by framing his militias as mere Future Movement supporters,⁸⁰⁶ and describing himself as a concerned member of Lebanon's Sunnī community.⁸⁰⁷ Those denials were unconvincing, and estranged partners like 'Alūkī would later implicate Ḥammūd in wider facilitation arrangements that extended all the way to

⁸⁰² Radwan Murtada, "Amīd Ḥammūd: Sa'usallih as-Sunna li Muwājahat Hizb Allāh," *al-Akhbar* (25/10/2012 2012). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/77834>.

⁸⁰³ ad-Diyyar, "Limādha Tamma Tahrīb 'Amīd Ḥammūd min Ṭarābulus ilā Khārij Lubnān Kayfa Qām al-Ḥarīrī bi I'tā' Ta'limātuhi li Tahrībihi li'lkhfā' Faḍīḥat "Tayyār al-Mustaqbal", " *ad-Diyyar* (18/04/2015 2015). <https://addiyar.com/article/879008-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D9%85-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AE%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%81-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%A5%D8%B9%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A1>.

⁸⁰⁴ The Daily Star, "Life Goes on in Tripoli's Warring Districts," *The Daily Star* (30/10/2013 2013). <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1446732283?accountid=8330>
http://JN8SF5HK5V.search.serialssolutions.com?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx_enc=info:ofi/enc:UTF-8&rft_id=info:sid/ProQ%3Amiddleeastnews&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:journal&rft.genre=article&rft.jtitle=The+Daily+Star&rft.atitle=Life+goes+on+in+Tripoli%27s+warring+districts&rft.au=&rft.aualast=&rft.aufirst=&rft.date=2013-10-30&rft.volume=&rft.issue=&rft.spage=&rft.isbn=&rft.btitle=&rft.title=The+Daily+Star&rft.issn=10273883&rft_id=info:doi/.

⁸⁰⁵ Ya Sour, "Wizārat ad-Dākhiliya Turakhkhaṣ li Sharika Amniyya bi Amrat al-Mas'ul al-'Askarī li Tayyār al-Mustaqbal", *Ya Sour* (N.D.). <https://www.yasour.org/2012/list.php?go=fullnews&newsid=44129>.

⁸⁰⁶ LBCI, "LBCI_NEWS_ 'Amīd Ḥammūd Kasr Ḥājjiz aṣ-Ṣamt wa Tahaddath," *YouTube* (26/10/2012 2012). <https://youtu.be/wxM-h9FiSWk>.

⁸⁰⁷ Irtiqaa Way IW, "Fīṣ-Ṣamīm (Taḥrīr Ḥalab)," *YouTube* (13/08/2016 2016). <https://youtu.be/R252yjlnlt4>.

senior Sunnī figures like Ashraf Rifi.⁸⁰⁸ But they helped his networks to institutionalise and routinise the violence in accordance with the shifting interests that had polarised the Hariris from actors like ash-Shahāl, keeping the violence at the establishment's preferred intensity while denying rivals a firm pretext for escalation.⁸⁰⁹

Between the Sunnī establishment's facilitation of new partners and the political sensitivities in which it had to work, it appeared that the shaykh would not be part of that process. There was no place in the new networks for ash-Shahāl when he could not serve the Hariris' overriding national concerns, particularly as they related to Syrian intervention in Lebanon. Tripoli's local leaders demanded state intervention as fighting between Sunnīs and 'Alawīs continued,⁸¹⁰ but while the March 14 government deployed the Army by July tenth, its intimations of Syrian responsibility—and its own role—suggested that real stability depended on its confidence that the ADP would not turn to Damascus for protection.⁸¹¹ And in the resulting negotiations, sectarian actors like ash-Shahāl would be unhelpful. Mainstream Sunnī politicians like Najib Miqati respected Salafis' religious convictions but were uncomfortable with them in politics while the ADP's Rif'at 'Aīd understandably associated them with HTI's attacks on 'Alawīs in the 1980s.⁸¹² And as Damascus' statements made Future Movement leaders worry about if or when the Syrian regime was about to re-

⁸⁰⁸ as-Safir, "Shaqīq "Alūkī" Yaḡarr bi Dawr aḡ-Ḍābiṭ as-Sābiq.. wa Mawqūfūn Yantaqidūn Rifī," *Janoubia* (21/03/2015 2015). <https://janoubia.com/2015/03/21/%D8%B4%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%88%D9%83%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%82-%D9%88%D9%85/>.

⁸⁰⁹ Donatella Della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, "Unwanted Children: Political Violence and the Cycle of Protest in Italy, 1966–1973," *European Journal of Political Research* 14, no. 5-6 (1986): 612.

⁸¹⁰ ash-Sharq al-Awsat, "Tawaqquf Ishtabākāt al-Muwāla wal-Mu'araḡa fī Ṭarābulus," *Youm7* (22/06/2008 2008). <https://www.youm7.com/story/2008/6/22/%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%89-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3/28542>.

⁸¹¹ Agencies, "al-Jaysh al-Lubnānī Yanhī Ishtabākāt Ṭarābulus ba'ad Qutilla 4 wa Juriḡa 75 Shakhṡan," *al-Arabiya* (10/07/2008 2008). <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2008%2F07%2F10%2F52857>; Nicola Tohme, "Ba'ad Ittifāq al-Muṡālaḡa.. Abnā' Ṭarābulus Yarḡabūn at-Tanfīdh," *Al Jazeera* (09/09/2008 2008). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2008/9/10/%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3>.

⁸¹² Al Aan AA, "Wathā'iqī Ḥaṡrī li Qanāt al-Ān 'an as-Salafīyya fī Lubnān j 2," *YouTube* (05/08/2009 2009). https://youtu.be/_35HKosD5qw.

establish its control in Lebanon, sectarian voices would only slow the negotiations down at a time when speed was of the essence.⁸¹³

The formal resolution by which the establishment tapered the violence in Tripoli confirmed that the shaykh was not the partner that Sunnī leaders needed. The agreement that Saad Hariri supported in September would come from mainstream Sunnī and non-Sunnī elites, after meetings between the Future Movement, ADP, Yakan's *al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyya*, and other Sunnī elites like Najib Miqati and Mufti Mālik ash-Sha'ār.⁸¹⁴ By the time Tripoli's various parties—including the Salafī movement and ash-Shahāl—signed it, its emergence had demonstrated that for a Sunnī establishment with changing priorities, the shaykh was no longer a necessary partner.⁸¹⁵ Even if the establishment had valued the shaykh as an accessory to its confessional power and headed off a potential challenge by co-opting him, its taste had changed as its priorities did.⁸¹⁶ As its interest in preserving national stability polarised it from ash-Shahāl's own interest in potentially unrestricted national competition, excluding and marginalising the shaykh became the natural choice.⁸¹⁷

As the agreement that officially resolved Tripoli's instability came into force, there were transparent signals that the Future Movement had shifted the underlying structure of opportunities and constraints for marginal actors like the Salafī movement. Saad Hariri's comments after the signing would signal two things: the Future Movement had

⁸¹³ Eli Hajj, "Mufāja'a min Ṭarābulus: al-Lubnāniyūn Qādirūn 'alā al-Muṣālaḥa," *Elaph.com* (08/09/2008 2008). <https://elaph.com/Web/Politics/2008/9/363965.html>.

⁸¹⁴ Omar Habanjar, "Lubnān: Wathīqat Musālaḥa bayna as-Sunna wal-'Alawiyyīn fī Ṭarābulus," *al-Anba* (08/09/2008 2008). <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/arabic-international-news/33812/08-09-2008-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%88%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3/>.

⁸¹⁵ Omar Habanjar, "Maṣdar Wuzārī Lubnānī li "al-Anbā": Qimmat Dimashq Sara'at al-Muṣālaḥa aṭ-Ṭarābulusiyya," *al-Naba* (10/09/2008 2008). <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/arabic-international-news/33941/10-09-2008-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%80-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%82%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%82-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9/>.

⁸¹⁶ Coy and Hedeem, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation: Community Mediation in the United States," 412.

⁸¹⁷ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 243.

institutionalised its activities in Tripoli to support shifting national priorities,⁸¹⁸ and figures like the shaykh were no longer suitable partners.⁸¹⁹ Emphasising common Lebanese identity and independence from foreign interference, his message to the 'Alawī community confirmed that the deal was an attempt to stabilise Lebanon's national politics by separating the ADP from the Syrian regime, limiting the incentives for it to seek Syrian protection at a time when the Doha Agreement's provisions had foreshadowed normalisation with Damascus. But Hariri also offered an implicit warning against action outside March 14 and the Future Movement's authority, stressing the collective Lebanese obligation to unite behind the Army against threats to stability. Third parties would have no business trying to manage such threats on their own—that responsibility sat with the government. And when Hariris' examples of those threats were *Fataḥ al-Islām* and the fighting in the Naher al-Bārid camp, the target audience was unmistakable: actors like ash-Shahāl, whose sectarian interest in open-ended competition contradicted the establishment's national priorities.⁸²⁰

As the government prepared to enforce the new peace, the general implication was that Sunnī leaders' boundaries of political acceptability had shifted, as had their expectations of the role that marginal actors would play. With March 14 Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's indications that political and sectarian banners around the city were to be removed, it became clear that the measures would deliver physical security for the public and political stability for Sunnī leaders. And between Siniora's pledge of an Army crackdown on unregulated weapons and the Future Movement's own work via intermediaries like Ḥammūd, any space for mobilisation that fell outside the Sunnī establishment's control had disappeared.⁸²¹ In a system where the Doha Agreement had limited the Hariris' ability to instrumentalise the state for partisan reasons, those measures were a next-best solution that stabilised Tripoli while suppressing threats to the establishment's national and confessional interests. The arrangement was not entirely novel and it echoed the crackdown

⁸¹⁸ Della Porta and Tarrow, "Unwanted Children," 613.

⁸¹⁹ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 266-67.

⁸²⁰ Habanjar, "Lubnān: Wathīqat Musālaḥa bayna as-Sunna wal-'Alawiyīn fī Ṭarābulus."

⁸²¹ al-Ittihad, "Ittifāq Muṣālaḥa Yanhī Khilāfāt Ṭā'ifiyya fī Ṭarābulus," *al-Ittihad* (09/09/2008 2008).

<https://www.alittihad.ae/article/37546/2008/%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%87%D9%8A-%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3>.

on Fataḥ al-Islām before 2008.⁸²² But the unoriginality only reinforced the signal to figures like ash-Shahāl that their political role would remain as marginal as ever or diminish further as Sunnī leaders found better partners.⁸²³ And that increasing structural distance from the establishment was precisely the kind of thing that could turn marginal actors like the shaykh into opposition figures,⁸²⁴ even if the precise extent and nature of that opposition would reflect whichever political opportunities emerged after Lebanon's May 2008 Crisis.⁸²⁵

Contained Contention in National Politics

The polarisation following May 2008's Crisis would not mark the end of ash-Shahāl's national role or release him from his existing constraints, but it would put him in a contained kind of contention with the Sunnī establishment and its priorities. His privileged place in Sunnī society was unchanged and he was well placed to articulate narratives of political identity and framing that—while awkward—would not trigger a backlash from Sunnī leaders that wanted to avoid unnecessary provocations. Like the wider community, he had framed his grievances and objectives in open-ended terms rather than narrow strategic ones, linking Tripoli's 'Alawīs to the city's violent political history and denouncing Hizbullah's role in Lebanon's politics and society.⁸²⁶ His calls for action reflected that diagnosis, too, as he met with partners in al-Liqā al-Mustaqil al-Islāmī who agreed to "escalate" and warned that circumstances would worsen so long as Sunnīs faced threats or humiliation,⁸²⁷ while later admitting that he had issued a fatwā directing Sunnīs to defend the community.⁸²⁸ At a time when the Future Movement's elites and their allies had personally visited Tripoli to try and keep the violence under control, that was not going to win friends in high places.⁸²⁹ But it would not invite direct intervention to suppress it, either. Even if he was still a marginal

⁸²² Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 20.

⁸²³ Verta Taylor, "Social Movement Continuity: The Women's Movement in Abeyance," *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 5 (1989): 772.

⁸²⁴ Kriesi et al., *New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis*, 124-25.

⁸²⁵ Della Porta and Tarrow, "Unwanted Children," 612-13.

⁸²⁶ Memowas, "7 / 7 Sā'at Ḥiwār. As-Sunna fī Lubnān bayna al-Khilāfāt wat-Taḥālufāt."

⁸²⁷ Dunya al-Waṭan, "an-Nā'ib as-Sābiq Dāhir: Bada'na bi Tashkīl Taktal 'Askarī Yuwājīh Hizb Allāh," *al-Watan Voice* (14/05/2008 2008). <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2008/05/14/128467.html>.

⁸²⁸ AJM, "Mubāshir ma'a Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl. As-Salafiyūn fī Lubnān."

⁸²⁹ Marcel Ters, "Mudīr 'Ām Quwwā al-Aman Yajūl fī Manāṭiq al-Ishtibākāt: Tajrīd an-Nās min Silāḥuhum Yaḥtāj ilā Qarār Siyāsī," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (27/06/2008 2008). <https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=10804&article=476556>.

actor in the structures of Sunnī power, it was possible for the shaykh to exercise some agency without encroaching on their interests.⁸³⁰

That left space for the shaykh to pursue his own interests from an existing position among the Salafīs, intervening in matters like a Salafī-Hizbullah reconciliation a month before the Future Movement's September Sunnī-ʿAlawī deal. That intervention had been essential for ash-Shahāl, even if it was contrary to the establishment's stated interest in national stability. One problem from his perspective was that the deal challenged his authority, having been signed by his cousin Ḥasan ash-Shahāl and Ṣufwān az-Zāʿabī as representatives of Lebanon's Salafīs with Ibrāhīm as-Sayyid from Hizbullah.⁸³¹ The motives behind that were debateable—while the two men representing the Salafīs had downplayed Lebanese media suggestions of pressure from charities in Kuwait, their assertions of independence from Kuwaiti and other Lebanese interests suggested at least a general rejection of Shaykh ash-Shahāl's authority.⁸³² And the memorandum's objectives of cooperation and reconciliation with Hizbullah were hard to square with ash-Shahāl's stated interest in confronting threats to the Sunnī community.⁸³³ He was not going to help stabilise Tripoli or Lebanon by annulling the deal. But blocking it would at least let the shaykh assert his continuing appearance of authority over Lebanon's Salafīs, and of his own priorities as a guide for the wider movement.⁸³⁴

⁸³⁰ Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain*, 137.

⁸³¹ Muhammad Harfouche and Khaldun Kawas, "Wathīqa Taʿāwun bayna as-Salafiyīn wa Ḥizb Allāh li Manaʿ al-Fitna," *al-Naba* (19/08/2008 2008). <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/arabic-international-news/32757/19-08-2008-%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A9/>.

⁸³² George Wehbe, "at-Tayyār as-Salafī...Ṣaʿūd min Tarābulus Laylat al-Qabaḍ ʿalā Bayrūt," *al-Rai* (28/08/2008 2008). <https://www.alraimedia.com/article/59852/%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B5%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A8%D8%B6-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AA->

⁸³³ Maṣṣūr al-Jamrī, "Tafāhūm bayna as-Salaf wash-Shīʿa," *al-Wasat* (19/08/2008 2008): 2. <http://www.alwasatnews.com/pdf/2008/2174/all.pdf>.

⁸³⁴ Al Jazeera AJ, "Wathīqa bayna Ḥizb Allāh wa ʿAdad min at-Tayyārāt as-Salafiyya," *Al Jazeera* (24/08/2008 2008). <https://www.aljazeera.net/programs/behindthenews/2008/8/24/%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA->

Blocking the Salafī-Hizbullah memorandum would put ash-Shahāl in contention with a Sunnī establishment that wanted to limit Tripoli's violence and the associated national tensions. The difference between ash-Shahāl, his cousin, and az-Zā'abī's framing of the agreement mirrored the broader gap between the shaykh's public interests and those of the Hariris. Like the Future Movement, his cousin Ḥasan had framed May's events as a symptom of wider tension that needed to be addressed, and claimed to have the establishment's support.⁸³⁵ But ash-Shahāl framed it as an attempt to justify Hizbullah's behaviour and undermine the Sunnī community.⁸³⁶ How he acted outside the confines of the Salafī movement was another question. Within the Salafī circles that the Future Movement generally left alone, though, the shaykh had acted according to the priorities that had helped polarise him from the establishment, in contention with its political interests.⁸³⁷

But while ash-Shahāl's behaviour in the national context was contentious, his cautious political framing also avoided drawing repression from above. A willingness to intervene in political matters had distinguished him from other Salafīs like az-Zā'abī. And he did not claim to be a partner of the Sunnī establishment. If anything, ash-Shahāl presented himself as an outsider whose movement was misunderstood by Lebanon's political class and state,⁸³⁸ and he rejected political partisanship on religious grounds. But his actions did not mean that he was looking to expose himself to the risks and dangers of Lebanon's national politics by challenging the system or its structure. Blocking the Salafī-Hizbullah memorandum was an assertion of authority within Salafī circles but not a sign of broader opposition to the Sunnī establishment or Lebanon's confessional system. And notwithstanding any perceived misalignment of interests, ash-Shahāl said that the Salafī movement was still closest to the

⁸³⁵ Susan al-Atbah, "Ḥasan ash-Shahāl: Wāfiq "Tayyār al-Mustaqbal" fa Waqa'nā al-Wathīqa.. wa 'Indamā Tarāja'ū Jammadnāhā," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (21/08/2008 2008).

<https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=483708&issueno=10859>.

⁸³⁶ al-ʿāl, "Salafiyya Lubnān.. Şirā' Iqlīmī fī Qalb Ḥadat Ṭā'ifi."

⁸³⁷ Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain*, 94-95.

⁸³⁸ Memowas, "7 / 5 Sā'at Ḥiwār. As-Sunna fī Lubnān bayna al-Khilāfāt wat-Taḥālufāt."

Hariris and March 14,⁸³⁹ and lauded the establishment's political successes like its victory in 2009's municipal elections.⁸⁴⁰

That deference spoke to the nature of ash-Shahāl's contention with the centres of Sunnī power—it was a contained sort that was misaligned with Sunnī leaders' interests without challenging their authority. He would characterise any semblance of partisan loyalty as an exercise in political realism, with a concession that the establishment remained necessary so long as Sunnīs remained vulnerable to external threats in the unchanged structures of Lebanon's politics. Similarly, he still objected to the confessional system while accepting it as the foundation for Lebanon's political order, while warning that the Taif Agreement's arrangements were critical to preventing unnamed factions from asserting control over the wider country.⁸⁴¹ And it would only be in the narrow confines of the Salafī movement where he enjoyed authority that his actions—like the intervention in the Salafī-Hizbullah memorandum—signalled his polarisation from the Sunnī establishment. He had taken advantage of existing opportunities within the narrow confines of the Salafī movement, asserting his personal authority and sectarian interests at the expense of others' more accommodating orientation. But he still understood that as far as actors like him were concerned, the Lebanese context was as dangerously repressive as it had been before the Crisis of May 2008, the 2005 Syrian withdrawal, and even the settlement of Lebanon's Civil War. And he would not survive in it except by working within the constraints of a Lebanese system and in the dangerous shadow of the Sunnī establishment.⁸⁴²

A Confrontational Social Figure

The Future Movement's hands-off management of Tripoli's instability would also create the resources and political space that ash-Shahāl needed to position himself as a populist representative of Sunnī society, in opposition to the confessional elite. As had been the case

⁸³⁹ Memowas, "7 / 2 Sā'at Ḥiwār. As-Sunna fī Lubnān bayna al-Khilāfāt wat-Taḥālufāt."

⁸⁴⁰ Sada Akkar, "Nuwāb 'Akkār Astaqbalū al-Muhani'īn fī Kharaybat al-Jundī," *Sada Akkar* (11/06/2009 2009). <http://www.sadaakkar.com/%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%B9%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%87%D9%86%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%AE%D8%B1>.

⁸⁴¹ Shayya et al., *Islamic Movements in Lebanon*, 89.

⁸⁴² Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 248-50.

before the May 2008 Crisis, he would owe his shifting position in society largely to decisions that other people made, and the Sunnī establishment's failures to preserve stability in Tripoli were essential to his new role. But outbreaks of violence had political impacts that were specific to the places where violence happened, and the shaykh's rise was partly a product of Tripoli's own distinct circumstances. For one, the clashes would not just be between militias that took their orders from Lebanon's national parties, and as a significant mass of people from the city's Sunnī community mobilised on their own it would create opportunities outside the Future Movement's immediate control for the Salafīs.⁸⁴³ And that itself reflected a failure of the Sunnī establishment's political leadership. The Hariris had not really abandoned the city and the work by intermediaries like Ḥammūd were signs of continued engagement. But the mass mobilisation indicated a widespread public perception of political abandonment by a Sunnī establishment that did not care about Tripoli's affairs. That in itself made violence likely,⁸⁴⁴ and as the creeping political isolation saw Tripoli's Sunnīs take responsibility for their own affairs,⁸⁴⁵ an opportunity would appear for ash-Shahāl. The city's Sunnī public was mobilising at an unusual scale, and there appeared to be space—real or otherwise—for someone besides the Hariris to position themselves as its representative.

For the shaykh, the resource mobilisation opportunities amidst Tripoli's unrest were obvious. Neither he nor the wider Salafī movement were about to follow Sa'īd Sha'bān's example from the eighties and assemble a new Islamic emirate from a disparate mess of armed groups. But the wider public was becoming a source of material and political opportunities for Tripoli's Salafī movements. There were practical reasons for the public to engage with the city's Salafīs: the movement offered a structure in which fighters could mobilise, intangible resources of validation and motivation, and some tangible ones like material support.⁸⁴⁶ And those seemed to matter more to Tripoli's Sunnī community than

⁸⁴³ Erica Simmons, "Grievances Do Matter in Mobilization," *Theory and Society* 43, no. 5 (2014): 539-41.

⁸⁴⁴ Kurzman, "Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social-Movement Theory," 164-65; Alimi Eitan, "Mobilizing Under the Gun: Theorizing Political Opportunity Structure in a Highly Repressive Setting," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (2009): 224-25.

⁸⁴⁵ Mahmoud Dhaouadi, "Ibn Khaldun: The Founding Father of Eastern Sociology," *International Sociology* 5, no. 3 (1990): 325-26.

⁸⁴⁶ Mayer Zald, "Theological Crucibles: Social Movements in and of Religion," *Review of Religious Research* 23, no. 4 (1982): 324.

the Salafī movement's religious message—when fighters neglected even basic habits like prayer, the movement appeared to have been caught up in an opportune public response to an external threat, rather than mobilising a religiously-agreeable base of its own.⁸⁴⁷ Amidst the public sense of anger, vulnerability, and abandonment that May 2008's Crisis caused in Tripoli, Salafīs leaders like ash-Shahāl articulated a necessary sense of public identity and their organisations offered a structure in which to pool and distribute resources.⁸⁴⁸ While they were not the original source of Tripoli's wider public mobilisation, they were well-placed to appropriate the resources that it offered them. All the shaykhs needed to do was frame the underlying issues in their distinct terms and adopt the public's actions as their own.⁸⁴⁹

Tripoli's Salafīs like ash-Shahāl had recognised those opportunities and acted accordingly. It was not hard for them to do so. With a sectarian orientation they could easily position themselves as incidental leaders in a community where intercommunal tensions were high. While Hizbullah's takeover of Beirut was a relatively simple issue in Lebanon's national context, in Tripoli it came after years of deprivation and the historical memory of incidents like the massacres that destroyed HTI in the eighties, which recent concerns about Hizbullah's role in Lebanon after the July-August 2006 war had worsened.⁸⁵⁰ And Salafīs' marginal position in Sunnī politics would be opportune. Situated just above the wider community, figures like ash-Shahāl could convincingly present themselves as representatives of the public by echoing widespread complaints of abandonment by the establishment. But the shaykh would also be an ideal beneficiary of the Future Movement's efforts to keep tensions at the right level by distributing resources. That would make the details of his and others' role ambiguous—although the Future Movement would face allegations of supporting the Salafīs and it was not entirely clear how the shaykh secured his own weapons on their watch, the general public below was also “awash” with guns, making it easy for

⁸⁴⁷ Robert Worth, "Up North, Hothouse of Tension in Lebanon," *New York Times* (15/10/2008 2008). <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/16/world/middleeast/16tripoli.html>.

⁸⁴⁸ Pablo Lapegna, "Social Movements and Patronage Politics: Processes of Demobilization and Dual Pressure," *Sociological Forum* 28, no. 4 (2013): 857-58.

⁸⁴⁹ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, "Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics," 275-76.

⁸⁵⁰ Abi Samra, *Ṭarābulus Sāhat Allāh wa Mīna' al-Ḥadātha*, 285-86.

fighters to equip themselves.⁸⁵¹ A mix of political isolation and physical insecurity had driven the Trabelsi Sunnī community to action, and the shaykhs had played only a limited role in causing it. But the opportunities for actors like ash-Shahāl were still obvious. All that he and people with his stature needed to do was provide a sense of purpose. By doing so, they would be able to position themselves as representatives of a mobilising community in Lebanon's wider national context, even if their actual leadership was limited.⁸⁵²

And thanks to his incidental position in the Salafī movement, that would turn Tripoli's unrest into ash-Shahāl's political moment. He was not Tripoli's only prominent Salafī figure and the minor protests that he led after May's events were not unique. Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī had notably led some as well. But ash-Shahāl's intervention in the Salafī-Hizbullah reconciliation had hinted at his image as the movement's national activist figurehead after 2005's Syrian withdrawal, notwithstanding the more limited realities of his influence. Just as importantly, his supporters saw him as a leader—at least until the Future Movement facilitated September's Sunnī-ʿAlawī reconciliation,⁸⁵³ banners would hang in areas like Bab al-Tabbaneh that spoke to his political prominence.⁸⁵⁴ And the shaykh was entirely aware of that position, too, having suggested that there was space for minor interests in Lebanon's politics. Without suggesting that the Future Movement had disappeared, he claimed that May's events had obliged Salafīs to side with the Sunnī community. Even if he was not the new leader of the Sunnī public, he was interested in representing and speaking for it.⁸⁵⁵

Ash-Shahāl would not rise beyond that basic representative role. Neither the community's mobilisation nor Tripoli's Salafī networks offered a clear path to leadership outside his movement's core membership. It was partly the shaykh's personal problem: he had limited resources and was dependent on circumstances, making it difficult to enforce cooperation

⁸⁵¹ al-Abtah and Alak, "'Bāb at-Tabbāna" wa Ḥadath Zuʿamāt as-Sunna.. wa ʿAlawiyūn Yalqūn bil-Masʿūliyya ʿalā "Ghurabā"; Nicholas Blanford, "Lebanon Warily Watches its Salafis," *Christian Science Monitor* (24/09/2008 2008). <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2008/0924/p06s03-wome.html>.

⁸⁵² Alan Johnson, Colin Barker, and Michael Lavalette, eds., *Leadership and Social Movements* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 65-66.

⁸⁵³ Lebanon Files and al-Akhbar, "Intishār Lāfitāt fī Ṭarābulus Muwaqqaʿa bi-Isim "Anṣār at-Tayyār as-Salafī" Taʿlanu Daʿahumā wa Taʿyīduha li-ash-Shaykh Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl," *Lebanon Files* (15/07/2008 2008). <https://www.lebanonfiles.com/news/73216/>; Rougier, *Sunni Tragedy in the Middle East*, 206.

⁸⁵⁴ Files and al-Akhbar, "Intishār Lāfitāt fī Ṭarābulus Muwaqqaʿa bi-Isim "Anṣār at-Tayyār as-Salafī" Taʿlanu Daʿahumā wa Taʿyīduha li-ash-Shaykh Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl."

⁸⁵⁵ AA, "al-Ḥuḍūr as-Salafī fī Madīnat Ṭarābulus."

with his directions.⁸⁵⁶ And in the wider Trabelsi community, he could not rely on his religious influence when more tangible social concerns had driven Sunnīs towards the city's Salafī movements. In his circumstances, the role of a religious figure would be to speak for the community, without leading it in a new political direction.⁸⁵⁷ He was still keenly aware that political control sat with the centres of Sunnī elite power, and he avoided suggestions that he had become more politically engaged and downplaying the possibility of political mobilisation.⁸⁵⁸ Even if the shaykh was not willing to step back from the public spotlight, he had signalled that his role was to only represent Tripoli's Sunnī community by articulating its concerns and a sense of collective identity.⁸⁵⁹

But ash-Shahāl's expressions of identity and framing were still politically contentious and positioned him against the Sunnī establishment, notwithstanding any enduring structural limits in which he had to work. He still framed actors like Hizbullah and the ADP as immediate threats,⁸⁶⁰ but he held the Sunnī political class responsible for the community's exposure to them. In his polarised telling, the establishment had contributed to the unrest through its negligence,⁸⁶¹ and left the community isolated from a Lebanese state that would not fulfil its responsibility to provide security and welfare.⁸⁶² Because of that perceived neglect, he saw Lebanon's Sunnīs as a community defined by vulnerability to foreign intervention more than shared civic identity, particularly when they lived in the shadow of a Syrian regime that saw Lebanon's Sunnīs and especially Salafīs as obstructions to the renewed co-optation of Lebanon's state.⁸⁶³ And in his view the Trabelsi parts of that Sunnī community stood out—to ash-Shahāl, Tripoli was the Lebanese “Sunnī centre” that

⁸⁵⁶ Zald, "Theological Crucibles," 327-28.

⁸⁵⁷ Allen James Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 30, 117.

⁸⁵⁸ Yusuf Diab, "'al-Quwwāt al-Lubnāniyya" Tattahim 'Awn bi Taḥrīd Hizb Allāh 'alā Ḍarb al-Manāṭiq al-Masīḥiyya," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (09/10/2010 2010).

[https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=11638&article=590153&feature=.](https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=11638&article=590153&feature=)

⁸⁵⁹ Morris and Staggenbord, "Leadership in Social Movements," 172, 74-75; Johnson, Barker, and Lavalette, *Leadership and Social Movements*, 65-66.

⁸⁶⁰ Memowas, "7 / 7 Sā'at Ḥiwār. As-Sunna fī Lubnān bayna al-Khilāfāt wat-Taḥālufāt."

⁸⁶¹ Wehbe, "at-Tayyār as-Salafī...Ṣa'ūd min Tarābulus Laylat al-Qabaḍ 'alā Bayrūt."

⁸⁶² Fadi al-Ghough, "Akkada an Tārīkh at-Tayyār Nāṣi' wa Ayādiḥ Bayḍā'.. Mu'assis as-Salafīyya al-Lubnāniyya li-“Ukāz”: al-Maṣālaḥa Rahn an-Nawāya..wa at-Tawatur Sayastamirru bi-Wujūd Farīq Qawī wa Ākhar Ḍa'if," *Okaz* (22/09/2008 2008). <https://www.okaz.com.sa/article/217023>.

⁸⁶³ Susan al-Abtah, "Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl Yaqrā' Nāqūs al-Khaṭar: Ayyuhā al-Lubnāniyūn Attaḥidū.. Antum fī Khaṭar," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (10/11/2008 2008).

<https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=10940&article=494337>.

Damascus targeted.⁸⁶⁴ None of that positioned him as a new competitor for leadership in the structures of Sunnī power, and his place in Lebanon's national context had not changed. But as someone caught between an outraged Trabelsi Sunnī community and a Future Movement that was suffering from declining credibility, he was well-placed to become a contentious representative of the Sunnī public.⁸⁶⁵ And as a figure with limited political influence in a social context that the Hariris had increasingly ignored, he appeared to recognise that the establishment would not repress him even if his narratives of political identity and framing no longer aligned with its interests.⁸⁶⁶

Stabilisation, Stagnation, Deterioration

Without further shocks to the centres of power that shaped his structural context from above, there was not going to be another dramatic change in ash-Shahāl's political role like the one that had followed May 2008's Crisis. His polarisation and alienation from the Future Movement lasted into 2009, as did his limited role in politics. He would have further disagreements with the establishment over issues that were sensitive in Lebanon's Sunnī community, like the government's release of four officers who had been detained over their role in the 2005 Hariri assassination. The controversy was informative: it drew allegations from the Shahāls of March 14's complicity in Sunnī oppression, and from other Salafī shaykhs like Zakaria al-Maṣrī of a double standard in the treatment of Sunnī detainees associated with organisations like *Fataḥ al-Islām*.⁸⁶⁷ But later political tests like 2009's June elections would be a reminder that those disagreements meant little, and even as the likes of Ḥasan ash-Shahāl and Ṣufwān az-Za'abī were working to promote more public political engagement

⁸⁶⁴ Lebanon Files, "ash-Shahāl li "Ukāz": al-Muṣālaḥa Rahaq an-Nawāya wat-Tawatur Satastamirr bi Wujūd Farīq Qawī wa Ākhar Ḍa'if," *Lebanon Files* (15/09/2008 2008). <https://www.lebanonfiles.com/news/81882/>.

⁸⁶⁵ Omayma Abdellatif, "Alliance in Question," *Al-Ahram Weekly* (16/06/2008 2008). Text available at <https://carnegie-mec.org/2008/06/16/alliance-in-question-pub-20226>.

⁸⁶⁶ Eitan, "Mobilizing Under the Gun: Theorizing Political Opportunity Structure in a Highly Repressive Setting," 232; Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun*, 13.

⁸⁶⁷ Awab al-Masri, "Muṭālab bi Iṭlāq Mu'taqilīn Islāmiyīn bi Lubnān Aswa biḍ-Ḍubbāt al-Arba'a," *Al Jazeera* (10/05/2009 2009).

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2009/5/10/%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A8%D8%A5%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86>.

from the Sunnī public and issued legal rulings supporting it,⁸⁶⁸ Salafīs' own role in politics continued to be limited. The most that ash-Shahāl himself could do was speak to Sunnī society's shared identity as a community united by shared risks and grievances, while framing the establishment as complicit after abandoning Salafīs despite their sacrifices for the community,⁸⁶⁹ and excluding the movement from March 14's political electoral lists. In his personal capacity as a dissatisfied scholar, he was someone who lacked real political independence and whose role outside the establishment's patronage—or his narrow intellectual circles—was to vocally represent a society that usually did not listen to him.⁸⁷⁰

From that marginal position as a representative of Sunnī society moving into 2009, ash-Shahāl's role in national politics would remain dependent on the overall structure of domestic constraints and opportunities that the Sunnī establishment controlled. The shaykh never gained the power—even within the Salafī movement—that he would need to confront the establishment, and while Tripoli's other Salafīs did not challenge his nominal leadership, they privately conceded that the movement was divided and its shaykhs could only ever muster a limited constituency.⁸⁷¹ That made it unsurprising that when Saad Hariri's tenure as Prime Minister began in 2009 after Fouad Siniora's term ended, the shift happened notwithstanding any concerns that the shaykh raised about the establishment's fulfilment of its obligations to Sunnī society.⁸⁷² And it also meant that when the shaykh did enjoy relevance, it would depend on how the Sunnī elite perceived him in relation to their priorities, rather than personal merit or some kind of political impact factor. If he did not serve the interests that the establishment believed itself to have, then the establishment could ignore him as a figure who was not worthy of any serious attention, as the Future Movement had when it facilitated new networks in response to changing priorities after May 2008. And if establishment figures' personal insecurities made the shaykh seem threatening,

⁸⁶⁸ Radwan Murtada, "as-Salafiyūn Muttahimūn: Ḥalāmiyūn wa Lakin [1/2]," *al-Akhbar* (27/11/2012 2012). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/79323>.

⁸⁶⁹ Susan al-Atbah, "Intikhābāt al-Mafzū'īn," *Elaph.com* (04/06/2009 2009). <https://elaph.com/amp/Web/NewsPapers/2009/6/447533.html>.

⁸⁷⁰ Susan al-Atbah, "Islāmiyū Ṭarābulus Ghādibūn..wa Yatawa'idūn Talqīn "Tayyār al-Mustaqbal" Darsan," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (06/06/2009 2009). <https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=522183&issueno=11148>.

⁸⁷¹ al-Atbah, "Islāmiyū Ṭarābulus Ghādibūn..wa Yatawa'idūn Talqīn "Tayyār al-Mustaqbal" Darsan."

⁸⁷² Agencies, "al-Ilān Rasmiya 'an Ḥukūma Jadīda bi Ra'asat Sa'ad al-Ḥarīrī," *France24* (09/11/2009 2009). <https://www.france24.com/ar/20091109-hariri-saad-president-michel-sleymane-gouvernement-lebanon>.

then as centres of power in a national setting they could actively repress him—something that Kuwait’s government did by blocking his travel on political stability grounds in March 2009,⁸⁷³ as the country worked through domestic tensions that had triggered the dissolution of its parliament.⁸⁷⁴ Regardless of what he said or did, the basic fact was that the Sunnī establishment had distanced itself from him, and still controlled the range of opportunities that he could seize and the constraints in which he could do so.

And for its part, the establishment continued to shape those opportunities and constraints according to interests that polarised it from actors like the shaykh. Developments in 2010 would be a reminder that it had to prioritise wider insecurities in Lebanon’s national and regional context, not its relationship to ash-Shahāl. Having already triggered the shocks of 2005’s Cedar Revolution and 2008’s May Crisis, those transnational forces could cause further shifts at home. By December 2010, the Future Movement had seemingly stabilised Lebanon’s national political order, securing its position from external threats like March 8 and Hizbullah and ending any earlier reliance on marginal partners like the Salafī movement for confessional dominance.⁸⁷⁵ But it had done so by placating actors in Lebanon’s transnational context. By September, Saad Hariri had visited Damascus for the fifth time as Prime Minister, and as the Assad regime welcomed his discussions about Hizbullah’s armed status and Lebanon’s stability,⁸⁷⁶ he distanced himself from the investigation into the assassination of his father that Damascus had allegedly caused.⁸⁷⁷ And as Iran’s President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, visited Lebanon in October and affirmed his solidarity with

⁸⁷³ Turki al-Maghamas, "‘Ashrāt ad-Du‘ā al-Islāmiyyīn Mamnū‘ūn min Dukkūl al-Kuwait! Bi Šūra ‘Ashwā’iyya," *Elaph.com* (12/03/2009 2009). <https://elaph.com/Web/ElaphGulf/2009/3/418471.html>.

⁸⁷⁴ Al Jazeera AJ and Agencies, "Kuwaiti Emir Dissolves Parliament," *Al Jazeera* (19/03/2009 2009). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2009/3/19/kuwaiti-emir-dissolves-parliament-2>.

⁸⁷⁵ Ghasan Saud, "al-Ḥarīrī Šāmid... Mādha fil-Mustaqbal?," *al-Akhbar* (28/12/2010 2010). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/100497>.

⁸⁷⁶ Agence France-Presse AFP, "al-Asad wal-Ḥarīrī Yastakmān bi" Nahaj at-Tahdī'a" wa "Da'am al-Muqāwama" Lahfaz Lubnān," *France24* (30/08/2010 2010). <https://www.france24.com/ar/20100830-syria-lebanon-hariri-bashar-al-assad-damascus>.

⁸⁷⁷ al-Anba, "al-Ḥarīrī: Artakabnā Akhtā' ma'a Sūriya wa Attahāmnā lahā bi Igthiyāl Wālidī Intahā," *al-Anba* (07/09/2010 2010). <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/arabic-international-news/lebanon-news/135498/07-09-2010-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%83%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%84%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%89/>.

Hizbullah and its stated mission of resistance,⁸⁷⁸ Future Movement elites pressed their confessional subordinates to avoid antagonising the Iranian government.⁸⁷⁹

But none of the establishment's compromises would really stabilise Lebanon. If anything, its attempts to manage those interests and maintain control over actors like ash-Shahāl ensured ongoing national instability. The wider March 14 bloc was concerned by concessions to Damascus and increasing activity by March 8, which some of the Hariris' partners accused of fomenting violence against the Christian community. And in the Sunnī confessional order, marginal figures like ash-Shahāl were growing similarly agitated. The prospects of Syrian re-engagement concerned the shaykh, who warned that Salafīs would respond to any aggression by Damascus in the North,⁸⁸⁰ and took the developments as a sign for him to return to public life following his withdrawal after the 2009 elections. But as had been the case before, his political engagement would depend on opportunities in Sunnī society—he re-joined *al-Liqā al-Mustaqil al-Islāmī*, for example, after its principal political representative Khaled Dhaher revived it.⁸⁸¹ Those opportunities were unlikely to shift again without another significant political shock. Such a shock was looming, of course—the Future Movement had preserved the structure of Lebanese politics without ever confronting internal or external structural challenges, and there would be a point where Saad Hariri ran out of opportunities for compromise. And that left Lebanon in a fragile place by 2010. Under the Hariris' leadership, Lebanon's national system and the Sunnī confessional order were slowly moving towards another collapse that would alter the structures of politics and ash-Shahāl's place relative to their centres of power. If his trajectory since 2005 was any indication, his role in Lebanon's national politics would once again change as that happened.⁸⁸²

⁸⁷⁸ Al Jazeera AJ and Agencies, "Najād Yabda'u Awwal Ziyāra Rasmiyya li Lubnān," *Al Jazeera* (13/10/2010). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2010/10/13/%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%8A%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A3-%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86>.

⁸⁷⁹ ad-Diyyar, "ad-Diyār," *Lebanese Forces News* (13/10/2010 2010). <https://www.lebanese-forces.com/2010/10/13/106828/>.

⁸⁸⁰ Diab, "'al-Quwwāt al-Lubnāniyya" Tattahim 'Awn bi Taḥrīd Ḥizb Allāh 'alā Ḍarb al-Manāṭiq al-Masḥiyya."

⁸⁸¹ ad-Diyyar, "ad-Diyār."

⁸⁸² Goldstone, "Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory," 173.

The Implications & Questions from 2005 to 2010

2005's Syrian withdrawal and 2008's May Crisis were significant shocks for Lebanon and ash-Shahāl alike, even if they did not undo the Lebanese system's fundamental structure. The national political landscape and the Sunnī confessional order would still be subject to key centres of power like the Hariris' Sunnī establishment and the March 14 coalition that it led, in contention with Hizbullah's comparable position at the head of Lebanon's Shī'a community and the March 8 coalition. And as the establishment manoeuvred to retain and consolidate its control over the structures of Sunnī confessional power while trying to preserve that national position, it would shape the role of marginal Sunnī actors like ash-Shahāl by altering the opportunities that he could seize and the constraints in which he could do so. That had never bought it and the shaykh's interests into alignment, at least in the political sense—his sectarian outlook and polarisation from the Future Movement after May's Crisis suggested that he lacked the sort of civil consciousness which would make him more concerned about maintaining national stability,⁸⁸³ as had his overtures to Fataḥ al-Islām before it. Instead, there was the same question that the comparable Najdī Salafī tradition's history in Saudi Arabia had raised: to what extent would the shaykh's distinct roots or those imposing structures of power shape his role in Lebanon's national politics?

Ash-Shahāl's course from 2005 to 2010 had offered a general answer to that question: the role of Salafīs like him would reflect that structural context and his place relative to the Hariris' power in it. There were reasons for that. The inability to mobilise the Salafī movement as a personal resource made him dependent on existing opportunities, and his initiative would not count for much. But with an unusual family background and networks, there were still enough incidental opportunities for him to have an image of elite leadership after 2005. And as the Sunnī public turned into a resource that he could opportunistically mobilise after the May 2008 Crisis, that would allow the shaykh to position himself as a national figure in apparent opposition to the Hariris' Sunnī establishment. Even if ash-Shahāl—like ar-Rāfi'ī—had religious roots in an exceptional Najdī Salafī tradition that

⁸⁸³ Anīs Ṣāyigh, *Lubnān aṭ-Ṭā'ifī* (Beirut: Dār as-Ṣirā' al-Fakrī, 1955), 5-6; Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi'ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 12-13.

identified people and framed things in stark terms, it appeared that his limitations and circumstances made his politics a generic structural phenomenon.

While that dependence on context meant that the contentious political dynamics between the shaykh and Sunnī leaders explained his shifting national role, there was still a question of if and why that dependence was inevitable. From 2005 to 2010, ash-Shahāl's transformation from being an accessory to an adversary of the Sunnī establishment overlapped with the establishment's shifting patterns of demobilising intervention in Sunnī society. But the 2007 crackdown that stopped ash-Shahāl from courting *Fataḥ al-Islām* was an active kind of intervention, while its limited engagement in Tripoli that facilitated the shaykh's representation of the Sunnī public after the May 2008 Crisis was more passive. And both incidents showed the establishment securing interests besides its relationships with figures like ash-Shahāl. One resulting question was of specifically how and why the establishment shaped those marginal players' role, which would stay unanswered until the Miqati government's March 2013 resignation. Another was about how much agency the shaykhs like ash-Shahāl had—some reports suggested that Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī, for example, was involved in the establishment's networks that Ḥammūd facilitated after May 2008,⁸⁸⁴ while ar-Rāfi'ī publicly rejected them.⁸⁸⁵ That second question reflected a recurring problem with many Salafī cases: their marginality invited a structural explanation of their role in politics but it also made it difficult to see how they would behave if they had the space to operate more independently. For better or for worse, the Hariri government's 2011 collapse was about to make that second question much easier to answer.

⁸⁸⁴ Sour, "Wizārat ad-Dākhiliya Turakhkhaṣ li Sharika Amniyya bi Amrat al-Mas'ūl al-ʿAskarī li Tayyār al-Mustaqbal!."

⁸⁸⁵ al-Akhbar, "Tawḍīḥ," *al-Akhbar* (16/10/2008 2008). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/154307>; Fida Itani, "al-Qāʿida fī Shamāl Lubnān: Lasna Kama Taʿtaqidūn! [1/2]," *al-Akhbar* (13/10/2008 2008). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/153988>.

Chapter 5:

The Limits of Political Advocacy & Religious Activism from 2011 to 2012

Introduction

Events in 2011 and 2012 offered half of an explanation for the shifts in ash-Shahāl's national role: Salafīs like him and ar-Rāfi'ī had weak political agency through their political advocacy and religious activism, and lacked impact on their place and role in the national context. That distinction began to stand out in 2011 as the two shaykhs gained more freedom to operate as representatives of the Sunnī community. Following the national shock of the March 14 government's January 2011 collapse, the Future Movement's withdrawal from public leadership left space for alternate representation of the Sunnī public with limited visible intervention from above. And at the same time, the Syrian Uprising's sectarian tensions diffused into Lebanon and turned the public into a self-mobilising resource for marginal actors like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī. Taken as a whole, the situation was turning into a test of their agency in national politics, and the question was simple: with the opportunities and space to shape their own course, what could the shaykhs do?

Even in those enabling circumstances the shaykhs were still marginal. Ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī's political rhetoric and identity were an exercise in contentious politics that responded to a regional context beyond Lebanon, and they were significant political players in narrower religious settings. Yet they could not decide if or where they affected significant change, be it in service of Najdī Salafism's basic ideas or anything else.⁸⁸⁶ As political advocates for Sunnī society they were nominally contentious figures with their demands for attention and action on certain issues,⁸⁸⁷ but their impact depended on whether more capable actors appropriated them as partners. And while ar-Rāfi'ī's religious activism put him in contention with other religious scholars, it was in a narrow religious space where politics was a discursive contest of ideas between interested experts.⁸⁸⁸ Those limitations made it unsurprising that amidst Tripoli's worsening violence in 2012, they were marginal players whose role depended on other dynamics like the public's own mobilisation, and sat closer to the peripheries of Sunnī politics than the centres of power that actually sustained the

⁸⁸⁶ Kriesi, "The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements," 173.

⁸⁸⁷ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, 45-46.

⁸⁸⁸ Fischer, *Reframing Public Policy*, 45.

fighting.⁸⁸⁹ But it also left questions of whose agency shaped their role, drawing attention to intervention by Sunnī leaders in 2013 and 2014.

Isolation & Politicisation in 2011

2011's events gave the shaykhs more independence from the Sunnī establishment, more relevance to the public, and more space to exercise whatever little agency they had. As in 2008, the central political shock had come from Hizbullah. The Party had found a way to topple the March 14 government, triggering aftershocks that would weaken the Sunnī establishment's position. That would have a direct consequence in Sunnī confessional politics, where Saad Hariri's withdrawal from public leadership created space for alternative representatives to step forth with only a limited risk of intervention from above. But it would also worsen the impacts of the Syrian Uprising and the associated sectarian tensions, which polarised the isolated Sunnī community from Sunnī elites and gave actors like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī new relevance as representatives of the public. While Lebanon's political order was intact, the Salafis had more independence and security in the national landscape. And as events developed further, the real question would not be whether the shaykhs had significant agency from 2011 to 2012, but rather the extent to which they could use it to define their own place and role.

The Damage of the January 2011 Collapse

Hizbullah's January 2011 withdrawal from the cabinet drove the March 14 government from power and altered the Future Movement's priorities in Sunnī society. That resulting January collapse was a distinctly Lebanese problem, having originated in disagreements over the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) investigation of Rafiq Hariri's assassination. Saad Hariri had tried to avoid the issue by deflecting March 8 calls for a cabinet meeting about the STL, and understandably so. He feared for the investigation itself, the function of the Lebanese government, his prime ministership, and stability in Lebanon.⁸⁹⁰ But those deflections had

⁸⁸⁹ Mehretu, Pigozzi, and Sommers, "Concepts in social and spatial marginality," 90-91.

⁸⁹⁰ Al Jazeera AJ and Agencies, "Istiqlāl Wuzarā' al-Mu'āraḍa bi Ḥukūmat Lubnān," *Al Jazeera* (12/01/2011 2011).

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2011/1/12/%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1->

not made it any less serious an issue for March 8 and Hizbullah who had been clear about what their concerns about the STL were.⁸⁹¹ And more importantly, their actions had signalled that they saw the STL as a time-sensitive issue. Recent months had seen attacks on investigators in Hizbullah-controlled suburbs in South Beirut,⁸⁹² and the looming collapse would come a week before a sealed indictment that might have implicated Party personnel in the 2005 killing—to say nothing of indictments which did that exact thing,⁸⁹³ later in 2011.⁸⁹⁴

While Saad Hariri wanted to dismiss Hizbullah and March 8's concerns as his counterparts' trivial personal problem, they were well-placed to make them into a major political one for his government. Just as the Hariris did in Sunnī politics, those actors enjoyed a hegemonic influence in the narrower Lebanese Shī'ī confessional sphere that they could use instrumentally. On January 12, they withdrew 10 ministers and were joined by Adnan Hussein—a normally independent Shī'ī politician who was close to President Michel Suleiman, but had received personal outreach from Hizbullah's Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah and hints of a ministry.⁸⁹⁵ To some extent, that made the collapse a long-term issue. Hizbullah had used the “blocking third” that the Doha Agreement entrenched after the May 2008 Crisis, which itself followed pressure on March 14 that had been worsening since

%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-
%D8%A8%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86.

⁸⁹¹ Al Jazeera AJ and Agencies, "Naṣr Allāh Yad'ū li Ḥiwār bi Sha'na al-Maḥkama," *Al Jazeera* (26/07/2010 2010). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2010/7/26/%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88-%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%A3%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A9>.

⁸⁹² Agence France-Presse AFP, "al-Maḥkama ad-Dawliya Tadīn al-l'tidā' 'alā Muhaqqiqihā wa Tuṣīr 'alā Ittimām Muhimmatuhā," *France24* (28/10/2010 2010). <https://www.france24.com/ar/20101028-lebanon-hezbollah-dispute-investigators-women-clinic-la-haye-tribunal-special>.

⁸⁹³ Matt Glenn, "UN Lebanon Tribunal Hands Down Sealed Indictment in Hariri Assassination Case," *Jurist* (18/01/2011 2011). <https://www.jurist.org/news/2011/01/un-lebanon-tribunal-hands-down-sealed-indictment-in-hariri-assassination-case/#>.

⁸⁹⁴ Agence France-Presse AFP, "al-Maḥkama ad-Dawliya Taslim as-Sulaṭāt al-Lubnāniyya al-Qarār al-Ittihāmī fī Qaḍiyat Ightiyāl al-Ḥarīrī," *France24* (30/06/2011 2011). <https://www.france24.com/ar/20110630-hezbollah-lebanon-hariri-indictment-rafiq-special-tribunal-un>.

⁸⁹⁵ Naharnet, "'Ḥizb Allāh" Takhallaf 'an Wa'ad Sābiq as-Sayyid Ḥasan bi Tawzīrihi fīl-Ḥukūma al-Jadīda," *Naharnet* (12/06/2011 2011). <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/ar/8133>.

2005. But it was also an immediate shock from Hizbullah, who needed to head off a worsening political threat from the STL and decided that destroying the March 14 government was a way to do that.⁸⁹⁶

The March 14 government's resulting collapse had the potential to change not just the partisan distribution of power in Lebanon but also the authoritarian structure of it, thanks to the STL's place in various domestic and transnational disputes. For one, the STL had been central to a wider discussion about foreign intervention in Lebanon before even formally starting in 2009. Leaving aside domestic allegations about Hizbullah's role in the death of Lebanon's former Prime Minister, the investigation had raised broader questions about the legitimacy of intervention by certain foreign governments, particularly the Syrian government that supported Hizbullah and Western ones that backed the STL. That was less a principled conversation than a partisan one, if its resonance in wider Sunnī society was any indication. To Salafīs like Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl who echoed the March 14 view, Damascus and its partners wanted to avoid investigative attention that exposed their involvement in Rafiq Hariri's killing.⁸⁹⁷ Conversely, the Sunnī Islamic activists that Damascus had co-opted after the crackdowns in the eighties like Hāshim Minqāra aligned with Hizbullah and March 8's view:⁸⁹⁸ the STL violated Lebanese sovereignty as an imposition on Lebanon by Western powers like the United States, United Kingdom, and France, and it lacked acceptance from the Lebanese public and Syria.⁸⁹⁹ While those marginal actors had no power over the issue, they were mirrors of the partisan lines along which disputes over the STL fell. More importantly, their concerns suggested that any fallout over the STL could become a disaster that entangled Lebanon's society, national order, and international circumstances.

⁸⁹⁶ Al Jazeera AJ and Agencies, "Views on Lebanon Political Crisis," *Al Jazeera* (13/01/2011 2011). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2011/1/13/views-on-lebanon-political-crisis>.

⁸⁹⁷ al-Bayyina, "ash-Shahāl Yaḥdhur min Mukhaṭaṭ Sūrī Didd Sunnat Lubnān," *Lebanese Center for Research and Consulting* (11/11/2008 2008). <http://www.center-lcrc.com/news/52>.

⁸⁹⁸ al-Ahed News, "ash-Shaykh Hāshim Minqāra: al-Muḥākīm ad-Dawliya Adwāt li Tamrīr al-Fitan ad-Dākhiliya min Ajl al-Muzīd min at-Taqsīm," *al-Ahed News* (17/09/2010 2010). <https://archive.alahednews.com.lb/details.php?id=36485>.

⁸⁹⁹ Marieke Wierda, Habib Nassar, and Lynn Maalouf, "Early Reflections on Local Perceptions, Legitimacy and Legacy of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon," *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 5, no. 5 (2007): 1074-75.

Those domestic issues behind and around January's collapse did not mean it lacked any international dimension. For Hizbullah and March 8 it was something that could at least be framed with reference to international concerns even if the decision still sat with them. Their ministers withdrew from cabinet one day after a Saudi-Syrian initiative failed to resolve the STL's tensions,⁹⁰⁰ and on the day of Hariri's trip to Washington which would have been followed by a Paris visit.⁹⁰¹ The timing spoke to a general point about the Syrian regime and its Lebanese partners' interests: they cared less about the Saudi efforts than Washington's influence. And there were good reasons for that. Saudi officials had indicated that their priorities lay in making Damascus a partner of Arab states instead of Iran, and Riyadh was more likely to accommodate March 8's position.⁹⁰² In contrast, American officials spoke of the STL's role in stopping "political assassinations with impunity in Lebanon."⁹⁰³

But those foreign interests only had so much influence and could not save the Hariri government. Pressure from outside Lebanon would not coerce or convince March 8 towards a different course in 2011, and lukewarm Western rhetorical support for March 14 was part of the problem. The weak reassurances fell short of the sort of threatened intervention that could force March 8 into reconsidering, and American backing for Lebanon's security institutions would struggle to balance Hizbullah when assistance was tailored to preserve the Israeli military's relative power.⁹⁰⁴ The failure of Saudi Syrian talks still marked the loss of opportunity for March 8 and Hizbullah, but March 14's foreign partners had not made any promises or threats that could change the course of events. In those circumstances, the Free Patriotic Movement's Gebran Bassil could talk dismissively about US pressure: the Saudi and

⁹⁰⁰ Agencies, "Fashl al-Mubādara as-Sa'ūdiyya as-Sūriya fīt-Tawaṣṣul li Ḥall al-Azma al-Lubnāniyya," *Al-Ahram* (12/01/2011 2011). <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/News//31103.aspx>.

⁹⁰¹ Wafa Awad and Agencies, "al-Mu'ārada Tusqit Ḥukūmat al-Ḥarīrī bisabab "Ẓannī" al-Maḥkama," *al-Bayan* (13/01/2011 2011). <https://www.albayan.ae/one-world/arabs/2011-01-13-1.995646>.

⁹⁰² Zuhayr Fahd al-Ḥārithī, "Turā min Afshal Mubādara (s_s) li Azmat Lubnān?," *al-Riyadh* (25/01/2011 2011). <https://www.alriyadh.com/597913>.

⁹⁰³ Jesse Lee, "The President Meets with Prime Minister Hariri on Stability and Justice in Lebanon," *Obama White House Archive* (12/01/2011 2011). <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/01/12/president-meets-prime-minister-hariri-stability-and-justice-lebanon>.

⁹⁰⁴ Clayton L. Thyne, "Supporter of Stability or Agent of Agitation? The Effect of US Foreign Policy on Coups in Latin America, 1960—99," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 4 (2010/07/01 2010): 455-57; Casey Addis, "U.S. Security Assistance to Lebanon," *Congressional Research Service Reports* (19/01/2011 2011): 7, 11. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/R40485.pdf>.

Syrian governments had helped “Lebanon move past the crisis that resulted from the work of the international court,” while Saad Hariri had submitted to “foreign pressures, particularly the American sort.”⁹⁰⁵

That limited foreign influence left the Sunnī establishment in a position where it would not be able to challenge its rivals, especially given the possibility of a national confrontation. Despite March 14’s role in Lebanon’s civil state, the Hariris’ national position was weaker than their confessional one. One problem was that despite years of manipulating social and religious networks to secure their confessional power, they had made minimal efforts to do so within the Lebanese state where key roles—especially security ones—were distributed according to confessional convention.⁹⁰⁶ And the Hariris also had not resolved Hizbullah’s armed role outside the state, while nobody else had come in to do it for them. Even as marginal figures like ash-Shahāl had condemned the threat that Hizbullah’s weapons posed to national stability and the Sunnī community,⁹⁰⁷ attempts to place them under state authority had failed, and foreign interests like the European Union had largely ignored the issue.⁹⁰⁸

The imbalance between Hizbullah’s willingness to prepare and the Hariris’ failure to do so would have made any national confrontation serious, too. There was an unmistakeable power imbalance between Lebanon’s seemingly equal national blocs, putting the March 14 government at risk. Hizbullah had established itself as the dominant actor despite being out of government, with political leadership in its own confessional block, an armed apparatus that could coerce its national rivals, and no alternative centres of power that might have balanced it.⁹⁰⁹ Ignoring the ethics and legality of the issue, Hizbullah had prepared for a fight

⁹⁰⁵ Agencies, "Istiḳālāt Wuzarā' al-Mu'āraḍa al-Jamā'iya Taḍa'u Lubnān Amāma al-Majhūl...Mujaddidan," 14/02/2022, *al-Riyadh* (13/01/2011 2011). <https://www.alriyadh.com/594236>.

⁹⁰⁶ Ali Rabah, "Ajhizat Ṭawā'if al-Amniyya.. Numudhaj Tawqīf aṭ-Ṭirās," *al-Modon* (10/06/2016 2016). <https://www.almodon.com/politics/2016/10/6/أجهزة-الطوائف-الأمنية-نموذج-توقيف-الطراس>.

⁹⁰⁷ Jaf Everson, "Samāḥat ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl Mutawa'idā Ḥizb ash-Shayṭān 2010," *YouTube* (21/04/2012 2012). <https://youtu.be/Tz6JXoIJdU>.

⁹⁰⁸ Talal Atrissi and Wissam Saada, "Wajhatuhā Naẓr: Silāḥ Ḥizb Allāh, Silāḥ Milīshiyā am Muqāwama?," *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies* (24/03/2014 2014). <https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/issues/2014/03/201432410657830631.html>.

⁹⁰⁹ Lachapelle et al., "Social Revolution and Authoritarian Durability," 558.

thing by building the foundations of a coup-proof state, and if the Hariris wanted to shape the fallout of the January collapse then they should have done the same thing.⁹¹⁰ But in an international context where the Sunnī establishment lacked credible foreign support, that left the March 14 government one remaining asset—the political fiction that its political legitimacy mattered. But without foreign support or an armed capacity that could confront challengers, that fiction would fail once Hizbullah decided to operate according to the political realities of material power.⁹¹¹

While Lebanon would avoid a national confrontation, Saad Hariri lacked the foreign support or domestic resources necessary to stop Hizbullah from destroying his remaining sources of political influence and forcing the Sunnī establishment out of national power. Unlike in 2005 or 2008, the Lebanese public would not help. The resignations of January 12 reflected an elite political disagreement that played out via the state's legitimate mechanisms, and lacked a repressive or threatening quality that could provoke the same public mobilisation as past crises.⁹¹² And in the following days, Hariri faced further domestic pressure as the pro-Hizbullah *Al-Jadeed* channel broadcast recordings that supported allegations of March 14 interference in the STL,⁹¹³ strengthening the national political case against him. His last traces of international support disappeared, too, as Turkish and Qatari officials stopped their last-minute efforts to stabilise Lebanon as it worked through its political problems,⁹¹⁴ and *Al-Jadeed* offered further revelations that Hariri had spoken ill of a senior Saudi prince, Muhammad bin Nayef, which alienated Riyadh.⁹¹⁵ Hariri still thought it was worth declaring

⁹¹⁰ James Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," *International Security* 24, no. 2 (1999).

⁹¹¹ Arthur Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 160.

⁹¹² Vincent Bourdieu, "State Repression and Democracy Protest in Three Southeast Asian Countries," in *Social Movements: Identity, Culture, and the State*, ed. David Meyer, Nancy Whittier, and Belinda Robnett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 29.

⁹¹³ Al Jadeed, "Ḥaqīqa Līks - Liqā' al-Ḥarīrī, al-Ḥasan, Līman, waṣ-Ṣadīq," *YouTube* (16/01/2011 2011). <https://youtu.be/FcfphNZrWy0>.

⁹¹⁴ Agencies, "Tawaqquf al-Mas'ā al-Qaṭarī - at-Turkī fī Azmat Lubnān," *Emarat al-Youm* (21/01/2011 2011). <https://www.emaratayoum.com/politics/news/2011-01-21-1.344969>.

⁹¹⁵ al-Quds al-Arabi, "Waṣaf al-Ḥarīrī Muḥammad bin Nāyif bi "as-Safāḥ" Athār Ghaḍab as-Sa'ūdiyya," *al-Quds al-Arabi* (20/01/2011 2011). <https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%A8%D9%80-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D8%A3%D8%AB%D8%A7/>.

his candidacy for the Prime Ministership again,⁹¹⁶ but none of that was going to be enough to save his national office. A crucial parliamentary ally, Walid Jumblatt, was no longer interested in supporting Hariri's leadership, and turned to March 8's preferred candidate of Najib Miqati. And while the ensuing protests from Future Movement supporters showed that the Sunnī establishment still had a base, there was no leverage left in the necessary areas that could save the March 14 government.⁹¹⁷

The March 14 government's collapse would not let Hizbullah reshape Lebanon's national political order, but March 8 had dislodged the Sunnī establishment from power in it. Hizbullah lacked the incentive or means to upend the Lebanese system, and Miqati's designation was a major national shift rather than a political restructuring. And the Party's campaign against the STL would stall because its allegations of foreign interference were partly valid. Despite needing Lebanese cooperation, funding and procedural arrangements made the court a partly-international enterprise that was likely to survive whether Hizbullah liked it or not.⁹¹⁸ Instead, Miqati's designation showed that while figures like Jumblatt were wary of Hizbullah and shared a pro-independence outlook, they feared disorder more and had protected the system from a national confrontation.⁹¹⁹

There would be further repercussions in the Sunnī confessional order. For the Sunnī community, things were serious. The establishment's political failure as March 14 would destroy its "symbolic value" among Lebanon's Sunnīs and create space for alternate sources of political representation in Sunnī politics. Moreover, it had lost the levers of state power

⁹¹⁶ Al Jazeera AJ and Agencies, "al-Ḥarīrī Yu'akkid Tarashuḥuhu li Ri'āsat al-Ḥukūma," 14/02/2021, *Al Jazeera* (20/01/2011 2011).

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2011/1/20/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%A4%D9%83%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B4%D8%AD%D9%87-%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A6%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9>.

⁹¹⁷ Reuters, "Anṣār al-Ḥarīrī Yataẓāharūn Ƨidd Istib'āduhu 'an Ru'āsat al-Ḥukūma al-Lubnāniyya," *Reuters* (25/01/2011 2011). <https://www.reuters.com/article/oegtp-leb-gov-prtstrs-mn4-idARACAE70008X20110125>.

⁹¹⁸ Chatham House, "The Special Tribunal for Lebanon and the Quest for Truth, Justice and Stability," 15/05/2022, *Meeting Reports* (December 2010): 8-10. https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Middle%20East/1210_stl.pdf.

⁹¹⁹ Anthony Shadid, "Ousted Lebanese Leader Swallows Rivals' Bitter Pill," *New York Times* (25/01/2011 2011). <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/26/world/middleeast/26lebanon.html>.

that had helped manage confessional competitors and problems.⁹²⁰ Saad Hariri would still have limited status as caretaker Prime Minister until Miqati officially confirmed his cabinet, and in coming months Hariri would defend his premiership as a state building effort and offer reaffirmations of commitment to his father's project. But his indirect references to Saudi patronage raised questions of how much of his attention would actually be committed to the Lebanese context where shaykhs like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī operated, while his questionable assertions of a strong national position made the extent of his remaining influence unclear.⁹²¹ Hizbullah had ejected the Sunnī establishment from power in a national shock, but the issue was still not totally resolved and Saad Hariri's vague remarks suggested that there would be further developments before it finally came to a resolution.

The Limits & Consequences of 2011's Collapse

Even if circumstances preserved the Future Movement's confessional dominance, the looming government posed Saad Hariri with a dilemma that he could not manage without leaving a representation gap in Sunnī politics. At first it may have seemed like the problems were going to fix themselves, as Najib Miqati started cabinet negotiations towards the end of January and other confessional leaders' survival instincts stopped Hizbullah from restructuring political power in Lebanon. But Miqati's opening proposal to President Suleiman sent a clear signal: Hariri was politically out despite his caretaker premiership, and shifts were coming that favoured March 8 and Hizbullah at the Sunnī establishment's expense. There were valid concerns about the implications for wider Lebanon—Miqati's Prime Ministership had Hizbullah support, and his proposed cabinet would increase March 8's influence over the Lebanese state.⁹²² But Miqati was not the secret figurehead for a

⁹²⁰ Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*, 109.

⁹²¹ Beirut Observer, "al-Ḥarīrī min Ṭarābulus: Man A'taqada an bi Istiṭā'atihi Tamhīshna fa Huwa Wāhim," *Beirut Observer* (15/03/2011 2011). <https://www.beirutobserver.com/2011/03/hariri-998/>.

⁹²² Agence France-Presse AFP, "Mīqātī Yaṭla' ar-Ra'īs al-Lubnānī 'alā Tarkībat Ḥukūma (Muṭa'ama bi Tiknūqrāt)," *al-Rai* (30/01/2011 2011).

<https://alrai.com/article/442024/%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%86%D9%88%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B7>

Hizbullah takeover. For one, he was a billionaire from Tripoli with his own wealth rather than the Party's patronage, and was a compromise pick that helped March 14's former partners like Jumblatt manage national tensions and prevent unrestricted competition.⁹²³ And Hizbullah's preferred candidate, Omar Karami, had discounted himself from the job on the stated grounds of being old and unwell.⁹²⁴ Yet none of that would comfort the Hariris. Lebanon's national elites had chosen stability over chaos and Hizbullah could not build a new order beneath itself, but the Sunnī community's nominal leaders still had to grapple with the national problem of losing office and the unknown implications for their confessional power.

The situation was still not catastrophic, and the Hariris' confessional control would stay intact. That did not change the fact that the process leading to a new government was bad for the establishment from every angle—Hizbullah had weakened Hariri's standing by positioning Miqati as an alternate centre of Sunnī power, distanced March 14 from domestic allies like Walid Jumblatt, and undermined the Future Movement's ties to foreign patrons like the Saudi government.⁹²⁵ But none of that was enough to turn the Hariris into insignificant and marginal players in Sunnī politics. Even if Hizbullah had gained total control over the state, the combination of flawed institutions, inability to impose security, and dysfunctional bureaucracy made Lebanon's government an unsuitable vehicle by which to assert total control over national competitors or Lebanese Sunnī society.⁹²⁶ And it would generally help that the Hariris were not as exposed to repression as marginal actors like the

⁹²³ EchoroukOnline, "Junblāt Yatakhallā 'an al-Ḥarīrī wa Yuṣṭaf ma'a Ḥizb Allāh," *EchoroukOnline* (21/01/2011 2011).

[ash-Sharq al-Awsat \(28/01/2011 2011\).
<https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=45&issueno=11749&article=605745>.](https://www.echoroukonline.com/%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%88-%D9%8A%D8%B5%D8%B7%D9%81-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84;Tha'ir Abbas,)

⁹²⁴ Beirut Observer, "Karāmī: Ana Amāmakum Fahal Tarūnanī Murīḍan wa Mā Ḥaṣala fī Ṭarābulus Ḥafla Junūn Khasir fihā al-Mustaqbal," *Beirut Observer* (25/01/2011 2011).
<https://www.beirutobserver.com/2011/01/mikati-89/>.

⁹²⁵ Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 59-60.

⁹²⁶ Robert Rotberg, "Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators," in *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, ed. Robert Rotberg (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 6-7.

Salafī movement, while their supporters' protests in Tripoli showed that their confessional influence would not die with their loss of national office.⁹²⁷

But several problems had emerged, one of which was that Najib Miqati's forthcoming premiership would damage the Future Movement's credibility with the Sunnī public. Losing the prime ministership had undermined its confessional legitimacy as Lebanese Sunnīs' default representatives. Being Prime Minister was not an entirely new concept for Miqati and he had held the job before, serving as an interim officeholder while the rest of Lebanon's political class competed for power in 2005's elections. But the office had generally gone to the Future Movement as the dominant force in Sunnī politics,⁹²⁸ and Saad Hariri had relied on March 14's political fortunes to build confessional credibility as the Sunnī community's leader.⁹²⁹ That had obviously never pleased everyone—Fathī Yakan's story, for example, was a warning that Sunnī notables could still be persuaded or coerced into aligning with March 8 and the Syrian regime. And Hariri's national policymaking power would always have been limited, no matter what he did. But his refusal to have any part in the new government showed that he understood why losing the premiership was an inherent problem: he had lost influence over the state, and the title that proved his ability to represent the Sunnī public and its interests.⁹³⁰

A second problem for the establishment was that losing national office threatened the patronage networks that had helped Saad Hariri lock down his confessional power in the face of threats from below. Public speculation was growing about the loyalty and role of

⁹²⁷ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 176-78; al-Bawaba, "Muẓāharāt fī Lubnān Ẹidd Istib'ād Ra'īs al-Ḥukūma," *al-Bawaba* (25/01/2011 2011).

<https://www.albawaba.com/ar/%D9%85%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B6%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9>.

⁹²⁸ Muhammad Alloush, "Ḥukūma Mu'āraḁa fī Lubnān.. Mādha Ba'ad?," *Al Jazeera* (27/01/2011 2011). <https://www.aljazeera.net/opinions/2011/1/27/%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF>.

⁹²⁹ Meier and Di Peri, "The Sunni Community in Lebanon," 41-42.

⁹³⁰ Agence France-Presse AFP and Deutsche Presse-Agentur DPA, "al-Ḥarīrī Yarfaḁ al-Mushārika fī Ḥukūma Yatara'asuha Murashshah Ḥizb Allāh," *al-Wasat* (24/01/2011 2011). <http://www.alwasatnews.com/news/523211.html>.

marginal Sunnī actors, ranging from political figures with March 14 roots like Mustafa Alloush, Salafis with March 14 leanings like ash-Shahāl, and influential Sunnī figures like Yakan or HTI's Bilāl Sha'bān who had long inclined towards March 8.⁹³¹ And while losing state power would make it more difficult for the establishment to manipulate minor players' opportunities and constraints, it was only one part of the problem. The other mechanism—a web of patronage networks—was also coming under strain.⁹³² Those networks were already unaffordable, and the family could only sell so many assets like its Oger Telecom business to pay for them.⁹³³ But there was also a serious question of how to pay for them after losing office, when international donors like the Saudi government had expected the Hariris to deliver political influence in Lebanon in return for the support.⁹³⁴

Thirdly, those overlapping international and domestic challenges would pose a dilemma that was difficult for the Hariris' Sunnī establishment to solve. In Lebanon itself, losing national power had weakened the political legitimacy that normalised the Sunnī establishment's confessional dominance,⁹³⁵ and without state tools of facilitation and repression there were questions of what mechanisms were left that could exclude or integrate potential challengers.⁹³⁶ Outside Lebanon, the partners who could support alternative mechanisms

⁹³¹ Muhammad Barakat, "Ṭarābulus "“Āṣimat as-Sunna” Tataṣaddar Ma‘arakat Ri’āsat al-Ḥukūma wal-Qarār al-Ittihāmī Qad Yūqiz “al-Ḥarb an-Nā’ima” fī Madīna “al-Jurḥ at-Tārīkhī”,” *al-Rai* (23/01/2011 2011).

<https://www.alraimedia.com/article/230825/%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%B1%D8%A6%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%82%D8%AF-%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%82%D8%B8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE%D9%8A->

⁹³² David Meyer and Debra C. Minkoff, "Conceptualizing Political Opportunity," *Social Forces* 82, no. 4 (2004): 1464.

⁹³³ Hassan 'Aliq, "al-Ḥarīrī bi Bay' “Awjīh Tīlīkūm” .. ad-Dajāja Allatī Tabīḍ Dhahban,” *Khiyam* (07/10/2010 2011). <http://www.khiyam.com/news/article.php?articleID=12410>.

⁹³⁴ Michael Young, "Is the Son Setting?," *Diwan* (26/11/2021 2021). <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/85865>.

⁹³⁵ McCorriston, "Pastoralism and Pilgrimage," 617.

⁹³⁶ Kriesi, "The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements," 173-74.

could not be taken for granted. As anyone who has had to choose between their political dynasty and their business empire would know, the resulting situation was not disastrous, but it was sensitive. Even if the Sunnī establishment did not face a binary choice, it had to think carefully about how to budget its time and energy between its pursuing its ideal interests in Lebanese Sunnī society, and securing the foreign partnerships that were crucial to funding the system that it controlled.⁹³⁷

And fourth, there was a question of if or when at least two potential competitors for Sunnī confessional power—the ISF’s Major-General Ashraf Rifi and Lebanon’s Prime Minister-designate Najib Miqati—were going to become a problem for the establishment. Both men were from Tripoli, like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī. Miqati was a Trabelsi native, whose relations with the city’s local interests had been helped by his support of Islamic and other social institutions, and a positive independent reputation among the national interests that intersected the city.⁹³⁸ And Rifi was another Trabelsi with history as an informal political figurehead for March 14 despite his supposed neutrality, to the point of even appearing on posters alongside Rafiq and Saad Hariri.⁹³⁹ Nationally, his cooperation with the Sunnī establishment before 2011 was an established grievance for the March 8 bloc that had just seized power,⁹⁴⁰ even if his official role and pretence of neutrality survived the 2011 collapse.⁹⁴¹ And in Sunnī politics Future Movement officials recognised his talent for sympathetically handling Tripoli’s local matters as personal ones, and that it gave him a strong local reputation that distinguished him from the Hariris’ “general standpoint.”⁹⁴² As a

⁹³⁷ Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 20.

⁹³⁸ Abbas, "Miqātī.. Wasatī am Rajul Hizb Allāh?."

⁹³⁹ Muhammad al-‘Alī, "Mufāraqāt ‘Allūsh wa Rīfī al-Lubnāniyya," *Al Jazeera* (15/01/2011 2011). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2011/1/15/مفارقات-علوش-وريفي-اللبنانية>.

⁹⁴⁰ See the preceding chapter’s remarks about the ISF’s alignment with the Future Movement after 2005, and Rifi’s involvement in extra-legal activities like those of the Hariris.

⁹⁴¹ Karam Karam, "The Fragile Balance in Lebanon: Domestic Tension and Foreign Pressure," *IEMed: Mediterranean Yearbook* (2012): 185-86.

⁹⁴² The New Arab, "Sijāl al-Ḥarīrī wa Rīfī: Inqasāmāt wa La Markaziya fī Tayyār “al-Mustaqbal”," *The New Arab* (12/02/2016 2016). <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%D8%B3%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84%22>.

result, the establishment had a problem: if Rifi used his reputation to mobilise a political base or Miqati started offering or withholding resources to potential partners,⁹⁴³ then either of them could undermine a Future Movement that had been increasingly disengaged from Tripoli since 2009.⁹⁴⁴ For some actors that would not be such a bad thing—elite division by nature could create new opportunities for marginal players like the Salafis. But after the January collapse it meant that for the Hariris, the worst-case scenario was a situation that forced them to make a difficult choice between confronting domestic challengers to their power or maintaining the relationships that were necessary to actually do that.⁹⁴⁵

Fortunately, circumstances spared Saad Hariri from that last problem, allowing him to retain leadership by default and take a leave of absence from Lebanon. Neither Rifi nor Miqati would emerge as new centres of confessional power or challengers to the Sunnī establishment in 2011. The former had never been fully integrated and subordinate to the Hariris in Sunnī politics whilst in his official role,⁹⁴⁶ and if anything, his avoidance of overt partisanship had given March 8 and Hizbullah more space.⁹⁴⁷ And the latter had taken Saad Hariri's old office anyway. In a more measured reading of things, the situation was simple and manageable: there were limits to what the Hariris could lose, while those two men had positions that limited how much they could take from the Sunnī establishment. So long as Rifi was stuck in his ISF directorship and Miqati needed to maintain a compromising image as Prime Minister, neither were likely to become polarised from the establishment and divide Sunnī power.⁹⁴⁸ Between that lack of a clear confessional threat, the obvious attacks on his national position, and a lack of clarity about how far March 8 would go to get rid of him, Saad Hariri would therefore be content to mostly remain overseas for the rest of 2011.⁹⁴⁹

⁹⁴³ John Scott, "Modes of Power and the Re-Conceptualization of Elites," *The Sociological Review* 56, no. 1_suppl (2008/05/01 2008): 32-33.

⁹⁴⁴ Barakat, "Ṭarābulus "“Āṣimat as-Sunna” Tataṣaddar Ma‘arakat Ri’āsat al-Ḥukūma wal-Qarār al-Ittihāmī Qad Yūqiz “al-Ḥarb an-Nā’ima” fī Madīna “al-Jurḥ at-Tārīkhī”."

⁹⁴⁵ Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 59-60.

⁹⁴⁶ Tamer Mallat, "Killing Mr. Lebanon II: Wissam al-Hassan," *ArabsThink.com* (21/10/2012 2012). <https://arabsthink.com/2012/10/21/killing-mr-lebanon-ii-wissam-al-hassan/>.

⁹⁴⁷ Casey Addis, "U.S. Security Assistance to Lebanon," *Congressional Research Service Reports* (20/05/2009 2009): 11. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA501030.pdf>.

⁹⁴⁸ Juan Rodríguez-Teruel, "Polarisation and Electoral Realignment: The Case of the Right-Wing Parties in Spain," *South European Society and Politics* 25, no. 3-4 (2020/10/01 2020): 405.

⁹⁴⁹ Omri Nir, "The Sunni-Shi'i Balance in Lebanon in Light of the War in Syria and Regional Changes," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (Online)* 18, no. 1 (2014): 61.

And that would be a prolonged absence—the earnest speculation about his return would only pick up in late 2012.⁹⁵⁰ Even if it was hard to argue that he had earned a break, Saad Hariri could at least be sure that the Sunnī political landscape was going to remain intact and nobody would usurp his position while he was away.

Between the limited impacts of the January collapse and Saad Hariri's absence, the authoritarian overall structure of Sunnī power would survive but there would be a representation gap for actors like the Salafī movement to fill. Hariri was making a political bet that there would not be a mobilisation of Sunnī society that required him and the Future Movement to be in Lebanon as the community's representative. If that did happen then there would be space for marginal actors like the Salafīs, whose place between the Sunnī public and the centres of power allowed them to give voice to public interests and anger in the establishment's stead. Their potential would still have limits—the Sunnī public could not choose alternate leadership without alternatives or democratic institutions, while marginal actors were unlikely to be serious competitors without a source of patronage, especially when Saad Hariri's attention was elsewhere and alternate partners like Miqati and Rifi lacked clear reason to co-opt marginal actors in a confessional competition.⁹⁵¹ But even if that prevented a change of political leadership, there was a risk that the limited shifts following 2011's collapse could have damaging second-order consequences. A lack of alternatives meant that any external shock would lend credibility to actors that remained in Lebanon with a more belligerent sectarian message like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿ.⁹⁵² And if there was another emergency that triggered a wave of mobilisation in wider society like the May 2008 Crisis had,⁹⁵³ then those other actors had space to position themselves as alternative representatives of the Sunnī public.

⁹⁵⁰ Naharnet, "Western Officials Contact Lebanese Leaders, Hariri Says People to Peacefully Oust Miqati," *Naharnet* (22/10/2012 2012). <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/57871>.

⁹⁵¹ Paul Lucardie, "Prophets, Purifiers and Prolocutors: Towards a Theory on the Emergence of New Parties," *Party Politics* 6, no. 2 (2000): 178-79.

⁹⁵² Noam Lupu, "Party Polarization and Mass Partisanship: A Comparative Perspective," *Political Behavior* 37, no. 2 (2015/06/01 2015): 350-51.

⁹⁵³ Kurzman, "Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social-Movement Theory," 154.

The Syrian Uprising & Vertical Polarisation

Circumstances would turn January's collapse and the resulting space for alternate representation in Sunnī politics into a problem, as sectarian currents surrounding 2011's Arab Uprisings and Syria's Crisis diffused into Lebanon. That would not trigger another Lebanese Civil War, but it would polarise the Sunnī community from the Sunnī elite and position actors like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī as new representatives of the public. And it was going to be a distinctly Lebanese issue that evolved within the country's local political and social structures, notwithstanding the Arab Uprisings' regional nature. While governments in Tunisia and Egypt had collapsed and the political order in Saudi Arabia and Gulf States were coming under strain,⁹⁵⁴ the early local protests were mostly against the Lebanese confessional system.⁹⁵⁵ But as the unrest in Syria escalated from limited protests in March to an uprising that threatened the entire Assad regime,⁹⁵⁶ confessional elites faced a growing threat of social instability that threatened the Lebanese system if left unchecked. And as the Future Movement and Hizbullah signalled their investment in the Uprising's outcome and Damascus signalled its own concerns about Lebanese intervention in it,⁹⁵⁷ it became clear that while it was an objectively transnational problem, views on how to manage it were going to depend on where actors sat in their local context.⁹⁵⁸ Even if Lebanon's political system would avoid the dramatic fates of its Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts,⁹⁵⁹ there would still be impacts that mirrored its own local structures of national and confessional

⁹⁵⁴ Madawi Al-Rasheed, "Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution: Saudi Responses to the Arab Spring," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 11, no. 3 (2011): 516-19.

⁹⁵⁵ Mona al-Najjar, "Iḥtijājāt fī Lubnān: 'ash-Sha'ab Yurīd Asqāṭ an-Niẓām aṭ-Ṭā'ifī", *Deutsche Welle* (15/04/2011 2011).

<https://www.dw.com/ar/%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A8-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%81%D9%8A/a-14987098>.

⁹⁵⁶ Dara Conduit, "The Patterns of Syrian Uprising: Comparing Hama in 1980–1982 and Homs in 2011," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017/01/02 2017): 75-76.

⁹⁵⁷ Nicholas Blanford, "Syrian Revolution Spreads, with Largest Protests Yet," *Christian Science Monitor* (15/04/2011 2011). <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2011/0415/Syrian-revolution-spreads-with-largest-protests-yet>.

⁹⁵⁸ Tarrow, McAdam, and Tilly, *The New Transnational Activism*, 74-76.

⁹⁵⁹ David Patel, Valerie Bunce, and Sharon Wolchik, "Diffusion and Demonstration," in *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, ed. Marc Lynch (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 71-72.

politics.⁹⁶⁰ And for the Lebanese public and marginal actors like the Salafī movement by extension, it was a social shock that would entangle them in regional waves of unrest, and alienate them from the political class.⁹⁶¹

No part of the Lebanese political landscape was safe from escalating tensions in Syria, and by the middle of 2011 the centres of Sunnī power found themselves in their own wider landscape of national and international competition. Syria's Crisis was not going to transform the system in which Lebanon's elites operated, but it was still going to become a partisan issue and a point of national competition. To some extent that would reflect Lebanon itself. Rather than declaring neutrality, confessional leaders were positioned in ways that mirrored the country's pro-independence and pro-Syrian currents—the Syrian opposition's international backers aligned with Lebanese partners in March 14 and the Syrian regime's partners aligned themselves with Hizbullah.⁹⁶² But that alignment had not been entirely by choice for Lebanon's political class. Iran's government had entered the war as Damascus's patron, the Saudi government took a leading role in backing the opposition, and Qatari and Turkish leaders seized an opportunity for greater regional influence amidst the Arab Uprisings and initially worked with Riyadh. For a class of Lebanese leaders that depended on and competed for foreign support, staying clear of those regional currents was unrealistic, and entanglement in Syria's Crisis was virtually inevitable.⁹⁶³

The problems would be slightly different for Lebanon's wider Sunnī community, where the more pressing issue would be social rather than political. Sectarian tensions were diffusing into Lebanese society by the middle of 2011, aided by a mix of pressures from abroad. Damascus' appeals to confessional animosity and attempts to implicate the Future

⁹⁶⁰ Tarrow, McAdam, and Tilly, *The New Transnational Activism*, 64.

⁹⁶¹ Marc Lynch, "Introduction," in *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, ed. Marc Lynch (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 3-4.

⁹⁶² Christopher Phillips, "Eyes Bigger than Stomachs: Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar in Syria," *Middle East Policy* 24, no. 1 (2017): 37-39; Curtis Ryan, "Inter-Arab Relations and the Regional System," in *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, ed. Marc Lynch (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 115-18.

⁹⁶³ Tamirace Fakhoury, "Do Power-Sharing Systems Behave Differently amid Regional Uprisings? Lebanon in the Arab Protest Wave," *Middle East Journal* 68, no. 4 (2014): 517.

Movement in Syria's sectarian violence proved toxic,⁹⁶⁴ and some Sunnī regional governments' use of sectarian narratives about Tehran-backed regional Shī'ī plots would not help the situation.⁹⁶⁵ As those narratives of social unease continually deepened Lebanon and especially Tripoli's own longstanding social tensions,⁹⁶⁶ the pressure could only build. And by the time of June's new violence between Sunnīs in Bab al-Tabbaneh and 'Alawīs in Jabel Mohsen,⁹⁶⁷ an environment had emerged in which sectarian Sunnī actors like the Salafī movement had an obvious place.⁹⁶⁸ Tripoli's Salafis like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī would recognise that, repeating claims that the violence was an Assad-Hizbullah plot.⁹⁶⁹ But they were not centrally responsible for it. Rather, a self-reinforcing cycle of tension in Sunnī society was deepening, and the shaykhs had a partial role in normalising it by framing tangible events as part of a wider pattern that included other actors and forces in Lebanon itself.⁹⁷⁰

⁹⁶⁴ Line Khatib, "Syria, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E. and Qatar: the 'Sectarianization' of the Syrian Conflict and Undermining of Democratization in the Region," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 3 (2019/05/27 2019): 392-93; Dunya al-Watan, "Sūriya: 'l'tarāfāt lrrhābī' Tuttahim al-Ḥarīrī bi Tamwīl Hajamāt," *Dunya al-Watan* (24/09/2011 2011). <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2011/09/24/193183.html>.

⁹⁶⁵ Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 214.

⁹⁶⁶ Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 215-16.

⁹⁶⁷ Agencies, "Lubnān: 6 Qutīlā fī Ishtabākāt Ṭarābulus," *Arab48* (18/06/2011 2011).

<https://www.arab48.com/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1--%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A/2011/06/18/%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-6-%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3>.

⁹⁶⁸ al-Anba, "ash-Shahāl: Lubnāniyūn Shārikū fī Qama' al-Muḥtajjīn bi Sūriya wa Ba'aḍuhum 'Ādū Amwātan," *al-Anba* (05/24/2011 2011). <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/arabic-international-news/lebanon-news/198535/24-05-2011-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%82%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%AA%D8%AC%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%B6%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%A7/>.

⁹⁶⁹ Bint Jbeil BJ, "Isrā'īl: Ṣawārikh al-Asad Satasquṭ bi-Yad Ḥizb Allāh," *Bint Jbeil* (27/06/2011 2011). <https://archive.bintjbeil.org/article/44706>.

⁹⁷⁰ Tarrow, McAdam, and Tilly, *The New Transnational Activism*, 61-62, 80.

Those tensions over Syria would remain mostly contained in 2011 and 2012, as the actors who shaped the Lebanese system acknowledged the problems and made some attempts to manage them. After finally assuming the Prime Ministership in June, Najib Miqati managed to stop confessional leaders from turning Syria's crisis into an unrestricted national competition. His confirmation was a positive step for the office and its prerogative. Before then, Hariri's caretaker premiership had enjoyed only limited power and Miqati faced pressure to compromise on nearly everything as Prime Minister-designate. And once in office he would make some progress on Syria, with a state policy of "dissociation" that saw Lebanon abstain from the relevant United Nations votes, and a political agreement of "delimitation" that got March 14 and March 8 to accept limits on their support for the regime or opposition.⁹⁷¹ And most importantly, it eased the anxieties of national figures who were understandably worried about Syria's implications for their communities at a time when the direction of the Crisis was still uncertain—the Maronite Patriarch Bechara Rai, for example, had raised concerns about the implications of a mostly-Sunnī uprising for Lebanon's Christians.⁹⁷²

But Miqati's national efforts were a temporary solution that would not fix any of the worsening problems in national or confessional politics. His solution required him to corral a Lebanese political class that was not going to be complicit in a national solution, particularly not the kind that stopped them from creating opportunities or easing the constraints on their confessional communities. The Future Movement and Hizbullah still publicly indulged Miqati's approach, of course. But there would be little hiding their own national competition or support for partners' efforts by late 2011, as the Hariris faced accusations of March 14

⁹⁷¹ Karam, "The Fragile Balance in Lebanon," 186-87; Paul Salem, "Can Lebanon Survive the Syrian Crisis?," *Diwan* (11/12/2012 2012). <https://carnegie-mec.org/2012/12/11/can-lebanon-survive-syrian-crisis-pub-50298>.

⁹⁷² Ahmad Hasso, "'Mawāqif al-Baṭriyark al-Mārūnī min an-Niẓām as-Sūrī Muḍra bil-Masīhiyīn'," *Deutsche Welle* (02/10/2011 2011). <https://www.dw.com/ar/%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%83-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B6%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86/a-15431327>.

involvement with weapons smuggling into Syria,⁹⁷³ and Syrian defectors were alleging Hizbullah's participation in the war.⁹⁷⁴ And that was to say nothing of the fact that Miqati's arrangements only made things worse in Sunnī society and particularly Tripoli. There, Salafī shaykhs like ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfi'ī, and Zakaria al-Maṣrī framed his compromises as concessions to Hizbullah and the Iranian government's project of a "Persian Empire" that was working to oppress Sunnīs in Syria.⁹⁷⁵ Even if Miqati's national efforts had saved the system for a little while longer, tensions were mounting and it was hard to see how they would ease.

In hindsight, the central problem would be that Miqati's national arrangements reinforced elite-public polarisation in Sunnī confessional politics and a subsequent demand for alternate Sunnī representation. The problem was not that Lebanon's confessional leaders were secretive about their attitudes towards Syria. By August, March 14 leaders generally supported the opposition, and Hizbullah's Secretary-General Nasrallah openly backed the regime and framed its position as a defence of Lebanon's international one. But neither spoke openly about direct involvement,⁹⁷⁶ and their public views about what was to be done were not as distinct as the Hariris needed them to be. Hizbullah's political branch chief, Ibrahim al-Sayyid, articulated March 8's view when speaking from Tripoli in July: Damascus would deliver necessary reforms, help Syrians and Lebanon resist American and Israeli regional plots, and support a revolution in Lebanon and Palestine rather than Syria.⁹⁷⁷ Saad

⁹⁷³ Radwan Murtada, "Tahrīb as-Silāh min al-Mārīnā: Mukhbīr al-Jaysh Mawqūfan," *al-Akhbar* (17/08/2011 2011). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/93196>; Agence France-Presse AFP, "Tahrīb as-Silāh ilā Sūriya Ḍāhira Ghayr Munazzīma Yaqūm bihā Afrād wa Tijār," *Elaph.com* (17/10/2011 2011). <https://elaph.com/Web/news/2011/10/689442.html>.

⁹⁷⁴ Haytham al-Ta'abi, "Jundī Munshaq min al-Ḥars al-Jumhūrī: Bashār Yaṣḍir Awāmir Iṭlāq an-Nār Kitābiyā.. wa Māhir al-Asad La Yunkin Rad'ahu," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (24/07/2011 2011). <https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=632542&issueno=11926>.

⁹⁷⁵ al-Liwa, "Masīrāt Salafīyya fī Shawārī' Tarābulus Hadhdharat Mīqātī min Farḍ Haymanat <Ḥizb Allāh>," *Lebanese Center for Research and Consulting* (10/07/2011 2011). <http://www.center-lcrc.com/index.php?s=25&cat=2&id=4454>.

⁹⁷⁶ Lebanon Files and as-Safir, "'Indumā Yakhūḍ Sa'ad al-Ḥarīrī Ma'ārika al-Khāsirā bil-Jumla," *Lebanon Files* (15/08/2011 2011). <https://www.lebanonfiles.com/news/25619/>; Al Jadeed, "Kalimat as-Sayyid Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh 2011-06-24," *YouTube* (25/06/2011 2011). <https://youtu.be/vUK4pLeZZWs>.

⁹⁷⁷ Moqawama.org, "Iḥtiqāl Ta'bīnī bi Dhikrā ad-Dā'iya Fathī Yakan.. wa al-Kalimā Shaddadat 'alā Da'am al-Muqāwama al-Wuqūf 'Alā Jānib Sūriya," *Moqawama.org* (12/06/2011 2011). <https://www.moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=20950&cid=199>.

Hariri struggled to distinguish the Future Movement's vision from that—he had not clearly signalled solidarity with the Uprising for months, and in July finally denounced the regime's failure to deliver reforms when protests erupted, but publicly refused to interfere in Syria's affairs.⁹⁷⁸ Admitting that the problem existed was a good first step, but refusing to publicly embrace a more drastic solution put him dangerously close to Miqati and March 8.⁹⁷⁹ And it was in stark contrast with Tripoli's Salafi shaykhs like al-Maṣrī who were participating in solidarity marches for Sunnīs in Syria, while ash-Shahāl warned crowds of another Bosnia, Chechnya, or Iraq,⁹⁸⁰ and there was an obvious gap between a public that wanted the shaykhs' brand of overt support and the Hariris' cautious tone. Just beneath it all, there was an implicit but unmistakable warning: the Sunnī public was becoming polarised from the establishment.⁹⁸¹

Saad Hariri's political distance from Lebanon after the January collapse would see that polarisation go unchecked. While the Future Movement could have co-opted or at least contained the growing sectarian tensions in Sunnī society by the end of 2011, Hariri found other things to do. In his defence, it was possible that he and the Future Movement's national leaders had not understood the sentiments diffusing into Lebanon and their impacts.⁹⁸² If considered from a national perspective, the calls for the Miqati government to bring stability—particularly joint ones from sectarian actors like ar-Rāfi'ī and other Salafīs alongside local politicians—could have suggested that local actors would stabilise things on their own even as violence continued.⁹⁸³ But by year's end there was no reason not to know. Even international actors could see deepening sectarian tensions immediately across the border, and with violence continuing to spill over into Lebanon, Syria's crisis was becoming a

⁹⁷⁸ France24 and Agence France-Presse AFP, "al-Ḥarīrī Yataḥaddath 'an "Jarīma 'alā aṣ-Ṣa'īd al-Insānī" fī Sūriya wa Yudāfi' 'an al-Maḥkama ad-Dawliya," *France24* (12/07/2011 2011). <https://www.france24.com/ar/20110712-syria-lebanon-saad-hariri-speaking-about-human-crimes>.

⁹⁷⁹ Emile Hokayem, "Syria and its Neighbours," *Survival* 54, no. 2 (2012/05/01 2012): 11-12.

⁹⁸⁰ Bint Jbeil BJ, "Mīqātī Yanāl Thiqqat al-Masjid...ba'ad Majlis an-Nuwāb," *Bint Jbeil* (09/07/2011 2011). <https://archive.bintjbeil.org/article/45126>.

⁹⁸¹ Della Porta and Tarrow, "Unwanted Children," 612-13; Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 93.

⁹⁸² Etel Solingen, "Of Dominoes and Firewalls: The Domestic, Regional, and Global Politics of International Diffusion," *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2012): 640.

⁹⁸³ al-Wifaq, "Liqa' fī Manzil an-Nā'ib Kabbāra Ḍam Kilā min al-Wazīrayn Samīr al-Jisr wa Aḥmad Fatfat wan-Nā'ibayn Khālīd aḍ-Ḍāhir wa Mu'tin al-Mar'abī was-Sādat al-'Ulamā' Zakariyā al-Maṣrī wa Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī wa Bilāl Bārūdī wa Kan'ān Nājī," *al-Wifak News* (18/10/2011 2011). <https://alwifaknews.com/archives/11324>.

crisis for Lebanon as well.⁹⁸⁴ That made the establishment's apparent withdrawal from domestic leadership a problem. Saad Hariri was still engaged, but his response to Syria centred round foreign relationships that did more for his national leadership than the community's immediate circumstances—he spent ʿīd al-Fiṭr in Riyadh, for example, where he called or spoke with senior Saudi, Qatari, and Turkish officials.⁹⁸⁵ That appearance of inattention would be unhelpful, deepening the polarising impacts on Sunnī society. And as conditions across the border worsened and pitted an overwhelmingly-Sunnī opposition against the state, a sectarian sense of Sunnī identity would take precedent,⁹⁸⁶ superseding any of the notions of civil identity that made the Future Movement's leadership over Lebanon's Sunnī community seem natural.⁹⁸⁷

Even if the Future Movement remained the key centre of power in Sunnī politics, marginal actors like ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfiʿī, and others were becoming better representatives of the Sunnī community's mood and Lebanon's confessional tensions. Ash-Shahāl's association of the Assad regime with Shīʿī "rejectionists who fight against God" were blunt, but also in touch with the worsening sectarian animosity that Syria's crisis had helped inspire.⁹⁸⁸ And while the televised fistfights over Syria by more marginal Future Movement figures like Mustafa Alloush were not battlefield victories in the literal sense, they captured public anger better than the Sunnī establishment's public alignment with Miqatī's neutral policies.⁹⁸⁹ That would not see the Salafī movement or actors like Alloush emerge as new leaders from within society, and experience from the public mobilisation of 2008 suggested that the Salafīs could help lend a structure to public mobilisation without driving it.⁹⁹⁰ But the national shock of

⁹⁸⁴ United Nations Security Council UNSC, *Fifteenth Semi-Annual Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559* (United Nations, 2012), 2-3. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Lebanon%20S%202012%20244.pdf>.

⁹⁸⁵ Naharnet, "al-Ḥarīrī Altaqī al-ʿĀhil as-Saʿūdī Muhna'a bi-ʿīd al-Fiṭr," *Naharnet* (30/08/2011 2011). <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/ar/13909>.

⁹⁸⁶ Dhaouadi, "Ibn Khaldun," 325-26.

⁹⁸⁷ Doug McAdam and Dieter Rucht, "The Cross-National Diffusion of Movement Ideas," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528, no. 1 (1993/07/01 1993): 71.

⁹⁸⁸ Jaf Everson, "ash-Shaykh Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl (fī Kalima Ḥamāsiya wa Mu'athira)," *YouTube* (23/12/2011 2011). <https://youtu.be/ytwNzY2jlfM>.

⁹⁸⁹ Al Jadeed, "Ashkāl bayna Fāyẓ Shukr was Muṣṭafā ʿAllūsh ʿalā al-Hawāʾ," *YouTube* (15/11/2011 2011). <https://youtu.be/7NXTPrqRBnU>.

⁹⁹⁰ Zald, "Theological Crucibles," 324.

the January collapse and the confessional shock of Saad Hariri's apparent withdrawal from domestic leadership had left a gap for alternative representation, and suggested that public intervention from above would be limited. And as the social shock of Syria took root and polarised the Sunnī community from the establishment that ostensibly led it, there was no longer just space but demand for the sense of political identity that actors like Tripoli's Salafī shaykhs offered. The overall structure of their context had not changed, but Syria had created pressure for the shaykhs to assume a role as alternate representatives of Lebanon's Sunnī community,⁹⁹¹ just as the January collapse created space for them to play it with an unprecedented degree of independence.

Salafī Independence & Its Limits

Yet even if Tripoli's Salafī shaykhs like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī had more agency after the January collapse, they would not use it to reshape their place in national politics. Half of their role was political advocacy for the Sunnī community: they articulated a sense of transnational political identity that responded to the regional context and a sectarian vocabulary that mirrored their religious roots. But that advocacy lacked impact unless another actor appropriated it. And the other half of their role—Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī and others' religious activism—had similar limits. That activism was impactful but lacked reach outside of narrow religious settings where politics was a contest of ideas between interested experts. As a result, the shaykhs' immediate context would evolve around them as Tripoli's fighting continued into 2012, and as marginal actors their agency would not shape it. If anything, the ways in which their local context evolved despite the establishment's apparent disengagement begged questions of whether Salafīs' visible orientation towards political authority was only a matter of appearance, and papered over the more subtle ways in which the centres of power shaped their role in politics.

Far-Reaching Advocacy, Limited Impact

Figures like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī stood out as advocates for the Sunnī community amidst worsening tensions over Syria, with a narrative of political identity that responded to the wider regional environment but lacked significant impact without support from other actors.

⁹⁹¹ Rodríguez-Teruel, "Polarisation and Electoral Realignment," 406-07.

It had never been a foregone conclusion that Lebanese actors could not shape the course of regional developments, and there was no question that more capable Lebanese players like the Sunnī establishment could influence events across the border by late 2011. The Future Movement was moving weapons to the Syrian opposition via Turkey with Ankara's cooperation, alongside that of Saudi and Qatari authorities. But the shaykhs would not be partners to those establishment efforts even if the Hariris still valued their domestic relationships—when the Salafis had no indispensable role to play across the Syrian border, there was no reason to create facilitating opportunities for them or impose new constraints. The problem was not the message that the shaykhs projected. There were widespread perceptions that Miqati had enabled Hizbullah and needed to resign,⁹⁹² while the Salafis themselves were close to Future Movement MPs who condemned Syria's regime, the Miqati government's compromising response to the Uprising, and Miqati's apparently weak support of the STL.⁹⁹³ And the Salafis' networks still had potential value. They could help mobilise people or materiel thanks to the Shahāls' history as a Trabelsi institution and the foreign partners like the Qatari Shaykh ʿĪd Charity Foundation that had helped Salafis like ar-Rāfiʿī, Zakaria al-Maṣrī, and others build foundations for social work.⁹⁹⁴ But the shaykhs would not be part of the networks through which Lebanon's major Sunnī players worked in Syria.

The Salafis' exclusion was understandable. The polarisation between elites' and wider society's priorities had become a standout problem, and shaped the Hariris' taste in partners. For its part, the Sunnī establishment preferred mainstream figures like the Lebanese ISF's intelligence chief Wisam al-Hassan and intermediaries like Ḥammūd. Actors like the Salafī movement, on the other hand, had a more radical or sectarian background that could take the Hariris' networks in the wrong direction.⁹⁹⁵ The same Sunnī anxieties about Damascus and Hizbullah that made the Salafis' rhetoric publicly resonant could still

⁹⁹² Yusuf Diab, "Iḥrāq Ṣūr Mīqātī fī Muṣāhara bi Ṭarābulus Tuṭālib bi Isqāṭ an-Niẓām as-Sūrī," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (19/11/2011 2011).

<https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=650471&issueno=12044>.

⁹⁹³ Al-Hayat, "Mihrajāh Ṭarābulus: Tamwīl al-Maḥkama Laysa Minna was-Silāḥ Yusqāṭ ad-Dawla," *Sauress* (28/11/2011 2011). <https://www.sauress.com/alhayat/333612>.

⁹⁹⁴ Pall, *Salafism in Lebanon*, 99-100.

⁹⁹⁵ Rougier, *Sunni Tragedy in the Middle East*, 178-79, 83.

help Saad Hariri retain confessional leadership by default,⁹⁹⁶ but the shaykhs who spoke to those anxieties in a more direct way were not going to be much use in his networks and their transnational activities.

Being stuck outside of the Sunnī establishment's networks would not confine the shaykhs' attention to Lebanon, and by early 2012 it was clear that their narrative responded to the wider transnational context. As Salafīs like Zakaria al-Maṣrī and others led marches in Tripoli, their message was centrally one of politicised collective identity, but the problems that their narrative addressed—and the sources of a potential solution—existed abroad. Besides criticisms of the Lebanese state, they called the Arab League and United Nations to act in Syria,⁹⁹⁷ while denouncing the regime alongside Iraq's Shī'ī Dawa Party, the Iranian government, and Hizbullah,⁹⁹⁸ and framing warnings about *jihādī* militancy as a sectarian pretext for a crackdown on Syria's mostly-Sunnī public.⁹⁹⁹ That was a message with a transnational scope and audience—it mirrored the anxieties of Saudi, Qatari, Egyptian, and other regional government officials about Damascus' crackdown, the interest in supporting

⁹⁹⁶ Wisam Abu Harfush, "Taqrīr / "Abū al-ʿAbd" Ism 'Musammā fī Ṭarābulus al-Mujāmalāt li Mīqātī wal-ʿAwāṭif," *al-Rai* (14/11/2011 2011).

<https://www.alraimedia.com/article/286523/%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%85-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%89-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%81-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A>

⁹⁹⁷ Paula Astih, "Lubnān: Muṣāhirāt fīsh-Shamāl wal-Baqā' Taḍāmanan ma'a ash-Sha'ab as-Sūrī," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (31/12/2011 2011).

<https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=656799&issueno=12086>.

⁹⁹⁸ Yusuf Diab, "Ra'īs Hay'at 'Ulamā' aṣ-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya fī Lubnān: al-Asad Fir'awn al-Ba'ath fī Sūriya," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (22/01/2012 2013).

<https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=12108&article=660017&feature=>

⁹⁹⁹ Safaa Qurrah Muhammad, "aṭ-Ṭarābulusiyūn fī Taḍāhira Wāsi'a Rāfiḍa Asālib li Niḍām al-Asad "al-Yawm", " *al-Yaum* (02/01/2012 2012).

<https://www.alyaum.com/articles/832601/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%85->

the opposition, and perceptions of broad links from Iran to Lebanon. None of that meant that the shaykhs operated on the same level or for the same ends, and their focus on the Sunnī community differed from those other actors' concerns about the international balance of power between Sunnī regional states, Iran, and Syria.¹⁰⁰⁰ At the same time, though, it showed that even if they were marginal figures with a largely representative role in Lebanon's national context, their rhetoric in that capacity extended far beyond their local setting and into places like Syria where they could not directly assert themselves.¹⁰⁰¹

The far-reaching focus of the shaykhs' rhetoric did not mean that they could talk about absolutely anything, and they still had to ground their message in the realities of the Lebanese Sunnī public's circumstances and anxieties. Their message had a long reach, but needed a political vocabulary based on more than just the fundamentals of Najdī Salafism if it was to define social identity and change in compelling terms. The shaykhs' core focus on the Sunnī public distinguished them from regional governments, whose focus was on geopolitical standing and the preservation of domestic stability.¹⁰⁰² Regardless of how much ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī cared about that regional balance, their stated concerns centred more on the prospect that Damascus might export violence to Lebanon, and that the Miqatī government might not protect the country's Sunnīs.¹⁰⁰³ And they framed their message and themselves in derivative terms that aligned the Salafī movement with Sunnī society more than the Najdī tradition's fundamentals, drawing on the symbolism and sectarian sentiments

¹⁰⁰⁰ Benedetta Berti and Yoel Guzansky, "The Syrian Crisis and the Saudi-Iranian Rivalry," *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (08/10/2012 2012). <https://www.fpri.org/article/2012/10/the-syrian-crisis-and-the-saudi-iranian-rivalry/>.

¹⁰⁰¹ Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, "Transnational Advocacy Networks in the Movement Society," in *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century*, ed. David Meyer and Sidney Tarrow (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 217-18.

¹⁰⁰² Mehran Kamrava, "The Arab Spring and the Saudi-Led Counterrevolution," *Orbis* 56, no. 1 (2012): 99-101.

¹⁰⁰³ el-Nashra, "Shaykh Salafī Yuraḥḥib bi Tashkīl "Majlis Ahl as-Sunna al-‘Askarī fī Ṭarābulus", " *al-Jaml* (19/08/2012 2012). <https://aljami.com/%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE%20%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%20%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AD%D8%A8%20%D8%A8%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%84%20%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3%20%D8%A3%D9%87%D9%84%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%20%D9%81%D9%8A%20%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3>; Nader Hajar, "ash-Shahāl li "Lībānūn Fāyl": Qiyādat Jabal Muḥsin Murāhaqa Siyāsiyyan wa Tuḥāwil an Tathbat Anna Hunāka Mushkila bayna al-Jaysh was-Sunna," *Lebanon Files* (15/03/2012 2012). <https://www.lebanonfiles.com/news/378264/>.

of Lebanon's history and Syria's Uprising. Speaking in Beirut on the anniversary of the May 2008 Crisis, for example, ash-Shahāl would address the crowd from beneath a Syrian flag with the older three-starred design favoured by the Syrian opposition. Instead of lecturing his audience on the importance of proper belief and avoiding disbelief, he reminded them of the threat that Lebanon's Sunnīs had faced in 2008—and of how the Salafī movement had stood with them.¹⁰⁰⁴

The connection to local context was essential if the shaykhs wanted to have a role outside the Sunnī establishment's immediate auspices and position themselves as representatives of public mobilisation. In part, it reflected their place as local representatives of the Sunnī community in Lebanon, and the independent decision-making that went into it. Even if their narratives of politicised collective Sunnī identity drew on far-reaching, transnational grievances,¹⁰⁰⁵ they needed to frame the issue and their place in it appropriately to present themselves as natural representatives of the community.¹⁰⁰⁶ And the diagnosis of problems and attempts to motivate action would speak to their role as advocates in that representative capacity, not just figures who had co-opted wider public mobilisation.¹⁰⁰⁷ But that invited a separate question: could the shaykhs convincingly position themselves as representatives of mobilisation further afield in Syria, or only in the narrower confines of the local Lebanese context where they had more tangible roots?

There was no question that the shaykhs wanted their advocacy to shape events. As imams of their mosques, they would have some natural influence in the community and by 2012 had used their Friday sermons to justify dramatic change in Syria. Ar-Rāfi'ī's sermons labelled the Assad government as the "criminal regime" and Hizbullah as its accomplice in crimes against the country's Sunnīs,¹⁰⁰⁸ while ash-Shahāl's denounced the regime generally and demanded

¹⁰⁰⁴ Jaf Everson, "ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl wa Kalima Sulṭān (Ṭarīq al-Jadīda)," *YouTube* (13/05/2012 2012). <https://youtu.be/NN7NEfMdRQs>.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Bert Klandermans, "Politicized Collective Identity: Collective Identity and Political Protest," *Social Identification in Groups* 22 (2005): 165.

¹⁰⁰⁶ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, "Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics," 275-76.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, 45-46.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Serian Uslim, "Khuṭbat ash-Shaykh Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī Ṭarābulus ash-Shām Hizb Allāh Yaqtul as-Sūriyīn Dākhil wa Khārij Sūriya Youtube," *YouTube* (20/11/2011 2011). <https://youtu.be/Hrr81ATkVeU>.

revenge.¹⁰⁰⁹ There was little doubt about what solution Tripoli's Salafī movement proposed, given its own rallies with the refrain of *yalla arḥal ya Bashar*—"resign, Bashar"—in solidarity with the Syrian opposition.¹⁰¹⁰ They wanted the regime to fall.¹⁰¹¹

But the Salafīs were not going to affect change in Syria on their own, and their calls for outside intervention were tacit signs that they recognised their limits. The tension between ash-Shahāl's calls for action and his reassurances that the Salafīs would not send weapons in 2011 was telling—there were either material limitations or political sensitivities that made such a course unrealistic or inadvisable.¹⁰¹² And even as Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī gained a reputation for being enmeshed in Tripoli's growing militia landscape by 2012, the nature and extent of his support for Syrian groups was uncertain.¹⁰¹³ There was less uncertainty in their advocacy that they projected abroad. As ash-Shahāl called for help from the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia, and announced "a campaign...for our brothers in Syria,"¹⁰¹⁴ appealing not just for humanitarian aid but also fighters and weapons alongside other Trabelsi shaykhs like al-Maṣrī.¹⁰¹⁵ What was uncertain, though, was whether that advocacy shaped behaviour in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf, or Syria.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Everson, "ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl (fī Kalima Ḥamāsiya wa Mu'athira)."

¹⁰¹⁰ Jaf Everson, "ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl (Dawrat Shuhadā' Sūriya) li Kurrat al-Qadam," *YouTube* (17/12/2011 2011). <https://youtu.be/BZTCpPhMjtk>.

¹⁰¹¹ Jaf Everson, "ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl (an-Niẓām as-Sūrī Mujrim)," *YouTube* (17/12/2011 2011). <https://youtu.be/iR6OePanosk>.

¹⁰¹² Zena Tabara, "Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl li "al-Anbā": Lasnā bi Wārid Irsāl al-Asliḥa lil-Mu'āraḍa as-Sūriya," *al-Anba* (10/08/2011 2011). <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/arabic-international-news/lebanon-news/218483/10-08-2011-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%84%D9%80-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/>.

¹⁰¹³ al-Manar, "14/5/2012 at-Taqrīr aṣ-Ṣaḥafī li Yawm al-Ithnayn," *al-Manar* (14/05/2012 2012). <https://archive.almanar.com.lb/article.php?id=235029>.

¹⁰¹⁴ Jaf Everson, "ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl (Ḥamlat al-Akhā'—Sūriya)," *YouTube* (17/12/2011 2011). <https://youtu.be/4WITU9VKWTI>.

¹⁰¹⁵ France24, "as-Salafiyūn al-Lubnāniyūn Yusānidūn al-Mu'āriḍīn as-Sūriyīn," *France24* (20/12/2011 2011). <https://www.france24.com/ar/20111220-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A9->

Given the limited space for actors like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī in the Syrian activist networks that were forming, it would be difficult for them to independently influence events outside Lebanon. Their marginality as religious figures was not necessarily going to shut them out. Mainstream Syrian scholars had started working in Turkey by the middle of 2011 with refugees and activists. But those other figures' experience highlighted the limits of religious influence on events in Syria, taking a largely discursive role and limited resources or influence in the wider landscape of activists,¹⁰¹⁶ many of whom preferred to work with more secularly-inclined revolutionary leaders and started forming coordinating bodies like the Syrian National Council.¹⁰¹⁷ That reflected a general problem: those other political partners had the political authority and material resources which made transnational influence possible, and would mediate the impacts of marginal actors like Syria or Lebanon's religious scholars.¹⁰¹⁸ And for Tripoli's Salafī shaykhs like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī there was another significant problem. Many Syrian actors saw Salafis and their rhetoric as a liability that validated the regime's warnings about a sectarian war, and its attempts to paint the opposition as a destabilising force of extremists.¹⁰¹⁹ All told, it was difficult to see where the shaykhs could or would fit into the emerging structures of activists who worked in Syria.

Those structural limitations would reinforce ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's marginality, and the shaykhs' far-reaching advocacy would have limited impacts in isolation and depended on the interest of potential partners. The shaykhs could be talkative and opportunistic, but their impact would depend on whether someone else cared to listen or create opportunities for them. Both ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī could still speak relatively freely as representatives of the Sunnī community within Lebanon, with a narrative of politicised collective identity that

%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85.

¹⁰¹⁶ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Profiles of Syrian Sunni Clerics in the Uprising," *Syria Resources* (15/03/2013 2013). <https://carnegieendowment.org/2013/03/25/profiles-of-syrian-sunni-clerics-in-uprising>.

¹⁰¹⁷ Thomas Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 235-37.

¹⁰¹⁸ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, 118.

¹⁰¹⁹ Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria*, 235-37.

responded to the community's wider regional context. And they could appropriate political symbolism in that regional context and attach themselves to public mobilisation in the local Lebanese one. But they were going to have a hard time affecting events outside Lebanon, unless other resource- and influence-rich actors believed that their priorities were aligned and opened a supportive line of political credit.¹⁰²⁰

It was therefore unsurprising that where the two Lebanese shaykhs were tied to events in Syria, their role was limited and dependent on the interest of their partners. While figures like Khaled Dhaher—a minor Future Movement figure with links to ash-Shahāl—maintained links to the shaykhs,¹⁰²¹ the resources and connections that allowed him to support armed movements across the border depended on his ties to the Future Movement and its interests more than religious similarities.¹⁰²² And while the shaykhs were sympathetic to *jihādī* detainees like Shādī al-Mawlawī who expressed a similar sense of identity and motivations, Lebanese officials could not confirm a more direct connection.¹⁰²³ They would have ties to events across the border via the Syrian *Aḥrār ash-Shām*, whose leaders had common Salafī roots and activist leanings.¹⁰²⁴ But *Aḥrār ash-Shām*'s leadership were as opportunistic as their Lebanese counterparts and mobilised by partnering with varying secular and religious groups. Like HTI in the eighties, its members would have diverse

¹⁰²⁰ Simon Bernd and Bert Klandermans, "Politicized Collective Identity: A Social Psychological Analysis," *American Psychologist* 56, no. 4 (2001): 323-24.

¹⁰²¹ as-Safir, "'14 Adhār" Tawāṣal Ḥamlatuhā 'alā Ghuṣn: Wazīr Difā' an-Nizām as-Sūrī fī Lubnān," *as-Safir* (31/12/2011 2011). <https://m.assafir.com/Article/262041>.

¹⁰²² Nidal Hamadeh, "Nā'ib Lubnānī Warā' Tahrīb Silāḥ wa Musallihīn ilā Sūriya," *al-Manar* (29/07/2011 2011). <https://archive.almanar.com.lb/article.php?id=84046>.

¹⁰²³ Zena Tabara, "Shādī al-Mawlawī li 'al-Anbā': Haddadūnj bi Naqlī ilā Dimashq li Taḥaqquq Ma'ī al-Mukhābarāt as-Sūriya," *al-Anba* (28/05/2012 2011). <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/arabic-international-news/lebanon-news/296214/28-05-2012-%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D9%84%D9%88%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%80-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%82-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%82-%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/>.

¹⁰²⁴ Rougier, *Sunni Tragedy in the Middle East*, 181-82.

religious leanings,¹⁰²⁵ and its foreign dependencies reflected an interest in securing a sympathetic resource-rich partner—the Qatari Shaykh ‘Aīd Charity Foundation—rather than friendly friends like Tripoli’s shaykhs themselves.¹⁰²⁶ Rather than giving Tripoli’s Salafi shaykhs access into Syria, the relationship highlighted their general problem: their transnational influence was mediated by other local actors who responded to other local factors.¹⁰²⁷ Even if political advocacy gave Lebanese Salafis a kind of rhetorical reach outside the Lebanese context, its impacts depended on the shaykhs’ place relative to those other sources of political power.¹⁰²⁸

Religious Activism, Limited Reach

The shaykhs’ religious activism—particularly ar-Rāfi‘īs—was more independent and impactful than their political advocacy, but it still lacked reach outside of narrow religious spaces. More room for that activism had appeared thanks to a less obvious aftershock of the January collapse: tensions in Lebanon’s official Sunnī religious institution, Dār al-Fatwā, and the ensuing religious leadership gap. That religious space was a long-established part of the Lebanese Sunnī landscape but had enjoyed a more formal structure since the fifties, when Dār al-Fatwā became the an official Sunnī clerical body.¹⁰²⁹ The body was not totally separate from the country’s political history—Beirut’s Sunnī Muftis had gained national standing by supporting early Lebanese leaders like Riad al-Solh.¹⁰³⁰ Its Mufti in 2011, Muḥammad Rashid Qabānī, had similarly been a Hariri client since the nineties.¹⁰³¹ And as

¹⁰²⁵ Muhammad Suleiman Aburaman, “*at-Tawḥīd as-Salafiyya*”: *ad-Dalālāt, at-Tadā‘iyāt wa Alfāq*, trans. Jumana Nawafleh (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2013), 42. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/amman/10295.pdf>; Thomas Pierret, “Salafis at War in Syria: Logics of Fragmentation and Realignment,” in *Salafism After the Arab Awakening: Contending with People’s Power*, ed. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2016), 142.

¹⁰²⁶ Pierret, “Salafis at War in Syria: Logics of Fragmentation and Realignment,” 146.

¹⁰²⁷ Tarrow, McAdam, and Tilly, *The New Transnational Activism*, 118-19.

¹⁰²⁸ Paul Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 218.

¹⁰²⁹ Clarke, *Islam and Law in Lebanon: Sharia Within and Without the State*, 44-45.

¹⁰³⁰ Dār al-Fatwā, “Samāḥat ash-Shaykh Muḥammad Tawfīq Khālīd Raḥimahu Allāh Ta‘āla: (1932 - 1951),” *daralfatwa.gov.lb* (2020).

<http://www.darelfatwa.gov.lb/%d8%b3%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%ad%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d9%81%d8%aa%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b4%d9%8a%d8%ae-%d9%85%d8%ad%d9%85%d8%af-%d8%aa%d9%88%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%82-%d8%ae%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%af-%d8%b1%d8%ad%d9%85/>.

¹⁰³¹ Vloeberghs, “The Hariri Political Dynasty after the Arab Spring,” 245.

with Tripoli's Salafīs after 2005 that was an instrumental relationship, where Qabānī reinforced the Hariris' confessional power as their accessory rather than a rival.¹⁰³²

Dār al-Fatwā had problems and as in Lebanon's national politics they reflected its leaders' choices, but it was unusual because of the parallel world of religious politics that it inhabited. Notwithstanding its national institutionalised character, it had never been totally subordinate to the political establishment. But Qabānī had become a distinct irritation by exercising his own judgment in late 2011. To the chagrin of the Hariris and the Sunnī community he attempted to reposition himself under the new Miqati government, met Damascus' ambassador shortly after Saad Hariri's own speeches about Syria and STL indictments, and visited Hizbullah's home territory in South Lebanon while bypassing the Hariris' hometown of Sidon.¹⁰³³ Yet to a large extent, he and Dār al-Fatwā would be insulated from immediate consequences. The institution's foundation in religious networks left the public no way to expel him,¹⁰³⁴ and most electors choosing his replacement were religious scholars rather than conventional politicians.¹⁰³⁵ Like the Salafīs, he occupied an alternative world of religious politicking that was mostly safe from the realities of normal life. But that was also a setting where actors like ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfi'ī, and others could resist the status quo by promoting an alternative Najdī Salafī vision of Islam that placed them in recognisable contention with the Sunnī religious mainstream.¹⁰³⁶ Even if the Mufti was formally secure,

¹⁰³² Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldūn*, 35-36.

¹⁰³³ al-Rai, "Maktaba al-ʿIlāmī: Istiqbālat as-Safīr as-Sūrī wa "Ḥizb Allāh" Jā'a fī Itār Jawlatuhumā 'alā al-Marja'īyyāt ar-Rūḥiya," *al-Rai* (03/09/2011 2011). <https://www.alraimedia.com/article/273105/%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%82%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AA->

¹⁰³⁴ Alexander Henley, *Religious Authority and Sectarianism in Lebanon* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016), 17-19.

https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_295_Henley_Lebabon_Final.pdf.

¹⁰³⁵ Raphaël Lefèvre, "Lebanon's Dar al-Fatwa and the Search for Moderation," *Carnegie Middle East Center* (05/01/2015 2015). <https://carnegie-mec.org/2015/01/05/lebanon-s-dar-al-fatwa-and-search-for-moderation-pub-57627>.

¹⁰³⁶ Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner, "Conceptualizing Resistance," *Sociological Forum* 19, no. 4 (2004): 538-42; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 5.

the religious context which insulated him from wider national politics would also make normally-marginal players like the Salafis into a serious threat.

While the Hariris had left space for alternate political representation in Sunnī confessional politics, the weakening of Dār al-Fatwā and Qabānī's position created space for new religious leadership. The central problem was that Qabānī had alienated nearly everybody. His manoeuvres irritated Future Movement MPs, who attacked his independence and boycotted the ʿid prayers that he held.¹⁰³⁷ He had enraged the Sunnī public so much that in December 2013 his presence at a funeral was nearly sufficient to trigger a riot that required the Lebanese Army's intervention.¹⁰³⁸ And most importantly, he had created friction with the other Sunnī shaykhs that might challenge his authority. The Mufti was a prominent scholar, making it unsurprising that he had some enemies who despised him for odd or even fictitious reasons. But there would usually be at least some formal deference from scholars like ash-Shahāl of the Salafis, for example, who had at least acknowledged Dār al-Fatwā and Qabānī's office while intimating a desire for a new body that mirrored his own politics.¹⁰³⁹ By 2012, though, that veneer of civility had worn thin, as Sunnī religious leaders openly questioned Qabānī's standing and some of them refused to even pray behind the man. Just as the Future Movement's manoeuvres after the January collapse left a representation gap in Sunnī confessional politics, that widening dissatisfaction was creating pressure for someone or something to provide new leadership in Lebanon's parallel universe of Sunnī religious politics.¹⁰⁴⁰

That leadership vacuum would create opportunities in the narrower structures of Sunnī religious politics, but the Salafis would not be the ones that filled it. Notwithstanding the new space, the shaykhs would struggle to position themselves as a new religious or political

¹⁰³⁷ Thair Ghaddour, "al-Mustaqbal Yu'lin al-Ḥarb 'alā al-Muftī," *al-Akhbar* (02/09/2011 2011). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/93925>.

¹⁰³⁸ LBCI, "LBCI News- Muḥaṣrat al-Muftī Qabānī fī Masjid al-Khāshuqjī," *YouTube* (30/12/2013 2013). https://youtu.be/a8_2BReWxPY.

¹⁰³⁹ al-Mustaqbal, "ash-Shahāl ba'ad Liqā'ahu Muftī al-Jumhūriya: Wathīqat "Ḥizb Allāh" Antahat," *Lebanese Center for Research and Consulting* (26/08/3008 2008). <http://www.center-lcrc.com/news/33>.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Qasim Qasim, "Qabānī: Lam Na'ud Khayr Umma," *al-Akhbar* (15/08/2012 2012). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/74121>.

force. Established leaders and institutions no longer satisfied the wider community, and Qabānī's inability to make visible concessions would only make that leadership vacuum seem more pronounced. But it was equally hard to ignore a lesson from the records of actors like HTI in the twentieth century or ash-Shahāl after 2005: those marginal players could not mobilise the sort of resources needed to build new institutions on their own. Fortunately, irritation with the Mufti was becoming endemic. Even more mainstream Sunnī scholars felt the same yearning for alternate religious leadership and would come together to build a new entity that provided it.¹⁰⁴¹ As a starting point for the Salafīs that would not be the best. But if they were willing to cooperate with the rest, then it was an opportunity to impose their Najdī inclinations on their colleagues within a narrower discursive environment of religious politics, and build a new social movement within the organisation that their mainstream colleagues formed.¹⁰⁴²

That new organisation would be *Hay'at 'Ulama al-Muslimīn* (HUM)—the Committee of Muslim Scholars—and it was precisely the kind of opportunity that the Salafīs could work with: an isolated political environment where they and particularly Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī would be politically competitive. HUM's trajectory would go beyond 2011 and 2012, and testified to ar-Rāfi'ī's organisational talents. As concerns deepened about Qabānī's conduct, he and other Sunnī shaykhs like Hassan Katerji and Malik Jdeideh started facilitating discussions in 2011 about a new religious leadership body.¹⁰⁴³ While they did not formally announce HUM until May 2012, its founders' initial calls just after that for a revitalisation of Sunnī religious institutions responded to Dār al-Fatwā's shortcomings as a religious body. And politically, its alignment with Lebanon's Sunnī community and the Syrian Uprising signalled a recognition of Qabānī's perceived abandonment of the Sunnī community for March 8. But those responses to the community's wider problems would empower the Salafī movement less than the organisation's internal environment—a place where religious discourse itself became politically competitive and the shaykhs represented an impactful political subculture. It was not a Salafī entity that gave Tripoli's shaykhs automatic leadership, and its

¹⁰⁴¹ Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 131-32.

¹⁰⁴² Alberto Melucci, "The New Social Movements: A Theoretical Approach," *Social Science Information* 19, no. 2 (1980/05/01 1980): 218-19.

¹⁰⁴³ Radwan Murtada, "al-Inshiqāq al-Awlā fī 'Hay'at al-'Ulamā': Hal Tasta'id Dawaruha?," *al-Akhbar* (20/11/2014 2014). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/41726>.

membership of more than 300 Sunnī Islamic leaders had varied political and religious views.¹⁰⁴⁴ But the public reports of internal disagreements would indicate the efforts by actors like Tripoli's Salafī shaykhs to compete with and impose their views on their peers.¹⁰⁴⁵ While disputes over core values and behavioural expectations—despite the nominally-similar religious roots—were normal for the shaykhs and adherents of Najdī Salafism more generally, HUM represented an unusual environment where those discursive differences was a more meaningful form of political competition.¹⁰⁴⁶

The discursive nature of politics within religious entities like HUM allowed ar-Rāfi'ī and the Salafīs to exert activist pressures on their peers. HUM had emerged as an advocate for the Sunnī public interest, making demands for state efforts to strengthen the rule of law and denunciations of Syrian interference in Lebanon.¹⁰⁴⁷ As members like Hassan Katerji and Ahmad Kurdi tried to emphasise in 2012, it was not a partner of Lebanon's elites or the Future Movement's March 14 bloc, and it would not align itself with a March 8 alliance that had sided with Damascus. But their mixed positions on certain issues, like whether the organisation was meant to replace Dār al-Fatwā,¹⁰⁴⁸ hinted at the organisation's internal disagreements. In 2012, public allegations that there had been a "diversion of *jihādī* duty

¹⁰⁴⁴ Muhammad Mustafa Alloush, "An al-Mārid as-Sunnī fī Lubnān," *Al-Sharq* (02/06/2012 2011). <https://al-sharq.com/opinion/02/06/2012/%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86>.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Qasim Qasim, "Ra'īs Hay'at al-ʿUlamāʾ al-Muslimīn: at-Tawāsul maʿa Ḥizb Allāh Lam Yanqatīʿ," *al-Akhbar* (19/04/2013 2013). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/49638>.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Hank Johnston and David Snow, "Subcultures and the Emergence of the Estonian Nationalist Opposition 1945-1990," *Sociological Perspectives* 41, no. 3 (1998): 474-75.

¹⁰⁴⁷ National News Agency, "Hay'at ʿUlamāʾ al-Muslimīn: li Rafḍ Ishʿāl al-Fitna," *al-Jumhouria* (08/06/2012 2012).

<https://www.aljournhouria.com/ar/news/10721/%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A9>.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Al Jazeera AJ, "al-ʿUlamāʾ bayna ad-Dīn was-Siyāsa fī Lubnān," *Al Jazeera* (17/11/2012 2012). <https://www.aljazeera.net/programs/religionandlife/2012/11/17/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86>.

from confronting the Jews to fighting on the side of the Assad regime,"¹⁰⁴⁹ had a similar tone to the Friday sermons from Salafīs like ash-Shahāl,¹⁰⁵⁰ and by 2013 HUM's position was that Dār al-Fatwā was weak and impotent.¹⁰⁵¹ It presented a united front, but those outward signals hinted at the discursive internal politics of a divided religious organisation, in which the members who represented a Najdī subculture had asserted control over the discourse that defined HUM's public orientation.¹⁰⁵² The 2014 departure of the mainstream Sunnī shaykh Malik Jdeideh confirmed that, as he condemned HUM's defence of *jihādī* movements like *Jabhat an-Nuṣra* and "Islamic State."¹⁰⁵³ And more specifically, he warned that Salafī members wanted to use it not just to challenge Dār al-Fatwā's religious leadership, but as a new political vehicle.¹⁰⁵⁴

But even with the opportunities that HUM offered, the realities of resource mobilisation still limited the Salafī shaykhs' impacts as religious activists in Lebanon's national politics. The facts of wider political life stopped ar-Rāfi'ī and his colleagues' successes from extending far beyond HUM's confines. The lack of any dramatic purge of disagreeable Sunnī figures reinforced the sense that Salafīs' were trying to shape HUM's direction without driving away the internal rivals who materially supported the organisation in the first place. While it was possible to argue over the resources that other mainstream partners brought in, the Salafīs could not bring new resources from outside if those partners left and had to prioritise the survival of the organisation.¹⁰⁵⁵ Just as importantly, HUM offered a safer institutional

¹⁰⁴⁹ Muslim Scholars' Committee of Lebanon MSC, "Tweet from 14th October 2012," *Twitter* (14/10/2012 2012). <https://twitter.com/MuslimOlama/status/257142944233054208>.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Everson, "ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl (fī Kalima Ḥamāsiya wa Mu'athira)."

¹⁰⁵¹ Muslim Scholars' Committee of Lebanon MSC, "Facebook Post from 5th November 2013," *Facebook* (05/11/2013 2013).

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=412668292194784&l=23ab95b46d>.

¹⁰⁵² Fischer, *Reframing Public Policy*, 89-90, 158-59.

¹⁰⁵³ Islamist-Movements.com, "Istiḳālat ash-Shaykh "Mālik Jadīda" ...Hal Bidayat Nihāyat Dhirā' Qaṭar ad-Dīnī fī Lubnān?," *Islamist Movements* (01/12/2014 2014). <http://www.islamist-movements.com/12130>.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Beirut Observer, "ash-Shaykh Mālik Jadīda Yastaqīl min Hay'at al-'Ulamā' al-Muslimīn wa Ya'ad li Inshā' Hay'ia Jadīda," *Beirut Observer* (19/11/2014 2014).

<https://www.beirutobserver.com/2014/11/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%A6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7/>.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Kriesi, "The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements," 192-93.

environment for the shaykhs to represent Sunnī community interests outside the auspices of Lebanon's centres of power, like a state and Sunnī establishment that members believed had abandoned Tripoli's Islamic movements. And it also sheltered them from perceived threats like the Syrian government,¹⁰⁵⁶ which members believed to be working against them.¹⁰⁵⁷ Jeopardising that was unwise, and while there would be public allegations that the Salafīs misused some other parties' resources, the resources in question would be funds from donors in the Gulf rather than their immediate partners who made HUM into a survivable organisation that they could co-opt.¹⁰⁵⁸

In the wider structures of Lebanon's politics, those resource limitations helped limit HUM's potential for contentious politics to the same weak advocacy that the shaykhs pursued on their own. It would occupy the same place that they did in Lebanon's national context, operating as a religious actor between Sunnī society and the state.¹⁰⁵⁹ And as an actor in that national context its public statements would continue diagnosing the same transnational threats to the Sunnī public,¹⁰⁶⁰ and calling for state intervention.¹⁰⁶¹ The organisation would have a distinct national profile, thanks to its ongoing institutional contest with Dār al-Fatwā for religious authority in which its sectarian politics distinguished it from mainstream offerings.¹⁰⁶² But the discursive religious world where that contest happened and the

¹⁰⁵⁶ Hank Johnston, "Religio-Nationalist Subcultures under the Communists: Comparisons from the Baltics, Transcaucasia and Ukraine," *Sociology of Religion* 54, no. 3 (1993): 238-39, 50.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Agency, "Hay'at 'Ulamā' al-Muslimīn: li Rafḍ Ish'āl al-Fitna."

¹⁰⁵⁸ Islamist-Movements.com, "Istiḳālat ash-Shaykh "Mālik Jadīda" ...Hal Bidayat Nihāyat Dhirā' Qaṭar ad-Dīnī fī Lubnān?."

¹⁰⁵⁹ Greg Martin, "Conceptualizing Cultural Politics in Subcultural and Social Movement Studies," *Social Movement Studies* 1, no. 1 (2002/04/01 2002): 74.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Agency, "Hay'at 'Ulamā' al-Muslimīn: li Rafḍ Ish'āl al-Fitna."

¹⁰⁶¹ National News Agency, "Hay'at al-'Ulamā' al-Muslimīn: li Tawqīf al-Muttahimīn bi Qaḍiyat 'Abd al-Wāḥid," *al-Joumhouria* (08/07/2012 2012).

<https://www.aljoumhouria.com/ar/news/16604/%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%82%D8%B6%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AF>.

¹⁰⁶² Ghassan Rifi, "Jadīda Yasta'id li Inshā' Hay'at 'Ulamā'iya Tuwājīh al-Fitan," *Janoubia* (01/12/2014 2014). <https://janoubia.com/2014/12/01/%d8%ac%d8%af%d9%8e%d9%8a%d9%92%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%8a%d8%b3%d8%aa%d8%b9%d8%af-%d9%84%d8%a5%d9%86%d8%b4%d8%a7%d8%a1->

shaykhs could have an impact was narrow. Outside of it, their religious activism would not help them or HUM exceed the limits of the Lebanese domestic context and their place as representatives of the Sunnī community in it.¹⁰⁶³

Politics Evolves Around the Shaykhs, Not Under Them

Those limits on the shaykhs' political advocacy and religious activism ensured their continued marginality, and their role in Tripoli's worsening violence reflected circumstances that were evolving around them. 2011 had become a dangerous year for the Trabelsi Sunnī community—while the March 14 government had collapsed in January, by June the tensions over Syria also wrecked the 2008 Sunnī-ʿAlawī reconciliation and the city saw its worst fighting since the May Crisis of that year.¹⁰⁶⁴ Lebanese leaders were understandably keen to distance themselves from those clashes, with the Future Movement and the ADP denying responsibility,¹⁰⁶⁵ and Najib Miqati claiming that the timing was suspicious.¹⁰⁶⁶ And the denials would survive at least some scrutiny. It was not until late 2011 that Future Movement partners in the state like the ISF's Wisam al-Hassan,¹⁰⁶⁷ for example, started working to support the Syrian opposition.¹⁰⁶⁸ And Miqati's stated suspicions were plausible

%d9%87%d9%8a%d8%a6%d8%a9-%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%a6%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%aa%d9%88%d8%a7/.

¹⁰⁶³ Paul D'Anieri, Claire Ernst, and Elizabeth Kier, "New Social Movements in Historical Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 22, no. 4 (1990): 455.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Awab al-Masri, "Ittāhamāt Mutabādala bi Ahdāth Ṭarābulus Lubnān," *Al Jazeera* (18/06/2011 2011).

[https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2011/6/18/%d8%a7%d8%aa%d9%87%d8%a7%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%af%d9%84%d8%a9-%d8%a8%d8%a3%d8%ad%d8%af%d8%a7%d8%ab-](https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2011/6/18/%d8%a7%d8%aa%d9%87%d8%a7%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%af%d9%84%d8%a9-%d8%a8%d8%a3%d8%ad%d8%af%d8%a7%d8%ab-%d8%b7%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%a8%d9%84%d8%b3-%d9%84%d8%a8%d9%86%d8%a7%d9%86)

¹⁰⁶⁵ Abd al-Kafi al-Samad, "Ishtibākāt Ṭarābulus Tathmur Iktishāf: Ṭarfūn Thālith Mutaḍarrar!," *al-Akhbar* (21/06/2011 2011). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/90363>.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Agencies, "Lubnān: 6 Qutlā fī Ishtibākāt Ṭarābulus," *Arab48* (18/06/2011 2011).

<https://www.arab48.com/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1--%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A/2011/06/18/%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-6-%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3>

¹⁰⁶⁷ Malak Aqeel, "ath-Thalāthī al-Qawī: Rifī - Mīrzā - al-Ḥasan.. fī "al-Zaman aṣ-Ṣaʿab", " *Khiyam* (17/06/2011 2011). <http://www.khiyam.com/news/article.php?articleID=11756>.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Rougier, *Sunni Tragedy in the Middle East*, 177.

when the fighting correlated with known transnational tensions,¹⁰⁶⁹ while figures outside his orbit in the Future Movement like Mustafa Alloush were making comparable claims of a Syrian connection.¹⁰⁷⁰ But it was still impossible to accept or fully interpret those claims from a Sunnī political class that had worked with known facilitators like Ḥammūd,¹⁰⁷¹ or that the violence was purely a bottom-up communal phenomenon when ash-Shahāl's trajectory had indicated strong demobilising pressures from above.

The Salafis were not behind the clashes, even if there were questions about their role. Ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī had long viewed radical movements like *Fataḥ al-Islām* as potential partners, but also had poor standing with some of the city's more radical *jihādī* figures that had openly endorsed violence.¹⁰⁷² And the conduct—if not the rhetoric—of other Sunnī shaykhs with similar political outlooks was not especially provocative in 2011 and 2012. The most visible example in Lebanon's national landscape, Sidon's Aḥmad al-Asīr, had built a similar following by speaking against Hizbullah,¹⁰⁷³ and led comparable marches and highway sit-ins like those in Tripoli in solidarity with Syria's Uprising.¹⁰⁷⁴ But as with the establishment there were still valid questions about the shaykhs' conduct—why, for example, had violence

¹⁰⁶⁹ Dunya al-Watan, "al-Ḥarīrī bayna al-Ams wal-Yawm Khasārāt La Taʿad wa La Tuḥṣā wal-Jamāhīr az-Zarqāʾ Tasʿal “‘alā Man Yatakallu ash-Shaykh Saʿad?” Wa Hal Jaʿjaʿ Kāfin?," *Dunya al-Watan* (29/10/2011 2011). <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2011/10/29/208226.html>.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Al Jazeera AJ, "Ishtibākāt bayna Musallihīn fī Ṭarābulus Shamāl Lubnān," *YouTube* (18/06/2011 2011). <https://youtu.be/eKK51QYWv6w>.

¹⁰⁷¹ LBCI, "LBCI_NEWS_ʿAmīd Ḥammūd Kasr Ḥājiz aṣ-Ṣamt wa Tahaddath."

¹⁰⁷² Muhammad al-ʿAlī, "Bakrī: Iʿtaqaltu Irdāʾ li Brīṭāniyā wa Amrīkā," *Al Jazeera* (19/01/2011 2011). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2011/1/19/%D8%A8%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%A5%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A7>.

¹⁰⁷³ Afif al-Jardali, "Mawāqif Nāriya lish-Shaykh Aḥmad al-Asīr maʿa aṣ-Ṣahāfi ʿAfif al-Jardālī," *SaidaNet* (19/11/2011 2011). <http://www.saidanet.com/News-12586/%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%81-%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%84%D9%8A/>; Aḥmad al-Asīr, "2011-05-06 / Waqfat Ihtijāj fī Masjid Bilāl bin Rabāḥ / MTV Lebanon," *YouTube* (08/05/2011 2011). <https://youtu.be/Xe13IHD7PHQ>.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Nicholas Blanford, "The Lebanese Sheikh Who's Leading a Sit-In Against Hezbollah," *Christian Science Monitor* (05/07/2012 2012). <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2012/0705/The-Lebanese-sheikh-who-s-leading-a-sit-in-against-Hezbollah>.

erupted in June after Friday prayers and Salafī-led sit-ins?¹⁰⁷⁵ With a range of unresolved issues and conflicting interests, there were leftover questions of what the shaykhs' role could be.

The shaykhs were at least loosely connected to the violence as it surged again in 2012. For one, the fighting centred round Trabelsi areas where Salafis and Islamic activist movements had history. Some fighters were from Bab al-Tabbaneh—the same place that had seen the HTI massacres of the eighties in which some of Damascus' partners had been involved. And the most visible other party to the clashes had been among those partners—militias linked to the 'Alawī ADP from the mostly-'Alawī Jabel Mohsen. More importantly, Tripoli's Salafī movements had involved themselves in the violence to some extent. Fighters associated with the movements had visibly participated in the clashes around Bab al-Tabbaneh in early May, necessitating the Lebanese Army's intervention.¹⁰⁷⁶ And as the violence kept going, shaykhs like ash-Shahāl called the city's youth to unite behind their city's scholars,¹⁰⁷⁷ while fighters who spoke to the media offered similar condemnations of confessional leaders and their failures to protect the community.¹⁰⁷⁸

But the shaykhs were not originally responsible for Tripoli's violence, or the resulting wave of public mobilisation that they had attached themselves to. There were explanations for the fighting besides Salafī influence, particularly the sectarian tensions that diffused into Tripoli as the Syrian Uprising delivered one social shock after another. The shaykhs' political advocacy could have—in theory—inflamed those tensions by shaping the framing of the issue and reinforcing hostile sectarian perception of outsiders like the ADP. And through their religious activism, they could have appropriated outraged elements of the public and directed the community's collective action.¹⁰⁷⁹ But those were also places where the Syrian

¹⁰⁷⁵ Abd al-Kafi al-Samad, "Ishtibākāt Ṭarābulus: Infijār Awwal Laghm fī Wajh al-Ḥukūma," *al-Akhbar* (18/06/2011 2011). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/90238>.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Paul Salem, "Lebanon Edges Closer to Syrian Crisis," *Diwan* (17/05/2012 2012). <https://carnegie-mec.org/2012/05/17/lebanon-edges-closer-to-syrian-crisis-pub-48148>.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Lebanon Files, "ash-Shahāl Ṭālaba bil-lfrāj al-Fawrī 'an al-Mawlawī," *Lebanon Files* (15/05/2012 2012). <https://www.lebanonfiles.com/news/377771/>.

¹⁰⁷⁸ LBCI, "LBCI News-Report-2012-05-17-Ishtabākāt Ṭarābulus," *YouTube* (18/05/2012 2012). https://youtu.be/yWK_ONM4pv0.

¹⁰⁷⁹ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, "Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics."

Uprising was an especially sensitive issue, and by 2012 the sectarian sensitivities were driven by a combination of the conflict itself and the regime's exploitation of social minorities' understandable sectarian anxieties.¹⁰⁸⁰ That link to events in Syria would become clearer by February as the Syrian regime's offensive in Homs became a source of global concern,¹⁰⁸¹ arousing not just public sympathy in Bab al-Tabbaneh and elsewhere for Syrians,¹⁰⁸² but also another round of violence between fighters from that neighbourhood and counterparts from Jabel Mohsen.¹⁰⁸³ And it highlighted a general issue that ran deeper than anything the Salafis were doing: the concentration of violence in an area with direct connections to the Syrian Uprising, and sectarian tensions that were becoming part of public life in Tripoli.¹⁰⁸⁴

As the fighting continued into the middle of 2012, it became clear that the surges of violence responded to other triggers and the shaykhs' message was directed elsewhere. Even when Tripoli's Islamic movements clashed with security forces in early May, there had been a political trigger—in that case, the arrest of a young suspected *jihādī*.¹⁰⁸⁵ And the same pattern played out in wider society, as fighters in Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabel Mohsen answered Syria's Houla massacre later that month with another round of fighting.¹⁰⁸⁶ Ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī were still aware of the basic pattern and underlying tensions, and their advocacy diagnosed the underlying anxieties by linking violence in Tripoli to Damascus'

¹⁰⁸⁰ Raymond Hinnebusch and Ola Rifai, "Syria: Identity, State Formation, and Citizenship," in *The Crisis of Citizenship in the Arab World*, ed. Roel Meijer and Nils Butenschøn (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 121-22.

¹⁰⁸¹ British Broadcasting Corporation BBC, "Sūriya: 'Ashrāt al-Qutlā fil-Hujūm 'alā Ḥimṣ wa Ūbāmā Yastab'id al-Khiyār al-ʿAskarī fī Ḥall al-Azma," *BBC* (06/02/2012 2012).

https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2012/02/120206_syria_homs_army_obama.

¹⁰⁸² Nivine Afiouni, "Shāri' Sūriya Yaqsam al-Lubnāniyīn fī Ṭarābulus," *Sky News Arabia* (23/02/2012 2012). <https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/7171-%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B9-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%B3%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3>.

¹⁰⁸³ Naharnet, "Jarḥā 'Askariyīn wa Madaniyīn fī Iṭlāq Nār Mustamirr bayna Bāb at-Tabbāna wa Jabal Muḥsin wa Sulaymān Yad'ū li Qama'a al-Mukhalayn bil-Aman," *Naharnet* (11/02/2012 2012). <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/ar/29649>.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Tarrow, McAdam, and Tilly, *The New Transnational Activism*, 103-04; Al Jadeed, "Jabal Muḥsin - at-Tabbāna 'alā Kaf 'Afrit," *YouTube* (11/02/2012 2012). <https://youtu.be/LcmM4w9cp7o>.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Salem, "Lebanon Edges Closer to Syrian Crisis."

¹⁰⁸⁶ Hwaïda Saad, "In a Lebanese City, Fighting Over Syria Conflict Is Deadly," *New York Times* (02/06/2012 2012). <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/03/world/middleeast/in-tripoli-lebanon-a-deadly-battle-over-syrian-conflict.html>.

behaviour in Syria and Lebanon, especially in the eighties. But they were not openly inciting it.¹⁰⁸⁷ The domestic action that they called for was usually a generic demand for Lebanon's state to secure the rule of law, rather than for public mobilisation, and in other cases related to more specific concerns like the ongoing detention of Islamic activist detainees or attacks on Sunnī shaykhs in June.¹⁰⁸⁸ Their general sense of sectarian identity still matched public sentiment. And their combination of sectarianism and political caution was normal among local Sunnī and 'Alawī fighters who claimed to be defending their homes, land, and community, while avoiding signals of hostility to institutions like the Army.¹⁰⁸⁹ But as representatives of the community that was precisely the sort of advocacy that reinforced public solidarity without necessarily driving action.¹⁰⁹⁰ And the generic calls for the state to act were misaligned with the patterns of violence, which indicated wider pressures that mobilised a community around figures like the shaykhs rather than under their leadership.¹⁰⁹¹

For their part, Tripoli's Salafīs blamed forces above them for the fighting's longevity and their allegations were reasonable. As one of ash-Shahāl's former students—Shaykh Nabīl Raḥīm—had suggested by August, there was a question of whether the city's resource-poor Salafī shaykhs were caught up in a wider national competition between the country's resource-rich elites. Locally in the city's Sunnī community, he could see a necessary mix of sectarian alienation that offered a general motivation for violence and specific outrages over

¹⁰⁸⁷ Altayarsalafi, "ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl Mutaḥaddathan 'an Tārīkh as-Sūrī," *YouTube* (26/07/2012 2012). <https://youtu.be/9A7-PQs7h1E>.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Hay'at 'Ulamā' al-Muslimīn, "Bayān Hay'at 'Ulamā' al-Muslimīn fī Lubnān Ḥawl I'ādat Tawqīf aḍ-Ḍubbāt at-Thalāth," *Ishrakat* (16/07/2012 2012). https://ishrakat.com/article-desc_2571_%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%A6%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A5%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B6%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AB

¹⁰⁸⁹ Al Jadeed, "Ḥaqīqat Ishtibākāt al-Jabal wal-Bāb - Rāmz al-Qāḍī," *YouTube* (15/05/2012 2012). <https://youtu.be/A8vF3-63XSY>.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Meyer and Minkoff, "Conceptualizing Political Opportunity," 1464.

¹⁰⁹¹ McAdam, "Beyond Structural Analysis," 291-93.

Syria that directed its outbreaks.¹⁰⁹² But nationally, he noted the involvement of actors including March 14, March 8, and Miqati that was essential to sustain prolonged fighting—a challenge for communities in deprived areas like Bab al-Tabbaneh.¹⁰⁹³ And together, those observations invited a reasonable inference that Lebanon's political class had appropriated Tripoli as an alternative arena for competition, much like it had done during the May 2008 Crisis.¹⁰⁹⁴

The evidence supported those insinuations of facilitation by Lebanon's political class, too. There had been hints of it since early 2012, like the February explosion of a warehouse filled with weapons in Tripoli's Abi Samra neighbourhood. While the destination of the weapons never became totally clear, the blast invited ADP allegations that they belonged to the Future Movement, whose own Moustafa Alloush rebutted the charges while still stressing his Party's commitment to the Syrian Uprising.¹⁰⁹⁵ And by August, more explicit allegations were circulating that ISF intelligence officers had distributed ammunition from sources like Saudi Arabia,¹⁰⁹⁶ and even if the ADP's Rifaat Eid rejected links between Tripoli's clashes and Syria he acknowledged Hizbullah's support for the Party.¹⁰⁹⁷ Tripoli had its own sectarian tensions and outrages over Syria that drove the public to action, and it was easy to link the Salafīs' sense of political identity and framing to it. But by 2012 it appeared to have been

¹⁰⁹² James Treadwell and Jon Garland, "Masculinity, Marginalization and Violence: A Case Study of the English Defence League," *The British Journal of Criminology* 51, no. 4 (2011): 632.

¹⁰⁹³ Al Jadeed, "al-Ḥadath - ash-Shaykh Nabīl Raḥīm," *YouTube* (27/08/2012 2012). https://youtu.be/XfT_6k8Kelg.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Jack Goldstone, "More Social Movements or Fewer? Beyond Political Opportunity Structures to Relational Fields," *Theory and Society* 33 (2004): 342-43.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Naharnet, "'Allūsh Yanfī 'Alāqat Tayyār al-Mustaḡbal bi Makhzan al-Asliḥa alladhī Anfajara fī Abī Samrā," *Naharnet* (11/02/2012 2012). <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/ar/29701>.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Margaret Milligan, "Tripoli's Troubles to Come," *Middle East Research and Information Project* (10/08/2012 2012). <https://merip.org/2012/08/tripolis-troubles-to-come/>.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Muammar Atwi, "Jabal Muḥsin - Bāb at-Tabbāna: Khuṭūṭ at-Timās al-Majbūla bi 'Araq al-Fuqarā'," *Deutsche Welle* (27/08/2012 2012). <https://www.dw.com/ar/%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86-%D9%80%D9%80-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1/a-16196363>.

Lebanon's political class that saw an opportunity to further their national competition over Syria and diverted resources to the city accordingly.¹⁰⁹⁸

Taken together, the public mobilisation from below and facilitation from above had not left the Salafī movement without any agency. Tripoli's shaykhs were not sitting around waiting for offers of support or signals of political sympathy, and they capitalised on the growing political space as fighting continued to the end of 2012. One of them in particular, Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī, was starting to show his ambitions: in the longer term he had an eye on Lebanon's national politics, where he believed the Arab Uprisings left space for a new party that challenged the Future Movement and its confessional dominance.¹⁰⁹⁹ But that would have to wait until someone or something solved the more immediate problem of Tripoli's security vacuum, which he saw as a state failure to protect the Sunnī community from the Syrian regime's partners. For that nearer-term problem, his solution of a new armed association that defended Sunnī interests as Hizbullah did for the Shīʿī community was feasible.¹¹⁰⁰ Tripoli was not a safe city, especially in 2011 and 2012, and the shaykhs had always maintained some capacity for violence—ash-Shahāl's bodyguards offered a good example of that by carrying their rifles openly.¹¹⁰¹ And although ar-Rāfiʿī publicly rejected portrayals of Tripoli as a hotbed of worsening violent extremism, local officials warned that armed groups including Salafī ones were still proliferating rapidly.¹¹⁰² While the shaykhs had not seized power over the wider community, they were still going to use their influence where they had it.

But there would still be constraints on the shaykhs' agency, particularly the sort that led to any armed role. Capitalising on the public's wider mobilisation with enabling from above was one thing, but mobilising men and guns outside the Sunnī establishment's control was another. While resource mobilisation issues had prevented their religious activism from

¹⁰⁹⁸ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 225-26.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Raphael Thelen, "Salafisten im Aufwind," *Taz* (07/10/2012 2012). <https://taz.de/Radikale-Prediger-im-Libanon/!5082402/>.

¹¹⁰⁰ el-Nashra, "Shaykh Salafī Yuraḥḥib bi Tashkīl "Majlis Ahl as-Sunna al-ʿAskarī fī Ṭarābulus".

¹¹⁰¹ Jaf Everson, "Laḥḥat Wuṣūl ash-Shaykh Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl (al-Bīra)," *YouTube* (22/05/2012 2012). <https://youtu.be/6-JpFceEdol>.

¹¹⁰² al-Hurra, "al-Jamāʿat as-Salafiyya fī Ṭarābulus - Lubnān," *YouTube* (25/05/2012 2012). <https://youtu.be/mqrE5TZ6Gpc>.

becoming a contentious political vehicle, ar-Rāfiʿī's attempts to mobilise an armed network attracted unwanted pressure from outside. He and people with similar views could find recruits by leveraging their connections to religiously and politically sympathetic people with militant backgrounds. But by August that had alarmed Tripoli's local political leaders. They saw a familiar pattern emerging, and their response was clear: there was not going to be another group like *Fataḥ al-Islām* in the city.¹¹⁰³ Other actors would not have to deal with those pressures—the Sunnī establishment's occasional facilitator, ʿAmīd Ḥammūd, could speak freely about arming the Sunnī community,¹¹⁰⁴ and his alleged partners like Ziyād ʿAllūkī who led the fighting on the ground would publicly condemn Miqatī's government as openly as the Hariris did.¹¹⁰⁵ But ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī were not part of those elite circles or networks—in spite of the shifts following Lebanon's January 2011 collapse, they were still marginal actors who depended on tools of political advocacy and religious activism, and events were taking shape around them. Those tools were not enough to establish a new place in the structures of Sunnī politics, or a new role besides one that reflected their marginal place relative to the centres of power in them.

Conclusion & Questions

The shaykhs' limited agency at the bottom of the system did not mean that the Sunnī political class had complete control of things from the top. If anything, October's assassination of the ISF's intelligence chief, Wisam al-Hassan, showed that the centres of Sunnī power were vulnerable to their own pressures and reprisals.¹¹⁰⁶ Al-Hassan's assassination would be a national shock like the January collapse was. Like many of Lebanon's security officials he had been political and confessional partisan, serving as March 14's informal partner in the state.¹¹⁰⁷ It was not going to affect the Sunnī establishment's structural dominance over Sunnī confessional politics. Like the Hariris' potential

¹¹⁰³ Rougier, *Sunni Tragedy in the Middle East*, 212-13.

¹¹⁰⁴ Murtada, "ʿAmīd Ḥammūd: Saʿusalliḥ as-Sunna li Muwājahat Ḥizb Allāh."

¹¹⁰⁵ Al Jazeera AJ, "Syria Spillover Clashes Escalate in Lebanon," *YouTube* (25/08/2012 2012). <https://youtu.be/xEr6GYUmowE>; Samia Nakhoul, "Analysis: Killing of Security Chief Raises Fears for Lebanon," *Reuters* (22/10/2012 2012). <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-lebanon-explosion-turmoil-analysis-idUKBRE89L06Q20121022>.

¹¹⁰⁶ Al Jazeera AJ, "Iḡhtiyāl Wisām al-Ḥasan fī Tafjīr bi Bayrūt," *YouTube* (20/10/2012 2012). <https://youtu.be/4KJesn5gSHw>.

¹¹⁰⁷ Rabah, "Ajhizat Ṭawāʿif al-Amniyya.. Numudhaj Tawqīf aṭ-Ṭirās."

competitors—Ashraf Rifi and Najib Miqati—circumstances and ethics had kept his attention mostly on his office, even if some of his politically-sensitive investigations, like a probe of a former pro-Syrian minister Michel Samaha, served the establishment's interests.¹¹⁰⁸ But his aforementioned work alongside the Future Movement in support of Syria's opposition had marked him as part of its national competition with March 8, Hizbullah, and their partners. Even if his activities' low profile helped avoid worsening national tensions, an attack on him was still a national shock like the Hariri government's January 2011 collapse had been. And like the January collapse, it showed that the Sunnī establishment's ability to protect and assert leadership over the Sunnī public was becoming weaker.

Despite the widespread public agreement that the killing was serious, it was not something that could draw more than a limited response from the Salafī movement. It was difficult to find an actor involved in Lebanon that publicly supported it—besides the fresh round of violence that broke out between fighters from Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabel Mohsen, there were condemnations from American officials, Hizbullah and Damascus, and the Future Movement.¹¹⁰⁹ But while the universal backlash left questions of whether one or more of

¹¹⁰⁸ Martin Chulov, "Lebanon's Great Divide Exposed by Assassination of Security Chief," *The Guardian* (20/10/2012 2012). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/19/lebanon-divide-assassination-security-chief>.

¹¹⁰⁹ Deutsche Presse-Agentur DPA, Agence France-Press AFP, and Reuters, "Qatīl fī Tabādul li Itlāq an-Nār fī Bayrūt wa Qatīla fī Ishtabākāt bi Ṭarābulus," *Deutsche Welle* (22/10/2012 2012). <https://www.dw.com/ar/%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AA-%D9%88%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3/a-16322533>; France24 and Agencies, "Maqṭal Ra'īs Fara' al-Ma'lūmāt al-ʿAmīd Wisām al-Ḥasan bi Bayrūt Yuʿīd Shabaḥ al-Iḡhtiyālāt ilā Lubnān," *France24* (19/10/2012 2012). [https://www.france24.com/ar/20121019-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AA-%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%B9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84-](https://www.france24.com/ar/20121019-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AA-%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%B9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84-%)

Lebanon's national actors was lying, the limits of the Salafī response were clear. Ash-Shahāl described an attack on the Sunnī community from a foreign "Iranian-Syrian axis," but his offers to advise Miqati and demands for a state response showed his awareness that any significant impacts depended on other actors.¹¹¹⁰ And although ar-Rāfi'ī and his colleagues took action, it involved forcing one of Damascus' most visible collaborators in Tripoli's religious community, the HTI veteran shaykh Hishām Minqāra, from the city.¹¹¹¹ While ash-Shahāl's political advocacy worked within rather than against the structures of Sunnī power, and ar-Rāfi'ī's religious activism was within familiar scholarly circles rather than in or against a political movement in wider society, neither response was politically significant.¹¹¹²

Instead, the aftermath of al-Hassan's death left questions of if and how Sunnī leaders had indirectly shaped marginal actors' behaviour. The shaykhs' marginality was unmistakable—whether they represented the community was contingent on other dynamics like public mobilisation, and they were actors at the peripheries of Sunnī power rather than ones who had central roles in Syria or Tripoli.¹¹¹³ But there was a contradiction between Sunnī leaders' apparent political disengagement from the Sunnī public and the signs of their intervention in Tripoli's 2012 violence. And more importantly, the power disparities between Sunnī elites and marginal actors meant that the authoritarian structure of Sunnī politics never really dissolved. Considered in that light, events in 2011 and 2012 begged a question of whether Salafīs always had agency but exercised it within constraints defined in less visible ways from above. That was a familiar question—the introduction suggested that Salafīs' role would reflect demobilising pressures, while the history of Najdī Salafism in Saudi Arabia left room for that explanation and the history of Tripoli's Islamic movements showed what that demobilisation might generally look like. Answering it could explain why the national

%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-.

¹¹¹⁰ Janoubia, "Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl: Ightiyāl al-Ḥasan li Nashar al-Fawḍā," *Janoubia* (24/10/2012 2012). <https://janoubia.com/2012/10/24/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86-%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1/>.

¹¹¹¹ Wehbe, "Saqaṭ Minqāra...wa Saqaṭat al-Imāra."

¹¹¹² Kriesi, "The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements," 173.

¹¹¹³ Mehretu, Pigozzi, and Sommers, "Concepts in social and spatial marginality," 90-91.

political role of a Salafī figure like ash-Shahāl had appeared to shift as a response to the structure of Lebanese Sunnī politics and his place relative to the centres of power in it. And while the demobilising processes would normally be opaque, the Miqati government's 2013 collapse and Lebanon's ensuing institutional paralysis was about to start a period of transparent national competition, making them unusually easy to see.

Chapter 6:

Elite Influence in 2013 & 2014

Introduction

Events in 2013 and 2014 would highlight the forces that shaped ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's changing national roles: the shaykhs exercised their weak agency within demobilising limits that other actors set from above, forcing them to conform to the structure of their context and a limited place in it. That was not a new issue. Ash-Shahāl's national political role after 2005 had shifted as the Hariris' intervention in Sunnī society did, while the Syrian regime had similarly shaped the opportunities, constraints, and history of Tripoli's Salafī and Islamic movements. And the Najdī movements of twentieth-century Saudi Arabia had invited structural questions and explanations of Salafī actors' participation in the national political landscape. But the underlying processes of contentious politics—particularly demobilisation—that shaped marginal actors' place in that landscape were especially visible in Lebanon's political climate after Najib Miqatī's March 2013 resignation. That would be a disaster for all of Lebanon that triggered a period of institutional paralysis and almost-unrestricted national competition, and it was no less damaging within the narrower world of Sunnī politics. There, an increasingly decentralised Sunnī elite had new incentives to appropriate partners who legitimised their claims to power and helped mobilise resources for other activities.

As Lebanon's newest crisis stretched from 2013 to 2014, it would be easy to see those demobilisation dynamics by which the centres of power shaped Salafī actors' place in the national context. At some points, Sunnī leaders co-opted the shaykhs' advocacy as a source of political legitimacy, while exploiting their position as prominent but not powerful religious figures to mobilise resources for Tripoli's ongoing fighting. At others, the response to incidents in Sidon and Tripoli showed that they would repress the shaykhs if they perceived them as a political liability or a threat. And while that mix of co-optation and repression reinforced a sense of "demobilisation" when taken together,¹¹¹⁴ the former's indirect processes and the latter's frequent reliance on subtle signals also spoke to what the shaykhs' structural "place" was: a "space" where they could safely operate as marginal players. That itself illustrated how ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's national role changed: they recognised what rhetoric and behaviour the centres of power left space for, and would survive by choosing

¹¹¹⁴ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, "Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics," 275-76.

their words and actions accordingly.¹¹¹⁵ There were still varied ways in which they could exercise their agency, and it was notable that after Lebanese leaders reached a settlement in 2014, ar-Rāfiʿī remained in Lebanon while ash-Shahāl fled. But they were still making those choices within that space, inviting the simple explanation that their role in the country's national politics ultimately reflected the structure of their context and their place relative to the centres of power in it.

Key Assumptions Start to Fail

Miqatī's March 2013 resignation triggered a period of institutional paralysis, highlighting the crucial influence which centres of power had over ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's national role. Even if the resignation left the authoritarian structures of Lebanon's politics intact, it created a national environment where confessional elites could address new challenges with minimal regard for convention or discretion. And in Sunnī politics, Miqatī's resignation and Ashraf Rifi's termination widened the field of active Sunnī elites and the range of political interests that they had to manage. There were still limits on how they used the Salafīs to pursue them, and regional shifts highlighted ongoing political considerations like Salafism's perceived toxicity that constrained elites' engagement with actors like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī. But March 2013 marked the start of a highly informal period in which the strategy, interests, and politics behind elites' influence on the Lebanese context and marginal actors' place in it were all uncertain.¹¹¹⁶ Amidst the uncertainty, there were basic questions about how those centres of political power managed their relationships with minor players like the Salafīs when many of the constraints on their ability to do that had disappeared.¹¹¹⁷

Institutional Paralysis & Elite Impunity

Cynical members of Lebanon's political class could afford to view Miqatī's resignation positively: the ensuing institutional paralysis created space for pragmatic competition, and by leaving Lebanon's two-level system intact it would allow elites to manipulate marginal actors like the Salafī movement with near impunity. That crisis was the result of structural problems in a system where elites and marginal actors coexisted, but power flowed from the

¹¹¹⁵ Massey, "Concepts of Space and Power in Theory and Political Practice," 19-20.

¹¹¹⁶ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 22-23.

¹¹¹⁷ Kriesi, "The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements," 168.

top. The central issue was a set of partisan political cleavages that had manifested themselves in most major disputes, like the Maronite rivalry between the March 14-inclined Samir Geagea and the March 8-leaning Michel Aoun. Those divides were comprehensive, drawing marginal actors in Lebanese society like the Salafīs and ash-Shahāl, who saw Aoun's relationship with Hizbullah as a deeper alignment with Damascus and the Iranian government.¹¹¹⁸ But not all problems were originally at the elite level, political in nature, or even Lebanese. Attempts to accommodate Syrian refugees, for example, had strained Lebanon's state and international partners' economic capacity,¹¹¹⁹ as Syrians sought the same education or work opportunities in Tripoli and elsewhere as wider Lebanese society.¹¹²⁰

Alongside other regional problems, those structural difficulties were enough to push the system to a point where any added complications could make it fail. March 14 and March 8 had failed to resolve divisions over Syria,¹¹²¹ hinting at a national confrontation. And social tensions were manifesting themselves plainly in protests led by marginal actors like HUM and figures like ar-Rāfiʿ, ¹¹²² hinting at the possibility of wider or deeper violence between

¹¹¹⁸ Zena Tabara, "ash-Shahāl li "al-Anbā": Saḥab Silāḥ aḍ-Ḍāḥiya Uwlā min Ṭarābulus," *al-Anba* (29/01/2013 2013). <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/arabic-international-news/lebanon-news/357174/29-01-2013-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b4%d9%87%d8%a7%d9%84-%d9%84%d9%80-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a7%d9%86%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%a1-%d8%b3%d8%ad%d8%a8-%d8%b3%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%ad-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b6%d8%a7%d8%ad%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%88%d9%84%d9%89-%d8%b7%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%a8%d9%84%d8%b3/>.

¹¹¹⁹ Roula El-Masri, Claire Harvey, and Rosa Garwood, *Shifting Sands: Changing gender roles among refugees in Lebanon* (Oxfam, 2013), 8.

<https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/300408/rr-shifting-sands-lebanon-syria-refugees-gender-030913-en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

¹¹²⁰ El-Masri, Harvey, and Garwood, *Shifting Sands: Changing gender roles among refugees in Lebanon*, 28-29.

¹¹²¹ Mona Christophersen and Cathrine Thorleifsson, "Lebanese Contradictory Responses to Syrian Refugees Include Stress, Hospitality, Resentment," *Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs Policy Brief* (June 2013 2013): 3-4. https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/policy_memo/20130705ifi_memo_Fafo_IFI_Policy_brief_Syrians_in_Lebanon.pdf.

¹¹²² Khadija al-'Omari, "Islāmiyūn Yad'ūn li-Iḥtijājāt bi-Wasaṭ Bayrūt al-Aḥad," *Anadolu Agency* (23/02/2013 2013).

<https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/archive/%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B7-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF/271736>.

communities. It was tempting to dismiss the warning signs. Marginal figures like ash-Shahāl, for example, had offered politicised explanations of Lebanon's problems that seemed to exist far above its ground-level challenges: Hizbullah and its partners abroad in Tehran and Damascus were to blame. But those were entirely serious, as were the shaykh's warnings of state collapse.¹¹²³ And that highlighted a general point. Lebanon's confessional elites were responsible for the system and had failed to address its political, economic, and social challenges, bringing the country that they insisted on ruling to the brink of failure. And while its structural problems had been manageable, added complications like further government instability or foreign pressure could see the whole thing collapse.¹¹²⁴

Miqatī's resignation would be the start of those added complications, if not necessarily the calamity which figures like the Salafis made it out to be. While his failures to manage political instability generally and March 8 specifically were enough to trigger a crisis, Lebanon would avoid a Hizbullah coup that restructured the country's politics according to the Party's unique vision. And when he finally did quit on March 22 it was framed as a disagreement about electoral law changes and the extension of ISF chief Ashraf Rifi's tenure rather than a declaration of civil war.¹¹²⁵ That would not ease the concerns that the Salafis were feeling about the issue. In his Friday sermon ar-Rāfi'ī described a coup against the Sunnī community. And he held Lebanon's established Sunnī institutions responsible for what had happened, be they the Hariris' national political establishment in the guise of March 14, their confessional one in the guise of the Future Movement, or their supposed Sunnī

¹¹²³ Beirut Observer, "ash-Shahāl: Ḥizb Allāh Yas'ā lil-īqā' bayna al-Jaysh was-Sunna," *Beirut Observer* (04/03/2013 2013). <https://www.beirutobserver.com/2013/03/2013-03-04-04-44-53/>.

¹¹²⁴ Abraham Diskin, Hanna Diskin, and Reuven Hazan, "Why Democracies Collapse: The Reasons for Democratic Failure and Success," *International Political Science Review* 26, no. 3 (2005): 304.

¹¹²⁵ Al Arabiya AA, "Qubūl Istiqālat Najīb Mīqātī wal-Qalaq Ya'um Lubnān," *Al Arabiya* (22/03/2013 2013). <https://www.alarabiya.net/arab-and-world/2013/03/22/%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%86%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%A6%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9>.

religious accessories like Qabānī and Dār al-Fatwā that ar-Rāfiʿī and HUM had agitated against.¹¹²⁶

In a more measured reading of the case, Miqatī's departure was less like a new catastrophe and more like a sign of two longstanding issues—one of which was the enduring nature of the Lebanese system. Despite ar-Rāfiʿī's charged interpretation, neither the Sunnī establishment nor the structures of Lebanon's politics were about to collapse. The basic issues that triggered the crisis were not entirely controversial, new, or existential. The electoral law backed by March 8 favoured the pro-Syrian bloc's chances in forthcoming elections, but the changes had wider traction and there was widespread interest in electoral reform.¹¹²⁷ And March 8's objections to extending Rifi's tenure were partisan but fit into Hizbullah's long-running campaign against the STL,¹¹²⁸ while Rifi himself would admit that the ISF's arrests of Hizbullah and Damascus' Lebanese partners like Michel Samaha during his tenure had long been a source of tension.¹¹²⁹ Taken together, it was not a sudden blow to the Lebanese system. Hizbullah had used its constitutional place as the opposition in the cabinet, holding fast to its position on established issues until Miqatī exercised his own prerogative to resign. Rather, it was a testament to one party's ability to obstruct politics, policy, and the workings of government more generally. March 8 had worked within the system towards an outcome while obstructing alternatives, rather than seizing or destroying Lebanon's government from opposition.¹¹³⁰

The other chronic problem that Miqatī's departure illustrated was that Lebanon's elites—as elsewhere—valued the system and their place in it, while still having their own interests and constraints. The reasoning behind Miqatī's departure was slightly unclear, even if

¹¹²⁶ Radwan Murtada, "ar-Rāfiʿī: al-Ḥarīrī Haraba wa Tarakna," *al-Akhbar* (30/03/2013 2013). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/48609>.

¹¹²⁷ Nassif Hitti, "Lebanon Must Reform Electoral Law," *Al-Monitor* (08/01/2013 2013). <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2013/01/lebanese-parliamentary-elections.html>.

¹¹²⁸ Martin Chulov, "Lebanon's Government Collapses as Miqatī Cabinet Resigns," *The Guardian* (23/03/2013 2013). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/22/lebanon-government-collapses-miqati-cabinet>.

¹¹²⁹ MTV Lebanon MTV, "Rifi Ḥawl Qaḍiyat Mīshāl Samāḥa," *YouTube* (20/02/2016 2016). <https://youtu.be/gbuRWpWbFKY>.

¹¹³⁰ Luca Tomini and Claudius Wagemann, "Varieties of Contemporary Democratic Breakdown and Regression: A Comparative Analysis," *European Journal of Political Research* 57 (2018): 708-09, 11.

acknowledgements of political pressure hinted at his calculations.¹¹³¹ His resignation speech noted overlapping political, economic, and societal problems alongside his earlier almost-resignations over the STL and Wisam al-Hassan's assassination, and he assigned blame to other elites for his government's failure.¹¹³² That was all fair. Managing domestic and international pressures without destroying the Miqati government had become impossible as Hizbullah became increasingly uncompromising, and public visits by a key backer—Walid Jumblatt—to Saad Hariri in Paris signalled that parliamentary allies remained open to renewed Future Movement leadership.¹¹³³ By 2013 it would be impossible for Miqati to please anybody. Pressures had stacked up in 2013 and left him with an electoral law that Hizbullah wanted but he and Jumblatt did not, international pressure for the elections to move ahead but blockage from Hizbullah, and US and Saudi pressure to confront the Assad regime over Hizbullah's objections.¹¹³⁴ But he was also not just someone who had fallen victim to the manipulative behaviour of other actors and forces. Speculation abounded that he had posed the ultimatum over Rifi's tenure, expecting a Hizbullah refusal that positioned him as the defender of Lebanese Sunnīs, especially in his native Tripoli.¹¹³⁵ Resigning capitulated to those pressures that constrained his premiership and made a state collapse unavoidable,¹¹³⁶ but it also capitalised on a chance to secure his own position.

¹¹³¹ Tareq Tarshisi, "Limādha Lam Yamna' al-Mujtama' ad-Dawli Istiqālat Mīqātī?," *al-Jumhouria* (23/03/2012 2013).

<https://www.aljournhouria.com/ar/news/62958/%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A>.

¹¹³² Al Jadeed, "ar-Ra'īs Najīb Mīqātī Ya'lan Istiqālat Ḥukūmatuhu," *YouTube* (23/03/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/WughH2nn18w>.

¹¹³³ Naharnet, "Junblāt Iltaqā al-Ḥarīrī fī Bārīs wa 'Araḍan li Ākhar at-Taṭawwarāt fī Lubnān wal-Miṭṭaqa," *Naharnet* (05/09/2012 2012). <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/ar/52417>.

¹¹³⁴ Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, "Lubnān: at-Taklīf al-Ḥukūmī al-Jadīd wal-Furaṣ "at-Tawāfiqiya"," *Doha Institute* (28/04/2013 2013). https://www.dohainstitute.org/ar/politicalstudies/pages/the_formation_of_a_new_government_and_state-wide_consensus_in_lebanon.aspx.

¹¹³⁵ Scarlett Haddad, "Mikati's Resignation Shakes Up Lebanese Politics," *Al-Monitor* (02/04/2013 2013). <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2013/04/mikati-resignation-lebanon-blessing.html>.

¹¹³⁶ Diskin, Diskin, and Hazan, "Why Democracies Collapse: The Reasons for Democratic Failure and Success," 300, 04.

In that stable system dominated by elites with their own interests, it was unexpected yet unsurprising that confessional leaders failed to settle on a new government in the wake of the 2013 resignation. March 14, March 8, and Lebanon's parliament generally were committed to the confessional system and collaborated to preserve its structure. That that end, they agreed to designate Tammam Salam as the next Prime Minister in April who could replace Miqati's caretaker premiership.¹¹³⁷ But while the political class valued the system that protected them from unrestricted competition, their conflicting interests stopped the system from delivering more than the bare minimum level of stability. While March 14 and President Michel Suleiman called for a neutral government as Salam began selecting a cabinet, Salam's refusal of March 8 demands for a "blocking third" in May would see the process and Lebanon's national institutions paralysed until one bloc capitulated.¹¹³⁸

The resulting inability to reach a national accord would have a second-order consequence: the paralysis of Lebanon's national institutions and a weakening of the artificial conventions that constrained national elites' behaviour. If the parliament's vote to suspend the June 2013 elections to 2014 was an indication, the leading figures in Lebanon's political class thought that they could wait the situation out. The adverse implications were going to be more limited for them than members of the wider public, who faced obvious disenfranchisement but could not do much about it besides generally being upset. But figures outside March 14 and March 8 were concerned that Lebanon's national blocs were waiting for international shifts that might tip the balance in their favour, or planning extra-legal competition outside of the country's constitutional processes.¹¹³⁹ As such, the situation

¹¹³⁷ al-Hurra, "Ijmā' Lubnānī 'alā Tasmiya Tammām Salām Ra'īs al-Ḥukūma al-Jadīda," *al-Hurra* (05/04/2013 2013).

<https://www.alhurra.com/latest/2013/04/05/%D8%A5%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%A7-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9>

¹¹³⁸ Paula Astih, "Tamām Salām Yarfuḍ Minh "ath-Thulth al-Mu'atal" li'ayya Faṣīl Lubnānī," *Anadolu Agency* (08/05/2013 2013). <https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/archive/%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%84%D8%AB-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B7%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%8A-%D9%81%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A/248278>

¹¹³⁹ Agencies, "Majlis an-Nuwāb al-Lubnānī Yumaddid Wilāyatuhu 17 Shahrān."

could worsen. The established legal frameworks of Lebanese politics offered little to confessional leaders, who would be able to compete outside them with minimal restraint. And while the electoral delays and disenfranchisement were bad enough on their own, wider Lebanese society and the marginal actors in it faced the prospect of being caught up in the middle of a dangerous competition between national political elites.¹¹⁴⁰

2013's gridlock therefore meant that Miqati's resignation had not plunged Lebanon into chaos, but it had left an atmosphere of elite impunity that would be dangerous for more marginal actors. The overall structure of Lebanon's politics would survive, but Miqati's resignation was symptomatic of the same domestic political instability that had helped freeze Lebanon's institutions. Until confessional elites reached an agreement the country would find itself just short of a civil war,¹¹⁴¹ and marginal actors like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿ would be in an uncomfortable spot as Sunnī leaders' strategy evolved. The shaykhs were unlikely to stay totally out of the resulting turmoil as Lebanon's elites sought and mobilised partners in service of national and confessional interests,¹¹⁴² and even in early 2013 ash-Shahāl conceded that Lebanon's state and major parties had penetrated the movement.¹¹⁴³ At the same time, they and the Sunnī public were at increased risk of repression, as worsening public perceptions of insecurity fuelled protests which gave once-marginal actors a base,¹¹⁴⁴ at a time when the absence of strong national norms freed the Sunnī establishment to suppress challenges to its power.¹¹⁴⁵ The situation had not become exceptionally abnormal—the basic political order survived and deadlocked cabinet negotiations showed that confessional elites still answered to each other.¹¹⁴⁶ But Lebanon's

¹¹⁴⁰ Andrea Cassani and Luca Tomini, "Reversing Regimes and Concepts: From Democratization to Autocratization," *European Political Science* 19, no. 2 (2020): 277-79.

¹¹⁴¹ Henry Hale, "Divided We Stand: Institutional Sources of Ethnofederal State Survival and Collapse," *World Politics* 56, no. 2 (2004): 170-71.

¹¹⁴² Goldstone, "More Social Movements or Fewer? Beyond Political Opportunity Structures to Relational Fields," 342-43.

¹¹⁴³ Tabara, "ash-Shahāl li "al-Anbā": Saḥab Silāḥ aḍ-Ḍāḥiya Uwlā min Ṭarābulus."

¹¹⁴⁴ Johannes Gerschewski, "The Three Pillars of Stability: Legitimation, Repression, and Co-Optation in Autocratic Regimes," *Democratization* 20, no. 1 (2013): 20-21; Hovig Wanniss, "Security Threat Perceptions in Lebanon," *International Alert* (November 2014 2014): 4-5.
<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/45504>.

¹¹⁴⁵ Dipak K. Gupta, Harinder Singh, and Tom Sprague, "Government Coercion of Dissidents: Deterrence or Provocation?," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 37, no. 2 (1993/06/01 1993): 335-36.

¹¹⁴⁶ Tsebelis, *Veto Players*, 78.

institutional paralysis had removed many barriers to once-unacceptable behaviours by the centres of Sunnī power. And just as importantly, there were new questions about the logic, ways, and means by which confessional elites shaped the structures of Lebanese Sunnī politics, and the place in them for marginal actors like the Salafis.¹¹⁴⁷

Political Decentralisation & the Removal of Artificial Structures

Miqati's resignation had separate implications for Sunnī confessional politics, where an increasingly decentralised class of Sunnī elites were going to have increasingly diverse interests. While the concentrated nature of the Future Movement's confessional power had always been artificial, Miqati's resignation confirmed that it was impossible to treat its centralised sort of control as a key assumption about Salafis' context and place in it. There had been hints of that before, the most obvious of which being that the Hariris' dominance was a relatively new phenomenon. Rafiq Hariri had risen in the nineties after the Civil War and Saad Hariri had consolidated the family's position in the 2005 elections, making places beyond the family's home of Sidon—like Tripoli—into territories at the expense of provincial competitors like the Trabelsi Karami family. That quasi-federal arrangement was not uniquely Lebanese—Saudi Arabia's Āl Sa'ūd had subordinated the Arabian Peninsula's tribes from their familial home in Najd, in collaboration alongside the Najdī 'ulama establishment and activist trends like the *Ṣaḥwā*. But the Hariris' emerging problems would provide a clearer illustration of how that system could collapse and of why its stability depended on other favourable circumstances.¹¹⁴⁸ The family's position relative to marginal actors like the Salafī movement was not about to change—its material resources and political influence made them lasting centres of power that constrained and enabled those minor players.¹¹⁴⁹ But 2013's events made it impossible to treat their position as an unchanging fact. Even if Najib Miqati had been a compromise premier and Ashraf Rifi had publicly deferred to the

¹¹⁴⁷ Christian Davenport, "State Repression and Political Order," *Annual Review of Political Science* 10, no. 1 (2007/06/01 2007): 10-11, 17-18.

¹¹⁴⁸ Hale, "Divided We Stand," 181-83.

¹¹⁴⁹ Tilly, *The Contentious French*, 396.

state until his tenure ended,¹¹⁵⁰ 2013's crisis had raised questions about the security of their positions and the purpose of Sunnī power.

Ashraf Rifi and Najib Miqati's departures from office would decentralise the Hariris' Sunnī confessional power, if only to a point. Miqati's resignation had raised fresh questions about a political vacuum in Lebanon and especially Tripoli,¹¹⁵¹ and circumstances positioned both men to fill it. That had been impossible in 2011 when March 8 started making increasingly aggressive attempts to stop March 14's politicised use of state resources.¹¹⁵² Then, there had only been space for some politically awkward actions like Miqati's diversion of funds to the STL in December,¹¹⁵³ and politically sensitive ISF raids that Rifi defended in May.¹¹⁵⁴ But while they respected their offices' limits in 2011, Miqati's resignation indicated his shifting priorities. And while Rifi had avoided appearances of excessive partisanship or parochialism when speaking about issues like terrorism in the weeks before his departure,¹¹⁵⁵ he spoke as a Trabelsi figure after, framing the city's violence as an act of community self-defence.¹¹⁵⁶ As Tripoli's deprivation and specific concerns about Hizbullah, Iran, and other threats

¹¹⁵⁰ Naharnet, "Rifi Yastab'id at-Tamdīd lahu fī Majlis al-Wuzarā': In Lam Yatimm al-Infāq 'alā Badīl Sa'aslim 'Ilm al-Mu'assassa bil-Wakāla ilā Mudīr 'Ām Jadīd," *Naharnet* (22/03/2013 2013). <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/ar/76576-%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A5%D9%86-%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%B3%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B3%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF>

¹¹⁵¹ LBCI, "LBCI News-2013-03-22 Muqadammat an-Nashra al-Masā'iyya," *YouTube* (23/03/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/QCmgmX8NvDQ>.

¹¹⁵² Karam, "The Fragile Balance in Lebanon," 185-86.

¹¹⁵³ Ohannes Geukjian, *Lebanon After the Syrian Withdrawal: External Intervention, Power-Sharing and Political Instability* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 189-91.

¹¹⁵⁴ al-Jarida, "Lubnān: Dāta al-Ittiṣālāt Tafajjar Khalāfan bayna al-Aman ad-Dākhilī wa Wazīr al-Ittiṣālāt Wazīr ad-Dākhiliyya Ya'takaf 'an Taṣrīf al-A'māl... wat-Tayyār al-'Awnī Yuḥadhdhir Sulaymān," *al-Jarida* (27/05/2011 2011). <https://www.aljarida.com/articles/1461908405904868800/>.

¹¹⁵⁵ MTV Lebanon MTV, "Kalimat Liwā Ashraf Rifi," *YouTube* (31/03/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/HwfUAtyCv38>.

¹¹⁵⁶ Al Jadeed, "Muqābila ma'a al-Liwā' al-Mutaqā'id Ashraf Rifi," *YouTube* (23/05/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/HK4CjZOTGu8>.

undermined the establishment's credibility, that placed both men in a good position from which to challenge the Hariris.¹¹⁵⁷ It did not remove any and all limits on the challenge that they could pose, and they had to make their own judgments in their own circumstances.¹¹⁵⁸ The former had to consider the lasting political constraints of his caretaker premiership thanks to stalled cabinet negotiations,¹¹⁵⁹ and the latter's noted lack of resources was an issue. But Miqati was wealthy and could support the mobilisation of the public under his auspices,¹¹⁶⁰ and Rifi's Trabelsi roots made him a natural local leader.¹¹⁶¹ They were independent men with some resources, and even if they would not overthrow the Sunnī establishment, their emergence marked a decentralisation of Sunnī power.¹¹⁶²

Even if a Sunnī civil war was unlikely, that decentralisation raised the prospect of limited competition for political legitimacy within the narrower structures of confessional power. Miqati's Premiership was a reasonable indication that he was already politically engaged, and there was only more bad news for the Hariris regarding Ashraf Rifi. Following Rifi's resignation, reports indicated that he took his termination as a sign of Miqati's weakness and the Future Movement's poor judgment. And for its part, the Sunnī establishment saw his public distance from them and interaction with their Saudi patrons as signs of a political threat.¹¹⁶³ Between the well-resourced Sunnī establishment and the resource-limited

¹¹⁵⁷ Barakat, "Ṭarābulus "“Āṣimat as-Sunna” Tataṣaddar Ma‘arakat Ri‘āsat al-Ḥukūma wal-Qarār al-Ittihāmī Qad Yūqiz “al-Ḥarb an-Nā’ima” fī Madīna “al-Jurḥ at-Tārīkhī”.”; Ruud Koopmans, "Political. Opportunity. Structure. Some Splitting to Balance the Lumping," *Sociological Forum* 14, no. 1 (1999): 98-99.

¹¹⁵⁸ Meyer and Minkoff, "Conceptualizing Political Opportunity," 1484-85.

¹¹⁵⁹ Naharnet, "Miqati Tackles Possibility of Reviving Caretaker Cabinet with Various Sides," *Naharnet* (11/12/2013 2013). <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/109399>.

¹¹⁶⁰ Al Jazeera AJ, Electronic Sites, and Wikipedia, "Najīb Mīqātī.. Aḥad Athariyā” al-‘Ālim Istad‘āhu Sāsāt Lubnān li Inqādh al-Murakkab," *Al Jazeera* (27/07/2021 2011). <https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2021/7/27/%D9%86%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D8%AB%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%87>.

¹¹⁶¹ Lucardie, "Prophets, Purifiers and Prolocutors," 176-77.

¹¹⁶² Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 176.

¹¹⁶³ Beirut Observer, "Khāṣ: Khilāf Ḥād bayna al-Ḥarīrī wa Rifi Qad Yaṣil Ḥad al-Qaṭī‘a wa Liqā’ Madīna “Kāna” Bā’ bil-Fashal," *Beirut Observer* (23/09/2013 2013). <https://www.beirutobserver.com/2013/09/%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B5-%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86->

newcomers, a direct confrontation was still unlikely. But a contest for political stature was possible, and all players could avail themselves to the networks and legitimacy that could be found in Sunnī society—particularly in the political advocacy of Lebanon’s Salafī and Islamic activist movements.¹¹⁶⁴

That decentralisation was going to affect Tripoli’s Salafīs, too. For resource-poor centres of power like Ashraf Rifi, the shaykhs were potential partners whose advocacy could reinforce his position in a contest for political authority and legitimacy. That did not mean that he would automatically use them, and Sunnī leaders still had to be discriminating when shopping for friends. Sidon’s shaykh Aḥmad al-Asīr’s anti-Hizbullah rhetoric and anti-establishment image, for example, were politically convenient, yet his increasing involvement in violence by early 2013 risked triggering a confrontation that would spoil any partner’s brand.¹¹⁶⁵ But as partners, Tripoli’s Salafīs had potential. Ar-Rāfi‘ī would stand out as someone who voiced scepticism of the political class on behalf of the Sunnī public,¹¹⁶⁶ and a productive working relationship was possible. Even as he attacked the establishment after Miqati’s resignation ar-Rāfi‘ī had warned Hammoud about what he was going to say.¹¹⁶⁷ And more generally, people from his and ash-Shahāl’s circles had spoken about Rifi and Miqati in warm terms.¹¹⁶⁸ At least in theory, that mix of good political leanings and judgment created an opportunity for figures like Rifi and Miqati to co-opt the shaykhs’ religious authority as a source of political legitimacy,¹¹⁶⁹ as a substitute for the power and networks which the

%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%82%D8%AF-%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%AD/; al-Anba, "Akhbār wa Asrār Lubnāniyya," *al-Anba* (27/09/2013 2013). <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/arabic-international-news/lebanon-news/411805/27-09-2013-%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9/>.

¹¹⁶⁴ Lucardie, "Prophets, Purifiers and Prolocutors," 178-79.

¹¹⁶⁵ Muammar Atwi, "Ma‘ārik Sayda: "Mashrū‘ Fitna" am "Şāhib Haqq"?", *Deutsche Welle* (24/06/2013 2013). <https://www.dw.com/ar/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%83-%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9-%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%85-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A8-%D8%AD%D9%82/a-16903068>; Davenport, *State Repression and the Domestic Democratic Peace*, 56.

¹¹⁶⁶ Sālim ar-Rāfi‘ī, "26/4/2013: ash-Shaykh Sālim ar-Rāfi‘ī fī Khuṭbat al-Juma‘a," *YouTube* (27/04/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/Zn31QImunO0>.

¹¹⁶⁷ Murtada, "ar-Rāfi‘ī: al-Ḥarīrī Haraba wa Tarakna."

¹¹⁶⁸ Hazem Saghieh and Bassan al-Sheikh, "Ṭarābulus min Zaman ad-Dawla ilā Zaman as-Salafiyya," *Lebanon Files* (15/01/2013 2013). <https://www.lebanonfiles.com/news/496147/>.

¹¹⁶⁹ Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldūn*, 35-36.

Hariris enjoyed.¹¹⁷⁰ But the shaykhs' support was not a substitute for the power and influence which the Hariris had enjoyed while the Hariris' potential competitors did not. And more practically, there was a question not just of how much Sunnī leaders would really want to coordinate and consult with the shaykhs, but also of how the shaykhs themselves could simultaneously advocate for elite and public interests.¹¹⁷¹

Besides the value of their political advocacy, the Salafī movement also had some potential as partners who helped mobilise resources for an increasingly dangerous national competition. That competition was already visible in places like Tripoli and especially around Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabel Mohsen, where March 14 and March 8 officials had signalled ongoing interest in communal violence as a proxy fight over the domestic balance of power and Syria.¹¹⁷² But the tangled patterns of facilitation in it would hint at competing Sunnī claims for confessional influence. It was common knowledge that storehouses existed around town and belonged to figures like the Hariris' long-time interlocutor Ḥammūd, Miqati who supported militia partners like Saad al-Maṣrī in Bab al-Tabbaneh despite his caretaker premiership, and Rifi who backed partners like Ziyād 'Alūkī.¹¹⁷³ That was arguably a problem for elites and not Lebanon's Salafīs, whose focus was on Syria. Ar-Rāfi'ī had framed Syria's war as a *jihād* by April,¹¹⁷⁴ and HUM more widely had called for fighters and weapons,¹¹⁷⁵

¹¹⁷⁰ McCorriston, "Pastoralism and Pilgrimage," 617.

¹¹⁷¹ Lapegna, "Social Movements and Patronage Politics: Processes of Demobilization and Dual Pressure," 855, 57.

¹¹⁷² Haytham Mouzahem, "Tripoli a Reflection of Syria's Sectarian War," *Al-Monitor* (24/05/2013 2013). <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2013/05/lebanon-tripoli-syria-crisis.html>.

¹¹⁷³ Abd al-Rahman Arabi, "'Qādat al-Maḥāwir'..Nakhba Jadīda fīl-Mujtama' aṭ-Ṭā'ifī al-Lubnānī (1)," *The New Arab* (06/04/2014 2014).

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%22%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%22-%D9%86%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A9%D9%8C-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%91-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%91-1-0>.

¹¹⁷⁴ Thair Ghandoor, "Burūda Jihādiya," *al-Modon* (23/04/2013 2013). <https://www.almodon.com/print/9f48bcd0-a029-4e10-b363-6e2b89f51683/2bb651ee-cf7b-4570-94a7-90287eeb2668>.

¹¹⁷⁵ Hamza Tekin, "Mashāykh bi Lubnān: Da'wāt al-Qitāl fī Sūriya Arā' Fardiya," *Anadolu Agency* (23/04/2013 2013). <https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/archive/%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%81%D9%8A->

“state-‘ulama partnership” in which figures like ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfi‘ī and others could act on their principled acquiescence or opposition to political authority. Rather, it was a potential problem. Given the decentralisation of confessional power after Miqati’s resignation, the shaykhs were vulnerable and expendable—alignment with one centre of Sunnī power risked making them a problem for another.¹¹⁸² There was still room for a positive relationship, especially when actors like Miqati and Rifi faced their own challenges and had incentive to use whatever material resources and political influence they could access. But their pragmatism could see them co-opt or repress their partners in service of their own political interests,¹¹⁸³ and common sense suggested that the relationship would last so long as Lebanon’s leaders saw no reason to break their promises.¹¹⁸⁴ After decades of crackdowns like those on HTI in Tripoli in the eighties, ash-Shahāl’s colleagues in Ḍinniyeh in the nineties, and *Fataḥ al-Islām* in Naher al-Bārid in 2007, there was no reason to expect the establishment to tolerate challenges.¹¹⁸⁵ If the leaders who loomed over the Sunnī confessional context could define Salafīs’ place in it according to their own interests, then the shaykhs’ political role and even survival depended less on their own principled views towards politics, and more on the calculated ways in which the centres of Sunnī power shaped the space in which they could operate.

Salafī Political Toxicity & Instability

Neither the Miqati government’s collapse nor the decentralisation of confessional power were occurring in a vacuum, and sensitivities in the wider context meant that the ties between the Sunnī political class and the Salafīs would only be so direct or controlling. For their part, Sunnī leaders had to consider shifts in that regional environment, beyond

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%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AA-
%D8%A8%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D8%AF-
%D9%88%D9%82%D9%88%D9%89-%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%B1-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B98-
%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%89.

¹¹⁸² David S. Meyer and Suzanne Staggenborg, "Movements, Countermovements, and the Structure of Political Opportunity," *American Journal of Sociology* 101, no. 6 (1996): 1648.

¹¹⁸³ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, "Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics," 275-76.

¹¹⁸⁴ Maguire, "Opposition Movements and Opposition Parties," 202-03.

¹¹⁸⁵ McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, 57.

Lebanon's local one where Salafī and activist movements had any meaningful influence.¹¹⁸⁶ Much of that centred round the regional competition in Syria, where the Qatari and Turkish governments were becoming a distinct source of support for the Syrian opposition,¹¹⁸⁷ and the Saudi government was attempting to influence the Uprising at Doha and Ankara's expense—a transnational split that mirrored a deeper Gulf diplomatic crisis.¹¹⁸⁸ And the Lebanese political class was keenly aware of that wider regional context's impacts on Lebanon. While Sunnī leaders usually avoided the issue, Hizbullah openly stated its concerns about Sunnī figures like Aḥmad al-Asīr in Sidon that it saw as Qatari beneficiaries, Salafī movements that generally had Saudi backing, and figures like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī who had enjoyed ties to Saudi and other Gulf partners well before 2011.¹¹⁸⁹

Those regional shifts would indirectly affect the Salafī movement. Saad Hariri had guaranteed the foreign support which secured the Future Movement's confessional dominance by backing the Syrian Uprising. That had not totally subordinated Lebanon's Sunnī community to any one regional power—in the absence of other considerations, he would sit somewhere within but not necessarily in opposition to any one part of the Saudi, Turkish, and Qatari partnership.¹¹⁹⁰ But it reflected a general problem: the national centres of Sunnī power which shaped the role of marginal players like ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfi'ī and other Salafī shaykhs would do so while managing pressure from a range of other, more powerful regional actors. While the shaykhs would not necessarily draw much direct attention from abroad, they were subject to the whims of Lebanese Sunnī leaders who did not necessarily

¹¹⁸⁶ Tarrow, McAdam, and Tilly, *The New Transnational Activism*, 62.

¹¹⁸⁷ Agencies, "al-Mālikī Yaḥdhar min Ḥurūb Ṭā'ifiyya ba'ad al-Asad," *Al Jazeera* (27/02/2013 2013). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2013/2/27/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%AD%D8%B0%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A8-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AF>.

¹¹⁸⁸ Frederic Wehrey, "Gulf Calculations in the Syrian Conflict," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (09/06/2014 2014). <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/06/09/gulf-calculations-in-syrian-conflict-pub-55865>.

¹¹⁸⁹ Nasser Chararah, "Saudi-Qatar Honeymoon In Lebanon Is Over," *Al-Monitor* (17/05/2013 2013). <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2013/05/qatar-saudi-arabia-stuggle-influence-middle-east.html>.

¹¹⁹⁰ Wehrey, "Gulf Calculations in the Syrian Conflict."

share their values and had to shape any relationship according to different perceptions of the world, their place in it, and their interests.¹¹⁹¹

An added regional complication was that the political toxicity of actors like Lebanon's Salafīs would limit the kind of relationships that actors like Lebanon's Sunnī establishment could build. The regional divide over those sorts of activist movements had become especially clear by July 2013, after the Egyptian Army removed the Muslim Brotherhood President Muhammad Morsi from office. Official explanations were difficult to parse. At the time, Saudi officials and their regional partners described it in specific terms as a domestic security issue for Egypt, and warned of links between the Brotherhood, interests in Qatar, and international terrorism.¹¹⁹² But those specific statements signalled a more general set of judgments about a broader set of political problems,¹¹⁹³ which were liable to evolve as circumstances did. While Qatar's regional relations were harmed in 2013 by perceptions that its relationship to the Brotherhood was regionally destabilising,¹¹⁹⁴ Saudi concerns about Qatari interference dated to 2011 when the waves of unrest had first broken out in the Arab world.¹¹⁹⁵ And despite the damaging nature of allegations that some support for extremist actors like Jabhat an-Nuṣra came from Qatar,¹¹⁹⁶ similar patterns of support had been coming from Saudi Arabia and going to armed groups like Jaysh al-Islām as a counterbalance

¹¹⁹¹ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 47-48.

¹¹⁹² Murshid al-Ṭisā, "ar-Riyāḍ al-Qaṭariyya Arḍ Khaṣba li Taṣḍīr Qādat "al-Irhāb", " *al-Riyadh* (19/06/2017 2017). <https://www.alriyadh.com/1603949>.

¹¹⁹³ Kathleen Carley and Michael Palmquist, "Extracting, Representing, and Analyzing Mental Models," *Social Forces* 70, no. 3 (1992): 609-10.

¹¹⁹⁴ Rachid Khechana, "Tabāyuna Rudūd al-Fa'al al-Khalījiya Ya'akas Tabā'ud al-Mawāqif min "al-Ikhwān", " *SwissInfo* (16/07/2013 2013). https://www.swissinfo.ch/ara/%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%8A_%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%8A-%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B9%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%83%D8%B3-%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%81-%D9%85%D9%86--%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-/36430980.

¹¹⁹⁵ Khaldūn as-Sa'īdān, "al-Jazīra wal-Fitna an-Nā'ima," *al-Riyadh* (22/01/2011 2011). <https://www.alriyadh.com/597079>.

¹¹⁹⁶ Maṣṣūr bin Khālīd Āl Sa'ūd, "I'lām Qaṭar Yaghtī Siyāstuhā as-Sayī'a," *al-Riyadh* (14/07/2017 2017). <https://www.alriyadh.com/1609390>.

against Brotherhood and Qatari-linked movements in Syria,¹¹⁹⁷ alongside other efforts there, in Libya, and elsewhere to curb Iranian regional influence.¹¹⁹⁸

Those regional disputes highlighted the political toxicity of actors with ideological leanings and an interest in disrupting their domestic political environment, and would affect the relationship that Lebanon's elites built with its Salafis. The anxieties were understandable. Saudi and other governments had to manage their differences with Qatar and a threat from Tehran.¹¹⁹⁹ But as regional governments worked through their differences, the tense political climate would force Lebanon's elites to speak and act carefully. And for marginal actors like Lebanon's Salafis, it meant that any relationship with the centres of power would remain dynamic because it was influenced—at least in part—by factors outside Lebanon. Regional officials would make political judgments based on political factors outside Salafis' control, and would have concerns about any Salafī political movement and those who associated with it.¹²⁰⁰ And any relationship between Lebanon's Sunnī establishment and its Salafī movements would evolve as the centres of power balanced local political priorities against other considerations.¹²⁰¹

That did not mean that any problems with ash-Shahāl or ar-Rāfi'ī's advocacy and activism were political inventions by Lebanese elites or regional governments, and the shaykhs' inflammatory rhetoric would only reinforce their alienation from polite international society. Many regional listeners would find the sectarian tone of ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī's activism and advocacy off-putting. Visiting Egypt, ash-Shahāl framed danger from Iran as a "Majūsī" threat—referencing Iran's ancient and un-Islamic Zoroastrian heritage—at conferences in

¹¹⁹⁷ René Reiger, *In Search of Stability: Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre, 2014), 16-18. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/182104/GRM_Rieger_final__09-07-14_3405.pdf.

¹¹⁹⁸ Daniel Odinius and Philipp Kuntz, "The Limits of Authoritarian Solidarity: the Gulf Monarchies and Preserving Authoritarian Rule During the Arab Spring," *European Journal of Political Research* 54, no. 4 (2015/11/01 2015): 650-51.

¹¹⁹⁹ Hassan Hassan, "Syria: the View from the Gulf States," *European Council on Foreign Relations* (13/06/2013 2013). https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_syria_the_view_from_the_gulf_states135/.

¹²⁰⁰ Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 12-13.

¹²⁰¹ Robert Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 428-29.

April and May,¹²⁰² or a “Safavid” one—referencing the Persian Shī‘ī Islamic empire—from *Al-Jazeera’s* Cairo studios.¹²⁰³ Ar-Rāfi‘ī’s remarks at April’s “Spring of Iraq” conference with Salafīs and other activists in Istanbul raised similar warnings, denouncing the Iranian threat to the region’s Sunnīs and calling young men to fight.¹²⁰⁴ That was to say nothing of the political specifics, like ash-Shahāl’s theory of a plot to trigger American regional intervention,¹²⁰⁵ or ar-Rāfi‘ī’s warnings of similar Iranian-Israeli schemes.¹²⁰⁶ With a provocative message of religious identity and a paranoid political framing of regional events, the shaykhs were only reinforcing the sense that they were precisely the kind of activists that wider society needed to avoid.

That incendiary rhetoric would limit the Salafīs’ range of interested partners. They would have no place in regional states’ more ambitious gatherings like Doha’s conference that courted potential backers like the United States for the Syrian opposition,¹²⁰⁷ or sensitive Saudi government negotiations to transfer equipment from Western suppliers into Syria.¹²⁰⁸ And the conference that ash-Shahāl attended in Cairo alongside various Salafīs and their fellow travellers would be far removed from those arrangements,¹²⁰⁹ especially when regional states wanted to avoid overt appearances of links to radical movements.¹²¹⁰ Those activist movements were still potentially useful partners in some instances. But the actors who might create opportunities and constraints for them had other interests, and needed to

¹²⁰² al-Maktab al-‘Ilāmī at-Tayyār as-Salafī, “Yaqīn Kalimat Faḍīlat ash-Shaykh ash-Shahāl bi Mu’tamar Naṣrat Ahl ash-Shām fil-Qāhira,” *YouTube* (29/04/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/Acd3DugZ55o>.

¹²⁰³ al-Maktab al-‘Ilāmī at-Tayyār as-Salafī, “Dā‘ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl Muqābalāt wa Mu’tamarāt wa Mudākhalāt,” *YouTube* (15/06/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/zzMhORVf4IA>.

¹²⁰⁴ Sālim ar-Rāfi‘ī, “5-4-2013 Kalimat ash-Shaykh ar-Rāfi‘ī fī Mihrajān Rabī‘ al-‘Irāq,” *YouTube* (06/04/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/tY9Hrhwwqf0g>.

¹²⁰⁵ as-Salafī, “ash-Shaykh Dā‘ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl Mu’tamar Da‘am Sūriya bil-Qāhira.”

¹²⁰⁶ ar-Rāfi‘ī, “5-4-2013 Kalimat ash-Shaykh ar-Rāfi‘ī fī Mihrajān Rabī‘ al-‘Irāq.”

¹²⁰⁷ Karen DeYoung, “Syrian Rebels’ Backers, Meeting in Qatar, Agree to Send Weapons,” *Washington Post* (22/06/2013 2013). https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/syrian-rebels-backers-meeting-in-qatar-agree-to-send-weapons/2013/06/22/a7707274-db50-11e2-b418-9dfa095e125d_story.html.

¹²⁰⁸ Amena Bakr, “Saudi Supplying Missiles to Syria Rebels: Gulf Source,” *Reuters* (17/06/2013 2013). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-missiles-saudi-idUSBRE95G0DK20130617>.

¹²⁰⁹ Muḥammad al-‘Amri, “Bada’a Mu’tamar “al-Jasad al-Wāḥid” lil-Munāṣara Sūriya Ḥāfiẓ Salāma wa Ḥuḍūr Rumūz Salafiya,” *al-Masry al-Youm* (25/05/2013 2013). <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/204731>.

¹²¹⁰ Alberto Negri, “Gulf Regional Crisis: Qatar-Saudi Arabia Rivalry, Tensions within the Gulf Cooperation Council,” *IEMed: Mediterranean Yearbook* (2018): 244-45.

consider the toxic political impacts of any perceived association.¹²¹¹ In those circumstances, the shaykhs' rhetoric was going to repel many potential partners.

Between the political risks of associating with Salafism and the shaykhs' own role in making them worse, any relationship that Lebanon's centres of Sunnī power had with its Salafī movements would have to be limited and conditional. Even before Miqatī's resignation had paralysed Lebanon's national institutions, Riyadh had seen North Lebanon warily. Saudi officials worried that the Hariris were undermining Saudi interests by ceding power to Salafī movements there, and as such they had started courting alternatives like Miqatī.¹²¹² Regional perceptions of Salafī and Islamic activist movements were still subjective, and while Saudi authorities had firm reservations about them, actors like Aḥmad al-Asīr and Salafī shaykhs like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī had all benefited from the support of Kuwaiti and Qatari networks.¹²¹³ But that subjectivity did not mean that those perceptions did not matter. For regional and local Lebanese interests alike, the political toxicity of the movements meant that any relationship could enable the political opponents of whichever actor chose to support them. As Ahmad Hariri's *Al-Arabiya* interview showed in early 2013, for example, such links were easily weaponised, as he denied any Future Movement relationship and blamed Mīqātī for tensions involving Salafīs in Tripoli and Aḥmad al-Asīr in Sidon.¹²¹⁴

There would still be space for Sunnī elites to maintain a relationship to their marginal counterparts in that environment, but it would not be an overly direct or controlling sort that jeopardised other political priorities. The possibility of a relationship was not news to

¹²¹¹ Carley and Palmquist, "Extracting, Representing, and Analyzing Mental Models," 610-11, 13; Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," 457.

¹²¹² Firas Choufi, "Al-Akhbar Article Taken from 'The Great Lesson of Patriotism of Hasan Nasrallah'," *Voltairenet.org* (28/01/2013 2013). <https://www.voltairenet.org/article177293.html>.

¹²¹³ Rougier, *Sunni Tragedy in the Middle East*, 181-82.

¹²¹⁴ Al Arabiya AA, "Naqṭa Niṣām: Aḥmad al-Ḥarīrī," *Al Arabiya* (30/03/2013 2013). <https://www.alarabiya.net/programs/organizing-point/2013/03/30/%D9%86%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A>.

Tripoli's Salafīs, who remembered their old partnerships with the Hariris.¹²¹⁵ But despite the near-impunity that Sunnī leaders enjoyed in the aftermath of Miqatī's choice to quit office, any ties would be sensitive and handled as such. Like the centralised Sunnī authority that had disappeared with Miqatī's resignation and Rifi's termination, a transparent "state-ʿulama" alliance was an unrealistic expectation. Yet at the same time, there was still room for Sunnī leaders to make a calculated judgment about the value and costs of a relationship, and the ways in which to maximise the former while minimising the latter. As such, the toxicity of movements like the Salafīs and other activists was not going to leave actors like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī free to respond to pressures from the public below them or follow their own religious and political instincts without any constraints. Instead, it meant that the centres of power would shape their place and role in the Lebanese context according to a more complex mix of general judgments about how a relationship with the Salafīs could serve one set of interests, and how it might be structured to avoid damaging another.

Demobilisation in Service of Elite Competition

Those overlapping domestic considerations, strategic interests, and political sensitivities would see the centres of Lebanese Sunnī power reshape the shaykhs' place in national politics from 2013 to 2014 through a loose process of demobilisation. Any facilitation would be no closer than necessary for Sunnī leaders to co-opt Salafīs' advocacy as a source of political legitimacy and their activist influence in society to mobilise resources. And while Sunnī elites needed to enforce certain limits, repression would only be direct enough to prevent marginal actors from becoming political liabilities or challengers. That mix of facilitation and repression formed a wider pattern of demobilisation, by which the centres of Sunnī power shaped the political space for ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfiʿī and other marginal actors. But it also meant that the shaykhs needed to use their agency not to define their own role, but to adapt to Lebanese confessional leaders' shifting preferences—a distinction which allowed ar-Rāfiʿī to survive as a national figure and forced ash-Shahāl to flee Lebanon as things settled in 2014.

¹²¹⁵ Thaer Gandour, "as-Salafiyyū fī Azma: an-Najda!," *al-Modon* (22/02/2013 2013). <https://www.almodon.com/politics/2013/2/22/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%84%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%88%d9%86-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%a3%d8%b2%d9%85%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%86%d8%ac%d8%af%d8%a9>.

Co-Optation of Resources & Legitimacy

As Tripoli's violence continued into 2013, Sunnī leaders co-opted the shaykhs' advocacy for political ends and exploited their place in the community to help mobilise resources for the fighting. The clashes were a constant reminder of Lebanese elites' domestic influence, and the question was less of whether Sunnī leaders had a relationship with the Salafīs than of how that relationship worked. The violence was still partly local—it centred mostly on Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabel Mohsen where militia leaders like Ziyād 'Alūkī described an independent conflict between the ADP and Sunnī fighters that the Hariris had abandoned.¹²¹⁶ But although the national problem of state paralysis and the local one of Tripoli's social tensions supported the idea that the initial outbreaks were a local phenomenon,¹²¹⁷ Tripoli was still a deprived city. It was difficult to look past the question of what—or who—had helped the fighting to last as long as it did.¹²¹⁸

Those unresolved issues meant that like the fighting after 2008's Crisis, the city's ongoing violence seemed more like a structural phenomenon that raised structural questions. The Salafīs and militias linked to them were still involved, but they were also not its source.¹²¹⁹ Given the indications from March 14 and March 8 that the clashes were part of a wider competition over the resettlement of national power and Syria,¹²²⁰ the more likely explanation was that the city's shaykhs sat in a larger structure of political arrangements. From a place as prominent figures in Sunnī society, they sat just above Tripoli's Sunnī public that had mobilised on its own and well below a Sunnī political class that had tied its interests

¹²¹⁶ Paula Astih, "Ṭarābulus al-Lubnāniyya.. Malāmiḥ Dimawiya Yarsamuhā Raṣāṣ al-Iqtitāl aṭ-Ṭā'ifi," *Anadolu Agency* (28/05/2013 2013).

<https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/archive/%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AD-%D8%AF%D9%85%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B5-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%81%D9%8A/242017>.

¹²¹⁷ James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *The American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 88.

¹²¹⁸ Daniel Cress and David Snow, "Mobilization at the Margins: Resources, Benefactors, and the Viability of Homeless Social Movement Organizations," *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 6 (1996): 1102-03.

¹²¹⁹ Zanoḥia, "Bil Asmā'..Hawlā'i min Qādū Ma'araka Ṭarābulus!!," *Zanoḥia* (08/06/2013 2013). http://www.znoḥia.com/archive/print_details.php?page=show_det&id=18002&num_page_det=1.

¹²²⁰ Mouzahem, "Tripoli a Reflection of Syria's Sectarian War."

to the ensuing violence. The resulting question was not a simple one of whether they were acquiescent or hostile to political authority. Rather, it was a more complex one of whether and why elites at the top of the Sunnī pile had co-opted them in the process, either as a source of political legitimacy or a tool that aided the mobilisation of resources.¹²²¹

Although the letter of ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's advocacy focused on the Sunnī community's circumstances as tensions over Syria heightened in early 2013, their rhetoric would be as incendiary in Lebanon as elsewhere. The shaykhs' narratives of politicised collective Sunnī identity had persisted, and their story of a Lebanese community which fit into a wider transnational Sunnī one would become increasingly noticeable as the Syrian government's pressure on Homs province and its offensive in the city of al-Qusayr escalated.¹²²² Neither of them wanted to be passive conveyers of the news—ar-Rāfiʿī's Friday sermons condemned Sunnī deaths in Syria, while he and ash-Shahāl accused the Lebanese state of complicit negligence by standing by as they happened. In that capacity, their religious tone was distinct. Ar-Rāfiʿī in particular framed the Revolution as a war against disbelief,¹²²³ pitching a believing community against a regime that wanted to replace Islam's basic affirmations of faith with "*la ilaha illa Bashar*," or "no God but Bashar."¹²²⁴ And there was also a more sensitive link that he and ash-Shahāl drew between Damascus' actions across the border and

¹²²¹ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 103-04, 06, 225-26.

¹²²² Paula Astih, "al-Qurrā 'al-Mutadākhila" .. Markaz al-Ishtibāk bayna al-Jaysh al-Ḥurr wa Ḥizb Allāh," *Anadolu Agency* (19/02/2013 2013). <https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/archive/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1-%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87/273115>; Al Jazeera AJ and Electronic Sites, "al-Quṣayr.. Muḥaṭṭa Muḥṣaliya li Thawrat as-Sūriya," *Al Jazeera* (20/05/2013 2013). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2013/5/20/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%81%D8%B5%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7>.

¹²²³ Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī, "26/4/2013 ash-Shaykh Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī fi Khuṭbat al-Juma'a," *YouTube* (27/04/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/no5EmCOQPVw>.

¹²²⁴ Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī, "15-3-2013 Salsila as-Sīra an-Nabawiyya - Waqa'at Badr - Mukhāṭbat Ahl al-Qalīb," *YouTube* (21/03/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/dq5fz0innMc>.

a threat to Lebanon by the Syrian “‘Alawī state.”¹²²⁵ But that did not necessarily make them radical outliers whose message centred round basic ideas of identity, drawn from the fundamentals of Najdī Salafism. Its foundations were geopolitical and if there was a problem then the shaykhs were only a symptom of it, having spoken as representatives of a Sunnī community where hostile views of the Syrian Regime and Iranian regional influence were widespread.¹²²⁶

The charged rhetoric made it unrealistic for Lebanon’s Sunnī elites to maintain a public relationship with actors like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi‘ī, and the shaykhs had not helped things. Even if their messaging was not an issue, they and their associates had positioned themselves as a destabilising force. Ash-Shahāl and some close followers had been caught in minor brawls with the Army, giving the movement a disorderly appearance at best.¹²²⁷ And ash-Shahāl’s vague threats of a Sunnī *jihād* in Lebanon also raised questions of whether the movement posed a national threat, just as ar-Rāfi‘ī’s calls for *jihād* in Syria hinted at a looming transnational one.¹²²⁸ That would pose a problem for the centres of Sunnī power, who needed to manage political perceptions and would find such rhetoric toxic. While the shaykhs were concerned about the Sunnī community’s welfare, Sunnī leaders had to operate

¹²²⁵ ar-Rāfi‘ī, "26/4/2013: ash-Shaykh Sālim ar-Rāfi‘ī fī Khuṭbat al-Juma‘a."; Jaf Everson, "al-Jaysh al-Lubnānī vs ash-Shaykh ash-Shahāl," *YouTube* (04/03/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/VF54hB5Rx1c>.

¹²²⁶ Aram Nerguizian, "Statement Before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs: Lebanon at the Crossroads," (25/02/2014 2014): 15-17. https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/022514_REVISED_Hearing_Testimony%20-%20Aram_Nerguizian.pdf.

¹²²⁷ Naharnet, "Lebanese Salafist Cleric Says Will Issue “Fatwa” Against “Sunni Attackers”," *BBC Monitoring Middle East* (London), 03/03/2013 2013, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1314120343?accountid=8330> http://JN8SF5HK5V.search.serialssolutions.com?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx_enc=info:ofi/enc:UTF-8&rft_id=info:sid/ProQ%3Aabidateline&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:journal&rft.genre=article&rft.jtitle=BBC+Monitoring+Middle+East&rft.atitle=Lebanese+Salafist+cleric+says+will+issue+%22fatwa%22+against+%22Sunni+attackers%22&rft.au=&rft.aulast=&rft.aufirst=&rft.date=2013-03-03&rft.volume=&rft.issue=&rft.spage=&rft.isbn=&rft.btitle=&rft.title=BBC+Monitoring+Middle+East&rft.issn=&rft_id=info:doi/.

¹²²⁸ Dunya al-Waṭan, "Mu’assis “at-Tayyār as-Salafī” fī Lubnān: al-Jaysh Muhīman ‘Alayhi min Qabl “Ḥizb Allāh” wa Ḥulafā’i Sūriya wa Īrān waḍ-Ḍaḥiya as-Sunna," 11/11/2021, *al-Watan Voice* (04/03/2013 2013). <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2013/03/04/367657.html>; Al Jazeera AJ, "Fatāwā Lubnān Tadakhkhul Atūn al-Azma as-Sūrī," *Al Jazeera* (24/04/2013 2013). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2013/4/24/%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%89-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84-%D8%A3%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9>.

from a national position where miscalculations between elite players could trigger a much broader security crisis. And that made any appearance of a link to the Salafī movement's incendiary language and provocative behaviour a dangerous liability.¹²²⁹

But those political sensitivities were still only half of the equation, and Sunnī leaders had to consider them alongside an emerging political priority: building bridges to the parts of Sunnī society that they needed to mobilise. Issues had arisen by 2013 that made it difficult to mobilise the public from a distance, and it was becoming difficult to resolve them by throwing money at the problem. There was not a lack of material resources. The Hariris and Miqati were financially secure, and billboards lauding Ashraf Rifi had emerged around Tripoli as his term ended at the start of April,¹²³⁰ which—considered alongside others showing him alongside Rafiq and Saad Hariri—hinted at some ongoing material support from the Sunnī establishment despite any political tensions.¹²³¹ By early 2013, though, Tripoli's crucial human resources were getting to be inaccessible. The militias had not disappeared, and in Bab al-Tabbaneh, 'Alūkī and others like Saad al-Maṣrī and 'Āmir Arīsh were local strongmen with their own networks.¹²³² But those leaders were becoming increasingly hard to buy, having come to see establishment partners like Ḥammūd as sources of incitement rather than support.¹²³³ There was space for new intermediaries and mediators who could build indirect links from Sunnī leaders to Lebanon's wider Sunnī public.

Leaving aside their political toxicity, the shaykhs could be a satisfactory solution to Sunnī leaders' resource mobilisation problems by serving as intermediaries between the Sunnī

¹²²⁹ Nerguizian, "Lebanon at the Crossroads," 43.

¹²³⁰ LBCI, "Report: Posters of Ashraf Rifi Overtake Tripoli," *LBC* (02/04/2013 2013). <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/news/d/lebanon-news/82765/report-posters-of-ashraf-rifi-overtake-tripoli/en>.

¹²³¹ Habib Battah, "The Rise of Rifi," *Beirut Report* (23/05/2013 2013). <https://www.beirutreport.com/2013/05/the-rise-of-rifi.html>.

¹²³² Ghasan Saud, "al-Mustaqbal Yanza' Mukhālib Mīqātī aṭ-Ṭarābulusiya," *el-Nashra* (17/04/2013 2013). <https://www.elnashra.com/news/show/607064/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84-%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%B2%D8%B9-%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9>.

¹²³³ Radwan Murtada, "Qādat al-Musallihīn fī Ṭarābulus Yanqalibūn 'alā al-Mustaqbal: Nurīd al-Hudū'," *al-Manar* (13/03/2011 2013). <https://archive.almanar.com.lb/article.php?id=439829>.

political class and public. Notwithstanding their political toxicity, actors like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī were potential enablers of resource mobilisation in Sunnī society that served wider national priorities. Sunnī leaders could still indirectly back the militias as Mīqātī did by using his office to provide political cover—a decision that fuelled Tripoli’s lax security environment, gave militia leaders like ‘Āmir Arīsh borderline impunity,¹²³⁴ and allowed them to illegally support themselves. And everyone with access to resources, including Rifi and Ḥammūd, could discreetly supply partners like ‘Alūkī.¹²³⁵ But Sunnī leaders needed to control problematic excesses like extortion that fuelled anti-elite sentiments,¹²³⁶ or nationally sensitive clashes with the Army.¹²³⁷ Fortunately, some Salafī shaykhs had shown the political instincts necessary to do that—ar-Rāfiʿī, for example, stressed Salafīs’ commitment to defending Sunnīs rather than attacking Lebanon’s Shīʿa,¹²³⁸ and ash-Shahāl evaded questions about Salafī hostility towards the wider Lebanese system and communities like Tripoli’s ‘Alawīs.¹²³⁹ Like the public they were polarised from the establishment. But if their advocacy and activism helped manage Lebanon’s sensitivities and the consequences of unacceptable conduct,¹²⁴⁰ they could still discreetly support public mobilisation in service of elite interests.¹²⁴¹

And for Sunnī leaders with more specific political needs like Ashraf Rifi, ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī’s political advocacy was a useful legitimising tool as the city’s violence worsened in May. The shaykhs’ rhetoric captured the public mood on issues like fighting in Syria’s al-

¹²³⁴ Anonymous, "Man Yaḥkum Ṭarābukus...al-Jaysh al-Lubnānī am Qādat al-Maḥāwir," *Jawadsayegh.blogspot.com* (22/08/2013 2013). https://jawadsayegh.blogspot.com/2013/08/blog-post_8729.html.

¹²³⁵ Arabi, "'Qādat al-Maḥāwir" ..Nakhba Jadīda fīl-Mujtamaʿ aṭ-Ṭāʾifi al-Lubnānī (1)."

¹²³⁶ Radwan Murtada, "Qarāṣinat Ṭarābulus: Aqwā min al-Ḥarīrī," *al-Manar* (12/04/2013 2013). <https://archive.almanar.com.lb/article.php?id=465079>.

¹²³⁷ British Broadcasting Corporation BBC, "Irtifaʿ Qutlā al-Ishtibākāt aṭ-Ṭāʾifiyya fī Ṭarābulus bi Lubnān Ilā Arbaʿa," *BBC* (22/03/2013 2013). https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2013/03/130322_lebanon_clashes.

¹²³⁸ AJ, "Mā Warāʿ al-Khubr - Daʿwat ash-Shaykh Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī li Sunnat Lubnān."

¹²³⁹ BBC, "Bilā Quyūd."

¹²⁴⁰ Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 20.

¹²⁴¹ David Meyer, "Peace Protest and Policy: Explaining the Rise and Decline of Antinuclear Movements in Postwar America," *Policy Studies Journal* 21, no. 1 (1993): 51-52.

Qusayr, as ash-Shahāl called Sunnīs to support their coreligionists abroad,¹²⁴² while Aḥmad al-Asīr and ar-Rāfiʿī called for Sunnī volunteers to confront Hizbullah in Syria.¹²⁴³ That would be incendiary for some Sunnī leaders like Miqatī. As Prime Minister he had to balance his local Trabelsi credentials against the national responsibilities of a caretaker premiership, and denounced the clashes while warning the public against those who wanted to encourage them.¹²⁴⁴ But Rifi could benefit from the political climate that the shaykhs' rhetoric had helped reinforce. His statements echoed their narratives of politicised Sunnī vulnerability, accusing the ADP in Jabel Mohsen of triggering the clashes for Hizbullah,¹²⁴⁵ even if he avoided sectarian language that explicitly linked him to the Salafī movement. And he took the same view that the militias had acted in self-defence at a time when external forces obstructed a ceasefire,¹²⁴⁶ while linking the clashes to violence further afield in al-Qusayr while warning that Trabelsi men would defend the city.¹²⁴⁷ That co-optation of the Salafīs' message had political costs, and some observers accused Rifi of abandoning his old ISF professionalism to the point where he was almost indistinguishable from the city's shaykhs

¹²⁴² SyriaThePromise, "Aṣḍā' Ma'rakat "al-Quṣayr" fī Ṭarābulus: Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl Ya'lan an-Nafir al-ʿĀm wa Yarsal Ibnuhu Zayd 'Aaā Ra'as Majmū'āt Salafiyya ilā Ḥimṣ," *SyriaThePromise.wordpress.com* (21/05/2013 2013).

<https://syriathepromise.wordpress.com/2013/05/21/%D8%A3%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5/>.

¹²⁴³ Shafiq Shaqir, "Ma'arakat al-Quṣayr as-Sūriya: Tabi'āt Tadakhkhul Ḥizb Allāh al-Lubnāniyya wal-Iqlīmiyya," *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies* (07/05/2013 2013).

<https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/reports/2013/05/20135711716642298.html>.

¹²⁴⁴ Wasim Saifuddin, "Miqātī Yuṭālib bi Tawqif al-Muṭawarriṭin fī Ishtibākāt Ṭarābulus (Fīdiyū)," *Anadolu Agency* (20/05/2013 2013).

<https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/archive/%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88/244558>.

¹²⁴⁵ Anne Barnard and Hania Mourtada, "Battle for Syrian Town Spurs Sectarian Fighting in Northern Lebanon," *New York Times* (24/05/2013 2013).

<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/25/world/middleeast/battle-for-syrian-town-spurs-sectarian-fighting-in-northern-lebanon.html>.

¹²⁴⁶ Jadeed, "Muqābila ma'a al-Liwā' al-Mutaqā'id Ashraf Rifī."

¹²⁴⁷ FutureTV News, "al-Liwā' Rifī: Ḥizb Allāh Ghabī Liannah Aqṭaḥam al-Quṣayr," *YouTube* (24/05/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/150qAi7SaVs>.

and their message.¹²⁴⁸ But it linked his political interests to the public one in a shifting conflict that sectarian rhetoric from the shaykhs had reinforced.¹²⁴⁹ Even though a clear relationship was still unwise amidst national sensitivities, that relationship was less valuable than the co-optation of the Salafīs' political identity and framing, which could channel public outrage in ways that legitimised his position and his interests.¹²⁵⁰

But Rifi's indirect co-optation of the Salafī movement was the exception rather than the rule, and most of the Sunnī political class would care more about using the shaykhs to help mobilise human resources for the fighting. That process would have to be just as indirect. Giving money and political cover to the militias would be enough to enable but not manage them, and when even Rifi avoided any indications of direct control,¹²⁵¹ steering the militias required complementary pressure.¹²⁵² And Sunnī leaders recognised that ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfi'ī, and others like Zakariya al-Maṣrī could help do that. The resulting arrangements were opaque but there were hints—albeit in the form of politicised allegations—of Sunnī elites' wider strategy, as Future Movement representatives accused Miqati of supporting ar-Rāfi'ī with “\$20,000 USD per month,”¹²⁵³ and pro-Syrian sources later claimed that Salafīs including ar-Rāfi'ī cooperated with Ḥammūd.¹²⁵⁴ That may have resulted in a lack of direct control, but that indirectness was a feature rather than a defect in the relationship. Sunnī leaders wanted the shaykhs to apply their own judgment and influence from an established position in Sunnī society, and did not—as observers like Nabīl Raḥīm noted—have principled

¹²⁴⁸ Ayman Sharrouf, "Rifi wa Tanānīr al-Maḥāwir," *al-Modon* (24/05/2013 2013). <https://www.almodon.com/politics/2013/5/24/%d8%b1%d9%8a%d9%81%d9%8a-%d9%88%d8%aa%d9%86%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%8a%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%ad%d8%a7%d9%88%d8%b1>.

¹²⁴⁹ Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, 48-49.

¹²⁵⁰ Jeff Corntassel, "Partnership in Action? Indigenous Political Mobilization and Co-Optation during the First UN Indigenous Decade (1995-2004)," *Human Rights Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2007): 139-40.

¹²⁵¹ FutureTV Interviews, "Inter-views 26/06/2013 Ma'a al-Liwā' Ashraf Rifi," *YouTube* (27/06/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/ENG9n2qVQkE>.

¹²⁵² J. Craig Jenkins and Craig Eckert, "Channeling Black Insurgency: Elite Patronage and Professional Social Movement Organizations in the Development of the Black Movement," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 6 (1986): 821, 23.

¹²⁵³ Nadine Elali, "Sects and the City," *NOW Media* (11/04/2013 2013). http://www.shiawatch.com/public/uploads/files/Sectarian_Now_Apr112013.pdf.

¹²⁵⁴ ad-Diyyar, "Limādha Tamma Tahrib 'Amīd Ḥammūd min Ṭarābulus ilā Khārij Lubnān Kayfa Qām al-Ḥarīrī bi l'ṭā' Ta'līmātuhu li Tahribihi li l'khfā' Faḍīḥat "Tayyār al-Mustaqbal"."

objections to sectarian rhetoric.¹²⁵⁵ And it made more sense as part of a larger picture of mobilisation where the militias offered manpower and their established grievances set them against Sunnī leaders' targets like the ADP, while the shaykhs' influence helped curtail the dangerous behavioural excesses.¹²⁵⁶ Rather than asserting direct leadership over the wider Sunnī community, the centres of Sunnī power were content to enable the shaykhs and the sort of sectarian conflict that their rhetoric encouraged,¹²⁵⁷ backing them as indirect partners who reframed and redefined community grievances according to their own outlook and political instincts.¹²⁵⁸

Although those relationships were not close or entirely obvious, that distance and its downsides were politically necessary for Sunnī leaders. Co-opting the shaykhs was still an imperfect solution to Sunnī leaders' diverse problems after the Miqati government's March 2013 resignation. By the middle of the year there were obvious control issues. Violence in Tripoli would continue towards the year's end thanks to tensions below and encouragement from above, and the shaykhs remained an indirect asset that channelled militia activities in roughly the same direction as elites' national priorities.¹²⁵⁹ But while mobilising resources towards the shaykhs had benefits, it risked detaching them from the structures of Sunnī power. There had been signs of their growing independence from society, like April's disputes that saw Tripoli's Salafī shaykhs like ar-Rāfi'ī and Salafī militia leaders like Ḥusām aṣ-

¹²⁵⁵ al-Quds al-Arabi, "ash-Shaykh Raḥīm Yastab'id Wujūd Bī'at Ḥaḍina li Dā'ish fi Lubnān," *al-Quds al-Arabi* (04/07/2014 2014).

<https://www.alquds.co.uk/%EF%BB%BF%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%85-%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A6%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%B6%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AF/>; Abd al-Kafi al-Samad, "Nabīl Raḥīm Khārij as-Sijin: al-Qā'ida Ghayr Mawjūda fi Lubnān," *al-Akhbar* (29/07/2011 2011). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/92289>.

¹²⁵⁶ Saud, "al-Mustaqbal Yanza' Mukhālib Mīqātī aṭ-Ṭarābulusiya."

¹²⁵⁷ Markus Holdo, "Cooptation and non-cooptation: elite strategies in response to social protest," *Social Movement Studies* 18, no. 4 (2019/07/04 2019): 451-53.

¹²⁵⁸ Coy and Hedeem, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation: Community Mediation in the United States," 413-14.

¹²⁵⁹ Jenkins and Eckert, "Channeling Black Insurgency: Elite Patronage and Professional Social Movement Organizations in the Development of the Black Movement," 821, 23; Kathim Aker, "Man Hum Qādat al-Maḥāwir fi Ṭarābulus?," *New Lebanon* (25/10/2013 2013).

<https://www.newlebanon.info/lebanon-now/86534/%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3->

Şabāgh assert the militias' right to extort the public.¹²⁶⁰ And as tensions between the Sunnī public and establishment deepened after June's crackdown on Aḥmad al-Asīr in Sidon, the shaykhs positioned themselves against the Sunnī establishment and more moderate local actors. In the crisis meetings between ar-Rāfi'ī, ash-Shahāl, Ḥammūd, and Trabelsi militia and civil leaders, ar-Rāfi'ī and ash-Shahāl sided with militant figures like aş-Şabāgh, and withdrew over objections to other attendees' proposed "moderate" response.¹²⁶¹ And as Tripoli's militias continued to occasionally exceed their remit to the point that it required Army intervention,¹²⁶² it was hard to ignore the costs of facilitating Tripoli's Salafis as partners. Sunnī leaders' ongoing interest in national competition made it unwise to overly limit public behaviour, and the decentralisation of Sunnī politics made a common strategy unlikely. But they needed constraints to maintain the general structure of Sunnī politics and regulate ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfi'ī, and other shaykhs' place in it.

Repressing Political Liabilities & Structural Challenges

Repression would complement Sunnī leaders' indirect facilitation efforts with necessary constraints, limiting the perceived political liabilities or systemic threats from the Salafis through an often-subtle process of signals and warnings. There had been more transparent examples of what repression could look like—June's crackdown on Aḥmad al-Asīr and his fighters in Sidon, for example, showed how far the crackdowns could go. The Sidon crackdown itself was confirmation that Sunnī leaders only saw a limited space for marginal

¹²⁶⁰ Murtada, "Qarāṣinat Ṭarābulus: Aqwā min al-Ḥarīrī."

¹²⁶¹ Antoine Amrieh, "Aṣdā' Şayda Tataraddad fī Ṭarābulus...wa ar-Rāfi'ī Yuṣa'id," *al-Jourhouria* (25/06/2013 2013).

<https://www.aljourhouria.com/ar/news/79314/%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B5%D8%B9%D8%AF>

¹²⁶² Paula Astih, "Ishtabākāt Musallaḥa Khilāl Muḥāwalat al-Jaysh al-Lubnānī al-Sayṭara 'alā "Bab at-Tabbāna" bi Ṭarābulus," *Anadolu Agency* (06/06/2013 2013).

<https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/archive/%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3/240121>

actors like the Salafīs, driving the shaykh into hiding and many fighters aligned with him to jail.¹²⁶³ But while the spark that triggered the eventual crackdown—an attack on an Army checkpoint—was obvious, the fact that al-Asīr’s fighters had previously clashed with Hizbullah-affiliated counterparts was a confusing detail.¹²⁶⁴ Even amidst the paralysis that followed Miqati’s March resignation, there was a question of why a crackdown had occurred in Sidon but not in Tripoli—there, Salafīs had been involved in those clashes, including some that struck the Army. And the shaykhs themselves added little clarity about the issue with public statements that held neither al-Asīr nor the state totally accountable—ar-Rāfi‘ī blamed Hizbullah’s role within Lebanon,¹²⁶⁵ and like ash-Shahāl he pointed to the Syrian and Iranian state interference that both men saw behind it.¹²⁶⁶ The Sidon crackdown was still an illustrative case, showing that the centres of power expected marginal actors to respect certain boundaries. But the Salafīs’ reading of the issue did not explain if or how their counterpart down south had transgressed them.¹²⁶⁷

¹²⁶³ al-Quds al-Arabi, "I‘tiqāl Aḥmad al-Asīr Dākhil aṭ-Ṭā’ira fī Bayrūt... wa ljrā’āt Amniyya fī Ṣayda," *al-Quds al-Arabi* (15/08/2015 2015).

<https://www.alquds.co.uk/%EF%BB%BF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AE%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A8/>.

¹²⁶⁴ Laila Bassam, Imad Omar, and Omar Khalil, "Maqṭal 12 fī Ishtibākāt bayna al-Jaysh wa Anṣār Shaykh Sunnī fī Ṣayda bi Janūb Lubnān," *Reuters* (24/06/2013 2013).

<https://www.reuters.com/article/oegtp-leb-clashes-mm2-idARACAE9B2X6M20130623>.

¹²⁶⁵ Al Jazeera AJ, "Taṣā‘id al-Ishtabākāt fī Ṣayda," *Al Jazeera* (26/06/2013 2013).

<https://www.aljazeera.net/programs/behindthenews/2013/6/26/%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A7>.

¹²⁶⁶ Zena Tabara, "Dā‘ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl li “al-Anbā’”: Ḥizb Allāh Khaṭafa ad-Dawla wash-Shāri‘ aṭ-Ṭarābulus mā ‘Ād Yuḥṭamil," *al-Anba* (28/06/2013 2013).

<https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/arabic-international-news/lebanon-news/392106/28-06-2013-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%84%D9%80-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%8A%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%85%D9%84/>.

¹²⁶⁷ Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 62-63.

Al-Asīr's experience also conveyed a crucial lesson: the centres of power would not extend political cover to marginal players who seemed like a political liability. Miqati was still Lebanon's Prime Minister while Sidon was the Hariris' hometown, and the absence of any crackdown suggested that as in Tripoli, they had used their position to shield all but the most destabilising behaviour.¹²⁶⁸ As shown by remarks in coming weeks from March 14 MP and sister of Rafiq Hariri, Bahiya Hariri, the boundaries of acceptability were political rather than legal: violence was not necessarily bad but attacks on the Army were toxic. To that end, her commitments to Lebanese civic identity distanced the Party from actors like al-Asīr, and she expressed confidence in President Fouad Siniora and the Army while condemning the Miqati government's failures to secure Lebanon since 2011.¹²⁶⁹ But the mobilisation of a violent movement outside the Sunnī establishment's control was less of an issue, and even if she framed the Army as a political red line, she still sympathised with al-Asīr and avoided undue comments on the clashes with Hizbullah.¹²⁷⁰ And the Salafis would recognise the hint. Even if ash-Shahāl's former associate Bilāl Daqmāq would blame the political establishment in coming years,¹²⁷¹ ash-Shahāl himself did not raise firm public objections to the crackdown at the time even if he worried about the implications for the community.¹²⁷² Similarly, ar-Rāfi'ī's advice to supporters against displaying weapons at the ensuing protests—after warnings from officials—showed that the shaykh could see and respect the boundaries.¹²⁷³ He knew that Sunnī leaders had their own political interests in a Lebanese system that they

¹²⁶⁸ Davenport, *State Repression and the Domestic Democratic Peace*, 179-80.

¹²⁶⁹ FutureTV, "Inter-views 03/07/2013 Ma'a an-Nā'ib Bahiya al-Ḥarīrī wa Fa'āliyyāt Ṣayda," (04/07/2013 2013). https://youtu.be/_LO_YwtFpCY.

¹²⁷⁰ Al Jadeed, "Kayf Waṣafat al-Ḥarīrī al-Aḥkām aṣ-Ṣādira bi Ḥaqq al-Asīr wa Faḍil Shākir?," *YouTube* (01/10/2017 2017). https://youtu.be/8p_GjjSvNe4.

¹²⁷¹ Al Jadeed, "ash-Shaykh Bilāl Daqmāq 'an al-Khilāf ma'a Jam'yyat al-Mushārī' wal-'Alāqa ma'a ash-Shahāl ..Mādha Qāla 'an al-Ḥarīrī wa 'Awn wa Bāsīl," *YouTube* (14/07/2021 2021). https://youtu.be/YbV_ND0z84g.

¹²⁷² al-Maktab al-Ilāmī at-Tayyār as-Salafī, "Kalām an-Nās ma'a ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl 2013 06 24," *YouTube* (26/06/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/DAkSI559eEs>.

¹²⁷³ The Daily Star, "Sidon, Tripoli See Limited Pro-Assir Protests," *The Daily Star* (06/07/2013 2013). <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1397916585?accountid=8330>
http://JN8SF5HK5V.search.serialssolutions.com?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx_enc=info:ofi/enc:UTF-8&rft_id=info:sid/ProQ%3Amiddleeastnews&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:journal&rft.genre=article&rft.jtitle=The+Daily+Star&rft.atitle=Sidon%2C+Tripoli+see+limited+pro-Assir+protests&rft.au=&rft.aulast=&rft.aufirst=&rft.date=2013-07-06&rft.volume=&rft.issue=&rft.spage=&rft.isbn=&rft.btitle=&rft.title=The+Daily+Star&rft.issn=10273883&rft_id=info:doi/.

controlled, and that threatening them was an unacceptable transgression that could provoke an overwhelming response.¹²⁷⁴

Unlike the Sidon crackdown, the August mosque bombings by the Syrian regime showed that perceptions of a systemic threat from marginal actors were just as likely to attract repression as a specific political problem. The blasts might have invited a sense that they were an attack on the city's Salafī movement, hitting ar-Rāfi'ī's at-Taḳwa mosque and the as-Salām mosque of another Salafī named Bilāl al-Bārūdī.¹²⁷⁵ But Damascus's actual target was unclear, and the most that a Lebanese judge could initially allege was that the Syrian regime had tasked Lebanese partners with targeting political and religious figures, if not specifically the Salafīs.¹²⁷⁶ For confessional leaders like Miḳati the ambiguity was a relief, when speculation could inflame tensions and he was not looking for more problems.¹²⁷⁷ But the shaykhs had fewer doubts. Ar-Rāfi'ī and HUM blamed Damascus for August's bombings,¹²⁷⁸ while ash-Shahāl suggested that the Syrian regime wanted to export violence to Lebanon.¹²⁷⁹ That was an understandable view when the bombings were not the first attack on them in 2013—someone had already shot ar-Rāfi'ī near his mosque in April, in an attack that he attributed to Trabelsi support for Syria's opposition.¹²⁸⁰ And state investigators would later support it

¹²⁷⁴ Davenport, *State Repression and the Domestic Democratic Peace*, 49.

¹²⁷⁵ Naharnet, "14 Qatīla 'alā al-Aqall wa 500 Jarīḥ fīl-Infijārayn Istahdafa Maṣjidayn fī Ṭarābulus," *Naharnet* (23/08/2013 2013). <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/ar/95236>; Saad Abedine and Michael Pearson, "Twin Bombings Rock Mosques in Tripoli, Lebanon," *CNN* (23/08/2013 2013). <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/23/world/meast/lebanon-tripoli-blast/index.html>.

¹²⁷⁶ Nicholas Blanford, "Lebanese Court Pegs Deadly Mosque Attacks on Syria," *Christian Science Monitor* (30/08/2013 2013). <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/0830/Lebanese-court-pegs-deadly-mosque-attacks-on-Syria>.

¹²⁷⁷ Agence France-Presse AFP, "Ṭarābulus Tushī' Ḍaḥāyāhā fī Yawm Hadād Waṭanī Wasaṭ Ijrā'āt Amniya Mushaddida," *France24* (24/04/2013 2013). <https://www.france24.com/ar/20130824-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B1>.

¹²⁷⁸ Naharnet, "Hay'at al-'Ulamā' al-Muslimīn Tuṭālib bi Lijān Sha'abiyya Tusā'id 'alā Ḍabṭ al-Aman fī Ṭarābulus," *Naharnet* (24/08/2013 2013). <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/ar/95390>.

¹²⁷⁹ Lebanon Files, "ash-Shahāl: Ma Jarā Yadfa'nā li Inshā' Shurṭa Dhātiya li Ḥafṣ al-Aman," *Lebanon Files* (15/08/2013 2013). <https://www.lebanonfiles.com/news/591154/>.

¹²⁸⁰ Naharnet, "ash-Shaykh Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī: Lam Akun al-Mustahdaf min Iṭlāq an-Nār wa Lan Atarāja' 'an Da'amī lith-Thawra as-Sūriya," *Naharnet* (02/04/2013 2013). <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/ar/77921>.

to some extent, accusing pro-regime figures in Tripoli including some ADP members of involvement,¹²⁸¹ alongside Syrian intelligence officers.¹²⁸²

While the mosque bombings' precise motive would remain slightly unclear, the uncertainty showed that the perceptions of a threat from the Salafis mattered more than the reality. Between their advocacy against the regime as representatives of the community and activist efforts to send Tripoli's Sunnis to fight in Syria,¹²⁸³ the shaykhs had positioned themselves in a way that would make Damascus nervous. Even without clear evidence that they were a demonstrable problem in their own right, the Syrian regime had taken their rhetoric and behaviour as a sign that they were part of a wider landscape of threats. Like the massacres in Bab al-Tabbaneh that destroyed HTI's emirate in the eighties, that made the bombings into less of a response to a specific transgression than a message to potential or perceived ones: opposition to the Syrian system in even the most menial ways would attract a violent reaction.¹²⁸⁴

But while June's crackdown and the mosque bombings were dramatic illustrations of what could happen and why, the establishment's warnings against an overreaction to the latter

¹²⁸¹ Naharnet, "Report: Arab Democratic Party, Syrian Intelligence Behind Twin Tripoli Bombings," *al-Bawaba* (13/10/2013 2013). <https://www.albawaba.com/news/lebanon-tripoli-bomb-526792>.

¹²⁸² Agence France-Presse AFP, "Lubnā Yattahim Dābiṭayn fīl-Mukhābarāt as-Sūriya bi Tafjīr Muzdawij fī Ṭarābulus," *SwissInfo* (02/09/2016 2016).

<https://www.swissinfo.ch/ara/%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%AC-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3/42418488>.

¹²⁸³ Omar Habanjar, "Ittijāh li-Taḥwīl Muḥāfazat al-Baqā' ash-Shamālī Mintaqa 'Askariyya.. wa at-Tansīq al-Amnī Yan'akas 'alā Tashkīl al-Ḥukūma," *al-Anba* (18/06/2013 2013). <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/arabic-international-news/lebanon-news/389727/18-06-2013-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%B9%D9%83%D8%B3-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9/>.

¹²⁸⁴ Davenport, "State Repression and Political Order," 2-3.

sending an inconvenient signal to the centres of Sunnī power. And in response, the centres of Sunnī power had sent a dangerous signal back.¹²⁹⁰

Ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfiʿī, and other Trabelsi Salafīs recognised the demobilising pressures and shaped their behaviour accordingly. The shaykhs' advocacy had not changed—ar-Rāfiʿī still criticised failures to deliver justice for Tripoli and Sunnīs generally,¹²⁹¹ and ash-Shahāl continued attacking the state and political class.¹²⁹² And activism within certain boundaries remained acceptable. Ash-Shahāl kept leading minor protests against security force behaviour,¹²⁹³ just as contemporaries like Zakaria al-Maṣrī warned that violence would continue while the bombings' perpetrators remained free.¹²⁹⁴ But beyond that, they chose their words carefully to avoid creating problems like the crackdown in Sidon and the mosque bombings.¹²⁹⁵ Ar-Rāfiʿī was publicly content to leave physical security to the state,¹²⁹⁶ and while ash-Shahāl did not walk back local security proposals that would usurp the government's role in Tripoli, he deflected questions of whether he was still firmly behind the idea, emphasising the security vacuum and the threat to Sunnīs.¹²⁹⁷ And they discussed

%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%B0%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AF.

¹²⁹⁰ Davenport, *State Repression and the Domestic Democratic Peace*, 49.

¹²⁹¹ "Paula Yacoubian's Friends", "Inter Views 11 12 2013 Ma'a an-Nā'ib Samīr al-Jisr wa ash-Shaykh Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī," *YouTube* (28/03/2018 2013). <https://youtu.be/lmqXGKo-0r8>.

¹²⁹² Al Arabiya AA, "Naqṭa Nizām: ash-Shaykh Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl," *Al Arabiya* (21/09/2013 2013). <https://www.alarabiya.net/programs/organizing-point/2013/09/21/%D9%86%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84>.

¹²⁹³ The Daily Star, "Salafist Sheikh, Protesters Block Road to Syria," *The Daily Star* (29/11/2013 2013). <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2013/Nov-29/239360-salafist-sheikh-protesters-block-road-to-syria.ashx#axzz2m4kH3BzD>.

¹²⁹⁴ Janoubia, "Sa'ad al-Maṣrī: al-Ḥall fī Ṭarābulus bi Taslīm Manfadhī at-Tafjīr," *Janoubia* (27/10/2013 2013). <https://janoubia.com/2013/10/27/%d8%b3%d8%b9%d8%af-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%b5%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d9%84-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%b7%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%a8%d9%84%d8%b3-%d8%a8%d8%aa%d8%b3%d9%84%d9%8a%d9%85-%d9%85%d9%86%d9%81%d8%b0%d9%8a/>.

¹²⁹⁵ Ritter and Conrad, "Preventing and Responding to Dissent: The Observational Challenges of Explaining Strategic Repression," 85.

¹²⁹⁶ Naharnet, "ar-Rāfiʿī Yuṭālib ad-Dawla bi Ḥal al-Ḥizb al-ʿArabī ad-Dīmuqrāṭī: Li l'tiqāl Muṭlaqī an-Nār fī Ṭarābulus," *Naharnet* (25/10/2013 2013). <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/ar/103257>.

¹²⁹⁷ AA, "نقطة نظام."

Tripoli's security in cautious terms that relied heavily on religious symbolism and language—ar-Rāfiʿī left responsibility for ultimately avenging the bombings to God,¹²⁹⁸ and ash-Shahāl promised that Sunnīs would confront disbelief, oppression, and attacks on their *ʿaqīda*.¹²⁹⁹ Like with many secular scholars, the shaykhs' insecurity and isolation made their advocacy and activism understandable. But they also understood that despite their nominal independence, they operated with the tacit approval of passive-aggressive authorities who rarely sent clear messages.¹³⁰⁰ Survival required them to read the situation, avoid accidentally threatening insecure superiors, and spare themselves a violent backlash.¹³⁰¹

As Tripoli's security plan started and stalled in October, that responsiveness to warnings from above distinguished ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's marginal position from that of Sunnī leaders who could renegotiate their position more freely. The plan initially saw basic measures in wider Tripoli—traffic stops, identification checks, and the like—with promises of targeted intervention in Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabel Mohsen from caretaker interior minister Marwan Charbel.¹³⁰² It included workable solutions to the militia problem including general security arrangements, offers of official jobs, and promises to cancel arrest warrants that addressed the insecurity and deprivation beneath the unrest.¹³⁰³ And reports of Ḥammūd and ar-Rāfiʿī's attempts to register a company to provide the jobs suggested that intermediaries like some shaykhs were on board.¹³⁰⁴ But it quickly stalled and Lebanon's elites were—tellingly—unable to agree on whose fault that was. Charbel warned that

¹²⁹⁸ Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī, "Tweet from 25th October 2013," *Twitter* (25/10/2013 2013).

<https://twitter.com/salemalrafei/status/393508244104433664>.

¹²⁹⁹ Jaf Everson, "ash-Shahāl Yuhaddad Hizb Allāh min al-Baqāʿ wa Qaṭaʿa Ṭarīq al-Muṣnaʿ," *YouTube* (30/11/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/e3Z9LDBsTQo>.

¹³⁰⁰ Eisinger, "The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities," 23, 27.

¹³⁰¹ Ritter and Conrad, "Preventing and Responding to Dissent: The Observational Challenges of Explaining Strategic Repression," 88.

¹³⁰² MTV Lebanon News MTV, "Prime Time News 10/10/2013 - al-Khuṭṭa al-Amniyya fī Ṭarābulus," *YouTube* (11/10/2013 2013). https://youtu.be/mMoldm6_MW0.

¹³⁰³ Eisinger, "The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities," 23, 27; Ali Saad, "Ṭarābulis ash-Sharq Taʿīsh ʿalā Waqaʿa Azma Sūriyā," *Al Jazeera* (25/10/2013 2013).

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2013/10/25/%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%88%D9%82%D8%B9-%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7>

¹³⁰⁴ al-Akhbar, "ʿIlm wa Khabar," *al-Akhbar* (07/06/2014 2014). <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/32757>.

Lebanese elites still supported the fighting,¹³⁰⁵ triggering a defensive response from Miqati who accused his minister of dodging responsibility and insisted that the state would prevail.¹³⁰⁶ Meanwhile, the Future Movement's Mustafa Alloush attacked Miqati for politically covering Tripoli's militias and enabling the violence.¹³⁰⁷ And Rifi denounced the plan, called Miqati and his colleagues to prioritise the city's interests, and demanded a crackdown on local Syrian government partners—alluding to the ADP—while defending militia leaders as Tripoli's "sons" who had defended themselves.¹³⁰⁸ The Army's implementation of the plan's early stages showed that repression was feasible despite the limits of state capacity after Miqati's resignation. But a serious resolution depended on Sunnī confessional leaders' own calculations, and so long as they did not face the same demobilising pressures in Lebanon's domestic context, there was nothing forcing them to change their behaviour until the violence stopped seeming like a political asset.¹³⁰⁹

That left Lebanese elites in control of the situation even if Tripoli's minor players like the Salafīs still enjoyed some independence, and the former would preserve space for the latter to operate so long as they perceived an asset rather than a liability. There would not be another crackdown like the one in Sidon even as clashes in Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabel Mohsen continued, drawing further allegations that Sunnī elites were enabling local partners

¹³⁰⁵ al-Modon, "Khuṭṭa Amniyya Siriyya li Ṭarābulus!," *al-Modon* (24/10/2013 2013).

<https://www.almodon.com/amp/politics/2013/10/24/%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3>.

¹³⁰⁶ Fatima Hudū, "Lubnān.. Khuṭṭa Amniyya Siriyya li Ḥafẓ "Ṭarābulus!," *al-Watan* (25/10/2013 2013). <https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/203310e>; al-Modon, "Khuṭṭa Amniyya Siriyya li Ṭarābulus!."

¹³⁰⁷ Agencies, "'Allūsh: al-Majmū'a Allatī Rawwa'at al-Muwāṭinīn bil-Ams Hiya Taḥta Ri'āyat Mīqātī," *Janoubia* (10/10/2013 2013). <https://janoubia.com/2013/10/10/%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%91%D8%B9%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7/>.

¹³⁰⁸ el-Nashra, "Rifī: Lā Qādat Maḥāwir fī Ṭarābulus wa Ha'ulā'i Abnā'unā wa Naḥnū Nufākhir bihim," *el-Nashra* (25/10/2013 2013).

<https://www.elnashra.com/news/show/676328/%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D9%88%D9%87%D8%A4%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A4%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AD%D9%86-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%87>.

¹³⁰⁹ Cunningham, "Veto Players and Civil War Duration," 879-80.

like the Salafis.¹³¹⁰ But for Sunnī leaders there was no need for one. The indirect relationships of facilitation between them and actors in wider society were inherently dangerous, but they were also discreet enough to avoid giving the allegations of extremist sympathies any serious political impacts.¹³¹¹ That did not mean their objectives mirrored those of the shaykhs. Ar-Rāfi‘ī still wanted the authorities to arrest the mosque bombings’ perpetrators and crack down on the ADP, warning that the security plan would fail until that happened.¹³¹² For his part, ash-Shahāl still openly accused Miqati of betraying Tripoli’s Sunnīs, and called fighters to continue defending themselves as necessary.¹³¹³ And ‘Alūkī welcomed the Army deployment in Bab al-Tabbaneh while warning of unrest until the ADP’s Rifaat Eid was arrested,¹³¹⁴ while Miqati’s established client—Saad al-Maṣrī—expressed confidence in Miqati but said that tensions would last until the mosque bombings’

¹³¹⁰ Amwage, "Akhtar min al-Jarīma Allatī Jarrat fī Bāb at-Tabbāna li ‘Amal Jabal Muḥsin," *Amwage* (03/11/2013 2013). <http://www.amwagenews.com/?p=12995>; al-Madina, "Lubnān: Akhtar min 55 Qatīlan wa Jariḥan fī Ishtibākāt “Bāb at-Tabbāna” wa “Jabal Muḥsin”," *al-Madina* (26/10/2013 2013). <https://www.al-madina.com/article/261500/%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A3%D9%83%D8%AB%D8%B1%D9%85%D9%86-55-%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AD%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86>.

¹³¹¹ Husayn al-Dirani, "al-Liwā Ashraf Rifī min Amīr ilā Wazīr," *Bint Jbeil* (14/01/2014 2014). <https://archive.bintjbeil.org/article/75422>.

¹³¹² Abdeslam Turkmani, "Jawlat al-‘Unf al-17 wa Mufāriqātuhā," *al-Modon* (28/10/2013 2013). <https://www.almodon.com/amp/politics/2013/10/28/%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%8417-%D9%88%D9%85%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7>.

¹³¹³ el-Nashra, "Dā‘ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl li”an-Nashra”: Tawjīhātunā li Qādat al-Maḥāwir bid-Difā‘ ‘an an-Nafs wa Idhā Lam Ta’ti ad-Dawka bi ‘Alī wa Rifa‘at ‘Īd fa li Kull Ḥādith Ḥādith," *el-Nashra* (03/12/2013 2013).

<https://www.elnashra.com/news/show/689137/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%8A%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B3-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B9%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%84%D9%83%D9%84-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%AB-%D8%AD%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AB>.

¹³¹⁴ Star, "Life Goes on in Tripoli's Warring Districts."

perpetrators faced justice.¹³¹⁵ All told, there was a common thread between those marginal players' views: the centres of power could decide where the situation went, who they supported, and if or when they launched a more serious security crackdown.

But if the Lebanese political class was in control of the situation, then there was a question of when the space for actors like the shaykhs was going to shift again. The same demobilising dynamic which made their situation appear stagnant towards the end of 2013 also meant that it could shift. That was a potential problem for actors like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī, whose rhetoric towards Lebanon's 'Alawī and Shī'ī communities, for example, was still inflammatory.¹³¹⁶ Certain Sunnī leaders like Rifi had tolerated and even embraced their message for political ends, and understandably so. By the end of the year, the media was beginning to speculate about whether he was surpassing Miqati as Tripoli's legitimate national representative.¹³¹⁷ But that indirect relationship reflected Rifi's own context as one of the major players in Sunnī national politics. And when the national political context in 2013 had been defined by disruptive institutional paralysis after Miqati's resignation, it was

¹³¹⁵ Janoubia, "Sa'ad al-Maṣrī: al-Ḥall fī Ṭarābulus bi Taslīm Manfadhī at-Tafjīr." *an-Nahar*, "Sa'ad al-Maṣrī Lan Yatruk 'Bay' al-Khaḍr wa La as-Silāḥ," *an-Nahar* (09/10/2013 2013). https://www.annahar.com/arabic/article/74146-%D8%B3%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B6%D8%B1-%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD?fb_comment_id=590726157635952_6057754.

¹³¹⁶ Zebian, "Ṭarābulus Tasta'id 'Imāratuhā al-Islāmiyya" fith-Thamānīnāt bi Amrā' Jadad wa Quwā Amr Wāqī' 8 Adhār Tarā an "al-Jamā'āt al-Islāmiyya" Najaḥat fī Qaḍm al-Manāṭiq wa La Tastab'id Ṭarad al-Jaysh."

¹³¹⁷ al-Anba, "Naṣr Allāh Yuhājim as-Sa'ūdiya wa Yattahim Mukhābarātuhā bi Tafjīr Sifārat Īrān wal-Ḥarīrī Yarid Madhkirān bi'anna Ḥizb Allāh Muttaham bi Igthiyāl Wālidihī," *al-Anba* (05/12/2013 2013). <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/arabic-international-news/lebanon-news/427804/05-12-2013-%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%8A%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B0%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%87/>.

difficult to ignore the possibility of a correction which changed that context again. A demobilising combination of facilitation and repression from above had left space for ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī to speak and act as they did, but it was ultimately the product of intervention by the centres of power who defined the shaykhs' context. That invited a reasonable assumption: as Sunnī leaders' own position and interests changed, they would use the same demobilising processes to reshape the space for the shaykhs. For their part, the shaykhs would need to choose between adapting to the new circumstances or leaving.

Salafī Adaptation to Shifting Space

Lebanese leaders' demobilising influence meant that as they reached a new national settlement in 2014, ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's future would depend on whether they adapted their advocacy and activism to changing political space. The political class which shaped that space could not afford to leave things as they were, and were becoming increasingly exposed to the costs of national competition as the country approached the new year. The clearest indicator of where things were heading was arguably Tripoli, where circumstances had not stabilised and the situation was not entirely under control. Sunnī leaders were partly responsible for ongoing clashes in Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabel Mohsen,¹³¹⁸ despite a military presence.¹³¹⁹ And it was hard for them to ignore the pile of political problems. Some were well-established and outside Sunnī leaders' control, like ar-Rāfiʿī's continued denunciations of Hizbullah's support for an Assad regime that was killing Sunnīs.¹³²⁰ But others, like ash-Shahāl's attacks on the state and its perceived failures,

¹³¹⁸ al-Arab, "Taṣāʿid Ḥidat al-Ishtabākāt bi Ṭarābulus Shamāl Lubnān," *al-Arab* (02/12/2013 2013). <https://alarab.co.uk/%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86>.

¹³¹⁹ ash-Sharq al-Awsat, "Taʿzīzāt Amniya fī Ṭarābulus Shamāl Lubnāl Wasaṭ Ishtibākāt Mutaqaṭiʿa," *Shorouk News* (03/12/2013 2013). <https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=03122013&id=bea2b916-a8cd-4616-9da5-c3c419a3d2b3>.

¹³²⁰ Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī, "Khuṭbat al-Jumaʿa min Masjid at-Taqwā bi ʿUnwān: Ḥurmat Takthīr Sawād az-Zālimīn," *YouTube* (01/12/2013 2013). <https://youtu.be/8PBBxs3tJ3k>.

reflected problems that Sunnī leaders had at least some ability to fix.¹³²¹ The underlying challenges were complex, and security officials had warned that tensions over Syria and the Sunnī public's polarisation from national leaders would prevent an easy resolution to problems like Tripoli's.¹³²² But incidents like the December assassination of March 14's Muhammad Chatah and an early January bombing in Beirut's Hizbullah-dominated southern suburbs suggested that confessional leaders would not be safe as Lebanon's instability worsened,¹³²³ and they needed to find some kind of solution before things became too dangerous.¹³²⁴

As that national instability became unbearable even for the Lebanese political class, it raised questions for marginal players of how to adapt. For one, looming national shifts suggested that Sunnī leaders were about to reconsider how they influenced the political opportunities and roles of ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfi'ī, and others.¹³²⁵ And there was a more complex question of how the centres of Sunnī power would redefine the "space" in which the shaykhs could

¹³²¹ Antoine Amrieh, "Talks Avert Anticipated Tripoli Clashes," *McClatchy - Tribune Business News* (Washington), 07/12/2013 2013, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1465430986?accountid=8330> http://JN8SF5HK5V.search.serialssolutions.com?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx_enc=info:ofi/enc:UTF-8&rft_id=info:sid/ProQ%3Aabidateline&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:journal&rft.genre=article&rft.jtitle=McClatchy+-+Tribune+Business+News&rft.atitle=Talks+avert+anticipated+Tripoli+clashes&rft.au=Amrieh%2C+Antoine&rft.aualast=Amrieh&rft.aufirst=Antoine&rft.date=2013-12-07&rft.volume=&rft.issue=&rft.spage=&rft.isbn=&rft.btitle=&rft.title=McClatchy+-+Tribune+Business+News&rft.issn=&rft_id=info:doi/.

¹³²² Agence France-Presse AFP and Reuters, "Ishtibākāt Layliya 'Anīfa fī Ṭarābulus al-Lubnāniya," *Deutsche Welle* (02/12/2013 2013). <https://www.dw.com/ar/%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9/a-17265677>.

¹³²³ British Broadcasting Corporation BBC, "Ḥizb Allāh Yudīn Ightiyāl Muḥammad Shaṭaḥ fī Bayrūt," *BBC* (27/12/2013 2013). https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2013/12/131227_beirut_explosion_hezbollah_condemns; Agence France-Presse AFP and Reuters, "Qutīlā wa Jarḥā fī Infijār Sayyāra Mufakhkha bi Ḍāḥiya Bayrūt al-Janūbiyya," *France24* (02/01/2014 2014). <https://www.france24.com/ar/20140102-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%81%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%81%D8%AE%D8%AE%D8%A9>.

¹³²⁴ Cunningham, "Veto Players and Civil War Duration," 879-80.

¹³²⁵ McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, 66.

operate—put simply, what behaviours, associations, issues, and the like would be out-of-bounds? That political space was an abstract issue and a difficult thing to describe plainly.¹³²⁶ And that was precisely why 2014 would be a delicate period for actors like the shaykhs, who needed to read the situation carefully and avoid doing things that invited a catastrophic response from above.¹³²⁷

The warning signal for Lebanon's marginal players was specific to the Lebanese context: February's new government, which signalled shifts in Sunnī leaders' engagement with actors like the Salafis. Miqati's March 2013 resignation had left Lebanon's national institutions paralysed or at least slightly ataxic, incentivising competition outside of them while limiting the likely costs for doing so. But the new government signalled that competition within the institutionalised confines of the state were going to become a realistic political option once again. And Tammam Salaam's new cabinet confirmed that by giving Sunnī confessional leaders a few small successes: Nouad Machnouk and Ashraf Rifi, among others, would represent the Future Movement in the Interior and Justice Ministries respectively, giving the Sunnī establishment access to government, while the absence of Hizbullah's "blocking third" made another damaging national shock less likely.¹³²⁸ And the May expiry of President Michel Sleiman's term was not far off, offering the Sunnī establishment a fresh chance for structured competition with March 8 and Hizbullah in the more structured confines of the Lebanese state's constitutional processes. But all of that was less promising for Tripoli's Salafis. From their perspective as actors with less influence over Sunnī politics, it was a looming threat. While Sunnī elites had used them to mobilise resources when Tripoli's

¹³²⁶ Deborah Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005), 353-54.

¹³²⁷ Kurzman, "Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social-Movement Theory," 154, 64-65.

¹³²⁸ Ali Saad, "Walādat Ḥukūma Lubnāniyya Baʿad Ashhur min al-Intizār," *Al Jazeera* (15/02/2014 2014).

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2014/2/15/%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%86>.

violence was an informal institution,¹³²⁹ their value in national political disputes like the presidency was going to be limited.¹³³⁰

With a new government that shifted the position and interests of Sunnī elites, the Salafī movement faced a renewed risk of repression. It was not necessarily a disaster, notwithstanding rumours that the Hariris were abandoning them.¹³³¹ The shaykhs' advocacy still had a sympathetic ear—Ashraf Rifi, for one, remained grounded in Tripoli's Sunnī community and still had reasons to co-opt their narratives.¹³³² Rifi's ministry ensured that from the shaykhs' perspective, Sunnī leaders were divided instead of being inherently hostile. But ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfi'ī, and other Salafīs' networks and role as informal partners to the political class was going to decline as Sunnī leaders' needs changed.¹³³³ Their role and rhetoric had responded to the circumstances of Sunnī society, making them assets for confessional leaders to co-opt after Miqatī's March 2013 resignation and the decentralisation of Sunnī confessional power. But most of Lebanon's political class, and especially its members with prominent roles in March 14 and March 8, had different needs to figures like Ashraf Rifi. They were operating in a new political environment that needed different partners and would need to reconsider what relationships they maintained or abandoned. As their patterns of demobilising influence shifted, the same sorts of calculations that had made the shaykhs into assets that merited facilitation could turn them into liabilities that the Sunnī centres of power needed to repress.¹³³⁴

¹³²⁹ Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 130.

¹³³⁰ Naharnet, "Hariri, Gemayel Meet in Paris: Priority is for Presidential Elections," *Naharnet* (07/10/2014 2014). <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/150056-hariri-gemayel-meet-in-paris-priority-is-for-presidential-elections>.

¹³³¹ SaidaTv, "Ma'raka al-Liwā' al-Yatīma Rīfī: Naḥnu Hunā!," *SaidaTV* (20/01/2014 2014). <http://www.saidatv.tv/news.php?go=fullnews&newsid=60769>.

¹³³² al-Joumhouria, "Rīfī: Ṭarābulus Mustahdafa wa Jamī'unā Taḥta Saqaf al-Qānūn wad-Dustūr," *al-Joumhouria* (15/12/2013 2013). <https://www.aljoumhouria.com/ar/news/109661>.

¹³³³ Michael Heaney and Fabio Rojas, "The Partisan Dynamics of Contention: Demobilization of the Antiwar Movement in the United States, 2007-2009," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (2011): 58-59.

¹³³⁴ Taylor, "Social Movement Continuity: The Women's Movement in Abeyance," 770, 72. The reference to Taylor's work reflects the influence of Gade's research, which draws on Taylor's concept of social movement "abeyance." Gade's work on Lebanon is generally worth reading for its clarity and depth, but the specific work in this case is Tine Gade, "Together all the way? Abeyance and Co-Optation of Sunni Networks in Lebanon," *Social Movement Studies* 18, no. 1 (2019/01/02 2019).

And just as the new government meant that Sunnī leaders' dealings with the Salafīs could shift, other domestic and regional pressures made it likely that they would. Regional interests had undeniably helped stabilise Lebanon: Iran's government wanted better relations with Saudi Arabia and pressed March 8 to reach a settlement, while Riyadh supported the Future Movement concessions that allowed one. But regional and domestic pressures were bad for Salafīs. Saad Hariri depended on foreign partners who considered Salafism politically toxic—something evident in his outreach to Saudi and Egyptian officials and his vows to wipe out Sunnī extremism.¹³³⁵ And Salafīs could not change their reputation as a domestic force that fuelled instability—a point Hizbullah's Hasan Nasrallah understood as he framed Syria as a sectarian war against Salafī threats like "Islamic State."¹³³⁶

The shaykhs' rhetoric was also going to be part of the problem as those overlapping pressures forced new sensitivities to emerge in 2014. Ash-Shahāl had distanced himself from extremist understandings of *takfīr* and "cutting necks,"¹³³⁷ and tried to make a nuanced argument for defending Sunnīs in Syria.¹³³⁸ But his continued framing of Syria's Uprising as *jihād* suggested that he could not bring himself to change as much as some observers would want him to.¹³³⁹ Similarly, ar-Rāfi'ī had counselled against radical understandings of *takfīr* and *jihād* in late 2013's Friday sermons while encouraging congregants to respect Lebanon's multi-confessional society.¹³⁴⁰ Yet the shaykh still condemned attacks on Sunnīs outside Lebanon and international powers' war against Islam.¹³⁴¹ All that left him and ash-Shahāl with some awkward problems. They were only willing to do so much to meet changing

¹³³⁵ Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, "Lebanon: A New Government to Preempt a Presidential Vacuum," *Doha Institute* (02/03/2014 2014). https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/PoliticalStudies/pages/lebanon_a_new_government_to_preempt_a_presidential_vacuum.aspx; Laila Bassam, "Tashkīl al-Ḥukūma al-Lubnāniyya al-Jadīda ba'ad Azmat Istamarat Akthar min 10 Ashhur," *Reuters* (16/02/2014 2014). <https://www.reuters.com/article/oegtp-lebn-govt-mn1-idARACAEA1E07C20140215>.

¹³³⁶ Mariam Farida, "Adopting Religion to Meet Political Goals: the Case of Hizbullah," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 13, no. 3 (2018/09/02 2018): 326.

¹³³⁷ Bernāmaj Humūmana, "(2) Barnāmij Humūmunā 4 - al-Ḥalaqa ath-Thāmina - Indifā' ash-Shabāh Naḥw Manāṭiq aṣ-Ṣirā'," *YouTube* (20/03/2014 2014). <https://youtu.be/COW8zAE03EE>.

¹³³⁸ Humūmana, "Barnāmij Humūmunā 4 - al-Ḥalaqa as-Sābi'a - Indifā' ash-Shabāb Naḥw Manāṭiq aṣ-Ṣirā'."

¹³³⁹ as-Salafī, "Kalimat Samāḥat ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl min Masjid al-Iḥsān 2014 - 5 -13 Masīḥī."

¹³⁴⁰ ar-Rāfi'ī, "Silsilat as-Sīra an-Nabawiyya Ghazwat Badr 30 Wuṣūl Uṣrā al-Mushrikīn ilā al-Madīna."

¹³⁴¹ ar-Rāfi'ī, "Khuṭbat al-Juma'a min Masjid at-Taḳwā bi 'Unwān: Ḥurmat Takthīr Sawād aḏ-Ḍālimīn."

expectations and could not really convince everybody that they were separate from Tripoli's militias and *jihādī* movements.¹³⁴² And Sunnī leaders had to consider the security of their own position relative to other elites, amidst growing regional and domestic pressure to give the shaykhs less space. If the shaykhs could not accommodate Sunnī leaders' needs, then the Salafī movement's advocacy risked becoming a perceived liability and its activism risked being seen as a threat.¹³⁴³

Those projected problems turned into real ones as Tripoli's April security plan came into effect. As expected, Sunnī leaders' demobilisation strategy shifted and marginal actors who fell outside the new norms would have no place in the new order. Nouad Machnouk's public late March announcement of the plan served the national need to stabilise things,¹³⁴⁴ especially in Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabel Mohsen.¹³⁴⁵ But the plan also allowed Sunnī confessional elites to end their private relationships with the people and things that had helped make the violence happen. Besides demolishing barricades and raiding weapons caches,¹³⁴⁶ security forces had warrants for leaders like the ADP's Rifaat Eid,¹³⁴⁷ as well as Sunnī militia leaders from Bab al-Tabbaneh like Ziyād 'Alūkī who initially fled but eventually surrendered in May.¹³⁴⁸

¹³⁴² Alexander Corbeil, "The Syrian Conflict and Sunni Radicalism in Lebanon," *Sada* (09/01/2014 2014). <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/54132>.

¹³⁴³ Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain*, 94-95, 137.

¹³⁴⁴ Radwan Akil, "al-Khuṭṭa al-Amniyya fī Ṭarābulus Maḥal Taraqub... Mīqātī Yu'ayyaduhā wa Darbās: Mā Yaḥṣul lā Yuṭāq," *an-Nahar* (28/03/2014 2014).

<https://www.annahar.com/arabic/article/120419-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%84-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A8-%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%A4%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B3-%D9%85%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D8%AD%D8%B5%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%82>.

¹³⁴⁵ The Daily Star, "New Security Plan for Lebanon's Tripoli," *al-Bawaba* (29/03/2014 2014). <https://www.albawaba.com/news/tripoli-lebanon--564867>.

¹³⁴⁶ British Broadcasting Corporation BBC, "al-Jaysh al-Lubnānī Yanfadh Khuṭṭa Amniya fī Ṭarābulus," *YouTube* (04/04/2014 2014). <https://youtu.be/U0a7FJZ5TM0>; MTV Lebanon MTV, "Prime Time News 07/04/2014 - al-Khuṭṭa al-Amniyya," *YouTube* (08/04/2014 2014). <https://youtu.be/QHfoERhudDY>.

¹³⁴⁷ Reuters Staff, "Lebanon Security Forces Launch New Push to Halt Tripoli Violence," *Reuters* (02/04/2014 2014). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-tripoli-security/lebanon-security-forces-launch-new-push-to-halt-tripoli-violence-idUSBREA3016120140401>.

¹³⁴⁸ LBCI, "LBCI News _ Ziyā 'Alūkī wa Sa'ad al-Maṣrī Yaslamān Nafsīhuma lil-Jaysh," *YouTube* (08/05/2014 2014). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2o3s3WOU8g&ab_channel=LBCILebanon;

For high-profile Salafīs with politically toxic histories, April's security crackdown was a political challenge and the shaykhs needed to adapt to elite expectations. The situation was difficult but it was possible to survive it by visibly disassociating from anything those in power disliked, avoiding an impression of being a liability, and thus preventing a dangerous response. That would be impossible for some *jihādī* radicals like Omar Bakri Fustuq, of course, who were immediately marked for arrest.¹³⁴⁹ But other figures still had a chance to shift their advocacy and activism in ways that avoided sending the wrong signals. Ash-Shahāl still advocated against the state, accusing Hizbullah of a national takeover but acknowledging that the Hariris had unique interests.¹³⁵⁰ And while ar-Rāfi'ī and HUM made similar claims and used their religious stature to warn local officials against excesses,¹³⁵¹ they acknowledged the shifting boundaries that made further clashes unacceptable and advised militias to surrender or go to Syria.¹³⁵² There were still brushes with authorities, notably including security forces' confiscation of two of ash-Shahāl's vehicles and arrest of two bodyguards for possessing illegal weapons. But ash-Shahāl's angry insistence on the return of his cars and pragmatic silence about the guns was a sensible accommodation of Sunnī

Janoubia, "Ziyād 'Alūka: at-Tārīr Sayuhāsib "14 Adhār" wa Taslīm an-Nafs La Yajūz Shar'an," *Janoubia* (03/04/2014 2014). <https://janoubia.com/2014/04/03/%d8%b2%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%af-%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%88%d9%83%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%ae-%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%ad%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a8-%d9%a1%d9%a4-%d8%a2%d8%b0%d8%a7%d8%b1-%d9%88/>.

¹³⁴⁹ Staff, "Lebanon Security Forces Launch New Push to Halt Tripoli Violence."

¹³⁵⁰ Rachel Karam, "Part 1 - Aqna'nī - ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islam ash-Shahāl ma'a Rachel Karam," *YouTube* (14/04/2014 2014). <https://youtu.be/tXYN1BzjTME>; Rachel Karam, "Part 2 - Aqna'nī - ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islam ash-Shahāl ma'a Rachel Karam," *YouTube* (14/04/2014 2014). <https://youtu.be/Gxpp13hZQG4>.

¹³⁵¹ Antoine Amrieh, "Dahama fī Ṭarābulus wal-Jaysh Yuqaf Maṭlūbīn," *al-Joumhouria* (09/04/2014 2014). <https://www.aljoumhouria.com/ar/news/131399/%D8%AF%D9%87%D9%85-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%82%D9%81-%D9%85%D8%B7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86>.

¹³⁵² Janoubia, "al-Akhhbār: Hay'at al-'Ulamā' al-Muslimīn lan Taghtī al-Musalliḥīn Idha Aṣṭadamū' Ma'a al-Jaysh," *Janoubia* (16/04/2014 2014). <https://janoubia.com/2014/04/16/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%ae%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%b1-%d9%87%d9%8a%d8%a6%d8%a9-%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%a1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%b3%d9%84%d9%85%d9%8a%d9%86-%d9%84%d9%86-%d8%aa%d8%ba%d8%b7%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84/>.

leaders' changing calculations.¹³⁵³ The Sunnī political class had always balanced the political risks from local partners against the threat from national competitors,¹³⁵⁴ but as national circumstances stabilised and the competition in Tripoli declined, Sunnī leaders expected their partners to withdraw from violence and would repress those who could not.¹³⁵⁵

While ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī had handled the initial crackdown as well as they could, further arrests in July were a reminder that the repression ultimately depended on Sunnī leaders' ability, interests, and perceptions of the marginal actors. Around the middle of the month the Army arrested Ḥusām aṣ-Ṣabāgh, a *jihādī* figure with history as a facilitator for organisations including *al-Qā'ida* and "Islamic State." The arrest was publicly destabilising—*aṣ-Ṣabāgh's* detention angered *jihādī* supporters and Salafīs like ar-Rāfi'ī had to scramble to stop the resulting protests from turning into violence.¹³⁵⁶ And it did not help that the actors who could calm things like ar-Rāfi'ī and HUM were incensed, denouncing the arrest as part of a pattern of arbitrary detentions,¹³⁵⁷ just as Ashraf Rifi echoed allegations of double standards between the treatment of detainees from areas like Bab al-Tabbaneh, and others from Jabel Mohsen.¹³⁵⁸ Given the fallout, the blowback might have seemed like something that had been forced on the Hariris—between American and INTERPOL officials' calls for *aṣ-*

¹³⁵³ The Daily Star, "Soldiers Killed in Akkar after Tripoli Protests," *The Daily Star* (Beirut), 09/04/2014 2014, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1513626089?accountid=8330>
http://JN8SF5HK5V.search.serialssolutions.com?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx_enc=info:ofi/enc:UTF-8&rft_id=info:sid/ProQ%3Amiddleeastnews&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:journal&rft.genre=article&rft.jtitle=The+Daily+Star&rft.atitle=Soldiers+killed+in+Akkar+after+Tripoli+protests&rft.au=&rft.aualast=&rft.aufirst=&rft.date=2014-04-09&rft.volume=&rft.issue=&rft.spage=&rft.isbn=&rft.btitle=&rft.title=The+Daily+Star&rft.issn=10273883&rft_id=info:doi/.

¹³⁵⁴ Tiberiu Dragu and Adam Przeworski, "Preventive Repression: Two Types of Moral Hazard," *The American Political Science Review* 113, no. 1 (2019): 78-79, 81-82.

¹³⁵⁵ Della Porta and Tarrow, "Unwanted Children," 612-13.

¹³⁵⁶ Hiba Harb, "Shāri' Ḥussām aṣ-Ṣabāgh: Maw'idnā ba'ad al-ʿĪd," *al-Modon* (21/07/2014 2014). <https://www.almodon.com/politics/2014/7/21/%d8%b4%d8%a7%d8%b1%d8%b9-%d8%ad%d8%b3%d8%a7%d9%85-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b5%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%ba-%d9%85%d9%88%d8%b9%d8%af%d9%86%d8%a7-%d8%a8%d8%b9%d8%af-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d9%8a%d8%af>.

¹³⁵⁷ Janoubia, "Hay'at 'Ulamā' al-Muslimīn fī Tarābulus waṭ-Ṭaṣāhura al-Layliyya," *Janoubia* (21/07/2014 2014). <https://janoubia.com/2014/07/21/198522/>.

¹³⁵⁸ al-Joumhouria, "Rīfī li "al-Jumhūriya": al-Mushkila an Ahālī Ṭarābulus Ya'tabirūn Alā Tawāzunā fīl-ljra'āt bayna "Muḥsin" wa "at-Tabbāna," *al-Joumhouria* (22/07/2014 2014). <https://www.aljoumhouria.com/ar/news/154749>.

Ṣabāgh's arrest, any political cover seemed unrealistic.¹³⁵⁹ But between Machnouk's recent visit to Riyadh and the Hariris' general interest in rebranding as a moderate force, the reality was that even if Tripoli's Salafis did not want to seem like problems, the Sunnī establishment viewed them as toxic actors who were best avoided. Saad Hariri had signalled that there was no sentimental quality which might preserve their relationship—speaking at an event the night before the arrest, he disparaged those who “committed a crime against Tripoli” and hid “behind what is happening in Iraq and Syria.”¹³⁶⁰ It was a political exercise for Sunnī leaders that needed to accommodate other domestic and regional pressures. They would not risk their position just to maintain space for Salafis in Lebanese society.¹³⁶¹

That said, it was an exercise in demobilisation rather than control and the situation still left the shaykhs with political agency and space. As ar-Rāfiʿī showed, it was possible to survive by accommodating the interests of Sunnī leaders. In August, the centres of Sunnī power drew their own judgments about whether to ignore or co-opt figures like ar-Rāfiʿī. The shaykh's advocacy positioned him as an opposition figure, with Friday sermons that denounced a negligent Sunnī state and its failure to confront Hizbullah or avoid aiding the oppression of Tripoli's Sunnīs.¹³⁶² But his role depended on Sunnī leaders' own judgments. He still had a backer in Ashraf Rifi, whose profile as a local Trabelsi figure made it reasonable to demand

¹³⁵⁹ Harb, "Shāriʿ Ḥussām aṣ-Ṣabāgh: Mawʿidnā baʿad al-ʿĪd."

¹³⁶⁰ The New Arab, "Lubnān: Tawqīf Qiyādī Islāmī wa Qatul Mushaghghal al-Intihāryīn," *The New Arab* (20/07/2014 2014). [https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%81-%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%88%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%BA%D9%91%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86;Wassim Raad, "The Syrian State Has Already Won the First Round in Geneva 2," *Voltairnet.org* \(27/01/2014 2014\). <https://www.voltairenet.org/article181930.html>.](https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%81-%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%88%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%BA%D9%91%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86;Wassim%20Raad,%20The%20Syrian%20State%20Has%20Already%20Won%20the%20First%20Round%20in%20Geneva%202,%20Voltairnet.org%20(27/01/2014%202014).%20https://www.voltairenet.org/article181930.html)

¹³⁶¹ Esen Kirdiş, *The Rise of Islamic Political Movements and Parties: Morocco, Turkey and Jordan* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 125-26.

¹³⁶² Antoine Amrieh, "Fī Dhikhrā “at-Taqwā” wa “as-Salām” Muṭālaba bi Muḥākamat al-Mutawarriṭīn," *al-Joumhouria* (22/08/2015 2015). <https://www.aljoumhouria.com/ar/news/254681/%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B0%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%88%D9%89-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86>.

the acknowledgement and support of new Sunnī entities like HUM.¹³⁶³ Ar-Rāfiʿī would not be a partner for Saad Hariri though, who had taken the same anti-extremist positions as Saudi officials and was looking to build an image as a moderate.¹³⁶⁴ Instead, the Future Movement preferred someone like Abdel Latif Derian—Dār al-Fatwā’s new Saudi and Egyptian-backed chief, with a national orientation and anti-extremist stance—who Hariri honoured with a public lunch in August.¹³⁶⁵ The establishment was still going to co-opt ar-Rāfiʿī’s religious activism to solve certain problems like the kidnapping of Army soldiers in the border town of ‘Arsāl,¹³⁶⁶ where the Future Movement’s Nouad Machnouk deputised HUM and ar-Rāfiʿī as consultant mediators. Naysayers could argue that the outcome of that was not perfect—the resulting deal failed immediately, fighting broke out, and someone shot Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī.¹³⁶⁷ But the situation was still an illustration of where ar-Rāfiʿī stood and why. His role in Lebanon’s national landscape was not a sign of principled acquiescence or opposition to political authority. Instead, it reflected the relationship that Sunnī leaders cared to build with him as someone whose political advocacy and religious activism might serve their interests.

Conversely, ash-Shahāl’s disastrous October departure also showed that it was possible to position oneself outside of that shifting political space. That month was a sensitive time,

¹³⁶³ Janoubia, "Rīfī: Intikhāb Raʿīs Jumhūriya min ash-Shaʿab Ṭaraḥa Anānī wa Kḥaṭīr Jiddan," *Janoubia* (22/08/2014 2014). <https://janoubia.com/2014/08/22/%d8%b1%d9%8a%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%86%d8%aa%d8%ae%d8%a7%d8%a8-%d8%b1%d8%a6%d9%8a%d8%b3-%d8%ac%d9%85%d9%87%d9%88%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%85%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b4%d8%b9%d8%a8-%d8%b7%d8%b1%d8%ad-%d8%a7/>.

¹³⁶⁴ Naharnet, "Hariri Hails Saudi King's Speech on Terrorism, Gaza," *Naharnet* (02/08/2014 2014). <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/141483>.

¹³⁶⁵ "Najib", "Derian Elected Lebanon Mufti in Show of Sunni Unity (Text Taken from The Daily Star)," *Khazen.org* (N.D. 2014). <https://www.khazen.org/index.php/165-uncategorised/4030-derian-elected-lebanon-mufti-in-show-of-sunni-unity>.

¹³⁶⁶ Naharnet, "Hudna Masāʾiyya fī ‘Arsāl Kharaqūhā Baʿaḍ al-Musallihīn Tasbiq Ittifāqan Yashmal Khurūjahum wa Itlāq Sarāḥ al-Makḥṭūfīn," *Naharnet* (06/08/2014 2014). <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/ar/141881-%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D8%A8%D9%82-%D8%A5%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D8%B4%D9%85%D9%84-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%85-%D9%88%D8%A5%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%88%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%86>.

¹³⁶⁷ Paula Astih, "'Hay'at al-ʿUlamāʾ al-Muslimīn" li "ash-Sharq al-Awsaṭ": Taṣrifāt Muhābarāt al-Jaysh Taʿarqil Masār al-Mufāwaḍāt," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (15/12/2014 2014). <https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=13166&article=798265&feature=>.

thanks to reported agreements between extremist groups to strike Hizbullah in Lebanon,¹³⁶⁸ and the resulting investigation that linked some of them to various Lebanese figures including one of ash-Shahāl's occasional associates, Khaled Dhaher.¹³⁶⁹ That triggered nationwide raids including the ones in Bab al-Tabbaneh that turned into two days of armed clashes,¹³⁷⁰ necessitating a ceasefire facilitated by Najib Miqati, Future Movement representatives, and others.¹³⁷¹ The tensions meant that Tripoli's Salafis had to speak carefully, as ar-Rāfi'ī's colleagues in HUM understood. To that end, they liaised with Ashraf Rifi and invited the media to see the return of relative peace,¹³⁷² while discouraging attacks on the Army.¹³⁷³ But ash-Shahāl was prepared to make a more antagonistic position. His

¹³⁶⁸ Arabi21, "Ishtibākāt Ṭarābulus.. Hal Hiya Radd 'alā Tahdīd Dā'ish," *Arabi21* (25/10/2014 2014). <https://arabi21.com/story/784350/%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D9%87%D9%84-%D9%87%D9%8A-%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B4>.

¹³⁶⁹ Kamal Khalaf, "al-Ishtibākāt fī Ṭarābulus Tamtadu ilā Sūr aṣ-Ṣāgha was-Sarāyat al-‘Aqīda wal-Jund al-Munshaq ‘an al-Jaysh al-Lubnānī Laqī Ḥatfah.. I’tiqāl Khalīh Irhābiyya baynahum Maṭlūbīn Khaṭarīn wa Ma‘lūmāt Awlia Tufīd bi’anna Aḥad Akḥṭar al-Maṭlūbīn Nasaq ‘Amaliyyātuḥu ma‘a an-Nā’ib al-Lubnānī Khālid aḍ-Ḍāhir," *Rai al-Youm* (24/10/2014 2014). <https://www.raialyoum.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%AF-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%A7/>.

¹³⁷⁰ Arabi21, "اشتباكات طرابلس..".

¹³⁷¹ Ali Saad, "Ma‘arakat Ṭarābulus Lubnān.. Mujarrad Jawla am Hasam Nihā’ī?," *Al Jazeera* (29/10/2014 2014). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2014/10/29/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%85-%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%85>.

¹³⁷² National News Agency NNA, "Hudū’ Ḥadhar fīl-Aswāq ad-Dākhiliyya fī Ṭarābulus," *al-Joumhouria* (22/10/2014 2014). <https://www.aljoumhouria.com/ar/news/180742/%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%A1-%D8%AD%D8%B0%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3>.

¹³⁷³ Masr al-Arabia, "al-Jaysh al-Lubnānī Yadkhal Ākhar Muwāqī‘ al-Musallihīn fī Ṭarābulus," *Masr al-Arabia* (27/10/2014 2014). <https://masralarabia.net/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85/393889-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84-%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3>.

proclamations identified Sunnī soldiers as traitors who were going to hell for defending Shīʿī, Syrian, and Iranian interests that he and ar-Rāfiʿī framed as the principal threat to the Sunnī community.¹³⁷⁴ And while his counterparts in HUM had urged caution, he made threats against Lebanon's Army.¹³⁷⁵

If there was a lesson in Shaykh ash-Shahāl's response to Tripoli's October incident, it was that understanding the dynamics which shaped his role and responding to them were two separate things. While his public remarks gave an understandably bad impression, authorities' discovery of weapons in his colleague Bilāl Daqmāq's house made things worse. And after a warrant was issued for his arrest,¹³⁷⁶ the shaykh's defences did nothing to manage the demobilising pressure that was coming down on top of him. He tacitly acknowledged that the centres of Sunnī power had co-opted Salafīs like himself, reminding the media of the movement's role in maintaining stability during Tripoli's violence. But demanding the guns' return and protesting that "this is not the way we are handled" ignored the changes to Sunnī leaders' priorities, to say nothing of how they influenced the structural context where actors like him operated.¹³⁷⁷ The shaykh still had agency—he exercised it by

¹³⁷⁴ MTV Lebanon MTV, "Dai al-Islam al-Shahhal to Declare Jihad Across Lebanon," *MTV News* (25/10/2014 2014). <https://www.mtv.com.lb/news/articles/405274/dai-al-islam-al-shahhal-to-declare-jihad-across-lebanon>.

¹³⁷⁵ The Daily Star, "Akkar Mufti Urges Army to End Tripoli Airstrikes," *TCA Regional News* (Chicago), 26/10/2014 2014, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1616367576?accountid=8330>
http://JN8SF5HK5V.search.serialssolutions.com?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx_enc=info:ofi/enc:UTF-8&rft_id=info:sid/ProQ%3Aabidateline&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:journal&rft.genre=article&rft.jtitle=TCA+Regional+News&rft.atitle=Akkar+Mufti+urges+Army+to+end+Tripoli+airstrikes&rft.au=&rft.aulast=&rft.aufirst=&rft.date=2014-10-26&rft.volume=&rft.issue=&rft.spage=&rft.isbn=&rft.btitle=&rft.title=TCA+Regional+News&rft.issn=&rft_id=info:doi/.

¹³⁷⁶ Muhammad Nimr, "ash-Shahāl min "Nawāt Jaysh al-Islāmī" ilā Makhāzin as-Asliha... Hal Yatimm Tawqīfuhu?," *an-Nahar* (03/11/2014 2014). <https://www.annahar.com/arabic/article/186276-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D9%87%D9%84-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%85-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%87>.

¹³⁷⁷ Paula Astih, "Mu'assis at-Tayyār as-Salafī fī Lubnān Yuṭālīb al-Ḥukūma bi l'ādat Aslaḥatuhu Allatī Ṣādarahā al-Jaysh," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (02/11/2014 2014). <https://aawsat.com/home/article/213441/%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B3%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1->

leaving for Saudi Arabia. But he had used it in a way that fell outside the space where the centres of power expected him to work. In doing so, he had made his place in Lebanon's national politics untenable.¹³⁷⁸

Conclusions & Questions

Ash-Shahāl's October 2014 departure showed that his, ar-Rāfiʿī, and other Salafīs' role in national politics could be understood simply as a reflection of their structural context and the demobilising influence that the centres of power had on their place in it. That demobilisation had been especially visible after Miqatī's March 2013 resignation freed confessional elites to instrumentally facilitate and repress marginal actors. And it had ensured that as Lebanon's political class resolved the country's institutional paralysis in 2014, the ensuing crackdown narrowed the space where the Salafīs could safely operate. The shaykhs' position in all that had been fragile. Between the national competition with March 8 and the decentralisation of confessional power, Sunnī leaders had overlapping priorities. And given Salafism's political toxicity, there was no good reason to expect anything besides an instrumental demobilising relationship that saw Sunnī elites co-opt actors like the shaykhs when their political advocacy or religious activism added value, and repress them when they looked like liabilities. Ash-Shahāl's case was a reminder that Salafīs still had agency and could use it in more or less constructive ways. But the boundaries in which they exercised that judgment reflected demobilising influence from the centres of power, which loomed over their structural context and defined their place in it.

That demobilisation arrangement was not unique to Salafī shaykhs like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī. Other actors like Bilāl Daqmāq and ʿAmīd Ḥammūd recognised the influence of the centres of Sunnī power. Speaking to the media from Turkey, both understood that Sunnī leaders' priorities had shifted and avoided any signals that would draw the wrong kind of

%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-
%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-
%D8%A8%D8%A5%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-
%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A-
%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4.
¹³⁷⁸ Ali Rajab, "Wafāt Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl.. man Huwa Muʿassis at-Tayyār as-Salafī fī Lubnān?," *Islamist Movements* (15/11/2020 2020). <https://www.islamist-movements.com/55727>.

attention. Asked about the militias, Ḥammūd avoided any firm admission of involvement, while Daqmāq suggested that he—like other Salafis—was a moderating influence during 2013's violence and evaded questions about guns in his house. The evasions were understandable. Like ash-Shahāl, both lacked confidence in state independence and were concerned that they would face arbitrary repression rather than fair treatment. And Daqmāq's claims that he was buying Turkish electrical supplies suggested that he had found new work or wanted to send benign signals to Lebanese authorities. Taken in that light, their reassurances that they wanted to come home suggested that they were not waiting for a pardon or some indication that authorities had decided to ignore them.¹³⁷⁹ They understood that like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī, they needed to navigate a system where the centres of power reshaped marginal actors' political space, and avoid any indication that they were more of a liability than an asset in the meantime.

But there were unresolved questions about Salafis' role in national politics, even after events in 2013 and 2014. The reliance on facilitation and repression suggested a pattern of demobilisation by the centres of power, but that pattern allowed for an alternate outcome—actors' disengagement from politics—that was under the shaykhs' control more than that of Sunnī leaders.¹³⁸⁰ It was equally unclear whether ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's agency after 2011 as political advocates or religious activists was generalisable to all Salafī movements. The notion that Salafis exercised agency within limits was still sensible—there were instances of that in the history of Trabelsi Salafī and activist movements, and it explained ash-Shahāl's shifting national role after 2005 as well as the original Najdī *ʿulama* and *Ṣaḥwā*'s role in Saudi Arabia. But whether the dynamics visible in 2013 and 2014 were good indications of all Salafis' national roles reflected the structure of their context and place relative to its centres of power was another issue that invited further discussion.

¹³⁷⁹ Jadeed, "Man Huwa ash-Shaykh Bilāl Daqmāq - Yumnah Fawāz."; LBCI, "LBCI News- Mādha Yaqūl ʿAmīd Ḥammūd ʿan al-Ittiḥāmāt al-Mawjaha Ilayhi?," *YouTube* (18/04/2015 2015). https://youtu.be/q_5CdH6aTGw; al-Maktab al-Iʿlāmī at-Tayyār as-Salafī, "Taʿlīq Samāḥat ash-Shaykh Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl ʿalā Muqābila maʿa al-Jadīd al-Mujtazaʿa wa Rudūd al-Faʿal ʿAlayhā," *YouTube* (02/01/2015 2015). <https://youtu.be/jtzPQNcHlm4>.

¹³⁸⁰ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, "Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics," 276.

Chapter 7:

Discussions & Conclusions

Limited Solutions to Expansive Problems

It was possible to understand Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl and Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī's trajectory from 2005 to 2014 in simple terms: as figures in Lebanon's national politics, their role reflected the structure of their context and place relative to the centres of power in it. That was not to ignore the more complex details in their story—their religious roots in Najdī Salafism, the social dynamics of Tripoli's Sunnī community, and the personal agency that shaped their political advocacy for the community and activism within Tripoli's religious circles. Rather, it was to say that their national political role as representatives of the Sunnī public could be sufficiently explained as a structural phenomenon in the local Lebanese context. But that local quality also raised its own issues. Would other Salafī cases beg the same questions that ash-Shahāl's funeral and ar-Rāfi'ī's comments to the media did? And to what extent was that structural explanation based on resource mobilisation and contentious politics theories applicable to Salafīs more generally?

Three issues warranted further attention. First, the shaykhs' trajectories from 2005 to 2014 addressed permanent questions about Salafīs' politics, but the Lebanese context during that time represented a passing opportunity to address them. Second, the cases and their context—ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfi'ī, and Lebanon—accurately illustrated the demobilising processes of contentious politics that shaped Salafīs' role in the national landscape, but other cases more exhaustively showed how Salafīs could exercise agency and elite actors could reshape their operating space. Third, resource mobilisation theory helped define the marginality that made the shaykhs distinct from the centres of power that shaped their national context, while still struggling to capture Salafism's influence on their role or the cultural factors that made them into national leaders of the Salafī movement in the first place. But that was not necessarily an issue when the resource mobilisation approach did not so much ignore those details—instead, it made them manageable problems. Like the original questions about the influence of Salafism and structural context and the theories of contentious politics, it offered a viable way of understanding the national environment and role of Salafī actors, while working around the complexities that arose when trying to describe every single detail of their lives and work.

Old Problems & Solutions

The Discourse-Actor Gap

What made the two Lebanese shaykhs' cases interesting was that they and Lebanon's troubles from 2005 to 2014 offered a fleeting opportunity to address lasting questions. Beyond 2014, the typologies of "quietist," "*ḥarakī*," and "*jihādī*" Salafī discourse could not explain an actor like Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī, for example. The shaykh remained at-Taqwā Mosque's imām and his statements offered contradictory hints of apolitical quietism, political activism, and violent intentions. To some, his support for *jihād* in Syria remained unsettling and hinted at extremist leanings.¹³⁸¹ But he still vocally supported "Saad Hariri...against extremism," and for figures with similar anti-Hizbullah and anti-establishment positions like Ashraf Rifi,¹³⁸² the shaykh's reputation and rhetoric were useful. On the eighth anniversary of August 2013's mosque bombings Rifi appeared with Shaykhs Bilāl Bārūdī and ar-Rāfi'ī, who condemned the Syrian regime over its role while demanding accountability in Lebanon for the bombings and later incidents like August 2020's Beirut port explosion.¹³⁸³ But the shaykh was also not a partner of state power and continued denouncing state failures to manage challenges like the COVID pandemic.¹³⁸⁴

Shaykh Sālim's mixed messaging highlighted a general problem with typologies based on discourse: it was difficult to rationalise and predict his behaviour with reference to his rhetoric alone, and it was hard to say what he really thought from the little that he did as a figure in the national context. A reductive approach—most notably that certain "marker issues" placed actors on a spectrum spanning from Islamic modernism to *jihādī* extremism—was unhelpful.¹³⁸⁵ And the problem was not that the shaykh fluidly shifted between quietist, activist, or *jihādī* attitudes towards political authority and society. Even with clearer

¹³⁸¹ Marwan Nasif, "Ba'ad Aḥmad al-Asīr...Hal Saya'tī Dawr Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī," *el-Nashra* (28/04/2017 2017).

<https://www.elnashra.com/news/show/1139427/%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1...-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A3%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%9F>.

¹³⁸² Raphaël Lefèvre, "Man of the Moment?," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (13/11/2017 2017). <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/74703>.

¹³⁸³ ar-Rāfi'ī, "Kalima fī Mu'tamar ad-Dhikrā as-Sanawiya at-Thāmina li Tafjīr Masjidī at-Taqwā was-Salām."

¹³⁸⁴ Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī, "Khuṭbat al-Juma'a: ((Kūrūnā... wa Sujin Rūmiya))," *YouTube* (20/09/2020 2020). https://youtu.be/Nu9E7Eu9D_8.

¹³⁸⁵ Bernard, *Civil Democratic Islam*, iii.

typologies of Salafism like Wagemakers',¹³⁸⁶ the shaykh's messaging could make him resemble multiple things, and if Salafis' politics reflected differences in Salafism's discourse then he was a contradictory figure.

And more specifically, a typology was unhelpful with someone like ar-Rāfi'ī who appeared to be a product of complex human circumstances and had an "intersectional" role in society. He was a real person in a real context and reflected its overlapping pressures, mirroring the "bottom up" social forces that scholars like Lefèvre described with Tripoli's early Salafī and Islamic activist movements like *Ḥarakat at-Tawḥīd al-Islāmī*.¹³⁸⁷ But ar-Rāfi'ī also accommodated the same elite-dominated system that early Lebanese activists like Fathī Yakan described.¹³⁸⁸ In academic language he was "intersectional:" simultaneously an activist, scholar, and partner of elite power, because he sat in different places relative to difference social actors and forces.¹³⁸⁹ That mirrors a wider point about how Lebanon's Salafi movements were "Lebanized" over time.¹³⁹⁰ And it reinforces the problems with typologies of Salafism grounded in "new social movement theory" logic. His role was not based on "marginal counter-culture" or imagined identity,¹³⁹¹ and unlike the middle class movements that informed the new social movement model, it was difficult to ignore the lasting questions of if and how his deprived context shaped his visible, national role.¹³⁹²

Those problems were not unique to Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī, and there were similar ambiguities in ash-Shahāl's rhetoric after his 2014 departure from Lebanon. After arriving in Saudi Arabia, the shaykh's remarks on Saudi television might have suggested quietist or pro-government views. He denounced Hizbullah and Iranian intervention in Lebanon and the region and framed the issue in sectarian terms, while reflecting on Muslim Brotherhood-aligned

¹³⁸⁶ Wagemakers, "Revisiting Wiktorowicz," 15-17.

¹³⁸⁷ Lefèvre, *Jihad in the City*, 28-30. For a study that looks further back to the Shahāls' early movements with similar depth, also see Saoud el-Mawla, *as-Salafiyya was-Salafiyyūn al-Jadad: min Afghānistān ilā Lubnān* (Dar Sair al-Mashriq wal Tawzi', 2016).

¹³⁸⁸ Yakan, *al-Mas'ala al-Lubnāniyya min Manzūr Islāmiyya*, 55.

¹³⁸⁹ Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 4 (2013): 797.

¹³⁹⁰ Gade, *Sunni City: Tripoli from Islamist Utopia to the Lebanese 'Revolution'*, 17, 21-22.

¹³⁹¹ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*.

¹³⁹² di Leonardo, *Exotics at Home: Anthropologies, Others, and American Modernity*, 111-12.

movements like Fathī Yakan's *al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyya* and HTI as failures.¹³⁹³ That could have suggested a pro-government outlook—in isolation, it matched regional governments' anxieties about Iranian influence amidst the Arab uprisings after 2011,¹³⁹⁴ and about the Muslim Brotherhood's implications for domestic stability.¹³⁹⁵ But ash-Shahāl's actual politics were not that clear. Calls to confront the Iranian "Safavid project" and Hizbullah in Lebanon despite the Future Movement's accommodations with its national rivals had activist overtones, as did denunciations of Lebanon's state.¹³⁹⁶ But there were also *jihādī* hints, thanks to allegations that he had facilitated young Trabelsis' fighting in Syria and his son's alleged association with *jihādī* organisations there.¹³⁹⁷ While Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī blurred the lines between apolitical quietism and political activism, Dā'ī ash-Shahāl's remarks about Lebanon invited an additional inference of *jihādī* inclinations. But it was still not clear whether and why that *jihādī* current in Salafī discourse would have more influence than the others.

Ambiguities of Religion & Process

If the ambiguities surrounding ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī were lasting then a structural approach based on social movement theories had lasting value as well, but applying that structural approach would also be more difficult outside of Lebanon and its 2005-2014 difficulties. That approach's focus on the shaykhs' conduct as observable actors was sensible when intimate details of their circumstances and calculations were unobservable. It managed ambiguities like the shaykhs' relationship to political violence and *jihād*, for example. Publicly, their statements had echoed the wider discussion's ambiguities about the

¹³⁹³ Khalījiyya, "ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl Ḍayf Liqā' al-Juma'a ma'a 'Abd Allā al-Mudayfir - al-Mashrū' al-Ṭrānī fī Lubnān."

¹³⁹⁴ Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 154; Toby Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis: Shiism, Dissent and Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 216-17.

¹³⁹⁵ Stéphane Lacroix, "Saudi Arabia's Muslim Brotherhood Predicament," *POMEPS* (09/03/2014 2014). <https://pomeps.org/saudi-arabias-muslim-brotherhood-predicament>; Nawaf Obaid, *The Failure of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab World* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2020), 112.

¹³⁹⁶ Muhammad Mohsen, "'Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl" Mu'assis at-Tayyār as-Salafī fī Lubnān Laysa Mamnū'a min Dukhūluha," *Islamion* (12/10/2015 2015). <https://islamion.com/news/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B3%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D9%85%D9%85%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%88%D9%84%D9%87%D8%A7>

¹³⁹⁷ al-Ahed News, "Hal 'Āda Dā'ī ash-Shahāl ilā Ṭarābulus?," *al-Ahed News* (02/10/2015 2015). <https://archive.alahednews.com.lb/details.php?id=115967>.

Salafism and Jihadism, framing *jihād* as a communal obligation rather than a personal one and reserving their credentialed Islamic scholarly authority to declare it. And when they did make a case for violence in the national public discourse, it was a politically hygienic one that centred round the plight of Syria's Sunnī public.¹³⁹⁸ That public caution was not a totally candid reflection of their views—Rougier's work showed that they were open to the idea of violence as a reaction to events in Syria or as a means of imposing an Islamic social order.¹³⁹⁹ And the inconsistency was a recurring issue with *Madkhalī* Salafī movements, for example, which had reputations for political quietism while fighting for social control in Libya and attacking the country's Ṣūfī movements.¹⁴⁰⁰ As noted in the introduction, there was a distinction to be drawn between Salafism as a discourse and Salafīs as the actors who subscribed to it, as well as a sense that the actors shaped the discourse and its real implications.

And linking the shaykhs' political role to distinct issues and actors in an observable national context was easier than linking it to the Islamic discourse. The two Lebanese shaykhs' prevarications about *jihād* and political violence were unconvincing, especially given the past credible allegations about their behaviour and incidents in which they had been involved. But there was a genuine distance between their unapologetic scholarly relationship to *jihād* as part of Islam's legal tradition and their *jihādī* counterparts' belligerent extremist relationship to it. For one, the reservations of scholarly authority and collective responsibility contrasted with *jihādī* scholarship's emphasis on a personal obligation and simpler judgments.¹⁴⁰¹ And the assertions of orthodox legitimacy placed them in a tense relationship with the evolving universe of *jihādī* scholars, who turned Islamic law into an ideology that demanded and rationalised violence.¹⁴⁰² As in other cases, it was difficult to establish whether *jihādī* rhetoric offered a political framing for political violence that served other

¹³⁹⁸ Humūmana, "Barnāmij Humūmunā 4 - al-Ḥalaqa as-Sābi'a - Indifā' ash-Shabāb Naḥw Manātiq aṣ-Ṣirā'."; ar-Rāfi'ī, "Khuṭbat al-Juma'a min Masjid at-Taqwā bi 'Unwān: Ḥurmat Takthīr Sawād az-Zālimīn."

¹³⁹⁹ Rougier, *Sunni Tragedy in the Middle East*, 181-82, 202-04.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Group, *Addressing the Rise of Libya's Madkhali-Salafis* 6-8.

¹⁴⁰¹ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 33, 40.

¹⁴⁰² Nathan S. French, *And God Knows the Martyrs: Martyrdom and Violence in Jihadi-Salafism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 7-8; Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 81-82.

grievances,¹⁴⁰³ especially given the position of Syria and Lebanon's Sunnīs which had been so prominent in their rhetoric. The shaykhs were open to *jihād* as a concept and a framing for political struggle that aligned with their narratives of transnational Sunnī victimhood. But their stated views of the issue suggested a more ambiguous relationship between it and their behaviour, and the extent to which it was even an inherently "Salafī" matter was unclear.

But while the structural approach based on a framework of social movement and contentious politics theories had helped resolve those ambiguities, ash-Shahāl's circumstances suggested that such a framework would be difficult to use outside of Lebanon and its 2005-2014 turbulence. By 2015 he might have seemed welcome in Saudi Arabia as a quietist religious figure, having appeared in that capacity at events with other members of Riyadh's polite society.¹⁴⁰⁴ Yet that was hard to square with his impolite regional commentary and incendiary remarks about Lebanon, and like ar-Rāfi'ī, his position had only become harder to track by 2017. There were cursory allegations that he faced house arrest and bans on engagement with Saudi Arabia's religious networks after misusing Saudi partners' funds,¹⁴⁰⁵ just as there were rumours that Lebanese authorities were going to arrest ar-Rāfi'ī.¹⁴⁰⁶ Those details were far more limited than the ones that had been available amidst Lebanon's circumstances before 2014, though, and that spoke to a general problem. The enduring ambiguities of what the shaykhs said and did left an enduring question of the extent to which their role in national politics reflected their relationship to Salafism or the structures of their context and place in it. But outside of Lebanon's 2005-2014 difficulties and the environment of relative impunity that had allowed many of its problems to play out

¹⁴⁰³ Tristan Dunning, *Hamas, Jihad and Popular Legitimacy: Reinterpreting Resistance in Palestine* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 41-42.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Thalāthiyyat as-Sudayrī, "Thalāthiyat as-Sudayrī - al-Kawn min Hawlana - Amīr 'Abd al-'Azīz ash-Shammarī," *YouTube* (26/05/2015 2015). https://youtu.be/0D5VNqD_iQc.

¹⁴⁰⁵ ad-Diyyar, "Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl fīl-Iqāma al-Jabariyya fīs-Sa'ūdiyya," *ad-Diyyar* (06/04/2017 2017). <https://addiyar.com/article/1339738-%d8%af%d8%a7%d8%b9%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a5%d8%b3%d9%84%d8%a7%d9%85-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b4%d9%87%d8%a7%d9%84-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a5%d9%82%d8%a7%d9%85%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ac%d8%a8%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d8%b9%d9%88%d8%af%d9%8a%d8%a9>.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Nasif, "Ba'ad Aḥmad al-Asīr...Hal Saya'tī Dawr Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī."

in the open, it was harder to see the details which made it easier to explain their national role.

Processes in Salafī Politics

Demobilisation in the Regional Context

Ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī were still not ideal cases and Lebanon was still not an ideal context—for one, they offered illustrative but not exhaustive demonstrations of the contentious politics processes like demobilisation that explained Salafīs' place in politics. They were still reasonable choices. Like the Najdī tradition's native Saudi Arabia, Lebanon's authoritarian Sunnī order had put religious actors above communities defined by foundational sources of solidarity and below the elites that ruled them. And by the eighties, its Salafī movement had matured to the point where it had comparable Najdī roots. But its processes of resource mobilisation and contentious political interaction were more visible than in Saudi Arabia, and pressures on elites made necessary political shifts more likely. That was part of why the fourth chapter showed ash-Shahāl's role in the national context shift after 2005's Syrian withdrawal and 2008's May Crisis and the Future Movement's changing relationships, transforming him from a duplicitously deferential accessory of elite power to a populist representative of an aggrieved Sunnī public. And later chapters were able to explain that with two key points: actors like him and ar-Rāfiʿī would not have an impact on their political context, and the centres of power would instead define their place in it through demobilising processes.

Just as importantly, the processes of demobilisation that explained ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's trajectory explained other Salafī actors in the region, which had faced similar patterns of repression and co-optation after 2011. Like Lebanon's movements they had strengthened their domestic positions before that year's uprisings began, shifting as elites' power underwent similar patterns of disruption and re-consolidation.¹⁴⁰⁷ In their respective settings in North Africa, Turkey, and the Levant they faced similar questions about how to survive shifting patterns elite intervention and popular mobilisation, which could see beneficial

¹⁴⁰⁷ Weismann, "Salafism in the Twenty-First Century," 278-79.

cooperation or facilitation, or more dangerous repression.¹⁴⁰⁸ And as in Lebanon, the outcomes were not necessarily negative. Authorities in Libya and Yemen co-opted Salafis with apolitical credentials when mutually convenient,¹⁴⁰⁹ just as the Saudi government complemented investments in security and economic development with additional funding for religious organisations.¹⁴¹⁰ As in Lebanon, there were circumstances in which a relationship—albeit an instrumental and suitably-distant one—was workable for the centres of political power.

But the two Lebanese shaykhs had not shown the theoretically plausible outcome of “defection” from politics that demobilisation implied. The disruptions to elite-civil society relationships were commonplace, as were the dynamics of co-optation and repression,¹⁴¹¹ and the patterns that demobilisation described were not just passing disruptions—they explained the long-term evolution of Palestinian politics, for example.¹⁴¹² But marginal actors would not necessarily participate in politics only to face co-optation and repression, and the other theoretical possibility was defection whereby they simply stayed out.¹⁴¹³ And the shaykhs could have done that, particularly given the fifth chapter which highlighted their agency—if not impact—as political advocates and religious activists after the Hariri government’s 2011 collapse and tensions over Syria gave them an unusual amount of space in which to operate. If the demobilisation framework explained how the centres of power shaped the shaykhs’ opportunities and constraints, then those alternate patterns of defection were a reasonable possibility.

And more generally, there questions of whether the centres of Sunnī power could have shaped the shaykhs’ political space in more drastic ways? In the sixth chapter and amidst the institutional paralysis following the Miqati government’s 2013 resignation, they operated

¹⁴⁰⁸ Kirdiş, *The Rise of Islamic Political Movements and Parties: Morocco, Turkey and Jordan*, 178-80.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Meijer, "Conclusion: Salafis and the Acceptance of the Political," 236.

¹⁴¹⁰ CNN, "Activists Disappointed by Saudi King's Reforms," *CNN* (18/03/2011 2011).
<http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/03/18/saudi.arabia.reforms/index.html>.

¹⁴¹¹ Fatima El-Issawi and Francesco Cavatorta, eds., *The Unfinished Arab Spring Micro-Dynamics of Revolts between Change and Continuity* (London: Gingko, 2020), 5-6.

¹⁴¹² Dana El Kurd, *Polarized and Demobilized: Legacies of Authoritarianism in Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 21-27.

¹⁴¹³ Lapegna, "Social Movements and Patronage Politics: Processes of Demobilization and Dual Pressure," 857-58.

within political boundaries thanks to the real or perceived threat of intervention by Lebanon's Sunnī leaders. But they always had some space, even if they still needed to carefully position themselves in it after 2014's crackdowns. If that reflected Lebanon's Sunnī elites' interests and perceptions, then it was worth noting that authorities elsewhere had different priorities after 2011—European governments notably faced a transnational threat from *jihādī* organisations like “Islamic State” and appeared intent on limiting the opportunities of Salafī and Islamic movements in their own jurisdictions.¹⁴¹⁴ The contrast left questions of whether Salafīs' political space could shrink more drastically than it had in Lebanon after 2013.

Demobilisation, Defection, & the Centres of Power

Events beyond 2014 and Lebanon itself showed that demobilisation generally captured Salafīs' role in national politics. Tripoli's ongoing crackdowns in 2015 confirmed that Salafīs could defect from politics as the demobilisation concept suggested but the two shaykhs' journeys had not shown, as a gap appeared between the Trabelsi shaykhs who criticised authorities' ongoing crackdowns in 2015 and those who avoided creating a nuisance. Ash-Shahāl's former student Nabīl Raḥīm would speak for the critics, accusing authorities of trying to “liquidate” some militants for political reasons.¹⁴¹⁵ But Ṣufwān az-Za'abī spoke for the disengaged, and his position was not necessarily an indication of principled quietism. If anything, his remarks conveyed a pragmatic view: authorities would support some protests and instrumentally use Salafīs, who were safer at home or in their mosques.¹⁴¹⁶ That defection was not a sign that az-Za'abī represented an isolated part of the movement or a uniquely Lebanese position. Lebanon's quietists were more religiously engaged and cohesive than the activists despite having fewer followers,¹⁴¹⁷ mirroring Jordanian quietists that had

¹⁴¹⁴ Caroline Copley and Madeline Chambers, "Germany Bans Islamist 'True Religion' Group, Raiding Mosques and Flats," *Reuters* (15/11/2016 2016). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-security-raids-idUSKBN13A0MY>; Christina Okello, "France to Cut Qatar Funding of Mosques in Crackdown on Islamic Fundamentalism," *RFI* (15/02/2015 2015). <https://www.rfi.fr/en/general/20150215-france-cut-qatar-funding-mosques-crackdown-islamic-fundamentalism>.

¹⁴¹⁵ Ali Saad, "Tafkīk “Imārat Ṭarābulus” al-Lubnāniyya Injāz am Tarwīj?," *Al Jazeera* (11/04/2015 2015). <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2015/4/11/%D8%AA%D9%81%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%83-%D8%A5%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%A3%D9%85>.

¹⁴¹⁶ al-Mayadeen, "15-09-2015 | as-Salafiyūn bayna | Islāmiyūn wa Ba'ad."

¹⁴¹⁷ Pall, *Salafism in Lebanon*, 157-58.

similarly avoided signalling a threat to state interests as the space for activism narrowed.¹⁴¹⁸ And Saudi scholars acknowledged government reservations about activist *‘ulamā* and warnings against illegitimate forms of protest,¹⁴¹⁹ just as Egypt’s Salafī an-Nūr Party worked cautiously to avoid the security force attention that had undermined other movements despite being politically active.¹⁴²⁰

That defection was a dynamic issue of contentious politics rather than a fixed feature of Salafī discourse—it came and went as circumstances evolved. Lebanon’s Salafīs were largely disengaged before the Hariri government’s 2011 collapse, and became increasingly involved in politics after the subsequent domestic tensions and influx of support from the Future Movement and foreign partners.¹⁴²¹ And there were similar patterns elsewhere, such as in Tunisia where the Salafī *Jabhat al-Islāh* secured a license to operate as a political party in 2012 from a post-uprising government that wanted it to favour institutionalised politics over political violence.¹⁴²² Rather than adopting a rigidly “quietist” approach, Salafīs in Lebanon and elsewhere with an interest in politics had engaged as demobilising forces allowed and withdrawn as they demanded.

A demobilisation explanation worked outside of regional “quietist” or “activist” movements, even in the *jihādī* field. In Tripoli, Husām aṣ-Ṣabāgh—arrested in July 2014 over links to groups like al-Qāʿida and “Islamic State”—would be a prime example. Notwithstanding the role he played prior to his arrest, after his 2016 release he reassured journalists that his future priorities were his family and community.¹⁴²³ Like az-Zaʿabī, he was content with his

¹⁴¹⁸ Wagemakers, *Salafism in Jordan*, 220-21, 25-26.

¹⁴¹⁹ Raihan Ismail, "Reclaiming Saudi Salafism: The Saudi Religious Circles and the Threat of ISIS," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2019/07/03 2019): 169-70; Stéphane Lacroix, "To Rebel or Not to Rebel: Dilemmas Among Saudi Salafis in a Revolutionary Age," in *Salafism After the Arab Awakening: Contending with People's Power*, ed. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 71-73.

¹⁴²⁰ Stéphane Lacroix and Ahmed Zaghloul Shalata, "The Rise of Revolutionary Salafism in Post-Mubarak Egypt," in *Egypt's Revolutions: Politics, Religion, and Social Movements*, ed. Bernard Rougier and Stéphane Lacroix (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 175; Jannis Grimm and Cilja Harders, "Unpacking the Effects of Repression: the Evolution of Islamist Repertoires of Contention in Egypt After the Fall of President Morsi," *Social Movement Studies* 17, no. 1 (2018/01/02 2018): 14-15.

¹⁴²¹ Wehrey et al., *Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam*, 83.

¹⁴²² Anne Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 144-45.

¹⁴²³ 14March.org, "Husām aṣ-Ṣabāgh Amīr ‘alā Man?," *YouTube* (23/01/2016 2016).
<https://youtu.be/WF4YFtou1Y4>.

home and mosque, and he was not the only person looking to send that sort of message. In Syria years later, Abū Muḥammad al-Jawlānī of the al-Qāʿida-linked *Jabhat an-Nuṣra* was eager to present his organisation as a relatively benign force, stressing that it did not threaten foreign interests.¹⁴²⁴ And just as importantly, al-Jawlānī's movement would serve as an occasional partner for centres of power like the Turkish government when it needed to solve more serious security problems.¹⁴²⁵ Leaving aside his and aṣ-Ṣabāgh's *jihādī* history or the distinction between individuals and organisations, nothing stopped them from analysing their circumstances and acting in response to opportunities and threats.

Those other regional cases—particularly the “Islamic State” organisation—did raise a question of whether outliers emerged because of Salafī actors' agency or the absence of centres of power that regulated their environment. “Islamic State” had carved out a territorial space for itself in Iraq and Syria in the early 2010s, and that was not surprising. By that point they had marked themselves as radicals by going to war with similar actors like *Jabhat an-Nuṣra* in 2013,¹⁴²⁶ and launching a transnational terror campaign and local state building project in Iraq and Syria that threatened a broad range of international interests.¹⁴²⁷ And their actions were not necessarily a reflection of their local context and place in it—early leaders like Abū Muṣʿab az-Zarqāwī had harboured an unusual political outlook that was based on a strangely-intense hatred of outsiders like Shīʿa that even some other extremist leaders found unsettling.¹⁴²⁸ Between those radical views and the radical direction that the organisation took, there was a question of whether it had challenged the established order through the power of its leaders' will rather than a shifting political space that emerged through shifting patterns of demobilisation from above.

But Islamic State was an exception that validated the demobilising rule, highlighting the central role that centres of power played in shaping the structure of marginal actors' context

¹⁴²⁴ PBS, “The Jihadist: Abu Mohammad al-Jolani,” *Frontline* (February 2021 2021).
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/interview/abu-mohammad-al-jolani/>.

¹⁴²⁵ Christopher Solomon, “HTS: Evolution of a Jihadi Group,” *Wilson Center* (13/07/2022 2022).
<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/hts-evolution-jihadist-group>.

¹⁴²⁶ Brian Fishman, “The History of the Islamic State: From Abu Musab al-Zarqawi to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,” in *Routledge Handbook of U.S. Counterterrorism and Irregular Warfare Operations*, ed. Michael A. Sheehan, Erich Marquardt, and Liam Collins (Routledge: London, 2021), 62-64.

¹⁴²⁷ Fawaz Gerges, *ISIS: A History*, New ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 269-70.

¹⁴²⁸ Fishman, “The History of the Islamic State,” 55-56.

and their place in it. Islamic State exploited similar resource mobilisation opportunities like the disenfranchisement of Iraqi Sunnī communities. And in the early years of Syria's crisis and Iraq's state failure when a meaningful state intervention was unlikely, the organisation faced minimal constraints on its ability to use them.¹⁴²⁹ But while it opportunistically surfaced by exploiting popular mobilisation like the Lebanese shaykhs had during the twenty-first century, it was also unsustainable like Tripoli's *Ḥarakat at-Tawḥīd al-Islāmī* had been in the eighties. As in the Trabelsi case, local and international centres of power would eventually rediscover the capacity and interest for a security crackdown, forcing it back underground.¹⁴³⁰ At most, its rise would be an exception which proved the rule, showing the facilitating impact that disengagement by the centres of power could have. In the more likely arrangement where those centres of power regulated the structural environment, it showed that actors like Salafis were ultimately marginal and subject to co-optation, repression, or demobilisation.

The emphasis on Muslim-majority settings did leave one question: did Islamic discourse still ultimately shape Salafī movements' national role, even if it was still mediated by the centres of power that regulated their political space? A wider look at similar settings invited a plausible inference that Salafī movements would always have room for a compromising relationship with political power in settings with a Muslim majority or at least a tolerance of Islamic discourse in political life. That carried over to places like Malaysia, for example. There, regional religious authorities took varying positions towards Salafīs and their views on issues like *ʿaqīda* and Islamic law,¹⁴³¹ and some political actors similarly embraced Salafī *ʿulama* to reinforce a socially conservative base just as the Hariris and Āl Saʿūd had done to

¹⁴²⁹ International Crisis Group ICG, *Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2016), 15-18. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/exploiting-disorder-al-qaeda-and-islamic-state>; el-Nashra, "ash-Shaykh Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl Yataḥaddath ʿabr "an-Nashra" ʿan Muʿashrāt li Inhiyār Lubnān," *el-Nashra* (20/10/2014 2014).

<https://www.elnashra.com/news/show/801279/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%AB-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA->

¹⁴³⁰ Gerjes, *ISIS: A History*, 269-70, 81-83.

¹⁴³¹ Maszlee Malik, "Salafism in Malaysia: Historical Account on Its Emergence and Motivations," *Sociology of Islam* 5 (2017): 326-27.

secure their interests at certain points.¹⁴³² And a selective reading of Islamic thought and history could rationalise that as an Islamic phenomenon, framing it as proof of a natural place for religious actors in the structures of politics. Ibn Taymiyyah described the *‘ulama* as actors who sat between the wider public and political leaders,¹⁴³³ and elements of the Islamic scholarly class had historically supported rulers’ political legitimacy or expressed popular public sentiment from that position.¹⁴³⁴ And theorists who focused on Muslim societies rather than European ones like Ibn Khaldun considered religious authorities important to the political order and the consolidation of tribal societies.¹⁴³⁵

But looking further afield to Europe demonstrated that Islamic discourse was entirely incidental, and the key political concept was structural: in the national system where Salafi actors operated, a centre of power could reshape the place and role of marginal actors according to its own perceptions and interests alone. There, some policymakers and consultants saw Salafism as a fundamentalist religious project and a separatist political one.¹⁴³⁶ And at a time when European authorities needed to manage a worsening terror threat, the sense that even non-violent Salafis threatened Western cultural norms and social cohesion would see movements come under growing pressure by the 2010s.¹⁴³⁷ And notwithstanding security officials’ warnings against oversimplifying the issue or overreacting to a perceived problem, that translated into a crackdown on Salafi and other Islamic movements.¹⁴³⁸ The general principle was familiar—the centres of power shaped the available political space in Lebanon and elsewhere, and the signals that Salafis sent could affect the ways in which those centres of power shaped their political space. But the European experience showed that the interventions from above were entirely subject to

¹⁴³² Mohamed Nawab and Mohamed Osman, "Salafi Ulama in UMNO: Political Convergence or Expediency?," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 36, no. 2 (2014): 218-20.

¹⁴³³ Taymiyyah, *as-Siyāsa ash-Shar‘iyya fī Iṣlāḥ ar-Rā‘ī war-Ra‘iyya*, 37-38.

¹⁴³⁴ Hallaq, *Sharīa*, 130-31.

¹⁴³⁵ Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldūn*, 76.

¹⁴³⁶ William Racimora, *Salafist/Wahhabite Financial Support to Educational, Social and Religious Institutions* (Brussels: European Union, 2013), 4.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/457136/EXPO-AFET_ET\(2013\)457136_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/457136/EXPO-AFET_ET(2013)457136_EN.pdf).

¹⁴³⁷ Martijn de Koning, Carmen Becker, and Ineke Roex, *Islamic Militant Activism in Belgium, The Netherlands, and Germany: "Islands in a Sea of Disbelief"* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 215-16.

¹⁴³⁸ Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, *Salafism in America: History, Evolution, Radicalization* (George Washington University, 2018), 18-21.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Salafism%20in%20America.pdf>.

how the centres of power perceived Salafī actors. Even if the latter attempted to manage their circumstances pragmatically, they could still come under pressure for seemingly arbitrary reasons from the former that controlled their political context and place in it.

Actors in Salafī Politics

Resource Mobilisation as Marginal Actors

While contentious politics theory had more potential that needed to be explained, resource mobilisation theory had limits that needed to be understood—most notably on its ability to explain Salafism's influence over the two shaykhs' politics and their emergence as leaders. Resource mobilisation was still a useful framing—for one, it distinguished marginal national actors like Tripoli's shaykhs whose role reflected constraints on their ability to use resources from centres of power like Ashraf Rifi, whose role reflected their ability to find resources. And that distinction from Rifi was a good illustration of their marginality—his stalled rise showed that elites worked according to different rules, one of which was that their success depended more on the resources that they could find than the political space in which they used them. By 2016, he had challenged the Hariris and Miqati, quitting the Justice ministry in February that year over investigations into the pro-Syrian former minister Michel Samaha and Future Movement failures to confront Hizbullah.¹⁴³⁹ And his electoral list secured a majority in Tripoli's May municipal elections, despite competition from a coalition of the Hariris, Miqati, and other established Trabelsi political families.¹⁴⁴⁰ But his rise had limits, and while an anti-Hizbullah position differentiated him from the Hariris,¹⁴⁴¹ by 2017 he still struggled to secure Saudi support and it was not clear where else he would find the necessary largesse.¹⁴⁴² As an elite figure he was freer to mobilise resources than religious

¹⁴³⁹ 24 فرانس / France 24 Arabic, "Istiḳālat Wazīr al-ʿAdl al-Lubnānī Ashraf Rifī," *YouTube* (23/02/2016 2016). <https://youtu.be/IDfHZeiuguY>.

¹⁴⁴⁰ Mona Alami, "Is Lebanon Abandoning Sectarian Politics?," *Al Monitor* (09/06/2016 2016). <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/06/lebanon-elections-iraq-protests-change-sectarian-politics.html>.

¹⁴⁴¹ Al Arabiya AA, "Ashraf Rifī: Ḥizb Allāh Qat Yanfadh Iḡhtiyālāt Jadīda fī Lubnān," *Al Arabiya* (05/11/2017 2017). <https://www.alarabiya.net/arab-and-world/2017/11/05/%D8%A3%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%81-%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%82%D8%AF-%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B0-%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86>.

¹⁴⁴² Jena al-Dahaybi, "Mīqātī - Rifī: Mā al-ʿUnwān ath-Thalātha Allatī Ittafaqa ʿAlayhi," *al-Modon* (18/09/2017 2017). <https://www.almodon.com/politics/2017/9/18/%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%A7>.

actors like ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfi‘ī, and others. But Rifi’s fortunes would still depend on the resources that he could find, which remained limited.

And the Hariris’ survival-by-default as Lebanon’s Sunnī establishment highlighted a second difference: while the Salafī movement generally lacked influence over the perceptions that other actors had of them, the centres of power could manage resource constraints by persuading other actors that they were influential. Saad Hariri remained insecure amidst ongoing financial troubles and lukewarm Saudi support, and like Rifi he struggled to find the resources to rebuild or buy public confidence through patronage. But Hariri had a family heritage and political history as the Sunnī public’s default national representative, enabling a comeback at the end of 2016 after negotiations with Lebanon’s political class and his supposed enemies in March 8. His subsequent recognition of Hizbullah’s preferred presidential candidate, Michel Aoun, would still anger Future Movement supporters in parliament and the public. But it was enough to position him as the next Prime Minister.¹⁴⁴³ And crucially, it was a reminder that elites like the Sunnī establishment operated at a different level to marginal players in wider society like the Salafīs. Hariri would not mobilise a Sunnī base again—like Rifi, he had to use the resources that he could find. But actors in his position could renegotiate their relationships, boundaries, and the influence that they offered, preserving just enough inertia to survive politically and form a new cabinet in December.¹⁴⁴⁴

In contrast, marginal Sunnī actors had to work within the space that those centres of power defined. By 2015, two of the most prominent militia leaders since 2011—Ziyād ‘Alūkī and Sa‘ad al-Maṣrī—faced trial in a military court and pressure to speak carefully. Their testimony still said a lot: the Future Movement’s facilitators had been involved but evaded arrest, and one especially—‘Amīd Ḥammūd—had supplied and sometimes even undertaken armed activities in Syria. But as with ash-Shahāl’s toxic 2014 remarks and the tentative

%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A%D9%86-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AB%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A-
%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D9%82%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%87%D8%A7.

¹⁴⁴³ Ali Hashem, "How Lebanon’s Presidential Problem Turned into Opportunity," *Al Monitor* (26/10/2016 2016). <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/10/lebanon-president-hariri-aoun-hezbollah-saudi-arabia.html>.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Arsan, *Lebanon*, 414-17.

proposals of new security arrangements after 2013's mosque bombings, the centres of Sunnī power were unenthusiastic about what they were saying. Despite ostensibly being in court rather than Lebanon's open political arena, they and other defendants complained of threats and demands for retraction from Future Movement officials and even Ḥammūd.¹⁴⁴⁵ The issue was not that Lebanon's Sunnī elites always repressed lesser players—Ḥammūd could not be allowed to face the courts or media, but Future Movement warnings of judicial interest let him flee to Turkey.¹⁴⁴⁶ And most minor players could still speak on most issues as ar-Rāfi'ī and others did with their continued protests against state handling of the mosque bombings, double standards in Sunnīs' general treatment,¹⁴⁴⁷ and Aḥmad al-Asīr's trial over 2013's Sidon clashes.¹⁴⁴⁸ But unlike the centres of Sunnī power, they worked with the resources that they were allowed to have within boundaries in which they were allowed to use them.

Where Does Salafism Become Political? Does it Matter?

Not every issue with resource mobilisation theory was a problem, though, and its emphasis on Salafis rather than Salafism helped avoid some of the problems which arise when scholars try to understand Islamic discourse and its implications. At least from a distant national perspective, it was easier to describe the way Salafism shaped Salafīs' view of the world than their actual behaviour in it. As the second chapter noted, the Najdī tradition's implications for political behaviour were vague at best. It was plausibly a model of "ontological politics" that shaped Salafīs' interpretation of an observable world that they shared with everyone else,¹⁴⁴⁹ a "social imaginary" that offered shared understandings which enabled "common

¹⁴⁴⁵ as-Safir, "Shaḡīq "Alūki" Yaḡarr bi Dawr aḡ-Ḍābiḡ as-Sābiq.. wa Mawḡūfūn Yantaḡidūn Rifī."

¹⁴⁴⁶ as-Safir, "'Amīd Ḥammūd Yughādir Lubnān," *IMLebanon.org* (17/04/2015 2015).
<https://www.imlebanon.org/2015/04/17/amid-hammoud-escape-turkey/>.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Amrieh, "Fī Dhikhrā "at-Taḡwā" wa "as-Salām" Muḡālaba bi Muḡākamāt al-Mutawarriḡīn."

¹⁴⁴⁸ Abd al-Kafi al-Samad, "al-Asīr fī Ṭarābulus: Muḡāṭ'a Islāmiyya wa Mushāraka Mustaqbaliya," *Saida City* (01/10/2012 2012). <http://saidacity.net/news/105610/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%B3--%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9>.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena, "Pluriverse: Proposals for a World of Many Worlds," in *A World of Many Worlds*, ed. Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 5-6.

practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy,"¹⁴⁵⁰ or a "cultural system" that defined the world as a set of symbols that invited certain feelings and actions.¹⁴⁵¹ But none of that suggested a political program like that of the Muslim Brotherhood, which had been inspired by Western political thought and instrumentally reframed it with a more convenient Islamic vocabulary,¹⁴⁵² and was based on a fundamental belief in the need for political change above all other considerations.¹⁴⁵³ Salafism's rigid but vague ideas of theology and methodology explained the diverse views and journeys of leaders like ash-Shahāl, ar-Rāfi'ī, and az-Za'abī, as well as Salafī movements' frequent disputes about doctrinal purity and legitimacy.¹⁴⁵⁴ And its ambiguities left space for the cautious positions of ostensibly-activist Salafī actors like Egypt's *Ḥizb an-Nūr*.¹⁴⁵⁵ But it was distinct from movements like the Egyptian Brotherhood, for example, which survived into the Arab Uprisings of 2011 by prioritising ideological loyalty to a party over any religious principles or political pragmatism.¹⁴⁵⁶

That hinted at two general problems, one of which was the difficulty of linking the shaykhs' religious roots to their conduct without ruling out the norms of their local context. Ash-Shahāl harboured grievances towards the Sūfī *Aḥbāsh* movement, for example, but the stated issue was that he held them responsible for his organisation's legal problems in the nineties.¹⁴⁵⁷ And while ar-Rāfi'ī denounced temporary Shī'ī *mut'a* marriages as un-Islamic legal innovations,¹⁴⁵⁸ he still spoke carefully and avoided signalling that Lebanon's Sunnīs were at war with Lebanese or Syrian Shī'a.¹⁴⁵⁹ There were still things that the shaykhs would publicly say and many others would not, like the framing of political violence as *jihād* and

¹⁴⁵⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 170-72.

¹⁴⁵¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 96-97.

¹⁴⁵² Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, trans. Carol Volk (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 39-40.

¹⁴⁵³ Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, 46-47.

¹⁴⁵⁴ de Koning, "The 'Other' Political Islam," 174-75.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Stéphane Lacroix, "Unpacking the Saudi-Salafi Connection in Egypt," in *Wahhabism and the World: Understanding Saudi Arabia's Global Influence on Islam*, ed. Peter Mandaville (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 265-68.

¹⁴⁵⁶ Ovamir Anjum, "Do Islamists Have an Intellectual Deficit?," in *Rethinking Political Islam*, ed. William McCants and Shadi Hamid (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 306-07; al-'Anānī, *Inside the Muslim Brotherhood*, 143-44.

¹⁴⁵⁷ Sa'd 'Alī ash-Shahrānī, *Firqat al-Aḥbāsh: Nashā'tuhā - 'Aqā'iduhā - Athāruhā* (Mecca: Dar 'Ālin al-Fawa'id lil-Nashr wa-Tawzī', 2002), 116.

¹⁴⁵⁸ ar-Rāfi'ī, *Aḥkām al-Aḥwāl ash-Shakhṣiyya lil-Muslimīn fīl-Gharb*, 536, 44-45.

¹⁴⁵⁹ AJ, "Mā Warā' al-Khubr - Da'wat ash-Shaykh Sālim ar-Rāfi'ī li Sunnat Lubnān."

identifying Syrian and Lebanese ‘Alawīs by an often-derogatory *Nuṣayrī* moniker.¹⁴⁶⁰ But religious vocabulary was also not necessarily a religious phenomenon. Ash-Shahāl described a *fitna*—a trial or strife—across the Sunnī world,¹⁴⁶¹ yet Hariri and Miqati publicly used the same term and made similar appeals for Divine help.¹⁴⁶² All of that illustrated a general contextual problem when considering Salafī actors’ orientation in national politics: their words and actions could reflect religious roots, or local norms of political expression and conduct.¹⁴⁶³ But it was hard to say which.

Another general problem was harder to work around, especially when approaching Salafis as actors in the wider national context: the secular philosophical roots of resource mobilisation theory struggle to define Salafism on Salafis’ own terms. Secular studies of Muslim politics are studies of language,¹⁴⁶⁴ and even basic Islamic terms translate subjectively. *Religion*, for example, can translate to *dīn* which relates to subordinate devotion or *milla* which is more about a community.¹⁴⁶⁵ And even the Arabic *Islām* can indicate observable practice, separate from *īmān* as belief and *ihṣān* as spiritual cultivation,¹⁴⁶⁶ or can capture all three simultaneously, or alternatively can sit in a process where it indicates *īmān* and cultivates *ihṣān*.¹⁴⁶⁷ One resulting issue of that subjectivity is that scholars’ understandings and meaning reflect personal differences of creed, law, experiences, and temperament. Sālim ar-Rāfi‘ī, for example, drew on outsiders like Bernard Shaw, Tolstoy, and others,¹⁴⁶⁸ while

¹⁴⁶⁰ Khalījiyya, "ash-Shaykh Dā‘ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl Ḍayf Liqā’ al-Juma‘a ma‘a ‘Abd Allā al-Mudayfir - al-Mashrū‘ al-Ṭrānī fī Lubnān."; as-Salafī, "Kalimat Samāḥat ash-Shaykh Dā‘ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl min Masjid al-Iḥṣān 2014 - 5 -13 Masīḥī."

¹⁴⁶¹ as-Salafī, "Kalimat Samāḥat ash-Shaykh Dā‘ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl min Masjid al-Iḥṣān 2014 - 5 -13 Masīḥī."

¹⁴⁶² Al Jadeed Diaspora, "Sa‘ad al-Ḥarīrī Sayā‘ūd ba‘ad Khurūj ‘Awn min Qaṣr al-Ba‘abdā .. Mā Muddā Dīqat al-Khabr?," *YouTube* (26/10/2022 2022). <https://youtu.be/8ACfwM00XBs>; al-Anba, "Mīqātī Yad‘ū ilā at-Ta‘aqqul wa Yuḥḍhir min Fitna ba‘ad Ṣudūr al-Qarār al-Iṭṭihāmī," *al-Anba* (01/07/2011 2011).

<https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/arabic-international-news/lebanon-news/208908/01-07-2011-%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%82%D9%84-%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AD%D8%B0%D8%B1-%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A/>.

¹⁴⁶³ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 192-93.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 5-6.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 353, 1077.

¹⁴⁶⁶ "Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 6429 (Book 81, Hadith 18)." English Text Available at <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:50>.

¹⁴⁶⁷ Ibn Taymiyyah, Salman Hassan al-Ani, and Shadia Ahmad Tel, *Kitab al-Iman: Book of Faith*, trans. Salman Hassan al-Ani and Shadia Ahmad Tel (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2009), 20-25.

¹⁴⁶⁸ ar-Rāfi‘ī, *al-Fawā‘id al-Ḥasān fī Ḥadīth Harqal wa Abī Sufyān*, 115-18.

acknowledging teachers like Abū Bakr al-Jazā'irī.¹⁴⁶⁹ And for Salafī movements, Salafism generally may be closer to a Muslim youth culture just as jihadism may give antisocial delinquents a counterculture,¹⁴⁷⁰ while some Salafīs may adopt different labels while still embracing Salafism's fundamentals or become indistinguishable from other antisocial trends which lack Islamic roots.¹⁴⁷¹ That does not make it impossible to map Salafīs' debates about the tradition's fundamentals and implications, as some scholarship has done. But doing so has required a narrower focus on discourse,¹⁴⁷² and the extent to which it shapes actors' conduct in the wider national context is unclear.

But those general problems validated resource mobilisation theory rather than undermining it. Even if the limited engagement with Salafism left unresolved questions, it also accommodated the same limits that the wider academic discussion has needed to manage. Contributors to the academic discussion about Salafism have generally conceded that describing discourse is easier than understanding it,¹⁴⁷³ and the field has recognised that specific ideas of a monolithic movement based on Najdī orthodoxy, Saudi money, or an all-encompassing division between "quietist" or "activist" classes, are unrealistic.¹⁴⁷⁴ Scholars have conceded that "a focus on Salafī theology reveals little about the world in which theological principles are cited,"¹⁴⁷⁵ while Salafism is "foreign and strange" but still "basically human."¹⁴⁷⁶ And the attention to ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī's structural constraints mirrors

¹⁴⁶⁹ ar-Rāfi'ī, *al-Ḥadīth at-Tāsi'*: *Ṣanā' al-Ma'rūf*, 61; al-Jazā'irī, *ad-Dawla al-Islāmiyya*, 5-6, 11-15.

¹⁴⁷⁰ David Yuzva Clement, "Post-Migrant Dynamics of Islam: Muslim Youth and Salafism in Germany," in *Dynamics of Islam in the Modern World*, ed. Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 162-63; Marks, "Youth Politics and Tunisian Salafism," 108; Aaron Zelin, *Your Sons Are at Your Service: Tunisia's Missionaries of Jihad* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 5; Paul Cruickshank, "A View from the CT Foxhole: An Interview with Alain Grignard, Brussels Federal Police," *CTC Sentinel* 8, no. 8 (2015): 8; J. Milton Yinger, "Contraculture and Subculture," *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 5 (1960): 629.

¹⁴⁷¹ Iman Dawood, "Who is a 'Salafi'? Salafism and the Politics of Labelling in the UK," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 9 (2020): 253-55; Moustafa Ayad, *Islamogram: Salafism and Alt-Right Online Subcultures* (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2021), 4-5. <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Islamogram.pdf>.

¹⁴⁷² Ismail, *Rethinking Salafism: The Transnational Networks of Salafi 'Ulama in Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia* 28-29; Wagemakers, "Salafism: Generalisation, Conceptualisation and Categorisation," 34.

¹⁴⁷³ Wagemakers, "Salafism: Generalisation, Conceptualisation and Categorisation," 25.

¹⁴⁷⁴ Bruckmayr and Hartung, "Introduction," 143; Simeon Evstatiev, "Salafism as a Contested Concept," in *Knowledge, Authority and Change in Islamic Societies: Studies in Honor of Dale F. Eickelman*, ed. Allen James Fromherz and Nadav Samin (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 172-73.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Aaron Rock-Singer, *In the Shade of the Sunna: Salafi Piety in the Twentieth-Century Middle East* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 9-10.

¹⁴⁷⁶ Susanne Olsson and Jonas Svensson, "'One of the Most Important Questions that Human Beings Have to Understand': Salafism as Islamic Differentialist Fundamentalism," *Approaching Religion* 12, no. 2 (2022): 74.

some recent research.¹⁴⁷⁷ It is possible to move further in that direction with the assertion that from an outsider's perspective Salafis themselves are central, and their continuous re-interpretation and re-imagination of old discourse in a contemporary context effectively creates multiple "Salafisms."¹⁴⁷⁸ That leaves the conceptual boundary between discourse and the actors that interpret it—noted in the introduction—as an unsolved problem. But by concentrating on Salafis like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī as observable actors in the national context and avoiding causal questions about the influence of Salafism on their political role, it becomes a manageable if not solvable problem.

What is Inside Salafī Movements?

But one significant set of details that resource mobilisation theory could not capture was the cultural context and social capital which had made ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī into movement leaders who warranted national attention in the first place. If resource availability was the only issues, then their prominence as distinct national figures was confusing. There were, after all, opportunities that could have helped others supplant ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfi'ī's position as leading figures in the national context. Domestically, Lebanese activists like Faṭḥī Yakan and foreign analysts had seen them within Sunnī society,¹⁴⁷⁹ and there were also those sources of support outside Lebanon, like the Gulf charities that empowered Shaykhs Ṣufwān az-Za'abī and Khālīd Za'rūr by the late 2010s.¹⁴⁸⁰

And given the obvious question of why other shaykhs who mobilised Lebanon's resources had not displaced ash-Shahāl or ar-Rāfi'ī from a place of national importance, cultural context was a standout issue. Zakariya al-Maṣrī and Rā'id Ḥlayḥal, for example, had taken advantage of the opportunities and positioned themselves as leaders in Sunnī society as the Hariris' authority faltered and tensions over Syria worsened.¹⁴⁸¹ That rise to prominence was

¹⁴⁷⁷ Zoltan Pall and Pérez Pereiro, "Salafī Islam in Cambodia: Institution Building, Transnational Networks and Patterns of Competition in a Muslim-Minority Context," *Die Welt des Islams* 60, no. 2-3 (2020): 249-50, 55; Iona Emy Matesan, "Typological Varieties of Transnational Jihadism and Implications for Conflict Resolution," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 16, no. 1 (2022): 49-52; Barak Mendelsohn, *Jihadism Constrained: The Limits of Transnational Jihadism and What It Means for Counterterrorism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 24.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Bishara, *On Salafism: Concepts and Contexts*, 6-9.

¹⁴⁷⁹ Yakan, *al-Maṣ'ala al-Lubnāniyya min Manẓūr Islāmiyya*, 127; Gade, *Sunni City: Tripoli from Islamist Utopia to the Lebanese 'Revolution'*, 21-22; Lefèvre, *Jihad in the City*, 28-29.

¹⁴⁸⁰ Pall, *Lebanese Salafis Between the Gulf and Europe*, 69, 74.

¹⁴⁸¹ Rabil, *Salafism in Lebanon*, 207.

unsurprising, and looked like a challenge to Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl and Sālīm ar-Rāfiʿī. If existing academic theory is correct, then social movement authority is negotiable, internal structures differ, and leadership can change,¹⁴⁸² while Islamic movements have frequent competitions for religious authority.¹⁴⁸³ Yet after 2014 that rise was still not enough to undermine ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī, who appeared as powerful or at least privileged as ever. As the government pressed for ash-Shahāl's return in 2015,¹⁴⁸⁴ interior minister Nouhad Machnoug publicly guaranteed the shaykh's safety,¹⁴⁸⁵ while 2020's rumours of ar-Rāfiʿī's upcoming military court trial alarmed Dār al-Fatwā's head—and Lebanon's Grand Mufti—Abdel Latif Derian, who warned authorities that arresting such an exceptional figure would destabilise Tripoli.¹⁴⁸⁶ By contrast, other Salafīs like Bilāl Daqmāq were less secure, if his arrest after returning from Turkey was any indication.¹⁴⁸⁷ And that contrast with ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī stood out—it hinted at underlying “cultural context” issues that resource mobilisation theorists acknowledged as gaps.¹⁴⁸⁸

In that cultural framing, it was easier to explain the shaykhs' prominence: it reflected a distinct kind of social capital which had emerged thanks to Tripoli's own local and regional history. There had been hints of that in one key part of ash-Shahāl's reputation—as the “founder” of Lebanon's Salafi institutions in the eighties.¹⁴⁸⁹ It did not necessarily indicate his own resourcefulness, particularly when his father Sālīm ash-Shahāl founded the earlier

¹⁴⁸² Johnson, Barker, and Lavalette, *Leadership and Social Movements*, 15-17.

¹⁴⁸³ Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 74.

¹⁴⁸⁴ as-Safir, "Tawqif ash-Shaykh Ghalayīnī Risāla Amniyya ilā ash-Shahāl," *IMLebanon.org* (31/10/2015 2015). <https://www.imlebanon.org/2015/10/31/arrest-ghalayini-message-to-chahal/>.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Itani, "Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl: Lam Yakun Irhābiyan.. bal Sunniyyan."

¹⁴⁸⁶ Ahmad Al-Ayubi, "Baʿad Istidʿāʾ ar-Rāfiʿī.. al-Muʿabad ʿalā Ṭarrās: Innahā al-Fitna," *Asas Media* (08/07/2020 2020). <https://www.asasmedia.com/news/386437/%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B9%D9%8A..-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%91%D8%A7%D8%B3:-%D8%A5%D9%86%D9%91%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A9>.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Suha Jaffal, "Limādha Tamm Tawqif ash-Shaykh Bilāl Daqmāq baʿad ʿAwdatuhu min Turkiyā?," *Janoubia* (21/02/2015 2015). <https://janoubia.com/2015/02/21/%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D9%85-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%AF%D9%82%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF/>.

¹⁴⁸⁸ John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, "The Enduring Vitality of the Resource Mobilization Theory of Social Movements," in *Handbook of Sociological Theory*, ed. Jonathan H. Turner (Boston, MA: Springer US, 2001), 555.

¹⁴⁸⁹ AJM, "Mubāshir maʿa Dāʿī al-Islām ash-Shahāl. As-Salafiyyūn fī Lubnān."

movement and facilitated his sons' studies in Saudi Arabia during that decade.¹⁴⁹⁰ Rather, it indicated the importance of timing: by the eighties, the Najdī establishment had started working to normalise its ownership over the *Salafī* title in competition with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Saudi *Ṣaḥwā*.¹⁴⁹¹ As Najdī institutions welcomed scholars from abroad—including Lebanon—they would build symbolic authority for their definition of “Salafism” and change Trabelsi religious culture,¹⁴⁹² building social capital for the Najdī tradition, its native Saudi cultural environment, and local partners who conveyed it.¹⁴⁹³ That was a meaningful kind of shift. Among British Salafīs, for example, Saudi institutions, scholars, and their associates enjoyed credibility even outside institutional settings.¹⁴⁹⁴ And it would give Saudi institutions, traditions, and the associated local scholars the same symbolic power over Tripoli's Salafīs.¹⁴⁹⁵ There would be no “Salafī takeover,” and the movements' wider role centred round social welfare more than religious leadership.¹⁴⁹⁶ But local understandings of Salafī identity and legitimacy had shifted.

Shifts in that cultural context had made the Najdī tradition and its symbolism into dominant cultural forces among Tripoli's Salafīs, and would give figures like ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿ social capital that legitimised them as the Trabelsi movement's national representatives. That social capital was tied firmly to their religious credentials and connections,¹⁴⁹⁷ as reactions to ash-Shahāl's November 2020 death in Istanbul showed.¹⁴⁹⁸ Rā'id Ḥlayḥal remembered ash-Shahāl as a student of Najdī Salafism thanks to studies in Madīnah and an associate of famous Saudi names like ‘Abd al-‘Azīz bin Bāz and Nāṣr ad-Dīn al-Albānī.¹⁴⁹⁹ And

¹⁴⁹⁰ Abi Samra, *Ṭarābulus Sāhat Allāh wa Mīna' al-Ḥadātha*, 83-84.

¹⁴⁹¹ Nathan Spannaus, "Evolution of Saudi Salafism," in *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change, Volume 1*, ed. Masooda Bano, Evolving Debates in Muslim Majority Countries (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 164.

¹⁴⁹² Talal Asad, "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz," *Man* 18, no. 2 (1983): 251.

¹⁴⁹³ Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 134; Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith*, 13-14.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Inge, *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman*, 113; Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: the Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism*, 54-55.

¹⁴⁹⁵ Abner Cohen, "Political Symbolism," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 8 (1979): 101-02.

¹⁴⁹⁶ Pall, *Lebanese Salafis Between the Gulf and Europe*, 35-36.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Douglas F. Barnes, "Charisma and Religious Leadership: An Historical Analysis," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 17, no. 1 (1978): 15.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Safir al-Chamal, "Wafāt ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl," *Safir al-Chamal* (15/11/2020 2020). <https://safiralchamal.com/2020/11/15/156904/>; moultāqā l2as7ab, "Janāzat ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām bin Sālim ash-Shahāl Raḥimahu Allāh," *YouTube* (16/11/2020 2020). <https://youtu.be/FRkC6e7zsSw>.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Qiyamtech, "Raḥīl ash-Shaykh Dā'ī al-Islām ash-Shahāl - al-Qanāt at-Tāsi'a," *YouTube* (16/11/2020 2020). <https://youtu.be/SydwNk1DZnM>.

as noted by the second chapter, ar-Rāfiʿī was similarly placed thanks to his studies and connections to the Najdī establishment. The resulting social capital would not make him or ash-Shahāl leaders in Lebanon's wider politics, but it marked them as qualified defenders and articulators of Najdī principles, and emissaries of its institutions.¹⁵⁰⁰ Academically speaking, that positioned ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī as leaders who could mobilise resources within and for the movement, giving them the choice of defecting from or participating in Lebanon's national political landscape as its representatives. And historically, it would be the start of the story which the introduction's first paragraph had introduced with its mention of ash-Shahāl's death in Turkey and ar-Rāfiʿī's defence of the Salafī movement.¹⁵⁰¹

But for researchers who just wanted to explain the national role of shaykhs like Dāʿī al-Islam ash-Shahāl and Shaykh Sālim ar-Rāfiʿī who already had an established profile, granular details like cultural context were unnecessary. The core question was simple: to what extent did the shaykhs' roles reflect their Salafī roots, or the structure of their context and place in it? And so was the answer: ash-Shahāl and ar-Rāfiʿī's roles from 2005 to 2014 shifted as the structure of their political context and their place relative to its centres of power did. The shaykhs still stood out because of their Najdī roots and Salafism's history in the city since the eighties. But despite voicing strong views in incendiary language, their practical focus and impacts reflected their place in a Lebanese context that they did not control. And even though they could still make independent choices about how to speak and act, that place had to fit into a political space that Lebanon's authoritarian political class set for them. As such, there was nothing stopping ash-Shahāl's last tweets from denouncing Freemasonry, Zionist plots, and plots against Islam, or preventing ar-Rāfiʿī from blaming the Syrian regime for his colleague's exile.¹⁵⁰² But neither man could do much about those perceived problems. They still had distinct roots that gave them a privileged place in a distinct movement defined by a distinct understanding of Islam. But their political survival depended on the generic structural realities of Lebanese Sunnī power and their ability to work within them.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Morris and Staggendord, "Leadership in Social Movements," 175-76.

¹⁵⁰¹ al-Dahaybi, "ad-Dāʿī ash-Shahāl: min 'Adāwat an-Niẓām as-Sūrj ilā al-Mawt bi Turkiyā."

¹⁵⁰² al-Dahaybi, "ad-Dāʿī ash-Shahāl: min 'Adāwat an-Niẓām as-Sūrj ilā al-Mawt bi Turkiyā."

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