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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Events of October 7, 2023: Rupture and Continuity in Quietist Salafi Discourse¹

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the positions of the quietist Salafist movement regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on an analysis of the speeches of Salafist clerics and preachers. It highlights the movement's characteristic apoliticism and its consistent critique of jihadist groups. The analysis traces the stances of these actors before the October 7, 2023 attacks and shows that the adjustments made afterward remained marginal, without altering their fundamental orientation.

KEYWORDS: Salafism, quietism, Hamas, October 7th, Palestine

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1. Introduction

From the late nineteenth century, and even before the State of Israel was officially founded in 1948 (Perrin, 2000), the gradual settlement of Jewish communities in Palestine generated tensions, fears, and opposition among Arabs (Saint Prot, 2013; Choueiri, 2001). These forms of resistance prompted political movements to seize upon the issue and turn it into a central marker of their discourse and programs. Thus, actors with diverse, and at times divergent, ideological orientations - from Islamist movements to organizations claiming Arab nationalist legacies to leftist parties - have made resistance to Zionism and to Israel a major political issue (Girard, 2023; Pappé, 2004; Morris, 2008; Krämer and Harman, 2008). Thus, secular political movements and religiously inspired movements, particularly those stemming from the Muslim Brotherhood matrix, made

¹ I sincerely thank my colleague and friend Dr. Ayoub Mazek for his invaluable help, insightful discussions and generously shared documents, which greatly contributed to the completion of this article.

Palestine a cornerstone of their ideology and politics (Hroub, 2008). The founding Charter of Hamas (*ḥarakat al-muqāwama al-ʿislāmiyya*) of 1988, situated within the ideological heritage of the Muslim Brotherhood, offers a paradigmatic illustration of how MB-inspired movements think about Palestine. This document asserts that Palestine is Muslim land and must be liberated from Israeli influence in the name of the sacred duty of preserving holy sites, particularly the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem (Levitt, 2008).

Academic reflection on the positions of Islamist movements regarding the Palestinian question has often focused on the most active and visible branches of this current, namely the Muslim Brotherhood or political formations linked to it, and this has also been the case after the October 7th attack and the subsequent Israeli genocidal war (Gunning and Valbjørn, 2025). As for Salafism, it is worth noting that its positions have been studied unevenly, depending on the trend in question. While scholarly work is abundant concerning jihadist or political Salafism (Maher, 2016), research remains far more limited when it comes to quietist Salafism. Although, like revolutionary and political Salafism, this current calls for a return to the monotheistic values of Islam by opposing all innovations regarded as deviations, it differs from other Salafi trends by emphasizing three forms of action (Wiktorowicz, 2006). The first is preaching, through activities aimed at calling Muslims and non-Muslims alike to Islam. This current considers that “sociological Muslims” maintain only a distant relationship with their religion and therefore they need to be educated to what it really means both as a doctrine and a practice (Amghar, 2023; Haykel, 2009). The second is religious education: Salafi advocates hold that religious practice cannot be conceived without Islamic knowledge and thus studying the actual texts becomes a priority. The third and final form is correcting religious beliefs and practices (Haykel, 2009), whereby all elements not deemed consistent with “original Islam” (Amghar, 2010) need to be eliminated to arrive at a ‘pure’ message.

Often considered highly critical of political engagement, this current of Islam has never been the subject of sustained and systematic research by social scientists working on Palestine. Nevertheless, the Salafi reading of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is particularly noteworthy, because it runs counter to the dominant position in the Muslim world, providing therefore a more nuanced picture of the feelings and actions that such conflict instills across the Arab world and Muslim communities elsewhere. For many observers and specialists of the region, the attacks of 7 October 2023 constitute a political “turning point” for regional politics and for international relations, having led to the resurgence of the Palestinian question for both Arab regimes and public opinion, as Paride Turlione notes in his contribution to this special issue, and for global civil society and governments. Despite the several reactions that it has generated, have the attacks and the response to them led to any change in Salafi positions on this issue? Have the theological and religious justifications hitherto advanced by Salafis been called into question by the political and diplomatic consequences of this event? In other words, did the October 7 attacks prompt quietist Salafi theologians to adjust their positions?

The Salafi interpretation of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, as articulated by theologians and preachers, rests on a set of religious and doctrinal arguments which, by their very nature, are immutable, intangible, and fixed. Yet these arguments cannot be entirely insulated from profane and especially political contingencies. This article thus seeks to re-examine the dogmatism and political abstentionism Salafis advocated even on this particularly sensitive issue for the Arab – and Muslim – world, by demonstrating that these positions are often relaxed, adapted, recalibrated, or even effaced in response to major political developments. Consequently, their so-called “political neutrality” concerning October 7 and its aftermath prompted religious positions with eminently political consequences, aligning themselves with the foreign policies of their respective countries, most notably Saudi Arabia.

The article draws upon semi-structured interviews conducted in France (2001–2008), Canada (2010), and Algeria (2025) with Salafi actors and leaders. In addition, it mobilizes the discourse of leading contemporary Salafi figures available on social media (in Arabic, French, and English), including lectures, *fatwas* (legal

opinions), and sermons of major authorities who have spoken on the subject such as al-Albānī, Ibn Bāz, Ibn ‘Uthaymīn, Rabī‘ al-Madkhalī, Muqbil al-Wādi‘ī, and Mohamed Ali Ferkous. By comparing the corpus of discourses and *fatwas* produced before and after October 7, 2023, the aim is to document in a nuanced and precise manner the continuities, the enduring features, and the potential shifts in Salafi discourse on the Palestinian question.

Accordingly, the article is structured in two parts. The first describes the main doctrinal and religious positions of quietist Salafis regarding Palestine and the second attempts to delineate the contours of possible mutations and changes following the events of October 7, 2023.

2. The Foundations of Quietist Salafism before October 7, 2023

Primacy of the Religious Solution and Rejection of All Forms of Mobilization

The Palestinian cause has consistently been the object of statements of support from theologians belonging to the quietist Salafī current. In numerous declarations, they have affirmed that Palestine, being a sacred territory by virtue of the presence of the al-Aqsa mosque - the third holiest site in Islam after Mecca and Medina -, must not be occupied by non-Muslims. Consequently, Palestine should return to Muslim sovereignty. They have therefore constantly supported this cause and have never hesitated, following the views of Ibn Bāz², Ibn ‘Uthaymīn³, and al-Albānī⁴, to consider the Palestinian people as victims of injustice, aggression, and domination. This is why they have regularly urged Muslims to support them in their suffering and in their right to the land⁵.

However, while calling for support for this cause, such support could only take place within a religious and spiritual framework: the only “tools” to be mobilized to assist this population were prayer, invocations, and donations, not direct political activism, never mind violent engagement. If Salafi theologians hold that the solution to the Israeli occupation is above all religious, they are equally convinced that its origin is also religious. Because Palestinians practiced a superficial Islam not strictly guided by an orthodox reading and were insufficiently attached to the values of monotheism (*tawhīd*), God punished them by causing them to lose their land to another people. Thus, al-Albānī was persuaded that Palestinians must first reform themselves religiously from within before considering any other potential solution, whether political or military. Rather than engaging politically or militarily in resisting colonization, he maintained that priority should be given to the religious activities of preaching (*da‘wa*) and Islamic education (*tarbiyya islāmiyya*), which he regarded as the true *jihad* (Meijer, 2009).

When expounding on the conflict, he issued a key *fatwa* in 1993 that many quietist Salafis subsequently used to justify their religious reading of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict⁶. He argued that the defeat of Muslims

² Ibn Bāz (1910-1999) was a scholar and great learned man of Sunni Islam, known for his numerous works on Islamic jurisprudence and belief. He also held the position of Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia for many years.

³ Ibn ‘Uthaymīn (1925-2001) was a prominent Saudi Islamic scholar and theologian known for his expertise in Islamic jurisprudence and creed. He studied under leading scholars in Saudi Arabia and became a widely respected authority in the Salafi tradition.

⁴ Born in 1919 in Albania, he went to teach in Saudi Arabia at the University of Medina in the 1960s. His criticisms of Saudi scholars led to his expulsion, and he decided to return to Syria in the 1970s. He died in 1999. A specialist in hadith, he is regarded by the Salafī movement as one of the greatest scholars of the 20th century.

⁵ Jihad and the Prophet’s Biography, and What Is the Religious Ruling on the Jihad of the Palestinians, Ibn Bāz Website (in Arabic).

⁶ The fatwa is available at: <https://islamiclaw.blog/2018/08/14/1993-fatwa-from-muhammad-nasiruddin-al-albani-calling-on-palestinians-to-leave-the-west-bank/>

and the occupation were nothing but the results of superficial religious practices and a “faulty” faith, polluted by polytheistic beliefs. He thus declared it a duty for Palestinians to leave their country, since they were incapable of repelling the Jews. Consequently, Palestinians were obliged to migrate and settle in another territory (particularly in neighboring countries) where the practice of Islam was possible. This perspective ran completely against what the Palestinians themselves had been engaged in since 1948, which was to avoid leaving Palestine at all costs – even when confronted by the violence of the occupation – for fear of never being able to return. Religiously, al-Albānī compared the situation of the Palestinians to that of the Prophet, who had to undertake the *hijra* (emigration) to Medina on divine command when his community lived under the diktat of the polytheists in Mecca. According to him, a Muslim land conquered by non-Muslims automatically becomes a non-Muslim land. Therefore, it is forbidden for any Muslim to continue living there: “*It is a duty for them to leave! O my brother, it is a duty to abandon a land where one is incapable of repelling the unbeliever, in order to go to a land where they can practice Islam.*” *It is the practice of true Islam that matters most, not the land it is practiced on.*

This *fatwa* provoked a plethora of negative reactions among many Muslim theologians, who argued that al-Albānī was completely disconnected from the political and social realities and from the stakes of the conflict. For example, Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī declared: “*I have also expressed my disagreement with his fatwa making it obligatory for the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza to emigrate from this ‘Dār al-ḥarb’ or ‘Dār al-kufr’ to the Dār al-Islām. This would be the greatest service one could render to Israel: to empty the country of its inhabitants.*”⁷ Likewise, the Syrian cleric al-Būṭī al-Ramadan stated that al-Albānī’s *fatwa* only served the interests of non-Muslims and constituted an obstacle to the formation of a Palestinian resistance against the Israeli presence in the region.⁸ Despite the criticism it attracted, al-Albānī’s religious opinion served as a compass for many Muslims, particularly for Salafīs, including those living in the West, who did not hesitate to brandish this *fatwa* to justify their indifference toward the Palestinian question. The authority and prestige of al-Albānī is what ensured that the *fatwa* enjoyed a degree of support. It remains true though that this religious opinion was poorly received by many Palestinians and contributed to the loss of the theologian’s influence in the occupied territories and among Muslims in the region⁹.

Advocating unconditional allegiance to the political authority in place in accordance with the Islamic principle of *ṭā‘at walī al-amr* (obedience to the ruler), and opposing any form of political engagement (uprisings, demonstrations, revolutions), Salafī theologians display their hostility to any form of political support for the Palestinian cause. In this framework, the question of Palestine, although important to the hearts of many Muslims, is not an exception to the principle of absolute obedience to established authorities. Doctrinally, even if the liberation of this territory is significant, it remains more essential to preserve social and political order if such liberation could result in an anarchic situation. This is to avoid *fitna* (discord) and the division of the community.

In general, quietist Salafīs assert that demonstrations, and even public calls for solidarity, may only be undertaken on the order of the ruler or head of state (*walī al-amr*), even if he is tyrannical or unjust, as long as he is Muslim (Adraoui, 2022). Thus, Saudi theologians such as Ibn Bāz and Ibn ‘Uthaymīn always refused to call for military support of Palestine. Similarly, the Saudi scholar Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān insisted that “*supporting*

⁷ Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī expressed this view in 2008 when replying to a question by a faithful inquiring about the validity of al-Albānī’s point of view. The exchange is available at: <https://www.maison-islam.com/articles/?p=507>

⁸ Like the Syrian scholar Muhammad Sayyid al-Būṭī (1929–2013) who, in his work *al-Jihād al-Islām* published in 1994, opposed al-Albānī’s *fatwa* according to which Palestinians should leave their land for neighboring countries in order to better learn Islam before even considering rising up against Israel’s settlement policies. In the 2010s, he went on to provide an Islamic justification for suicide attacks in the Occupied Territories.

Gaza in a disorganized manner leads to chaos and greater harm for Muslims themselves.”¹⁰ In January 2009, he also declared that demonstrations of solidarity with the Palestinian people amounted to “corruption on earth” (*fasād fi al-arḍ*), since they distracted from the practice of Islam and generate divisions.¹¹

Another prominent example of this refusal to engage in political and social mobilization emerged when many theologians across the Muslim world¹², at the time of the Second Intifada (2000–2005), called for a boycott of products considered ‘Zionist.’ In opposition to this stance, quietist Salafi theologians, particularly Saudi ones such as Muḥammad ‘Alī Ṣāliḥ ‘Uthaymīn, ‘Ubayd al-Jābirī, and Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān, issued religious opinions arguing that boycotts had no Islamic justification. They contended that even during the Prophet’s time—when relations with the Jews were tense—Muslims never ceased to maintain commercial relations with them. One of them explained, regarding the boycott of Coca-Cola, whose main shareholders were said to be Zionists: “*Has it not reached you that the Prophet purchased food from a Jew for his family and that he died while his coat of mail (armor) remained pledged with this Jew?*”¹³

The Algerian-born Salafi theologian Mohamed Ali Ferkous¹⁴ shares the same position: “*The Prophet as well as his Companions conducted exchanges with the Jews residing in Medina, and with the Bedouins living in the surrounding areas. Moreover, the Companions carried out multiple and lasting commercial and financial transactions with them in full view of the Prophet, and although the Companions established commercial and financial relations with the unbelievers, it was never reported that the Prophet forbade them from dealing with them, whatever the nature of their unbelief—whether out of obstinacy, ignorance, or hypocrisy. On the contrary, numerous hadiths confirm that the Prophet, along with his Companions, engaged in transactions with the Jews of Medina through sales, purchases, loans, pledges, and other financial and commercial dealings permitted in our religion.*”¹⁵

All this is indicative of the influence that al-Albānī’s position holds among Salafis, most of which consider themselves quietist. Even the Second Intifada failed to shift quietists Salafis’ belief that political, social and military mobilization in favour of the Palestinians should not occur, preferring instead to focus of the necessity for Palestinians to embrace genuine Islam before thinking about other solutions to the problem they face. Although not particularly popular, this is a position that carries weight among Arabs.

Opposition to the Use of Violence and to the Jihadist Strategy

Although quietist Salafis acknowledge that the Palestinian people are subject to injustice, such injustice cannot, in their view, justify recourse to armed action or violence. They emphasize that recourse to *jihād* as a means of struggle can only take place within a strictly religious framework: it must be declared by a Muslim ruler following consultation with recognized ‘*ulamā*’. This hyper-centralized conception of *jihād* reflects a literalist approach to Islamic principles, in which religious legitimacy prevails over emotional reactions and contingent circumstances. According to quietist Salafi theorists such as Rabī‘ al-Madkhalī, Muḥammad Ibn Hādī al-

¹⁰ The declaration is available at: https://oumma.com/dossier/salih-al-fawzan/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

¹¹ The declarations is available at: https://www.saphirnews.com/Arabie-Saoudite-une-fatwa-contre-les-manifs-pro-Gaza_a19449.html

¹² Thus, the International Union of Muslim Scholars issued a fatwa calling on Muslims to support the Palestinian cause and to refrain from consuming goods known to support Israel.

¹³ The statement is available at: <https://salafiyyah.over-blog.com/2015/06/boycotter-les-produits-israeliens-et-des-kouffar.html>

¹⁴ Born in Algiers in 1954, he decided to pursue studies at the University of Medina in the late 1970s, before joining the University of Islamic Sciences of Algiers in 1982, where he held a teaching position. He later chose to continue his studies in Morocco and obtained a doctorate in Islamic sciences in Algeria in the 2000s. He is considered one of the main disseminators of Salafism in Algeria, alongside Abdelghani Aouisset. Author of several works, he also runs a bookstore in the Kouba district, where he continues to give lectures.

¹⁵ The statement is available at: www.ferkous.com

Madkhalī, and Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān, *jihād* is lawful only if several conditions are met: it must be proclaimed by a legitimate imam, that is, the holder of political authority (*walī al-amr*); it must be framed by a realistic military strategy capable of producing a concrete gain for Islam and the Muslims; and it must be carried out by individuals aligned with *tawḥīd*, free from any religious innovation (*bid‘a*) or ideological deviation (*ḥizbiyya*) (al-Fawzān, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqīda al-Wāsiṭiyya*; Madkhalī, *Bayān mafāsīd al-jihād fī al-‘aṣr al-ḥāḍir*). These three conditions not only exclude militant Islamist groups, but also any popular or insurgent movement operating outside a state framework. In the absence of such conditions, all military engagement is considered *ḥarām* (illicit), or at best reprehensible, as not conforming to the principles of authentic Salafism. For Salafis, sacralizing political authority and established order—even if unjust or authoritarian—remains the best safeguard against division, chaos, and *fitna*. When strictly applied, these conditions leave Palestine out of legitimate forms of violence.

Although Ibn Bāz affirmed that *jihād* in Palestine is “an obligation upon those who are able,” he also emphasized that *jihād* is not an anarchic individual act but must be declared only by a legitimate religious authority—thus restricting the possibility of granting an Islamic framework to independent or resistance groups. This nuance makes it possible to combine both empathetic discourse and unequivocal opposition to any popular uprising or demonstrations not authorized by the authorities. Ibn ‘Uthaymīn likewise argued that *jihād* is a collective act that cannot be undertaken without the order of a legitimate Muslim ruler (*imām*). In his statements on Palestine, he expressed compassion for the Palestinians but insisted on the necessity of remaining within the Islamic legal framework. Such positions produce an apparent depoliticization of the Palestinian conflict by redefining it primarily as a religious problem, rather than as the result of a colonial relationship of domination.

Moreover, even when a religious opinion is issued justifying the use of violence, it is denied legitimacy if the author of the *fatwa* is not a recognized Salafī theologian. This is sufficient to invalidate the opinion regardless of its content. Hence, quietist Salafis systematically opposed the *fatwas* of theologians such as Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, close to the Muslim Brotherhood, who justified suicide bombings as acts of resistance against Israeli presence in the Palestinian territories (Dassetto and Maréchal, 2006; Cook, 2005). Rejection of suicide bombings was not only a religious stance but also a way to discredit the mobilization strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood. Salafis reject not only the approaches of theologians like Qaraḍāwī, but also the strategies of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Palestinian jihādī militias, particularly their interpretation of the conflict and the means to be mobilized for the liberation of Palestine (Seniguer, 2025). Since such calls do not emanate from legitimate authority, all armed resistance is deemed illegitimate. The condemnation of armed Islamist movements—including Palestinian factions like Hamas or Islamic Jihad—rests on their affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood or their participation in what Salafis regard as deviant political projects (e.g., elections). The Yemeni theologian al-Hādī Muqbil¹⁶ stated: “*As for the Hamas group, it is a partisan group that neither commands good nor forbids evil, and it opposes the people of the Sunna. If they were to achieve victory, they would behave like in Afghanistan.*”¹⁷ Similarly, Shaykh ‘Ubayd al-Jābirī declared: “*Hamas is not on the path of the Salaf; they are followers of Sayyid Qutb and the Muslim Brotherhood*” (*Sharḥ Fath al-Majīd*, 2014). By arguing that Qutb and the Brotherhood fall outside the methodology of the Pious Ancestors, the aim is clear: to demonstrate that they belong to a heretical group unconnected to orthodoxy. This logic extends to the question of martyrdom: the dead of Hamas or Islamic Jihad are not automatically considered *shuhadā’* (martyrs).

¹⁶ Born in 1933 in the village of Dammaj, Yemen, he went in the 1970s to the Islamic University of Medina, where he studied under Mohammed al-‘Uthaymin and al-Albani, before being forced to return to Yemen after a period of imprisonment. In his native village, he established a training center that attracted numerous students from around the world. He passed away in 2001.

¹⁷ The statement is available at: <https://www.3ilmchar3i.net/2023/10/le-mouvement-hamas-s-oppose-aux-gens-de-la-sun-nah.html>

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān stated: “*The martyr is the one who fights under a legitimate banner, not the one who dies in disturbances led by people of innovation*” (*al-Muntaqā min Fatāwā al-Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān*). Refusing to recognize the spiritual status of Palestinian fighters thus prevents any implicit legitimization of a struggle deemed illegal and ideologically suspect. The Saudi Rabīʿ al-Madkhalī extended this criticism to all armed Islamist movements, accusing them of creating *fitna* in Muslim lands. According to his analysis, Hamas does not respect the rules governing *jihād* (lack of legitimate authority, alliances with unbelievers, insubordination to political ruler) and because the group includes Shiites in its ranks, he concluded, God will never grant them victory against Israel.

Quietist Salafis’ anti-Hamas and anti-Islamic Jihad positions were instrumentalized by the Palestinian Authority after it assumed power in 1994. It quickly moved to facilitate the growth of quietist Salafism, allowing it to pursue activism and proselytism in mosques, religious venues, and associations to undermine its competitors, something that several Arab rulers had also done to buttress their legitimacy and prevent the Muslim Brothers from monopolizing the religious field. In Palestine, based on the religious obligation of unconditional obedience to political authority, quietist Salafi scholars instructed their followers to submit to the decisions of President Mahmoud Abbas (Seurat, 2016). Yassine al-Astal, president of the Scientific Council of the Salafi Call, and Shaykh al-Hasm, president of the Ibn Bāz Association, affirmed that any struggle against Israeli presence in Palestine must first be preceded by a return to true Islam. Unsurprisingly, Hamas views these figures with suspicion, particularly since Shaykh al-Hasm opposed Hamas’s strategy of suicide bombings. These positions can therefore be interpreted as rather explicit support for Israel. In 2017, the Saudi Mufti ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Shaykh declared that it was not religiously permissible to fight the State of Israel. He even suggested that Muslims should consider an alliance with Israel to combat groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, which he described as terrorist organizations. He also asserted that the Israeli army protects the al-Aqsa mosque, and that attacking it would be religiously forbidden. The same authority issued a *fatwa* prohibiting demonstrations in support of Palestinians in Gaza, labeling them “useless demagogic actions” that would not help Palestinians, while instead encouraging Saudis to provide financial humanitarian aid.

Since Palestinian “difficulties” are understood above all as the result of laxity in religious practice, or of a superficial or heretical Islam (Cavatorta and Merone, 2017) any solution other than a religious one would only obstruct resolution of the conflict (Lauzière, 2015). As such, Salafis confined their support to calling on Palestinians to turn toward ‘true Islam.’

These positions—though they may appear apolitical—nevertheless serve the strategic interests of the Saudi kingdom, reproducing almost identically its official stance on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. On the one hand, mistrust or outright hostility toward Islamist movements engaged in the struggle against Israel is readily apparent. On the other, a desire not to alienate the American ally, itself a supporter of Tel Aviv, by adopting too active an involvement in the conflict, is also a clear motive for such positions (Hroub, 2008). Moreover, Salafi religious positions encouraged Israeli authorities to foster the development of this current among Muslim citizens of Israel as well as among the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza. By promoting the implantation of quietist Salafism, public authorities sought to anchor a rigorist discourse distant from criticism of Israeli presence, thereby weakening Islamist movements such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, both known for their vehement opposition to Salafi theologians’ overt depoliticization (Signoles, 2006). Encouraging the growth of quietist Salafism thus served as an indirect lever of political demobilization for populations sensitive to the Palestinian issue, although it does not seem to have generated the expected outcomes given the several military conflicts Israel had to engage in against armed Palestinian Islamist groups over the last two decades.

Table 1: Summary of Quietist Salafi Theologians' Positions Before October 7, 2023

Name and nationality of the scholar	Date of the first outline of their position on the conflict	Position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
Al-Albanî (Jordanian)	Before 1999	Providing moral support while opposing uncoordinated jihad
Ibn Uthaymin (Saudi)	Before 2001	Jihad conditioned by legitimate authority
Mohammed Ibn Bâz (Saudi)	Before 1999	Support for the cause, yet jihad strictly regulated
Muqbil Al-Wadî'i (Yemeni)	Before 2001	Opposition to Hamas
Rabî' Al-Madkhali (Saudi)	the first decade of the 2000s	Rejection of Islamist movements
Yahya Al-Hajouri (Yemeni)	the 2010–2020 period	Hostility toward Hamas and armed jihad
Saleh Al-Fawzan (Saudi)	prior to 2023	Spiritual support combined with political caution

In the same vein, the declarations of the Saudi Grand Mufti reflected a cautious approach aligned with official Saudi policy, emphasizing regional stability and the fight against groups deemed extremist. He never explicitly endorsed the boycott of Israeli products, preferring instead humanitarian aid and strategic alliances. It is therefore important to stress that Salafi ideological positions are not only linked to doctrinal considerations but are also closely tied to the degree of proximity to their rulers and to the stance of those rulers on the Palestinian question and Israel. Another example is Ibn 'Uthaymīn, who recommended supporting Palestinians “through prayer, donations, and raising awareness of their cause,” but above all avoiding reckless forms of activism that could have disastrous consequences for the population and for social equilibrium.

3. Permanence, Continuity, and Pragmatic Evolution: Quietist Salafi Discourse after October 7

Caution, Strategic Wait-and-See, and Renewed Support for the Palestinian People

Whereas most Muslim theologians hastened to react immediately after the events of October 7, 2023, those belonging to quietist Salafism preferred to wait. This silence - sometimes described by their critics as compromising - reflects the very nature of their relationship to politics: systematic avoidance of any contestation of the established order, loyalty to the authorities in place, and a preference for discourse centered on individual morality and doctrinal purity. It was only after assessing the scale of pro-Palestinian solidarity, both in the Muslim world and within their own societies, that these preachers “moderated” their position, partly under the influence of Riyadh's diplomatic posture. Indeed, as early as October 9, 2023 Saudi Arabia called for de-escalation, urging all parties to lay down their arms and seek a peaceful and diplomatic solution. The Saudi authorities carefully avoided taking sides by refusing to criticize Israel's response or to support the armed organizations that carried out the attacks. This “restraint” is in line with the foreign policy and diplomacy of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who aims to reinforce the kingdom's economic and geopolitical standing and to make it an indispensable regional power, notably through the Abraham Accords and indirect discussions with Tel Aviv.

Two days after the attacks, Saudi Arabia's highest religious body, the Council of Senior Scholars, issued a statement reminding the faithful that only religious solidarity was licit—prayers, almsgiving (through channels authorized by the authorities), and pious invocations—and that any political engagement or public

demonstration was proscribed. Thus, in a declaration dated November 9, 2024, the Saudi shaykh ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ruḥaylī sought to counter criticism of Salafis’ alleged disinterest in the Palestinian question: “*They try to present us as opposed to our brothers in Gaza, but, by Allah, they lie! We love our brothers in Gaza and throughout Palestine with immense and sincere love, we truly support them, we strongly encourage supporting them, we feel their pain, and, by Allah, I feel in my body each one of their wounds (...). Otherwise, this worldly life and the pursuit of popularity are not the path I follow.*” Such messages - essentially reiterating Salafi positions on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict - were broadcast repeatedly on Saudi public channels, notably Al-Ikhbariya and Saudi state television, as part of an effort to control religious opinion. Our research has found that these channels rebroadcast more than seventeen times an old *fatwa* of the former Saudi mufti, Ibn Bāz, in which he opposed any form of contestation of Muslim rulers, whatever the reason. This desire to tighten religious control, reflecting fears of uncontrollable popular demonstrations of support for Palestine, was also evident in the repression carried out between October 2023 and March 2025, very similar to the Egyptian one described by Shaimaa Magued in her contribution to this special issue. Indeed, forty-one ‘dissident’ Salafi imams and preachers were suspended by the General Presidency for Da‘wa; seventeen others saw their X (formerly Twitter) accounts frozen by the Specialized Prosecutor’s Office. In this way, Saudi authorities took advantage of the October 7 attacks to intensify their policy of controlling opposition, even within Salafi circles, which are otherwise known for their loyalty to the authorities.

In Egypt, the authorities feared that the conflict in Gaza could be exploited by the Muslim Brotherhood to reinsert itself into the political arena. For this reason, they requested that official religious institutions such as *Dār al-Iftā’* and al-Azhar University, which include numerous Salafi preachers and theologians, reaffirm the religious necessity of not rebelling against authority. We observed on social media that several Salafi figures thus expressed renewed, but carefully circumscribed, support for the Palestinian cause in a compassionate yet cautious tone, avoiding any criticism of the state or any support for Palestinian armed factions. This partial change in tone reflects earlier criticism accusing Salafis of failing to engage sufficiently with the Palestinian cause, or of ignoring and minimizing the suffering of Gaza’s population on the grounds that they did not live according to strict Islamic orthodoxy.

It was in this context that, by late October 2023, Salafi discourses on Gaza multiplied in both Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Yet they remained anchored in an “apolitical” and religious vision of the conflict. Messages emphasized patience (*ṣabr*), faith, Muslim unity, and pious invocation. They framed the conflict as a divine trial intended to test the Palestinians’ faith, asserting that despite the suffering endured by the population, the situation did not justify violent action that lacked religious legitimacy and proper authority. The same pattern appeared in Algeria, where Palestine is a highly sensitive issue, not least because both the population and the authorities explicitly support the cause. The Algerian theologian Mohamed Ali Ferkous, for example, explicitly condemned on his official website the violence suffered by Palestinians, attributing it to a “Zionist” plot aimed at destroying the *umma* from within. Yet he refrained from offering any support to Palestinian militant organizations, emphasizing instead the need to distinguish between the victimized population and the armed groups deemed responsible for triggering Israeli military intervention.

Explicit Condemnation of the October 7

While some Salafi preachers and theologians adopted a cautious yet still compassionate stance toward Palestinians following the Israeli military intervention in Gaza, others promoted a more ‘incisive’ discourse, such as the Palestinian Salafi theologian Salman b. Naṣr al-Dayah. He did not hesitate to condemn the October 7 attacks directly. In a *fatwa* widely circulated within quietist circles, he argued that the operation lacked Islamic legitimacy and violated the rules of *jihād* as defined by the *sharī‘a*: “*If flight is permitted (before an enemy)*

when objectives cannot be achieved, then it is likewise permitted not to fight from the outset [...]. Hamas did not respect the religious obligations of fighters not to target civilians [...].” This theological critique sought to delegitimize any military action that was not framed by the classical *fiqh* of *jihād*.

The Saudi theologian Muḥammad b. Hādī al-Madkhalī¹⁸ adopted an identical position. In several sermons delivered in November and December 2023, he denounced the “politicization of the Palestinian cause by the *Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* (Muslim Brotherhood) and their allies in Hamas” and urged Muslims “to avoid political conflicts by focusing on religious education, purification of the soul, and the internal reform of Islamic societies.” This line was echoed by pro-Saudi institutions such as the Muslim World League, presided over by Mohammed al-Issa, which issued a statement in December 2023 stressing the importance of “protecting civilians” while calling on Muslims “to turn away from political divisions and ideological quarrels that undermine Islamic unity.”

Other, more discreet figures of quietist Salafism, such as the Egyptian Yasser Burhami and the Kuwaiti ‘Abdallāh al-Turayjī, voiced concern over Hamas’s “suicidal” strategy and the counterproductive effects of the October 7 attacks, arguing that the intervention gave Israel the opportunity to justify its policies of occupation, colonization, and the extension of sovereignty over Palestinian territories. These theologians went so far as to criticize the military strategy of armed groups. In a statement dated January 2024, Burhami declared: “*The sharī‘a imposes on fighters the duty to protect civilians, preserve civilian infrastructure, and ensure the safety of the people.*”¹⁹ He further asserted that the inhabitants of Gaza had, on their own initiative, decided to wage war against Israel without consultation with other Muslim countries, and that the absence of support from these states stemmed from their agreements with Israel. He condemned these events not out of any support for Israel, but because such attacks represented disobedience to legitimate authorities—both Palestinian and Arab—and an unnecessary provocation harming the Muslims of Gaza. Hamas, according to these Salafis, was sacrificing Palestinian civilians for ideological purposes and failing to follow the legitimate path of *jihād*, which must be authorized by a legitimate imam and conducted under strict conditions.

The October 7 attacks thus served as an opportunity for quietist theologians not only to reaffirm their position on the Palestinian question but also to adopt a posture of benevolent neutrality, if not tacit complicity, with regard to Arab regimes that have normalized relations with Israel in recent years. Because they submit to political authority and refuse to contest political decisions, they abstained from criticizing the Abraham Accords and other political initiatives aimed at normalization with the Jewish state. None of the major quietist scholars explicitly condemned the choices of states such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, or Bahrain. This silence is justified on religious grounds: in their view, only the sovereign is empowered to make political decisions, including in the sphere of international relations. To oppose such choices would be to provoke *fitna*, a seditious division disastrous for the community. Hence, Salafī clerics often recall Shaykh Rabī‘ al-Madkhalī’s *fatwa*: “*Do not interfere in what the rulers decide for the interest of the Umma. Even if they normalize [with enemies], they know what they are doing*” (*Ajwibat al-usūliyya*, 2011). In this way, quietist Salafism presents itself as an instrument of stabilizing the geopolitical status quo, in the name of a rigorist reading of the *fiqh* of obedience. The Palestinian question is thus depoliticized, reduced to a matter of individual piety or, at most, humanitarian charity—yet strictly framed by deference to political authority. Arab states are often excused, even absolved: “*They do what they can,*” affirm some clerics; or again: “*Their wisdom exceeds what you understand*” (‘Ubayd al-Jābirī, *Sharḥ Risāla al-Imām al-Barbahārī*).

¹⁸ A Saudi Islamic scholar known for his Salafi-Madkhali orientation. He was influential in promoting quietist Salafism and advising strict obedience to Muslim rulers while opposing political activism.

¹⁹ Fatwa by Yasser Burhani: ‘The people of Gaza have decided to wage war on their own, and we have a pact with the Jews’ (in Arabic).

Table 2: Summary of Quietist Salafi Theologians' Positions After October 7, 2023

Political events and actors	The position of quietist Salafism	References and Key Figures	Political consequences of Salafi discourse
The attacks of October 7, 2023	Explicit condemnation of the Hamas attack because of their lack of legitimacy under Islamic law (<i>sharī'a</i>)	Salman b. Nasr al-Dayah, Yasser Burhami, and Abdallāh al-Turayjī	Armed action is considered non-compliant with the rules of jihad; absence of legitimate authority, targeting of civilians, and lack of a clear strategy
Hamas / Islamic Jihad / Hezbollah	Virulent critique: they are perceived as political rather than religious actors, branded as heretical, and portrayed as a threat to Islam	Muhammad b. Hādī al-Madkhalī, and Rabī' al-Madkhalī	Hamas is equated with the Muslim Brotherhood, despised for its politicization of Islam and its opposition to ruling regimes. Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah are criticized for their proximity to Shiism and to Iran.
Jihad as a means of resistance	Accepted only under legitimate authority and under very strict conditions	Classical doctrine of the <i>fiqh</i> of jihad, <i>Ajwibat al-usūliyya</i>	Any unauthorized, autonomous initiative of jihad is considered a source of <i>fitna</i> . Obedience to the authorities is deemed more important than resistance
The Palestinian civilian population	Mercy	Burhami: 'Hamas sacrifices civilians for its own goals	The solidarity of the people of Gaza is acknowledged, but their suffering should not be instrumentalized.
The Israeli military intervention in Gaza	No explicit condemnation; avoidance of the issue or deferential to the wisdom of the rulers	The silence of major Salafi authorities regarding Israel	Silence reflects an implicit alignment with Saudi Arabia's foreign policy
Arab regimes that normalized relations with Israel	No criticism; religious justification of their choices	Fatwa of Rabī' al-Madkhalī: 'They know what they are doing'	Normalization with Israel is justified by the principle of obedience to the rulers

Another example is the Saudi preacher 'Āid al-Qarnī, once a prominent figure of political Salafism, before distancing himself from this current. Previously a fervent defender of Islamic causes, including the Palestinian one, he has become highly critical of Islamist movements resisting Israeli presence in Palestine. In the Arabic-language daily *The Independent*, published on May 15, 2024, he argued that behind Hamas lies Iran, whereas Saudi Arabia merely supports the Palestinian people²⁰. According to him, the Muslim Brotherhood is a sectarian organization that leaves no space for those outside its ranks. He condemned Hamas leaders' blindness, claiming that despite the heavy losses they suffered, they persisted in viewing the October 7 attacks as a victory against Tel Aviv.

4. Conclusions

The October 7 attacks did not radically modify Salafi positions on the Palestinian conflict. Quietist theologians continue to emphasize the major doctrinal principles that frame their reading of the issue: religious support combined with a refusal of political mobilization. Nevertheless, these events prompted theologians of this current within Islam to reassert those principles while taking care to condemn not only the attacks themselves but also their political consequences, especially when they affected civilian populations. Support for Gaza has indeed been reaffirmed, but without any ideological rupture; it remains situated within the continuity of a Salafism that advocates respect for the status quo, loyalism, and the preservation of the existing political status quo. Although presented by quietist representatives as "apolitical," this position in practice aligns with Saudi Arabia's strategic interests by avoiding any direct confrontation with Israel's supporters and with the broader

²⁰ The statement is available at: [عائض القرني: من وقف ضد تحرير الكويت لن ينقذ فلسطين \(1-2\) | اندبندنت عربية](#) | *Ā'id al-Qarnī : man waqafa didd taḥrīr al-Kuwayt lan yunqida Filastīn (1-2) | Independent 'Arabiyya*

policy of normalization with that state. The intent to grow quietist Salafism in the Palestinian territories and among Arab citizens of Israel has partly been encouraged by both Israeli authorities and the Palestinian Authority for some time because they have viewed it as a means to counterbalance the influence of Islamist movements engaged in armed struggle, but this strategy does not seem to have had success, making Salafi scholars look fundamentally beholden to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies more broadly.

This article also demonstrates that Salafi positions are not monolithic: among political and jihadi Salafis, perspectives differ significantly from those of the quietists. Unlike the quietists, jihadi Salafis defend the idea that only armed struggle will liberate Palestine. They view the fight against Israel as a religious obligation, partly grounded in the concept of *dār al-ḥarb* (“the abode of war”) and the necessity of fighting those they regard as enemies of Islam (Hegghammer and Wagemakers, 2013). Jihadis insist on the need to liberate all of *Dār al-Islām*, or more precisely the *bilād al-muslimīn* (lands of the Muslims), from what they call impious foreign occupation (Thomas, 2024). That said, while al-Qa‘ida welcomed the October 7 attack despite its doctrinal disagreements with Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Islamic State explicitly rejected it. For the latter, faithful to its logic of ideological exclusivism, Hamas is seen as a deviant Islamist movement, led astray by its participation in electoral processes, its governance of Gaza, and above all its strategic alliances with Shi‘i actors such as Iran or Hezbollah, who IS denounces as apostates.

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