

Ibn Taymiyya as a Hermeneutical Paradigm

Reception and Reactivation of Medieval Islamic Thought in the Jihadist Discourse of Ayman al-Zawāhirī

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how Ayman al-Zawāhirī (d. 2022) mobilizes the thought of Ibn Taymiyya to construct a hermeneutical framework that transforms medieval doctrinal positions into enduring, transhistorical norms. Focusing on his treatise *al-Ḥiṣād al-murr* (*The Bitter Harvest*), the study demonstrates that al-Zawāhirī does not merely invoke Ibn Taymiyya as an authoritative reference. Rather, he reactivates a structured interpretive paradigm originally formulated in the context of the Ilkhanid Mongol threat and the political and religious crises it generated in the region. Al-Zawāhirī employs a method of “decontextualization by analogy” that removes Ibn Taymiyya’s rulings from their historical context and elevates them into universal principles. The Mongol precedent—especially the concept of a group that claims Islam while suspending the *sharī‘a* (*al-ṭā‘ifa al-mumtani‘a*)—becomes the primary lens through which he evaluates modern Muslim governments, their legal frameworks, and their alliances with non-Muslim states. Themes such as *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’*, political alliances, jihad, and the classification of contemporary rulers as a *ṭā‘ifa mumtani‘a* illustrate this process of reinterpretation. The article concludes that al-Zawāhirī’s engagement with Ibn Taymiyya represents a conscious attempt to build a comprehensive ideological system that legitimizes political judgment and violence. It also highlights the need for broader research to assess the consistency and evolution of this interpretive paradigm.

KEYWORDS:

Ibn Taymiyya; Ayman al-Zawāhirī; Paradigm; Hermeneutics; Decontextualization; *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’*; Jihadism; Jihad.

ابن تيمية أنموذجا تفسيريا

استقبال وإعادة تنشيط الفكر الإسلامي في العصور الوسطى في الخطاب الجهادي لأيمن الظواهري



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الملخص:

يحلل هذا المقال كيفية توظيف أيمن الظواهري (ت. 2022) لتراث ابن تيمية لبناء إطار تفسيري يحول المواقف العقديّة والفقهية الوسيطة إلى معايير تتجاوز سياقها التاريخي. ومن خلال دراسة كتابه "الحصاد المر"، يبين البحث أن الظواهري لا يكتفي بالاستشهاد بابن تيمية، بل يعيد تفعيل منظومة تفسيرية صيغت في سياق الغزو المغولي والاضطرابات السياسية والدينية في القرنين السابع والثامن الهجريين. يعمد الظواهري إلى ترع سياق أقوال ابن تيمية عبر ما يشبه "القياس التحويلي"، حيث تتحول الأحكام المرتبطة بظروف زمنية خاصة إلى قواعد مطلقة يحاكم بها الواقع المعاصر. ويغدو نموذج التتار—خصوصاً مفهوم الطائفة الممتنعة التي تدعي الإسلام وتعطل الشريعة—الإطار الذي يطبقه على الأنظمة العربية الحديثة، وتشريعاتها، وتحالفاتها مع القوى غير المسلمة. وتكشف موضوعات مثل الولاء والبراء، وأحكام التحالفات، والجهاد، وتصنيف الحكام ضمن الطائفة الممتنعة، طبيعة هذا التوظيف. ويخلص المقال إلى أن استخدام الظواهري لابن تيمية يشكل مشروعاً واعياً لإعادة تشكيل تراث فقهي ليصبح أداة لإنتاج أحكام سياسية وإضفاء شرعية على العنف.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

ابن تيمية؛ أيمن الظواهري؛ أنموذج؛ التأويل؛ نزع السياق؛ الولاء والبراء؛ الجهاد؛ الجهادية.

I. INTRODUCTION¹

The influence of Ibn Taymiyya (661/1263–728/1328) on contemporary Islam is by no means unexpected. As early as 1939, in his *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques d'Ibn Taymiyya*, Henri Laoust highlighted the doctrinal posterity of the Damascene thinker at a time when access to manuscripts was still limited and before the complete edition of the *Majmū' al-fatāwā* in the 1950s by 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim and his son Muḥammad.² Despite the scarcity of studies then available, among which Muḥammad Abū Zahra's work formed the main synthesis,³ Laoust had already noted that Ibn Taymiyya's influence extended beyond the strictly Hanbali tradition and nourished the reform movements of the modern Muslim world.

In another vein, Alfred Morabia wrote in 1978 that “the theses of the great Hanbali master were adopted only insofar as they could accord with the interests of the moment. They have continued, to this day, to exert, in a latent

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² Henri Laoust, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques d'Ibn Taymiyya (661/1262–728/1328)* (Cairo: Ifao, 1939), 477. Concerning the general influence of Ibn Taymiyya's thought, see Henri Laoust, “L'influence d'Ibn Taymiyya,” in *Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge*, ed. Aldford T. Welch and P. Cachia (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1979), 15-33; Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 100-107; Caterina Bori, “Ibn Taymiyya (14th to 17th Century): Transregional Spaces of Reading and Reception,” *The Muslim World* 108, no. 1 (2018): 87–123; Ovamir Anjum, *Politics, Law, and Community in Islamic Thought: The Taymiyyan Moment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 173–188; Khaled El-Rouayheb, “From Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 1566) to Khayr al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d. 1899): Changing Views of Ibn Taymiyya among Non-Ḥanbalī Sunni Scholars,” in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 305–311; T. F. Michel, “Ibn Taymiyya: Islamic Reformer,” *Studia Missionalia* 34 (1985): 213–232.

³ Muḥammad Abū Zahra, *Ibn Taymiyya: ḥayātu-hu wa-‘aṣru-hu wa-fiqhu-hu* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, 1952).

manner, a perceptible influence on the fundamentalist thinkers of Islam.”⁴ Although dated, this observation remains relevant for understanding how certain contemporary readers appropriate Ibn Taymiyya’s thought.

More recently, Yahya Michot (d. 2025) has examined in his work the use of Ibn Taymiyya’s writings, especially the so-called Mardin fatwa, by various contemporary authors in their politico-religious analyses of their respective eras.⁵ Michot underscores a “fundamental misunderstanding of the meaning of the Mardin fatwa” among these authors, whose political reading of the text led them to be unfaithful to its content.⁶ He shows that many current interpretations amount to political and militant reformulations of Taymiyyan verdicts, often detached from their original context.⁷ This politicization of Taymiyyan thought, initiated in the 19th century and intensified in the 20th century, forms the backdrop of the present study.

In the Levant, Ibn Taymiyya’s intellectual homeland, the rediscovery of his writings unfolded progressively from the late 19th century onward. The Damascene scholar Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1914) played a crucial role in reediting several manuscripts at the al-Zāhiriyya library and disseminating his thought among reformist circles.⁸ Through his work, Taymiyyan themes reached Egypt and India, notably through figures such as Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) and Abū al-A‘lā al-Mawdūdī (d. 1972). These authors drew

⁴ “Les thèses du grand maître hanbalite ne furent adoptées que dans la mesure où elles pouvaient concorder avec les intérêts du moment. Elles n’ont cessé, jusque de nos jours, d’exercer d’une façon latente, une influence sensible sur les penseurs intégristes de l’Islam.” Alfred Morabia, “Ibn Taymiyya, le dernier grand théoricien du jihād médiéval,” *Bulletin d’Études Orientales* 30 (1978): 98.

⁵ Yahya Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya: Mardin. Hégire, fuite du péché et « demeure de l’islam »* (Beirut: Albouraq, 2004): 28-64.

⁶ “Plus encore qu’une sollicitation, c’est en effet une fondamentale mécompréhension du sens du fetwa de Mardin qui fut constatée chez M. ‘A. S. Faraj, ‘A. A. ‘Azzām, M. al-Mas’arī, le shaykh al-Jarbū’ et Z. Sālim. Entre eux et Ibn Taymiyya s’ouvre ainsi la béance d’un large et profond malentendu.” Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya. Mardin*, 51. For the discussion, see 47-64.

⁷ Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya. Mardin*, 47-48, 58. Regarding the use of the so-called anti-Mongol fatwas, see Yahya Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya Against Extremisms* (Beirut and Paris: Albouraq, 2012), XXV-XXVIII (introduction); Yahya Michot, “Ibn Taymiyya’s ‘New Mardin Fatwa’: Is Genetically Modified Islam (GMI) Carcinogenic?,” *The Muslim World* 101, no. 2 (2011):130-181; Jon Hoover, “Ibn Taymiyya between Moderation and Radicalism,” in *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition: Modern Interpretations of the Classical Heritage*, ed. Elisabeth Kendall and Ahmad Khan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 177-203.

⁸ On Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, see Pieter Coppens, “The ‘Mujtahids Incident’ According to al-Qāsimī’s Memoirs,” *MIDÉO* 36 (2021): 63-97; Pieter Coppens, “A Silent Uṣūl Revolution?,” *MIDÉO* 36 (2021): 21-61.

from Ibn Taymiyya several theological concepts such as *tawhīd* (unity of God), *shirk* (associationism), and *Jāhiliyya* (pre-Islamic ignorance), which they reformulated in a modern language of reform and sovereignty. They thus built a bridge between classical theology and the political thought of the modern state, unintentionally preparing the ground for more militant reinterpretations.

It was within this intellectual context that Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) reworked, in the 1950s and 1960s, a political doctrine of *tawhīd* and *ḥākimiyya* (divine sovereignty) through his radical critique of modernity, which he called *jāhiliyya*.⁹ By extending the notion of unbelief to Muslim rulers deemed unfaithful to the divine law (*takfīr*), Qutb effected a major ideological shift. As shown by Mounia Aït Kabboura in her recently published book *Sayyid Qutb. Architecte de l'islamisme radical*, Sayyid Qutb understands jihad as a two-stage process aimed at establishing the order of *ḥākimiyya*. The first stage is the jihad of *tamkīn*, which consists in gradually Islamizing society through internal action and the discreet infiltration of state institutions, without resorting to violence except when coercive forces obstruct the realization of *tamkīn*. The second stage is the jihad of *ṭalab*, an outward expansion that begins once Muslim societies have been reshaped along Islamist lines and are governed by the regime of *ḥākimiyya*. In his book *al-‘Adālat al-ijtimā‘iyya fī al-islām (Social Justice in Islam)*, Qutb gives the concept of jihad a distinctly political charge by linking it organically to the opposition between *ḥākimiyya* and *Jāhiliyya*, making jihad the agent responsible for overturning the materialist order that underpins Western civilization. According to Mounia Aït Kabboura, the continuity of his thought lies in the correlation between identity and alterity, which forms the basis of an “inverted orientalism” through which the order of *ḥākimiyya* must prevail over any identity deemed *jāhili*.¹⁰

Yet it was Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Salām al-Faraj (d. 1982), author of *al-Farīḍa al-ghā‘iba (The Neglected Duty)* and a leading member of the Egyptian

⁹ Sivan, *Radical Islam*, 23-27, 65-66, 85, 89, 117; Sayed Khatab, “Hakimiyyah and Jahiliyyah in the Thought of Sayyid Qutb,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 3 (2002): 145-170; Sayed Khatab, *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb: The Theory of Jahiliyyah* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 59-170; Usaama al-Azami, “Locating Ḥākimiyya in Global History: The Concept of Sovereignty in Premodern Islam and Its Reception after Mawdūdī and Qutb,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 32, no. 2 (2022): 355-376; Mounia Aït Kabboura, *Sayyid Qutb: Architecte de l'islamisme radical* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2025), 76-123, in particular p. 116-123.

¹⁰ Aït Kabboura, *Sayyid Qutb*, 77-78.

Jihad group, who put this doctrine into action: he declared Muslim rulers to be apostates for failing to legislate according to divine law and called for prioritizing combat against them. His strategy provided the intellectual and operational framework for the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat in 1981.¹¹ To justify this violence, al-Faraj explicitly drew upon Ibn Taymiyya's anti-Mongol positions, assimilating contemporary rulers, Sadat foremost among them, to the Mongol invaders condemned by Ibn Taymiyya. Michot has described this procedure as a "Mongolization" of the enemy, meaning the reconfiguration of the contemporary political adversary into a figure of apostasy that legitimizes armed violence.¹²

Among contemporary figures who situate themselves within this lineage, Ayman al-Zawāhirī occupies a singular place. Less publicized than Usāma b. Lādīn but more systematic in his approach, he imposed himself as "the chief ideologue and mastermind" of al-Qaeda.¹³ His writings are permeated by constant references to the scholarly heritage, from the Quran and the Sunna to authorities such as al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), and Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 750/1351), the last two being disciples of Ibn Taymiyya. Al-Zawāhirī also mobilizes Islamic history and its paradigmatic figures, from Nūr al-Dīn al-Zinkī (d. 569/1174) to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī (d. 589/1193), to give substance to his militant reading of the past. In this respect, he provides a privileged

¹¹ See Johannes Jansen, "The Creed of Sadat's Assassins: The Contents of the 'Forgotten Duty' Analyzed," *Die Welt des Islams* 25, no. 1/4 (1985): 1-30; Johannes Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan, 1986); Johannes Jansen, "Ibn Taymiyyah and the Thirteenth Century: A Formative Period of Modern Muslim Radicalism," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 5/6 (1987-1988): 391-396; Sivan, *Radical Islam*, 102-103; Caterina Bori, *Ibn Taymiyya: Una Vita Esemplare. Analisi delle Fonti Classiche della sua Biografia* (Pisa/Roma: Supplemento 1 alla Rivista di Studi Orientali, LXXVI, 2003), 11-12; Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya. Mardin*, 105-111; Michot, "Ibn Taymiyya's 'New Mardin Fatwa'," 141, 147-148, 150, 154, 17; David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 106-110; Jon Hoover, "Reconciling Ibn Taymiyya's Legitimation of Violence with His Vision of Universal Salvation," in *Violence in Islamic Thought from the Mongols to European Imperialism*, ed. Robert Gleave and István T. Kristó-Nagy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 107.

¹² Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya. Mardin*, 28-29; Michot, *Muslims under Non-Muslims Rule*, 49; Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya against Extremisms*, XXV-XXVI (introduction); Hoover, "Ibn Taymiyya between Moderation and Radicalism," 180-190.

¹³ "idéologue en chef et le cerveau". Stéphane Lacroix, "Al-Zawahiri, Ayman," in *Al-Qaida dans le texte*, ed. Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli (Paris: PUF, 2008), 222.

vantage point for analyzing how contemporary jihadism reinvests the Taymiyyan corpus.

This doctrinal shift, from reformism to radicalization, serves as a prelude to the central question of this study. To understand how contemporary jihadist ideologues appropriate the thought of Ibn Taymiyya, this article examines the case of Ayman al-Zawāhirī. How does he appropriate Ibn Taymiyya's ideas and render them operative in the contemporary context? In other words, through which hermeneutical and rhetorical mechanisms does Ayman al-Zawāhirī transform Ibn Taymiyya's fourteenth-century writings, produced in the context of politico-religious struggles, into a source of legitimation for modern jihadist movements?

The study adopts both a historical and a hermeneutical perspective. Historically, it traces the intellectual filiations linking Taymiyyan thought to jihadism; hermeneutically, it focuses on the transformation of textual meaning through a process that I call "decontextualization by analogy", whereby circumstantial prescriptions are elevated to universal principles and transferred to situations foreign to their original framework. I introduced this expression within the context of my research project funded by the Bureau central des cultes, and I have used it in several earlier works, though without offering a full formalization until now.¹⁴ I employ it here as an analytical framework to clarify how Ayman al-Zawāhirī transposes into the present what can be called, following Taymiyyan tradition, a medieval paradigm of jihad.¹⁵

¹⁴ Mehdi Berriah, "The Mamluk Sultanate and the Mamluks Seen by Ibn Taymiyya: Between Praise and Criticism," *Arabian Humanities* 14 (2020), §56; Mehdi Berriah, "Ibn Taymiyya's Conception of Jihad: Corpus, General Aspects, and Research Perspectives," *Teosofi* 12, no. 1 (2022): 44.

¹⁵ I have addressed the question of jihad in Ibn Taymiyya on several occasions and in many works. I would first refer to my lecture "Jihad: Ibn Taymiyya and the Historians," delivered on 18 May 2021 as part of the "CEFREPA Islam Series" seminar at the invitation of Abbès Zouache, and available online at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jllh5ew3Rr4>. I have also presented several papers at international conferences that dealt directly with these issues. Among them one may cite, for example, "An Important and Neglected Epistle by Ibn Taymiyya on Jihad: *Qā'ida fī al-inghimās fī al-'aduww*," delivered at the conference *Ibn Taymiyya's Thought: Corpus, Reception and Legacy* (MMSH/Aix-Marseille University, 9–10 November 2022), and "The Issue of *al-inghimās fī al-'aduww*. Preliminary Remarks and Research Perspectives," presented at the workshop *Fiqh and Jihad in Medieval Islam: Corpus, Concepts and Norms* (University of Strasbourg, 27 May 2022). One should also mention my article fully devoted to this question, "Ibn Taymiyya's Conception of Jihad: Corpus, General Aspects, and Research Perspectives," *Teosofi* 12/1 (2022): 43–70. In these works, especially the online lecture and the open-access article, I drew attention to two treatises by Ibn Taymiyya that had received little scholarly attention in the existing literature on jihad. These are the epistles commonly referred to as *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara fī qitāl al-kuffār wa-muhādanati-him wa-tahrīm qatli-him bi-mujarrad kufri-him* (*A*

This Taymiyyan paradigm functions as a coherent system of principles shaped by the political, religious, social, and cultural conditions characteristic of the period from the late 13th to the early 14th century. Decontextualization by analogy designates the procedure through which al-Zawāhirī extracts these principles from their original environment and reconfigures them as transhistorical norms applicable to contemporary Muslim states. It thus differs from what Michot terms “Mongolization”, which is not a hermeneutical mechanism but a polemical strategy for designating the enemy. Decontextualization by analogy operates upstream, allowing this medieval

Concise Principle concerning Fighting the Disbelievers, Making Truce with Them, and the Prohibition of Killing Them Merely on Account of Their Disbelief), and *Qā’ida fī al-inghimās fī al-’aduw wa-hal yūbāh?*, (*Principle concerning Plunging into the Enemy: Is This Permitted?*). I also explained on several occasions that I was preparing two separate, in-depth studies devoted to each of these texts.

It is therefore rather surprising that a recently published article on *Qā’ida mukhtaṣara fī qitāl al-kuffār* revisits a number of points, analytical as well as documentary and bibliographical, that I had already developed in these earlier works, especially in the 2021 lecture and the 2022 article, without consistently referring to them. The author cites my work only three times: twice for historical information taken from my article “Mobility and Versatility of the ‘ulamā’ in the Mamluk Period: The Case of Ibn Taymiyya,” in *Professional Mobility in Islamic Societies (700–1750): New Concepts and Approaches*, ed. Mehdi Berriah and Mohamad El-Merheb (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 98–130, and once regarding a minor confusion in a footnote where I inadvertently attributed the edition of *Qā’ida mukhtaṣara fī qitāl al-kuffār* to Ashraf ‘Abd al-Maqṣūd, editor of *Qā’ida fī al-inghimās*. Yet in the bibliography of the same article, I clearly identified ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Zīr Āl Ḥamad as the editor of *Qā’ida mukhtaṣara fī qitāl al-kuffār* (Riyadh, 2004). This isolated slip has no impact on the substance of my argument.

My intention here is not to contest the overall interpretation set out in that study, but rather to draw attention to a more substantial issue. The lecture and the open-access article just mentioned (see especially pp. 62–65), which more than three years before the publication of this piece explicitly underlined the need for a dedicated study of this epistle, are not cited in that capacity. They are mentioned only in relation to the footnote confusion already noted, despite the fact that the correct bibliographical information was also provided. At the same time, several analyses, references, and lines of reasoning in the published article closely parallel points I had already presented, without explicit acknowledgment. The introduction and opening remarks also contain formulations and bibliographical references, cited with the same pagination, that are very close to those appearing in the introduction of another of my studies, “Ibn Taymiyya’s Methodology regarding his Sources: Reading, Selection and Use. Preliminary Study and Perspectives,” *Filologie medievali e moderne. Serie orientale* 26, no. 5 (2022): 45–81, particularly 46.

All of these contributions, whether articles or the recorded lecture, predate the publication of the article in question. I simply recall the sequence of publications here and leave it to the reader to compare, to see for themselves, and to draw their own conclusions. The study devoted to *Qā’ida fī al-inghimās fī al-’aduw* is expected to appear very soon: Mehdi Berriah, “The Theology of Self-Sacrifice in Jihad: A Study of Ibn Taymiyya’s *Qā’ida fī l-ingimās fī l-’aduw wa-hal yūbāh*,” *Arabica* 73 (2026). It includes many elements already presented in my earlier lecture and my open-access article, several of which also reappear in the study under discussion. I have taken them up again with deeper analysis and by adding new material. This article on *Qā’ida fī al-inghimās fī al-’aduw* will be followed by another, currently in its final stages, on *Qā’ida mukhtaṣara fī qitāl al-kuffār*.

paradigm to become an operational model for judging democracy, political sovereignty, or international alliances in the twenty-first century.

Among al-Zawāhirī's writings, *al-Ḥiṣād al-murr: al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn fī sittīna 'āman* (*The Bitter Harvest: The Muslim Brotherhood in Sixty Years*), written at the turn of the 1990s, occupies a distinctive place. This text, both polemical and doctrinal, marks al-Zawāhirī's rupture with the gradualism of the Muslim Brotherhood and the assertion of a Salafi-jihadist grammar that articulates theology and action. By transposing Ibn Taymiyya's medieval frameworks including the struggle against the Mongols, and the critique of the *yasa*, to modern institutions such as constitutions, parliaments, and positive legislation, al-Zawāhirī performs full-fledged analogical decontextualization. Analyzing *al-Ḥiṣād al-murr* thus reveals the transformation of a scholarly authority into an instrument of political mobilization. It shows how the reference to Ibn Taymiyya operates not as a mere citation of authority but as a discursive matrix that produces an obligation to act and redefines religious priorities, from collective duty (*farḍ kifāya*) to individual duty (*farḍ 'ayn*).

To account for this dynamic and follow its doctrinal construction, the analysis proceeds as follows. First, it will show how al-Zawāhirī reworks Taymiyyan material relating to sovereignty and legislation in order to ground a critique of the contemporary state and its constitutional apparatus. It will then examine the role assigned to the figure of Ibn Taymiyya, whose voice becomes a central doctrinal reference in the denunciation of democracy and positive law, followed by an analysis of the redefinition of loyalty and disavowal, in which the memory of the Mongols serves as an implicit framework for reading relations between Muslim regimes and non-Muslim powers. The study will also consider the shift of *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar* (commanding right and forbidding wrong) toward the register of political contestation, transformed into an imperative of action for those who possess the capacity. Finally, it will show how the use of Ibn Kathīr and his portrayal of Ibn Taymiyya provides a historical staging of this doctrinal construction and situates contemporary jihad within the claimed continuity of a heroized past.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on al-Zawāhirī, who, although less studied than other jihadist figures, has been the subject of recent works such as those of Gohel on his intellectual trajectory and Mendelsohn on

succession challenges within al-Qaeda.¹⁶ It seeks to make visible the Taymiyyan matrix in contemporary jihadist discourse, not as a direct continuation but as a strategic reactivation through analogy.

This research forms part of a broader project entitled “The Taymiyyan Corpus of Jihad: Reception, Decontextualization, and Instrumentalization by Contemporary Jihadist Movements”, funded by the Bureau central des cultes (BCC) between 2020 and 2022.¹⁷ This project examines the influence of Ibn Taymiyya on a wide range of modern jihadist ideologues, including ‘Abdallāh ‘Azzām, Usāma b. Lādīn, and Abū Mūs‘ab al-Zarqāwī. The present article focuses on the case of Ayman al-Zawāhirī, particularly through his treatise *al-Ḥiṣād al-murr*, claiming to exhaust the subject; analyses devoted to the other figures formed part of the same project and will, it is hoped, be published in due course.

1. AL-ZAWĀHIRĪ AND THE TRANSPOSITION OF THE TAYMIYYAN PARADIGM: FROM SOVEREIGNTY TO LEGISLATION

The first occurrence of Ibn Taymiyya in al-Zawāhirī’s *al-Ḥiṣād al-murr* appears in the introductory chapter entitled “Exposition of the ruling concerning one who does not judge according to what God has revealed” (*fī bayān ḥukm man lam yahkum bimā anzala Allāh*), specifically in the section devoted to the “authorization of what is illicit and the prohibition of what is licit” (*istiḥlāl al-muḥarramāt wa taḥrīm al-ḥalāl*). There, al-Zawāhirī constructs a normative syllogism intended to delegitimize any political authority that “does not judge according to what God has revealed.” His progression is methodical: he begins by framing the debate through Quran 5:44–50, then invokes the exegesis of Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373). He next overlays the analyses of contemporary authors such as Aḥmad Shākir (d. 1958) and al-Mawdūdī (d. 1979), who translate this scriptural frame into the modern

¹⁶ Barak Mendelsohn, “Ayman al-Zawahiri and the Challenges of Succession in Terrorist Organizations,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 8 (2022): 1826–1845; Sajjan M. Gohel, *Doctor, Teacher, Terrorist: The Life and Legacy of Al-Qaeda Leader Ayman al-Zawahiri* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

¹⁷ See: <https://tinyurl.com/bdeyvekz>

political vocabulary of sovereignty, constitution, and democracy. Finally come the statements of Ibn Taymiyya (followed by those of two other scholars and of Sayyid Qutb), whose voice serves as the final doctrinal arbiter of the entire line of reasoning:

ثالثاً: قال شيخ الإسلام ابن تيمية رحمه الله: "ومعلوم بالاضطرار من دين المسلمين وباتفاق جميع المسلمين أن من سوغ اتباع غير دين الإسلام، أو اتباع شريعة غير شريعة محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم- فهو كافر وهو ككفر من آمن ببعض الكتاب وكفر ببعض، كما قال تعالى: {إن الذين يكفرون بالله ورسله، ويريدون أن يفرقوا بين الله ورسله ويقولون تؤمن ببعض وتكفر ببعض، ويريدون أن يتخذوا بين ذلك سبيلاً، أولئك هم الكافرون حقاً، وأعدنا للكافرين عذاباً مبيناً} [النساء ١٥٠، ١٥١].

Third: shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya, may God have mercy on him, said: "It is necessarily known, by the religion of the Muslims and by the unanimous agreement of the Muslims, that whoever follows a religion other than Islam, or follows a legislation other than that revealed to Muḥammad — peace and blessings of God be upon him — is an unbeliever. He is like one who believes in part of the Book and rejects another part. As the Exalted has said: 'Indeed, those who disbelieve in God and His messengers and seek to make a distinction between God and His messengers saying 'We believe in some and disbelieve in others' and who seek to take a path in between are the true unbelievers. And We have prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating punishment.'" (Q 4:150–151)¹⁸

Placed at the end of the argumentative chain, Ibn Taymiyya functions as a kind of seal of Islamic orthodoxy: his view, presented as an axiom known by necessity, confers canonical authority on al-Zawāhirī's thesis. The function of the citation is not to demonstrate but to authenticate; it transforms a political reading — the denunciation of democracy as an usurpation of divine sovereignty — into a theological verdict. The denunciation of "positive legislation" is thereby naturalized as equivalent to *shirk* (associationism); political critique becomes a dogmatic axiom.

An examination of the Taymiyyan corpus, however, allows this citation to be situated within its original context. The passage invoked comes from one of Ibn Taymiyya's three major anti-Mongol fatwas, specifically the second and

¹⁸ Ayman al-Zawāhirī, *al-Ḥiṣād al-murr: al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn fī sittīna 'āman* (digital version, al-Shamela al-dhahabiyya), 24.

most extensive one. This text examines in detail the obligation to fight the Islamized Mongols and the legal foundations of this obligation.¹⁹ Central among these elements is the Ilkhanid Mongols' use — despite their nominal conversion to Islam — of the Genghisid code, the *yasa*, which they endowed with normative force alongside, or even above, Islamic law.²⁰ Ibn Taymiyya's ruling responds to this precise situation, characterized by the adoption of a composite legislation drawn from various traditions and by the maintenance of military alliances with non-Muslim powers against Muslims.

Al-Zawāhirī cites this passage without mentioning the Mongol context to which it refers. In doing so, he universalizes Ibn Taymiyya's verdict: the critique of the *yasa* becomes applicable to any modern constitution, the struggle against the Ilkhanids becomes a template for judging contemporary states, and the politico-legal conflict of the fourteenth century is transposed into the debate on democracy and positive law. This universalization operates through analogical decontextualization: a judgment issued in a singular conjuncture — Islamized Mongols, a non-revealed law, illicit alliances — is elevated into a timeless principle applicable to Muslim states in the twenty-first century.

¹⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim and Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Qāsim (Medina: Majma' al-Malik Fahd, 2004), 28: 509-543.

²⁰ On the reasons that, for Ibn Taymiyya, justify the obligation to fight the Ilkhanid Mongols despite their profession of Islamic faith, see Sivan, *Radical Islam*, 96-100; Thomas Raff, *Remarks on an Anti-Mongol Fatwā by Ibn Taymīya* (Leiden: Brill, 1973); Yahya Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya: Lettre à un roi croisé* (Lyon: Academia/Tawhid, 1995), 62-69; Michot, "Ibn Taymiyya's 'New Mardin Fatwa'," 130-181; see also the series of excerpts from Ibn Taymiyya's texts relating to the Mongols, translated into French, annotated, and accompanied by substantial commentary notes, published online on the website muslimphilosophy.com under the title "Textes spirituels d'Ibn Taymiyya" numéros XI, XII, XIII et Nouvelle série XXIII; Denise Aigle, "A Religious Response to Ghazan Khan's Invasions of Syria: The Three 'Anti-Mongol' Fatwās of Ibn Taymiyya," in *The Mongol Empire between Myth and Reality: Studies in Anthropological History*, ed. Denise Aigle (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2016), 283-305; Denise Aigle, "Ghazan Khan's Invasion of Syria: Polemics on His Conversion to Islam and the Christian Troops in His Army," in *The Mongol Empire between Myth and Reality: Studies in Anthropological History*, ed. Denise Aigle (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2016), 255-282; Denise Aigle, "Mongol Law versus Islamic Law: Myth and Reality," in *The Mongol Empire between Myth and Reality: Studies in Anthropological History*, ed. Denise Aigle (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2016), 134-156; Denise Aigle, "The Mongol Invasions of Bilād al-Shām by Ghāzān Khān and Ibn Taymiyah's Three 'Anti-Mongol' Fatwas," *Mamluk Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (2007): 89-120; Teymour Morel, "Deux textes anti-Mongols d'Ibn Taymiyya," *The Muslim World* 105, no. 2 (2015): 368-397; Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya* (London: Oneworld Academic, 2019), 12-18.

The articulation with Ibn Kathīr's exegesis, cited in second position and treating Quran 5:50, which precedes Ibn Taymiyya in al-Zawāhiri's sequence, is decisive:

2- ونحن هنا نسرد طائفة من أقوال العلماء في هذه المسألة:
أولاً: يقول ابن كثير - رحمه الله - في تفسيره لقول الله تعالى: ﴿أفحكم الجاهلية يبغون ومن أحسن
الله حكماً لقوم يوقنون﴾ [المائدة: ٥٠]. قال: "ينكر تعالى على من خرج عن حكم الله المشتمل
على كل خير الناهي عن كل شر وعدل إلى ما سواه من الآراء والأهواء والاصطلاحات التي
وضعها الرجال بلا مستند من شريعة الله، كما كان أهل الجاهلية يحكمون به من الضلالات
والجهالات مما يضعونها بأرائهم وأهوائهم، وكما يحكم به التتار من السياسات الملكية المأخوذة
عن ملكهم جنكز خان الذي وضع لهم الياسق، وهو عبارة عن كتاب مجموع من أحكام قد اقتبسها
عن شرائع شتى من اليهودية والنصرانية والملة الإسلامية وغيرها، وفيها كثير من الأحكام أخذها
من مجرد نظره وهواه، فصارت في بنه شرعاً متبعاً يقدمونها على الحكم بكتاب الله وسنة رسوله
صلى الله عليه وسلم ... ، فمن فعل ذلك فهو كافر يجب قتاله حتى يرجع إلى حكم الله ورسوله فلا
يحكم سواه في قليل ولا كثير."

2. We shall cite here a number of scholarly statements on this matter.

First: Ibn Kathīr — may God have mercy on him — says in his exegesis of the Exalted's words: "Is it the judgment of ignorance (al-jāhiliyya) that they seek? Yet who is better than God in judgment for a people who believe?" (Q 5:50): "God censures anyone who abandons the judgment of God, which includes all good and all justice, in favor of anything that contradicts it among the views, desires, and terminologies devised by men without any basis in God's law, just as the people of the *Jāhiliyya* (pre-Islamic ignorance) judged according to the misguidance and ignorance they had invented from their own opinions and desires. Likewise, the Mongols judge according to the royal policies (*al-siyāsāt al-mulkīya*) that their king Genghis Khan instituted for them in a compilation called *yāsāq* [or *yāsā*]. It consists of a collection of laws drawn from various codes borrowed from Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and other religions, as well as many rulings derived solely from his personal reasoning and whims. This compilation has become for them a law to be followed and given precedence over the judgment of the Book of God and the Sunna of His Messenger. Whoever acts in such a manner is an unbeliever, and he must be fought until he returns to the judgment of

God and His Messenger. No one may be judged in any matter, great or small, except according to Him.”²¹

Al-Zawāhirī seems to privilege Ibn Kathīr over other exegetes for two reasons. First, Ibn Kathīr was both a disciple and biographer of Ibn Taymiyya.²² Their juxtaposition creates an impression of Taymiyyan continuity, master and disciple being invoked as two concordant witnesses. Second, Ibn Kathīr himself lived in the era of the Mongol threat and explicitly mentions Genghis Khan and his *yasa*, which he describes as “a collection of laws drawn from various codes borrowed from Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and other religions”; whoever “judges” according to this code rather than according to the Law brought by the Prophet falls, for him, under the rubric of *ḥukm bi-ghayr mā anzala Allāh* (judging by something other than what God has revealed). These remarks by Ibn Kathīr resonate with the extensive discussions that Ibn Taymiyya devotes to the same issue in his writings and with his struggle against the Ilkhanids, both on the battlefield and at the ideological level, which contributed to his renown and made him one of the symbols of Syrian resistance to the invaders.²³

The addition of Aḥmad Shākir and al-Mawdūdī serves to politicize the demonstration. The former described Egyptian legal codes as “*Jāhiliyya*,” while the latter theorized an exclusive sovereignty of God against representative democracy. Once superimposed in this sequence — exegesis, modern authorities, and Ibn Taymiyya — the argument produces a chain effect: the Mongol analogy becomes a political category and positive legislation a sign of public apostasy. The final closure by Ibn Taymiyya, formulated in the register of consensus, completes the transformation of what appears to be a cumulative demonstration into a verdict presented as indisputable.

²¹ al-Zawāhirī, *al-Ḥiṣād al-murr*, 23.

²² Henri Laoust, “La biographie d’Ibn Taymīya d’après Ibn Kathīr,” *Bulletin d’Études Orientales* 9 (1942–1943): 115–162.

²³ For more information on Ibn Taymiyya’s engagement against the Ilkhanid Mongols, see the works cited in note 19. See also Berriah, “Mobility and Versatility of the ‘*ulama*’ in the Mamluk Period,” 103–107, 113–117.

To assess the scope of this approach, it is essential to recall the complexity of Ibn Taymiyya's thought. The cited passage does indeed have echoes elsewhere in his writings, but the doctrine of *ḥukm bi-ghayr mā anzala Allāh* cannot be reduced, in his thought, to an automatic equation between non-revealed legislation and unbelief. The theological-political perspective he develops — as analyzed by Caterina Bori through Jan Assmann's model of "representative theocracy" — targets systems in which a human authority claims to substitute itself for divine sovereignty.²⁴ It is within this framework that he critiques the Quranic figure of Pharaoh, the Genghisid *yasa* as a rival legal system, and the Shi'i doctrine of the Imamate in the *Minhāj al-sunna*.²⁵ In each of these cases, the grievance concerns the claim to an autonomous legislative authority overshadowing divine law. For him, sovereignty belongs solely to God and His law; any human pretension to constitute the ultimate source of licit and illicit falls under representative theocracy and thus under *shirk*. Reading Ibn Taymiyya through this lens — rather than through detached excerpts — makes it possible to nuance al-Zawāhirī's thesis that "whoever does not legislate according to what God has revealed" necessarily falls into unbelief: Ibn Taymiyya's primary target is the claimed substitution of human sovereignty for revealed normativity, not the mere existence of contingent political forms.

The *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya fī naqḍ kalām al-Shi'a wa-l-Qadariyya* (*The Path of the Prophetic Sunna in Refuting the Discourse of the Shi'a and the Qadariyya*) was composed in response to *Minhāj al-karāma fī ma'rifat al-imāma* (*The Path of Nobility in Knowledge of the Imamate*), one of the most famous works of al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325), written to set out the Twelver Imāmī doctrine and refute Sunni positions on the Prophet's succession. This treatise had been presented to the Ilkhanid sultan Öljeitü, fully named Muḥammad Khodābandeh Öljeitü, who ruled the Mongol Ilkhanate

²⁴ The theological-political model of representation is, according to Jan Assmann, "the correlation between divine power and political power in the form of analogy, and the consequent unification of political and religious conduct in the hands of earthly representatives" (la corrélation entre pouvoir divin et pouvoir politique, sous forme d'analogie, et l'unification consécutive de la conduite politique et religieuse dans les mains des représentants terrestres), cited in Caterina Bori, "Théologie politique et Islam à propos d'Ibn Taymiyya (m. 728/1328) et du sultanat mamelouk," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 1 (2007), §46.

²⁵ Bori, "Théologie politique et islam," §22-24, 47-50.

from 703 to 716/1304 to 1316.²⁶ Like his brother and predecessor Maḥmūd Ghāzān (r. 694-703/1295-1304), Öljeitü undertook, during the winter of 712/1312–1313, a new campaign in Syria. The offensive failed: the Ilkhanid army, which laid siege to the strategic fortress of al-Raḥba on the Euphrates, proved unable to take the site, could not cross the river, and eventually lifted the siege and retreated. This final attempt to subdue Syria revealed the Ilkhanids' inability to break Mamluk power in a lasting way.²⁷ When news of the siege reached Cairo, Ibn Taymiyya was still there; an order was issued to prepare an army to relieve the fortress and confront the Mongols. He joined, with other volunteers, the troops that left the capital under Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. Upon learning of the approaching Mamluk army and facing the resistance of al-Raḥba, the Ilkhanids withdrew. When the army reached 'Asqalān, it learned of the lifting of the siege and the enemy's retreat; with the threat removed, Ibn Taymiyya returned to Damascus after seven years of absence.²⁸

This approach belongs to a refined casuistry. Ibn Taymiyya reasons according to circumstances, the hierarchy of duties, and the expected consequences of each decision. His fatwa on breaking the fast during the campaign against the Mongols on the eve of the battle of Shaqḥab (702/1303) offers a revealing example. Ibn Kathīr reports that Ibn Taymiyya publicly broke the fast in order to encourage the fighters to do the same, considering that preparation for jihad and the safeguarding of the community took precedence, in this specific context, over fulfilling the Quranic fast²⁹. The gesture reflects both the depth of his conviction and the strength of his determination: for him, it was a religious obligation of the highest order in light of the circumstances. Preparing for battle, and eating in order to remain physically capable of confronting an army perceived as an existential threat to

²⁶ For more information see Tariq al-Jamil, "Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Muṭaḥhar al-Ḥillī: Shi'i Polemics and the Struggle for Religious Authority in Medieval Islam," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 229-246.

²⁷ Mehdi Berriah, *L'art de la guerre chez les Mamelouks (1250–1375): stratégies et tactiques* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 268-269, 305-306, 540, 636.

²⁸ al-Birzālī, *al-Muqtaḥfī 'alā kitāb al-Rawḍatayn*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām al-Tadmurī (Beirut/Sayda: al-Maktaba al-'Aṣabiyya, 2006), 2/2: 89.

²⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, ed. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Turkī (Giza: Dār Hajr, 1998), 18: 28.

the Mamluk sultanate and to Islam as a whole, took precedence over observing the Ramadan fast prescribed in the Quran. Ibn Kathīr's narrative corresponds to Ibn Taymiyya's discussion in his *Mas'ala fī al-murābaṭa bi-l-thughūr afdal am al-mujāwara bi-Makkah sharrafa-hā Allāh Ta'ālā* (*On Whether Stationing in Ribāt on the Frontiers Is Preferable to Residing Near Mecca, May God Exalt It*), where he emphasizes the eminent place of jihad among acts of worship. Drawing constantly on the sacred corpus (Quran, Sunna, and the words of the Companions) he asserts that acts of jihad surpass in merit pilgrimage or pious retreat: participating in combat in God's path is more meritorious than continuous prayer and fasting, and depending on circumstances, jihad may even take precedence over the pilgrimage (*hajj*), the fifth pillar of Islam.³⁰

Other episodes illustrate this pragmatism. During the Ilkhanid occupation of Damascus, Ibn Taymiyya considered and ordered his companions not to forbid Mongol soldiers from drinking wine, in order to reduce their brutality toward the population.³¹ Rather than demanding application of the legal punishment (*hadd*) prescribed by Islamic law, he prioritized a contextual assessment of consequences: drunkenness, by rendering these soldiers more harmless and less prone to violence, served a higher good, namely the protection of Muslims and more broadly of civilians. This form of reasoning illustrates the juristic principle of *akhaf al-dararayn* (the lesser of two harms), which the theologian invokes on several occasions.³²

Such pragmatism contradicts the binary reading proposed by al-Zawāhirī. Whereas Ibn Taymiyya distinguishes situations of ignorance, coercion, or necessity, and reasons according to the priorities of the moment, al-Zawāhirī uproots Taymiyyan extracts from their context and confers upon them an absolute doctrinal value. The analysis of nuances, conditions of application, and teleological aims disappears. Democracy is thus presented as a system mechanically rivaling divine sovereignty, and positive legislation becomes an almost sufficient indicator of political apostasy.

³⁰ Ibn Taymiyya, *Mas'ala fī l-murābaṭa bi-l-thughūr afdal am al-mujāwara bi-Makka sharrafa-hā Allāh Ta'ālā*, ed. Abū Muḥammad Sharaf b. 'Abd al-Maqṣūd (Riyadh: Aḍwā' al-Salaf, 2002), 31-34, 36-37. See also Berriah, "Ibn Taymiyya's Conception du Jihad," 58-61.

³¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Istiḳāma*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim (Riyadh: Dār al-Faḍīla, 2005), 426.

³² For another example, see Berriah, "The Mamluk Sultanate and the Mamluks seen by Ibn Taymiyya," §53.

As several studies on the modern reception of Ibn Taymiyya have shown, this shift relies on elevating the case of the Islamized Mongols into an interpretive paradigm (non-revealed sovereignty, illicit alliances, hostility toward Muslims) and must be understood as the result of an authority mechanism based on the stratification of voices.³³ The Quran provides the premise. Classical exegesis identifies the phenomenon: obeying human legislators amounts to substituting a rival norm for Revelation. Contemporary doctrinarians transpose this diagnosis into modern political categories. Ibn Taymiyya, finally, concludes the chain in the name of Muslim consensus. Recourse to violence is no longer presented as a strategic option but as the logical consequence of a theological-legal diagnosis framed as consensual. Rupture with constitutional order is no longer discussed as a political choice but posited as a requirement of faith, indexed to the Mongol analogy and to the doctrine of *ḥākimiyya*.

2. IBN TAYMIYYA AS GUARANTOR OF ORTHODOXY AND MATRIX OF A POLITICAL ANTI-POSITIVISM

In the chapter setting out the incompatibility of democracy with Islam (*fī bayān munāqadat al-dīmuqrāṭiyya li-l-islām*), al-Zawāhirī does not merely denounce democracy as a Western political model; he reclassifies it as heresy by linking it to the longstanding polemic over *ḥukm bi-ghayr mā anzala Allāh*. Within this construction, Ibn Taymiyya occupies a central position, serving as the pivot that establishes an equivalence between modern political authority and certain medieval regimes of impiety, particularly those that substituted human legislation for revelation:

وقال شيخ الإسلام ابن تيمية - رحمه الله - بعد أن أورد حديث عدي بن حاتم السابق: فقد بين النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم أن عبادتهم إياهم كانت في تحليل الحرام وتحريم الحلال، لا أنهم صلوا لهم وصاموا لهم، ودعواهم من دون الله، فهذه عبادة الرجال، وقد ذكر الله أن ذلك شرك بقوله: {لا إله إلا هو سبحانه عما يشركون}.

³³ See notes 11 and 12 *op. cit.* See also Sivan, *Radical Islam*, 42, 101-102, 104, 127-129, 197, 199, 207; Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, 108-109; Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 144, 162-163.

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya — may God have mercy on him — said, after citing the previous hadith of ‘Adī b. Ḥātim: “The Prophet – peace and blessings be upon him – clarified that their worship of them [the monks] consisted in declaring licit what God had prohibited and illicit what God had permitted not that they prayed to them or fasted for them, or invoked them apart from God. This is the worship of men. And God has mentioned that this is *shirk* in His saying: ‘There is no deity except Him; exalted is He above what they associate [with Him]’” (Q 9:31).

Here, al-Ḍawāhirī invokes Ibn Taymiyya for his interpretation of the hadith of ‘Adī b. Ḥātim, reported by al-Tirmidhī in his *Sunan*, as he notes on the preceding page. In this hadith, ‘Adī recounts that he came before the Prophet Muḥammad wearing a gold cross. The Prophet instructed him to remove it, then recited verse 31 of sura 9 (al-Tawba): “They have taken their rabbis and their monks as lords apart from God.” When asked about the meaning of the verse, the Prophet explained that “worshipping them” did not mean bowing before them, but obeying them when they declared licit what God had prohibited and illicit what God had permitted. The hadith therefore warns against blind obedience to religious authorities when such obedience contradicts revelation and affirms that sovereignty over what is licit and illicit belongs to God alone. Al-Ḍawāhirī offers his own reading of this text, which he then reinforces by placing it alongside citations from various ulama and exegetes, among them Ibn Taymiyya.

This shift entails a semantic displacement. For Ibn Taymiyya, the critique of *ḥukm bi-ghayr mā anzala Allāh* was embedded in a very specific historical context, shaped above all by confrontation with the Ilkhanid Mongols, who had recently converted to Islam but continued to apply the *yasa* and to adhere to certain beliefs incompatible with Islamic doctrine. Ibn Taymiyya had direct confirmation of this during his encounters with Ilkhanid officials at the time of the temporary occupation of Damascus and parts of Syria – an occupation marked by massacres, abuses, and destruction – following the defeat of the

Mamluk army at the battle of Wādī al-Khazindār near Homs on 27 Rabī‘ I 699/23 December 1299.³⁴

For al-Zawāhirī, by contrast, the same reference serves to reframe the modern state (constitution, parliament, civil code) within the symbolic structure of the *yasa*, thereby reproducing the pattern of the internal enemy already present in Ibn Taymiyya’s writings. The process of analogical decontextualisation appears here in full force: the shift in historical scale does not invalidate the reasoning but, on the contrary, grants it a powerful universalising reach.

By placing Ibn Taymiyya’s statement at the end of a sequence of Quranic citations (9:31; 5:50) and exegetical authorities (al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Ḥazm, Ibn Kathīr), al-Zawāhirī constructs a layered apparatus of authority in which each discursive level reinforces the one preceding it. The result is the impression of an irrefutable coherence: democracy is no longer presented as a possible political option but as a fundamental deviation. Ibn Taymiyya ceases to appear as a theologian engaged in the debates of his own time and becomes the ultimate reference that closes the discussion. Through this hermeneutical device, al-Zawāhirī seeks to erase the role of *ijtihād* (independent juristic reasoning). in favour of a fixed doctrinal framework presented as immutable. Behind this construction lies a strategic intention: to dissolve the boundary between religious and political spheres and to delegitimise any normative authority not directly grounded in revealed law. Ibn Taymiyya thus becomes the emblem of an indivisible sovereignty, that of God as the sole source of legislation, and the voice of the Damascene theologian ultimately fixes the argument by marking the dividing line between belief and unbelief, loyalty and betrayal. This procedure is also found in Usāma b. Lādin and Abū Muṣ‘ab al-Zarqāwī, who likewise invoke Ibn Taymiyya to guarantee the purity of the

³⁴ Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya. Lettre à un roi croisé*, 35-48; Mathieu Eychenne, “Damas, 1300: Une ville dans la guerre à l’époque mamelouke,” in *Guerre et paix dans le Proche-Orient médiéval (Xe-XVe siècle)*, ed. Mathieu Eychenne, Stéphane Pradines, and Abbès Zouache (Cairo: Ifao, 2019), 385-409; Reuven Amitai-Preiss, “The Mongol Occupation of Damascus in 1300: A Study of Mamluk Loyalties,” in *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, ed. Michael Winter and Amalia Levanoni (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 21-41. On the battle of Wādī al-Khazindār see Reuven Amitai-Preiss, “The Logistics of the Mongol-Mamlūk War, with Special Reference to the Battle of Wādī al-Khaznadār, 1299 C.E.,” in *Logistics of Warfare in the Age of the Crusades: Proceedings of a Workshop at the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Sydney, 30 September to 4 October 2002*, ed. John H. Pryor (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 25-42.

normative reference and thereby ground the legitimacy of jihad waged against contemporary regimes.

The passage from Ibn Taymiyya that al-Zawāhirī inserts into the section on the incompatibility of democracy with Islam nevertheless oversimplifies Ibn Taymiyya's positions on what would today be termed "political thought." As Caterina Bori has shown, Ibn Taymiyya's conception of power bears no resemblance to a theocratic model. His most significant thesis in this regard is that the prophetic mission was not primarily intended to establish a political order but to transmit a message of faith and spiritual reform. He supports this claim by noting that the Quran contains no prescriptions concerning the establishment of a state or the form its government should take.³⁵

For Ibn Taymiyya, faith (*al-īmān*) precedes any political organisation: the imamate is neither the most fundamental doctrine of the religion nor the most important issue for Muslims. The Companions of the Prophet, he observes, did not concern themselves with defining its modalities; obedience to the Prophet was owed to him as God's envoy, not as a head of state, and this obedience, which remained obligatory after his death, bore no resemblance to that owed to an *imām* whose authority was contingent and temporary.³⁶

In a positive sense, Ibn Taymiyya conceives true theocracy as the absence of human domination over humans: authority belongs to God, to His Messenger, and, by extension, to the community to which God revealed His will through the Prophet. According to Bori, this principle entails a requirement of consultation (*shūrā*, *mushāwara*), grounded in the collective testimony of the community and constituting, at least ideally, the basis of sound governance. In other passages, Ibn Taymiyya emphasises the duty of

³⁵ Bori, "Théologie politique et islam," §15-17. On Ibn Taymiyya's position regarding the caliphate, see Anjum, *Politics, Law, and Community*, 252-266; Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 93-96. On contemporary misuses of Ibn Taymiyya's position concerning the caliphate, see Mona Hassan, "Modern Interpretations and Misinterpretations of a Medieval Scholar: Apprehending the Political Thought of Ibn Taymiyyah," in *Ibn Taymiyyah and His Times*, ed. S. Ahmed and Y. Rapoport (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 338-366. On the non-obligatory nature of the caliphate as a unique form of government, or approaches that relativize its institutional necessity, see Mohamad El-Merheb, *Political Thought in the Mamluk Period: The Unnecessary Caliphate* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022); Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu, "Revisiting Khilafah: The Role of Nonpolitical Social Factors in Good Governance," *Islam and Civilisational Renewal* 5, no. 1 (2024): 68-83; Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Classical Islamic Political Thought and Its Contemporary Relevance," *Islam and Civilisational Renewal* 9, no. 4 (2018): 21-46.

³⁶ Bori, "Théologie politique et islam," §20-21.

believers not only to obey those who hold authority but also to participate, each at his or her own level, in the conduct of public affairs through “good counsel” (*al-munāṣaḥa*). These elements reflect a political thought attentive to the balance between authority and participation, in which consultation holds both moral and institutional value.³⁷

Certain features of Ibn Taymiyya’s conception, rooted in his reading of the foundational texts (Quran and Sunna), suggest a proto-democratic horizon in the sense that *shūrā* opens the possibility of communal involvement in governance. All Muslims, regarded as God’s vicars (*khulafāʾ*) on earth, thus possess, according to Ibn Taymiyya, the right to delegate their authority to a ruler who governs while taking their opinion into account. Henri Laoust had already identified in this orientation a marked egalitarian tendency inherent in the principle of unity of God (*tawḥīd*): for Ibn Taymiyya, this unity grounds a spiritual equality that broadens, at least in theory, the body entitled to designate the leader of the community from the narrow circle of competent notables to the community of believers as a whole.³⁸

3. LOYALTY AND DISAVOWAL (*AL-WALĀʾ WA-L-BARĀʾ*): THE POLITICAL TRANSPOSITION OF THE TAYMIYYAN PARADIGM

Ibn Taymiyya is mobilized once again in the section entitled “The connection between love for the Lord—exalted be He—loyalty to the believers, and fighting in the path of God”:

هـ- العلاقة بين محبة المولى سبحانه وموالاتة المؤمنين والجهاد في سبيل الله. ونود بعد أن بينا أمر الشريعة بموالاتة المؤمنين ومعاداة الكافرين أن تذكر كلاماً نفيساً لشيخ الإسلام ابن تيمية - رحمه الله - في العلاقة الوثيقة بين محبة المولى سبحانه والجهاد. قال ابن تيمية رحمه الله: "والنصوص في فضائل الجهاد وأهله كثيرة، وقد ثبت أنه أفضل ما تطوع به العبد، والجهاد دليل المحبة الكاملة، قال تعالى: التوبة {قل إن كان أبواؤكم وإخوانكم وأزواجكم وعشيرتكم .. الآية} وقال تعالى في صفة المحبين المحبوبين: المائدة {يا أيها الذين آمنوا من يرتد منكم عن دينه فسوف يأتي الله بقوم يحبهم ويحبونه آذلة على المؤمنين أعزة على الكافرين يجاهدون في سبيل الله ولا يخافون لومة لائم}. فإن المحبة مستلزمة للجهاد، ولأن المحب يحب ما يجب محبوبه، ويبغض ما يبغض محبوبه، ويوالي من يوالي محبوبه،

³⁷ Bori, “Théologie politique et islam,” §30-31.

³⁸ Laoust, *Essai*, 285-288. See also Victor E. Makari, *Ibn Taymiyyah’s Ethics: The Social Factor* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 146-147.

ويعادي من يعاديه ويرضى لرضاه، ويغضب لغضبه، ويأمر بما يأمر به، وينهى عما نهى عنه، فهو موافق في ذلك.

وهؤلاء هم الذين يرضى الرب لرضاهم، ويغضب لغضبهم، إذ هم إنما يرضون لرضاه، ويغضبون لما يغضب له، كما قال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم لأبي بكر في طائفة فيهم صبيح وبلال: "لعلك أغضبتهم، لكن كنت أغضبتهم لقد أغضبت ربك" فقال لهم: يا إختوتي هل أغضبتكم، قالوا: لا، يغفر الله لك يا أبا بكر.

وكان قد مر بهم أبو سفيان بن حرب فقالوا: ما أخذت السيوف مأخذها، فقال لهم أبو بكر: أتقولون هذا لسيد قريش؟ وذكر أبو بكر ذلك للنبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فقال له ما تقدم، لأن أولئك إنما قالوا ذلك غضباً لله لكمال ما عندهم من الموالاة الله ورسوله والمعادة لأعدائهما."

* The connection between love for the Lord—exalted be He—loyalty to the believers, and fighting in the path of God

And to complete what we have presented regarding the rulings of the *sharī‘a* concerning loyalty to the believers and enmity toward the unbelievers, let us recall the precious words of shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya—may God have mercy on him—about the connection between love for God and jihad. Ibn Taymiyya—may God have mercy on him—said: “The texts concerning the virtues of jihad and its people are numerous, and it has been established that the best voluntary act with which a servant draws near [to God] is jihad, and that jihad is the proof of perfect love.”

God the Exalted says: ‘Say: If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your clan...’ [the verse] [9:24], and the Exalted says in describing the believers whom He loves: ‘O you who believe, whoever among you turns back from his religion, God will bring forth a people whom He loves and who love Him: humble toward the believers, stern toward the disbelievers, striving in the path of God, and not fearing the blame of any blamer’ (Q 5:54).”

“For love necessarily entails jihad. Indeed, the one who loves, loves what his Beloved loves, hates what He hates, takes as an ally the one He takes as an ally, and opposes the one He opposes; he is pleased with what pleases Him and becomes angry at what angers Him; he commands what He commands and forbids what He forbids. Whoever acts in this manner is in harmony with this.

These are those whom the Lord approves and who become angry over what angers Him, for they seek only His approval and are indignant

over what angers Him. As in the statement of the Prophet—may God bless him and grant him peace—to Abū Bakr, who was in a group in which were Ṣuhayb and Bilāl: ‘Perhaps you have angered them? By God, if you have angered them, you have indeed angered your Lord.’ Abū Bakr said to them: ‘O my brothers, have I angered you?’ They replied: ‘No, may God forgive you, O Abū Bakr.’

And it happened that Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb passed before them, and they said: ‘Have the swords not taken their due from this nobleman of Quraysh?’ Abū Bakr then said: ‘Would you say such a thing about the nobleman of Quraysh?’ Abū Bakr reported this to the Prophet—may God bless him and grant him peace—and he replied to him what has been mentioned above, for they had said this as an expression of anger for God, owing to what they carried within them of complete loyalty toward God and His Messenger, and of complete disavowal toward their enemies.’³⁹

The first point to note is that al-Zawāhirī makes Ibn Taymiyya the central cornerstone of his argumentation in this section. He cites neither verse nor hadith as a direct source of authority, but relies solely on the words of the Damascene theologian. This is unsurprising: al-Zawāhirī finds in Ibn Taymiyya an already complete synthesis of the Quranic and prophetic arguments he wishes to employ.⁴⁰

The opening of the passage is revealing. Al-Zawāhirī introduces Ibn Taymiyya with the honorific title *shaykh al-Islām* and announces that he will report his “precious words” (*kalāman naftsan*). This rhetorical device immediately installs an absolute authority. It grants Ibn Taymiyya’s statement normative force, elevating it from the rank of contextual opinion to that of a timeless standard ready to be reactivated in the present.

The formulation of Ibn Taymiyya that al-Zawāhirī selects, namely the idea that jihad is “the proof of perfect love” (*dalīl al-maḥabba al-kāmila*) for God, becomes the central principle of the argument. By seizing upon it, al-Zawāhirī carries out an analogical transposition: what was, for Ibn Taymiyya, anchored

³⁹ al-Zawāhirī, *al-Hiṣād al-murr*, 32-33.

⁴⁰ For more information on his methodology regarding sources, see Berriah, “Ibn Taymiyya’s Methodology regarding his Sources,” 45-81.

in the doctrinal debates of his time and in the context of the Mongol invasions becomes, in his hands, an axiom valid for every era. If loving God entails jihad, then each generation claiming to love God must, by analogy, fight in His path. This constitutes the first step in the telescoping of historical periods: the medieval paradigm becomes a contemporary paradigm and is transformed into a contemporary imperative.

The passages from Ibn Taymiyya's *Tuḥfat al-ʿIrāqīyya* cited by al-Zawāhirī, in which love for God and His Prophet is inseparable from the practice of jihad, resonate with other formulations that Ibn Taymiyya develops elsewhere, notably in *al-ʿUbūdiyya*, *al-Jawāb al-Bāhir fī Zuwwār al-Maqābir* et *al-Istiqāma*.⁴¹ He conceives of jihad against unbelievers and hypocrites as an act of worship alongside prayer, almsgiving, fasting, pilgrimage, kindness toward one's parents, and others. The markers of love for God are adherence to the Sunna and engagement in jihad; neglecting what one is able to accomplish in this domain reflects a deficiency in love for God and the Prophet. Jihad expresses love for what God has commanded and hatred for what He has forbidden; its performance is a form of obedience to God and His Messenger. Ibn Taymiyya supports this by invoking the *bayʿa* (oath of allegiance) of the Companions, which entailed obedience in battle and the prohibition of fleeing, even at the cost of one's life. This perspective was not unique: several Mamluk authors, Ibn Shaddād (d. 684/1285) and Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir (d. 692/1293) among them, present jihad as a pillar of Islam.⁴² My point here is not to suggest that Ibn Taymiyya, like the two authors discussed above, explicitly regarded jihad as a pillar of Islam. To the best of my knowledge, Ibn Taymiyya never states anywhere that jihad is one of the pillars. Yet, in view of what has been shown above about the preponderant place he gives to jihad among acts of

⁴¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *al-ʿUbūdiyya*, eds. Fawāz Aḥmad Zamralī and Fārūq Ḥasan al-Turk (Beirut: Dār Ibn Hazm, 2012), p. 95, 164, 166, 192; Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-bāhir fī zuwwār al-maqābir*, ed. Ibrāhīm b. Khālīd b. ʿIsā al-Mukhlif (Riyadh: Dār al-Minhāj, 2011–2012/1433 H), 306 and Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Istiqāma*, 197-202. See also in his *al-Siyāsa al-sharʿīyya*. See Hoover, "Reconciling Ibn Taymiyya's Legitimation of Violence," 155. For an overview of Ibn Taymiyya's general perception of jihad, see Berriah, "Ibn Taymiyya's Conception of Jihad," 51-61; Mehdi Berriah, "The Theology of Self-Sacrifice in Jihad: A Study of Ibn Taymiyya's *Qāʿida fī l-ingimās fī l-ʿaduww wa-hal yūbāh*," *Arabica* 73 (2026): 1-45.

⁴² Ibn Shaddād al-Ḥalabī, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Zāhir*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥuṭayṭ (Beirut: al-Maʿhad li-l-Abḥāth al-Sharqīyya, 1983), 317; Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir, *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Zāhir Baybars*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Khuwayṭir (Riyadh, 1976), 89.

worship, its close connection with certain pillars depending on the circumstances, and its status as one of the most distinctive signs of love for God, one may cautiously suggest that he comes close to treating jihad as a pillar *de facto*, especially in situations of acute threat such as the context of 1299–1303. In these treatises, jihad does not occupy the foreground: it emerges in the course of digressions, through a style of writing in which normative statements appear at the margins of the main discussion.

Al-Zawāhirī then shifts the debate to the doctrine of loyalty and disavowal (*al-walā' wa-l-barā'*), to which he devotes a separate epistle.⁴³ By deploying verse 118 of sura Āl 'Imrān (Q 3:118) and verses 51 to 53 of sura al-Mā'ida (Q 5:51–53), which prohibit taking Jews and Christians as allies, and by invoking major exegetes such as al-Qurṭubī and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), al-Zawāhirī recomposes what he takes to be the “Taymiyyan matrix”: love for God requires exclusive loyalty to the believers and disavowal of others. The shift he introduces, however, is decisive. A Quranic prohibition originally situated within the sphere of military or religious alliances becomes an instrument for politically delegitimizing contemporary rulers accused of complicity with the West. *Muwālāt al-kuffār* (alliance with the unbelievers) is thus elevated to the status of a principal criterion of apostasy in the modern era.

It is only after establishing this scriptural and exegetical foundation that al-Zawāhirī introduces his citation from Ibn Taymiyya:

قال ابن تيمية - رحمه الله - عن التتار: "وكل من قفز إليهم من أمراء العسكر فحكمه حكمهم، وفيهم من الردة عن شرائع الإسلام بقدر ما ارتد عنه من شرائع الإسلام. وإذا كان السلف قد سموا مانعي الزكاة مرتدين مع كونهم يصومون ويصلون ولم يكونوا يقاتلون جماعة المسلمين، فكيف بمن صار مع أعداء الله ورسوله قاتلاً للمسلمين."

Ibn Taymiyya—may God have mercy on him—said regarding the Tatars: “Every one of the amirs who has joined them [the Mongols], the ruling applied to him is their ruling; and it is understood of him a degree of apostasy corresponding to what he has turned away from of the laws of Islam. And the early generations (*al-salaf*) had deemed

⁴³ *al-Walā' wa-l-barā'*: ‘*‘aqīda manqūla wa-wāqī’ maḥqūd*’ which may be translated as “Alliance and Disavowal: A Transmitted Belief but a Lost Reality”
<https://shamela.org/pdf/9bfa1817f9ab8dc094cb3bfd17dada44>

those who withheld the *zakāt* to be apostates, despite their praying and fasting and despite the fact that they were not fighting the Muslim community. So, how then about one who has aligned himself with the enemies of God and His Messenger, fighting the Muslims?"⁴⁴

In this passage, Ibn Taymiyya alludes to certain Mamluk amirs who defected from the sultanate to join the camp of the Ilkhanid Mongols at the end of the 7th/13th and beginning of the 8th/14th century.⁴⁵ Although the latter had converted to Islam, particularly during the reign of Maḥmūd Ghāzān, Ibn Taymiyya doubted the sincerity of their conversion. He accused them of hypocrisy, of governing according to the *yasa*, of failing to renounce their former beliefs, and of fighting Muslims with the support of Christian allies, especially Franks, Armenians, and Georgians.⁴⁶ This text illustrates the analogical logic characteristic of Ibn Taymiyya: if the *man ṭ al-zakāt* (those who refused to pay the *zakāt*) during Abū Bakr's caliphate were deemed apostates despite their devotional practices, then those who join forces militarily with the enemies of Islam fall all the more clearly into the same category. In his argumentation, al-Zawāhirī reproduces this Taymiyyan pattern and makes the Mongol precedent the historical axis of his transposition.

For the Ḥanbalī theologian, the Islamized Mongols who governed by human-made norms and allied with non-Muslims constituted a *ṭā'ifa mumtani'a* that is, a group claiming Islam while suspending the law, whose combat was therefore licit.⁴⁷ Al-Zawāhirī transfers this framework to the

⁴⁴ al-Zawāhirī, *al-Ḥiṣād al-murr*, 33.

⁴⁵ Berriah, *L'art de la guerre chez les Mamelouks*, 321-323, 356-359; Charles Melville, "Sometimes by the Sword, Sometimes by the Dagger: The Role of the Isma'ilis in Mamlūk-Mongol Relations in the 8th/14th Century," in *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought*, ed. F. Daftary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 248-258.

⁴⁶ See the works of Michot, Aigle and Hoover cited in note 20 *op. cit.* On the presence of Christian soldiers in the Ilkhanid army, see Aigle, "Ghazan Khan's Invasion of Syria," 255-282.

⁴⁷ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ، كُلُّ طَائِفَةٍ مُمْتَنِعَةٍ عَنِ التَّزَامِ شَرِيعَةٍ مِنْ شَرَائِعِ الْإِسْلَامِ الظَّاهِرَةِ الْمُتَوَاتِرَةِ؛ مِنْ هَوْلَاءِ الْقَوْمِ وَغَيْرِهِمْ فَإِنَّهُ يَجِبُ قِتَالُهُمْ حَتَّى يَلْتَزِمُوا شَرَائِعَهُ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مَعَ ذَلِكَ نَاطِقِينَ بِالشَّهَادَتَيْنِ وَمُلْتَزِمِينَ بَعْضَ شَرَائِعِهِ كَمَا قَاتَلَ أَبُو بَكْرٍ الصِّدِّيقُ وَالصَّحَابَةُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ مَا جَعَلَ الزَّكَاةَ. وَعَلَى ذَلِكَ اتَّفَقَ الْفُقَهَاءُ بَعْدَهُمْ بَعْدَ سَابِقَةِ مَنَاطِرَةِ عُمَرَ لِأَبِي بَكْرٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا. فَاتَّفَقَ الصَّحَابَةُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ عَلَى الْقِتَالِ عَلَى حُقُوقِ الْإِسْلَامِ عَمَلًا بِالْكِتَابِ وَالسُّنَّةِ. وَكَذَلِكَ ثَبَتَ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مِنْ عَشْرَةِ أَوْجُهٍ الْحَدِيثُ عَنِ الْخَوَارِجِ وَأَخْبَرَ أَنَّهُمْ شَرُّ الْخَلْقِ وَالْخَلِيقَةِ مَعَ قَوْلِهِ: {تُحَقَّرُونَ صَلَاتَكُمْ مَعَ صَلَاتِهِمْ وَصِيَامَكُمْ مَعَ صِيَامِهِمْ} فَعَلِمَ أَنَّ مَجْرَدَ الْإِعْتِصَامِ بِالْإِسْلَامِ مَعَ عَدَمِ التَّزَامِ شَرَائِعَهُ لَيْسَ بِمُسْقَطٍ لِلْقِتَالِ. فَالْقِتَالُ وَاجِبٌ حَتَّى يَكُونَ الدِّينُ كُلُّهُ لِلَّهِ وَحَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ. فَمَتَى كَانَ الدِّينُ لِيُغَيَّرَ اللَّهُ فَالْقِتَالُ وَاجِبٌ. فَأَيُّمَا طَائِفَةٍ امْتَنَعَتْ مِنْ بَعْضِ الصَّلَوَاتِ الْمَفْرُوضَاتِ أَوْ الصِّيَامِ أَوْ الْحَجِّ أَوْ عَنِ التَّزَامِ تَحْرِيمِ الدِّمَاءِ وَالْأَمْوَالِ وَالْخَمْرِ وَالزَّيْنِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ أَوْ عَنِ نِكَاحِ ذَوَاتِ الْمَحَارِمِ أَوْ عَنِ التَّزَامِ جِهَادِ

modern period and identifies three features that, according to Ibn Taymiyya, characterized the Mongols: profession of Islam, governance based on legislation other than revelation, and alliance or cooperation with non-Muslims

الْكُفَّارِ أَوْ ضَرْبِ الْجَزِيَّةِ عَلَى أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَغَيْرِ ذَلِكَ مِنْ وَاجِبَاتِ الدِّينِ وَمَحْرَمَاتِهِ - الَّتِي لَا عُدْرَ لِأَحَدٍ فِي جُحُودِهَا وَتَرْكِهَا - الَّتِي يَكْفُرُ الْجَاهِدُ لَوْجُوبِهَا. فَإِنَّ الطَّائِفَةَ الْمُتَمَنِّعَةَ تُقَاتَلُ عَلَيْهَا وَإِنْ كَانَتْ مُقَرَّةً بِهَا. وَهَذَا مَا لَا أَعْلَمُ فِيهِ خِلَافًا بَيْنَ الْعُلَمَاءِ. وَإِنَّمَا ائْتَلَفَ الْفُقَهَاءُ فِي الطَّائِفَةِ الْمُتَمَنِّعَةِ إِذَا أَصْرَتْ عَلَى تَرْكِ بَعْضِ السُّنَنِ كَرَكْعَتَيْ الْفَجْرِ وَالْأَذَانَ وَالْإِقَامَةَ - عِنْدَ مَنْ لَا يَقُولُ بوجُوبِهَا - وَتَحْوِ ذَلِكَ مِنَ الشُّعَائِرِ. هَلْ تُقَاتَلُ الطَّائِفَةُ الْمُتَمَنِّعَةُ عَلَى تَرْكِهَا أَمْ لَا؟ فَأَمَّا الْوَاجِبَاتُ وَالْمَحْرَمَاتُ الْمَذْكُورَةُ وَتَحْوِهَا فَلَا خِلَافَ فِي الْقِتَالِ عَلَيْهَا. وَهَوْلَاءُ عِنْدَ الْمُحَقِّقِينَ مِنَ الْعُلَمَاءِ لَيْسُوا بِمَنْزِلَةِ الْبَغَاةِ الْخَارِجِينَ عَلَى الْإِمَامِ أَوْ الْخَارِجِينَ عَنِ طَاعَتِهِ؛ كَأَهْلِ الشَّامِ مَعَ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلِيِّ بْنِ أَبِي طَالِبٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ. فَإِنَّ أَوْلَيْكَ خَارِجُونَ عَنِ طَاعَةِ إِمَامٍ مُعَيَّنٍ أَوْ خَارِجُونَ عَلَيْهِ لِإِزَالَةِ وَلايَتِهِ. وَأَمَّا الْمَذْكُورُونَ فَهُمْ خَارِجُونَ عَنِ الْإِسْلَامِ؛ بِمَنْزِلَةِ مَايَعِي الزَّكَاةَ وَبِمَنْزِلَةِ الْخَوَارِجِ الَّذِينَ قَاتَلْتَهُمْ عَلِيُّ بْنُ أَبِي طَالِبٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ.

“Praise be to God. Every group that refrains from adhering to any of the outward, well-known, mass-transmitted laws of Islam, whether from these people or from others, must be fought until they commit themselves to its laws, even if they pronounce the two testimonies of faith and adhere to some of its laws; just as Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq and the Companions, may God be pleased with them, fought those who withheld the *zakāt*. And upon that the jurists after them agreed, after the precedent of ‘Umar’s debate with Abū Bakr, may God be pleased with them both. Thus, the Companions, may God be pleased with them, agreed on fighting for the rights of Islam, acting upon the Book and the Sunnah. Likewise, it has been established from the Prophet—may God’s prayers and peace be upon him—by ten chains or from ten aspects, the hadith concerning the Khawārij, and he informed that they are the worst of creation and creatures, despite his saying: “You would belittle your prayer in comparison to their prayer, and your fasting in comparison to their fasting.” It is therefore known that mere adherence to the name of Islam, while not committing oneself to its laws, does not remove the obligation of fighting. Fighting is obligatory until the religion is entirely for God and until there is no fitnah. So whenever the religion is for other than God, fighting is obligatory. Thus, any group that refrains from some of the prescribed prayers or from fasting or from the pilgrimage or from committing itself to the prohibition of bloodshed or unlawful consumption of property or wine or fornication or gambling or from refraining from marrying those of the forbidden degrees or from committing itself to jihad against disbelievers or from imposing *jizya* upon the People of the Book, as well as other obligations of the religion and its prohibitions, those matters for which no one has an excuse in denying or abandoning them and the denial of whose obligation constitutes disbelief, then that abstaining group is to be fought on account of these matters even if it acknowledges them. And I know of no disagreement among the scholars concerning this. The jurists have differed only concerning the case of a faction that persists in neglecting certain *sunan* (recommended practices), such as the two units of prayer before dawn (*rak‘atay al-fajr*), the call to prayer (*adhān*), or the *iqāma*, according to those who do not consider them obligatory, and other practices of this kind: must they be fought for abandoning them or not? As for the aforementioned obligations and prohibitions and similar matters, there is no disagreement regarding fighting over them. And these people, according to the verifying scholars, are not in the position of rebels (*bughāt*) who rise against the Imām or who depart from obedience to him, such as the people of Shām with the Commander of the Faithful ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him. For those rebels are ones who rise against a specific Imām or rise to remove his authority. But those previously mentioned groups are ones who have departed from Islam, like those who withheld the *zakāt* and like the Khawārij whom ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib—may God be pleased with him—fought.” Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, 28: 502.

against Muslims. The reference to the Mongol precedent thus functions as an analogical matrix: rulers who govern by non-revealed laws, conclude military alliances with non-Muslims, and fight Muslims are implicitly assimilated to the groups Ibn Taymiyya regarded as legitimate enemies. This is one of the hallmarks of al-Zawāhirī's method: bringing distant situations into proximity in order to generate maximal analogy from minimal resemblance.

These elements surface in the pages where he comments on *al-walā' wa-l-barā'*, condemns alliances with “enemies,” and evokes the Companions' struggle against the *man ṭ al-zakāt*. The reader is thereby led to draw the parallel: contemporary Muslim regimes that govern through secular laws and cooperate with the West become, by analogy, the “Mongols” of our time, in continuity with earlier jihadist framings (Anwar al-Sadat being a well-known case), as the works cited above have highlighted.

By reactivating the Taymiyyan paradigm, al-Zawāhirī proceeds through decontextualized analogy: a specific episode, namely the cooperation between certain Mamluk amirs and Ilkhanids deemed heretical, serves as a template for thinking about present-day relations between Muslim states and non-Muslim powers. This is not, to borrow Yahya Michot's expression, merely a “Mongolization of the enemy”, that is, the assimilation of a Muslim ruler to the figure of the Mongol and thus of the hypocrite or apostate, but a full analogical reconfiguration of reality, in which history functions as a reservoir of verdicts applicable to the present.

The citation of Ibn Taymiyya on the Mongols thus closes al-Zawāhirī's scriptural architecture: to the Qur'anic verses and the commentaries of classical exegetes is added the voice of the celebrated Ḥanbalī theologian of Damascus, which crowns the demonstration with medieval authority. The effect is twofold. Ibn Taymiyya is enveloped in classical legitimacy, and the reading shifts toward a conception of religion as a regime of political affects, in which loving and hating for God translate into active hostility toward enemies. The figure of the “Mongol” thereby ceases to belong to the past and becomes an operative category of contemporary jihadist thought.

4. FROM NORMATIVITY TO POLITICS: THE JIHADIST REACTIVATION OF *AL-AMR BI-L-MA'RŪF WA-L-NAHY 'AN AL-MUNKAR*

٨ - الوصول للحكم بالطريق القانوني:

يقول أحمد حسين في مرافعته في قضية مقتل النقراشي دفاعاً عن الإخوان المسلمين وأنها كانوا ضد العنف، وأن حسن البنا - رحمه الله - وقف ضد حوادث تحطيم الحانات وطالب بتغيير القانون بالطريق الانتخابي القانوني:

"وكتب حضرته (أي حسن البنا رحمه الله) بنفس العدد (النذير ٣٣) مقالاً آخر بعنوان "حول حوادث تحطيم الحانات" جاء فيه: تحريم الخمر وتعاطيها أمر من اختصاص الإمام، فإذا قصر كان خارجاً عن الكتاب والسنة، وعندئذ يجب على العلماء وذوي الرأي أن يقدموا له النصيحة، فإذا أبى وجب على الأمة أن تجاهده حتى تخلعه، ومن هنا نرى الإسلام هو دين نظام، جعل حتى تغيير المنكر للإمام، ولم يعط هذا الحق لكل فرد من أفراد الأمة، وإلا أصبح الأمر فوضى.

فالحكومة هي التي تقوم في عصرنا مقام الإمام، فهي المسؤولة عن تحريم المنكرات، فإن لم تفعل وجب على نواب الأمة أن يسحبوا ثقتهم منها، فإذا لم يؤد النواب واجبهم أصبح لزاماً على الأمة ألا تمنحهم ثقتها، وتنتخب غيرهم فإذا اجتمع تحت قبة البرلمان نواب مسلمون، أمكن القضاء على كل منكر بقوة القانون وحكم النظام.

هؤلاء هم الإخوان المسلمون في سنة (١٩٣٩)، أي منذ عشر سنوات يكرهون العنف والإخلال بالنظام، حتى أنهم بادروا فأعلنوا إنكارهم الجريمة التي وقعت من غير صفوفهم، وأعلنوا حكم الإسلام فيها، وقد كانت هذه الأقوال هي التي استندت إليها النيابة في ذلك الوقت على هؤلاء المتهمين في تحطيم الحانات.

وهذا الكلام من حسن البنا - رحمه الله - فيه خلط:

فهو أولاً: قد قصر الأمر بالمعروف والأمر عن المنكر على الحكومة فقط، وهذا خلاف ما استقر عليه العلماء أن الأمر عن المعروف والنهي عن المنكر فرض على الكفاية، فإذا قصر فيه الأمراء، كان لكل من قدر على إزالته القيام بذلك .

قال ابن تيمية رحمه الله :

"وكذلك الأمر بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر لا يجب على كل أحد بعينه، بل هو على الكفاية كما دل عليه القرآن، ولما كان الجهاد من تمام ذلك كان الجهاد أيضاً كذلك، فإذا لم يقم به من يقوم بواجبه أثم كل قادر بحسب قدرته، إذ هو واجب على كل إنسان بحسب قدرته، كما قال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم: "من رأى منكم منكراً فليغيره بيده، فإن لم يستطع فبلسانه، فإن لم يستطع فقلبه، وذلك أضعف الإيمان".

وقال أيضاً رحمه الله:

"وإذا كان جماع الدين وجميع الولايات هو أمر ونهي، فالأمر الذي بعث الله به رسوله هو الأمر بالمعروف، والنهي الذي بعثه به هو النهي عن المنكر، وهذا نعت النبي والمؤمنين،

كما قال تعالى: {والمؤمنون والمؤمنات بعضهم أولياء بعض يأمرون بالمعروف وينهون عن المنكر}، وهذا واجب على كل مسلم قادر، وهو فرض على الكفاية، وبصير فرض عين على القادر الذي لم يقم به غيره، والقدرة هو السلطان والولاية، فدو السلطان أدر من غيرهم، وعليهم من الوجوب ما ليس على غيرهم، فإن مناط الوجوب هو القدرة، فيجب على كل إنسان بحسب قدرته، قال تعالى: {فاتقوا الله ما استطعتم}." وقال أيضاً رحمه الله:

"وقول من قال لا يقيم الحدود الا السلطان ونوابه إذا كانوا قادرين فاعلين بالعدل. كما يقول الفقهاء الأمر الى الحاكم إنما هو العادل القادر، فإذا كان مضيعاً لأموال اليتامى أو عاجزاً عنها لم يجب تسليمها إليه مع إمكان حفظها بدونه، وكذلك الأمور إذا كان مضيعاً للحدود أو عاجزاً عنها لم يجب تفويضها إليه مع إمكان إقامتها بدونه، والأصل أن هذه الواجبات تقام على أحسن الوجوه، فمتى أمكن إقامتها من أمير لم يحتج إلى اثنين، ومتى لم يقم إلا بعدد ومن غير سلطان أقيمت إذا لم يكن في إقامتها فساد فيه على إضاعتها، فإنها من باب الأمر بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر، فإن كان في ذلك من فساد ولاة الأمر أو الرحمة ما يزيد على إضاعتها لم يدفع فساد بأفسد منه، والله أعلم".

8. Reaching authority through the legal path:

Aḥmad Ḥusayn said in his plea in the case of the assassination of al-Nuqrāshī [d. 1948], in defense of the Muslim Brotherhood and affirming that they were against violence, that Ḥasan al-Bannā — may God have mercy on him — had opposed the incidents of destroying the bars and had demanded that the law be changed through the legal electoral path:

“And his presence (meaning Ḥasan al-Bannā, may God have mercy on him) wrote, in the same issue (*al-Nadhīr* 33), another article entitled ‘On the Incidents of the Destruction of Bars’, in which he said: The prohibition of wine and its consumption is a matter belonging to the competence of the imam. So, if he falls short, he becomes outside the Book and the Sunnah, and then it becomes obligatory upon the scholars and the people of sound opinion to offer him advice. If he refuses, then it becomes obligatory upon the community to strive against him until they depose him. From this we see that Islam is a religion of order. It made the right of changing wrongdoing belong to the imam, and it did not give this right to every individual of the community, otherwise the matter would become disorder. Thus, the government, which in our time occupies the place

of the imam, is responsible for prohibiting wrongdoings. If it does not do so, then it is obligatory upon the deputies of the nation to withdraw their confidence from it. If the deputies do not fulfil their duty, it becomes necessary for the community not to grant them its confidence and to elect others. And if, under the dome of Parliament, Muslim deputies gather, then it becomes possible to eliminate every wrongdoing by the force of law and the judgment of order.”

These were the Muslim Brotherhood in the year 1939, that is, ten years earlier: they hated violence and the disruption of order, to the point that they hastened to declare their denunciation of the crime that occurred outside their ranks, and they proclaimed the ruling of Islam concerning it. These statements are the ones the prosecution relied upon at that time regarding those accused in the destruction of the bars. And this statement of Ḥasan al-Bannā — may God have mercy on him — contains confusion.

For first, he restricted commanding right and forbidding wrong to the government alone, and this is contrary to what the scholars have established, namely that commanding right and forbidding wrong is a collective obligation. If the rulers fall short in it, then everyone who is able to remove it must do so.

Ibn Taymiyya — may God have mercy on him — said: “Likewise, commanding right and forbidding wrong is not individually obligatory (*farḍ ‘ayn*) upon each person in particular. Rather, it is a collective obligation (*farḍ kifāya*), as the Quran indicates. And because jihad is the completion of this, jihad is likewise so, for it becomes obligatory upon the one who is capable. Thus, it is obligatory upon each human being according to his ability, as the Prophet — peace and blessings be upon him — said: ‘Whoever among you sees a wrongdoing, let him change it with his hand; if he is unable, then with his tongue; and if he is unable, then with his heart, and that is the weakest of faith.’”

He [Ibn Taymiyya] — may God have mercy on him — also said: “When the collective essence of religion and of all positions of authority is command and prohibition, then the command with which

God sent His Messenger is the command to what is right, and the prohibition with which He sent him is the prohibition of what is wrong. And this is the description of the Prophet and of the believers, as the Exalted said: ‘The believing men and the believing women are allies of one another; they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong’ [Q 9:71]. And this is obligatory upon every Muslim who is capable. And it is a collective obligation, and it becomes an individual obligation upon the one who is capable when no one else has carried it out. And capability is authority and governance, so those who possess authority are more capable than others, and upon them is obligatory what is not upon others, for the basis of obligation is capability. Thus it is obligatory upon every person according to his capability, as the Exalted said: ‘So fear God as much as you are able’ [Q 64:16].

And he [Ibn Taymiyya] — may God have mercy on him — also said: “The statement of one who says that none but the ruler and his deputies establish the prescribed punishments is correct only when they are capable and act with justice. As the jurists say, the matter is referred to the judge only when he is just and capable. So, if he is one who squanders the wealth of orphans or is incapable concerning it, it is not obligatory to entrust it to him while it is possible to preserve it without him. Likewise, the ruler, if he is one who neglects the prescribed punishments or is incapable concerning them, it is not obligatory to entrust them to him while it is possible to establish them without him. The fundamental principle is that these obligations are to be performed in the best manner. Thus, whenever it is possible to establish them by means of one commander, there is no need for two. And whenever they are not established except by a number, and by someone other than the ruler, then they are established if this does not result in corruption greater than neglecting them. For this belongs to the domain of commanding right and forbidding wrong. So, if in carrying them out there is corruption, whether in the rulers or in the subjects, that is greater than the corruption of neglecting them, then

corruption is not to be repelled by what is more corrupt than it. And God knows best.”⁴⁸

In this passage, al-Zawāhirī stages Ibn Taymiyya as a decisive authority tasked with resolving a specific political issue: access to power through legal and electoral means. He begins by dismissing the legalist option by drawing upon contemporary examples, notably the attempts of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian parliamentary experience dating back to the time of Ḥasan al-Bannā (d. 1949). This opening move is deliberate; it establishes a framework in which the present is judged through the lens of medieval paradigm elevated to the status of normative reference, and in which the failure of “constitutional” procedures calls for a response of a different order.

It is within this framework that Ibn Taymiyya is introduced. Al-Zawāhirī draws on passages from his treatises dealing with “commanding right and forbidding wrong” (*al-amr bi-l-ma‘rūf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar*) and with sharī‘a-based governance (*al-siyāsa al-shar‘iyya*). He selects those statements that present the suppression of wrongdoing as a duty conditioned by capacity and effective power, emphasizing the shift from a collective obligation (*farḍ kifāya*) to an individual one (*farḍ ‘ayn*) whenever some are able to act while others are prevented from doing so.⁴⁹ The objective is clear: authority is displaced from a failing state to any group capable of carrying out the divine injunction, even outside institutional structures.

This interpretation rests on a double hermeneutical operation. On the one hand, al-Zawāhirī generalizes opinions formulated by Ibn Taymiyya in highly specific contexts (disputes over authority, the practical administration of the *ḥisba*, military threats) and turns them into principles theoretically applicable to any situation in which temporal power (*sulṭān*) fails to enjoin the right. On the other hand, he widens the notion of “wrongdoing” without transition. What originally concerned particular behaviors within the domain of moral policing or social reform becomes, in his reading, the political order as a whole whenever the ruling power “does not judge according to what God has

⁴⁸ al-Zawāhirī, *al-Ḥiṣād al-murr*, 42-43.

⁴⁹ On the nature of *farḍ kifāya* and *farḍ ‘ayn* see Adnan Ahmad Zulfiqar, *Collective Duties (farḍ kifāya) in Islamic Law: The Moral Community, State Authority and Ethical Speculation in the Premodern Period* (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2018), 53-68.

revealed” or allies itself with non-Muslims. This shift grants opposition to the regime the status of a religious obligation for anyone possessing the capacity to act.

Yet this reading is marked by silences. In Ibn Taymiyya’s work, these same passages on commanding right are consistently framed by two safeguards: the competence of public authority when it is able to act, and the imperative of proportionality, which prohibits any intervention likely to produce greater harm than it removes. Al-Zawāhirī cites the condition of capacity, but he attenuates the restrictive force of *maṣlaḥa* and of consequential reasoning, which Ibn Taymiyya develops at length. Procedural prudence is thereby recast as tactical evaluation, easily fulfilled once the state is deemed “incapable” or “complicit.”

In Ibn Taymiyya, the obligation of *al-amr bi-l-ma’rūf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar* operates through a conditional grammar rather than through an undifferentiated imperative. In the *Hisba* and the *Siyāsa al-shar‘iyya*, the duty is calibrated to actual means and becomes individually binding only when legitimate authorities fail to act; the elimination of a wrong is permitted only if it genuinely reduces overall harm.⁵⁰ One illustrative example concerns the celebration of the mawlid, which was very popular in his time. When addressing those who wish to encourage adherence to prophetic practice, Ibn Taymiyya advises them to guide participants toward a more appropriate form of commemoration while avoiding any intervention that might push them toward an innovation considered more serious. One may infer that he implicitly prefers the continuation of the *mawlid* among the “innovators” rather than seeing them adopt practices he judges more dangerous. He does not name these explicitly, yet several passages suggest that he has in mind certain visits to tombs or sites deemed sacred, which he feared could lead to *shirk*, regarded as the gravest sin in Islam.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 153-155.

⁵¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidā’ al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm li-mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-jaḥīm*, ed. Nāṣir b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-‘Aql (Beirut: Dār ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1999), vol. 2: 125; Mehdi Berriah, “Ambiguity and Confusion around the Celebration of the Mawlid: On Ibn Taymiyya’s Position and Its Use in Contemporary Religious Debates,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 155 (2024): 95-100. See also Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, p. 65-67; Raquel M. Ukeles, “The Sensitive Puritan? Revisiting Ibn Taymiyya’s Approach to Law and Spirituality in Light of 20th-Century Debates on the Prophet’s Birthday (mawlid

Moreover, the execution of punishments and the use of coercion fall primarily within the remit of public authority, while private individuals, in practice, are limited to verbal censure whenever the use of force risks aggravating the harm. As Michael Cook has shown, the obligation to command right and forbid wrong in Ibn Taymiyya's thought is closely tied to effective capacity, to the competence of those holding authority, and to a teleological mode of reasoning: one eliminates a wrong only on the condition of actually decreasing the total amount of harm. In relation to established power, implementation therefore remains confined to speech and does not give rise to a doctrine of insurrection derived mechanically from the interdiction of wrongdoing. Taymiyyan normativity incorporates conditions of exercise that filter and prioritize action, far removed from any binary automatisms.⁵²

Beyond these safeguards, political authority, in Ibn Taymiyya's conception, is anchored in a theology of guidance. As Jon Hoover has shown, Ibn Taymiyya conceives the task of government is to lead individuals toward the worship of the one God and to reform their religious practice. Political function thus extends the prophetic mandate: God sent messengers and scriptures, but He also endowed human beings with "iron," the symbol of legitimate coercion, to correct deviations from revelation. The use of force therefore participates in a soteriological purpose aimed at protecting faith and directing souls.⁵³

Placed within this framework, the passages that al-Zawāhirī employs to transform *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar* into a permanent political obligation lose their appearance of universal judgement. Ibn Taymiyya's primary concern is the explicit substitution of human sovereignty for revealed law, as in the case of the Mongols and the *yasa*, and not the mere existence of contingent political forms or the practical shortcomings treated in casuistry. By neutralizing capacity, proportionality and institutional primacy, which are pillars of the system that Cook rightly highlights, al-Zawāhirī converts a hierarchy of priorities into an axiom: democracy becomes almost mechanically the designation of a legislation competing with that of God.

al-nabī),” in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Ahmed Shahab (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 327.

⁵² Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong*, 155.

⁵³ Hoover, “Reconciling Ibn Taymiyya's Legitimation of Violence,” 114. On the role and objectives of public authority according Ibn Taymiyya see Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 96-103.

The appeal to Ibn Taymiyya thus serves less as exegesis than as legitimation. By detaching opinions from their medieval context and reorganizing them around the single criterion of capacity, al-Zawāhirī transforms a body of political jurisprudence into an operational doctrine of overturning established powers. The reference to authority is not ornamental; it reconfigures the hierarchy of duties, subordinates positive legality to religious obligation, and reinterprets electoral failure not as political defeat but as a summons to act.

In sum, al-Zawāhirī presents Ibn Taymiyya as the guarantor of a passage from the legal to the legitimate. Electoral legality is deemed incapable of restoring the revealed norm; religious legitimacy shifts to those who “are able,” that is, to actors capable of imposing the “commanding right and forbidding wrong” by coercive means. This shift, grounded in a historically imprecise analogy and in a selective use of normative texts, grants al-Zawāhirī’s discourse its prescriptive tone and its semblance of self-evidence.

5. HISTORY AS PROOF: THE USE OF IBN KATHĪR AND THE TELESCOPING OF ERAS

The citation from Ibn Kathīr at the end of al-Zawāhirī’s text fulfills a function of rhetorical and historical closure:

وقال ابن كثير - رحمه الله- في حوادث سنة تسعة وتسعين وستمائة:
"وفي يوم الجمعة سابع عشر رجب أعيدت الخطبة بدمشق لصاحب مصر، ففرح الناس بذلك، وكان يخطب لغازان بدمشق وغيرها من بلاد الشام مائة يوم سواء، وفي بكرة يوم الجمعة المذكور دار الشيخ تقي الدين بن تيمية - رحمه الله - وأصحابه على الخمارات والحانات فكسروا أنية الخمر، وشققوا الظروف، وأراقوا الخمر، وعزروا جماعة من أهل الحانات المتخذة لهذه الفواحش، ففرح الناس بذلك."

Ibn Kathīr — may God have mercy on him — said, in the events of the year 699

“And on Friday, the seventeenth of Rajab, the Friday sermon (*khuṭba*) was restored in Damascus for the ruler of Egypt [sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad], and the people rejoiced at that. He would deliver the sermons for Ghāzān in Damascus and elsewhere from the lands of al-Shām for a full hundred days. And on the morning of that

aforementioned Friday, shaykh Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya — may God have mercy on him — and his companions assaulted the taverns and the houses of immorality (*khānāt*). They broke the vessels of wine, split open the gambling instruments, poured out the wine, and administered disciplinary punishment to a group of the inhabitants of the *khānāt*, and drove out a group of the women of the brothels who had taken those places as dwellings.”⁵⁴

The citation from Ibn Kathīr that closes al-Zawāhirī’s passage is not a mere textual ornament; it plays a strategic role in the staging of authority. Ibn Kathīr, a disciple of Ibn Taymiyya, occupies a pivotal position between history, exegesis, and the memory of the master. By quoting his *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, al-Zawāhirī does not simply deploy an additional jurist, but a witness to Ibn Taymiyya’s active sanctity. The episode he reports—the destruction of taverns and places of debauchery in Damascus in 699/1300—elevates the figure of the scholar to that of a political and moral actor: Ibn Taymiyya appears not only as a theorist of jihad but as a man of action, arousing popular support and collective fervor.⁵⁵

Ibn Kathīr himself, in the notices he devotes to his master, adopts an admiring tone: he describes the shaykh al-Islām as a man of learning and courage, present on the battlefield and issuing legal opinions that galvanized the city. This historiographical memory, appropriated by al-Zawāhirī, becomes a secondary source of authority: it does not create normativity, but authenticates the normativity of the master it celebrates. In other words, Ibn Taymiyya articulates the rule, and Ibn Kathīr narrates its enactment.

The intended effect of closure is twofold: to recall, on the one hand, that political violence may be sanctified through the figure of the scholar; and to show, on the other, that Islamic history itself legitimizes armed action when faith is threatened. Al-Zawāhirī thus weaves a vertical link between doctrine, history, and action: Ibn Taymiyya proclaims, Ibn Kathīr transmits, and he himself claims to reactivate. The choice of Ibn Kathīr is anything but incidental: his authority, situated at the intersection of scriptural learning and

⁵⁴ al-Zawāhirī, *al-Hiṣād al-murr*, 43.

⁵⁵ On Ibn Taymiyya’s role as a social actor, see Berriah, “Mobility and Versatility of the ‘*ulama*’ in the Mamluk Period,” 118-120.

historical memory, offers a form of traditional consensus. The jurist's word and the historian's pen converge in a single truth: the legitimization of struggle.

This use of Ibn Kathīr operates on two levels. On the discursive level, it grants the argumentation a narrative dimension (*qiṣṣa*): where the citations from Ibn Taymiyya laid down legal principles, Ibn Kathīr provides their historical embodiment. The narrative becomes a perceptible proof, emotional as well as rational, transforming duty into example. On the hermeneutical level, this invocation completes the analogical decontextualization: the account of the events of the year 699 AH becomes a mirror for the present, a paradigm of pious resurgence in the face of religious corruption. This echoes a phenomenon found among a minority of modern exegetes, such as the Egyptian Muḥammad Abū Zahra, the Syrian Sa'īd Ḥawwā and the Indonesian Hamka, who, although a minority, interpret some verses with explicit reference to contemporary events, as Johanna Pink has shown in her study of Q 5:51.⁵⁶ Al-Zawāhirī here turns chronicle into norm; the past is no longer merely a reservoir of examples but a living temporal framework reactivated as a moral imperative. In this sense, both historical narration and exegesis can assume, and indeed often do assume, a presentist function.

This narrative from Ibn Kathīr, placed immediately after the words of Ibn Taymiyya, fully participates in al-Zawāhirī's appropriation of the master, an appropriation that follows a stable rhetorical pattern. Al-Zawāhirī begins with a diagnosis of the failure of legal avenues, moves on to doctrinal citations that make capacity the criterion of obligation, and concludes with an exemplary precedent, in this case the Mongol occupation of Syria during the winter of 699-700/1299-1300, which casts contemporary political action in a heroic register of safeguarding the faith. The framework thus constructed produces an effect of necessity: action outside institutional frameworks appears no longer as an option but as the sole path faithful to religious normativity.

Thus the citation from Ibn Kathīr does more than close a demonstration; it completes a cycle of legitimation. Ibn Taymiyya provides the norm, Ibn Kathīr

⁵⁶ Johanna Pink, "Tradition and Ideology in Contemporary Sunnite Qur'anic Exegesis: Qur'anic Commentaries from the Arab World, Turkey and Indonesia and Their Interpretation of Q 5:51," *Die Welt des Islams* 50, no. 1 (2010): 7, 44-45, 50-51, 57.

stages it, and al-Zawāhirī draws from it the political conclusion: jihad as historical continuity rather than rupture.

CONCLUSION

The analysis proposed in this article set out to show how Ayman al-Zawāhirī reactivates what may be described as a Taymiyyan paradigm, that is, a worldview and a set of normative schemes developed between the second half of the thirteenth century and the early fourteenth century in the Near East, under circumstances marked by the Mongol invasions and the profound political, religious, social and cultural upheavals they produced, which Ibn Taymiyya experienced as an existential threat to Islam.⁵⁷ In contemporary jihadist discourse, these schemes tend to be elevated to the status of a medieval paradigm capable of illuminating political situations that have little in common with the context in which they were originally formulated.

The examination of *al-Hiṣād al-murr* confirms this shift. It brings to light a recurrent hermeneutical procedure based on decontextualization by analogy, which enables al-Zawāhirī to extract Taymiyyan positions from their original grounding and transform them into transhistorical norms applicable to contemporary Muslim states, to their legal systems, and to their external alliances with non-Muslim actors. The analysis of *al-Hiṣād al-murr* thus shows how al-Zawāhirī reorganizes a Taymiyyan paradigm of jihad, forged in the Mongol context, and turns it into a framework for interpreting contemporary politics and an instrument for legitimizing violence.

It is nevertheless important to recall the preliminary nature of this study. The inquiry has deliberately focused on a single text, selected for its importance and doctrinal density, in order to follow as closely as possible its argumentative mechanisms and its modes of reappropriating the Taymiyyan corpus. A broader investigation encompassing al-Zawāhirī's other writings will be necessary to assess the actual coherence of this paradigm and the ways in which it is modulated according to audiences, contexts, and strategic needs. This wider investigation is underway and will be the subject of forthcoming publications.

⁵⁷ Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya. Lettre à un roi croisé*, 62-69; Berriah, "The Mamluk Sultanate and the Mamluks seen by Ibn Taymiyya," §11-28.

Contemporary uses of Ibn Taymiyya cannot, moreover, be understood solely through the figure of al-Zawāhirī. Other ideologues, from ‘Abdallāh ‘Azzām to Abū Muṣ‘ab al-Zarqāwī and including Usāma b. Lādin, also appropriate this medieval paradigm, though not always in identical ways. A comparative study will be required to determine whether this constitutes a genuinely shared paradigm or rather a set of parallel appropriations that sometimes converge and at other times diverge. Ongoing research should help clarify this point and refine the hypotheses advanced here.

Finally, the issue extends beyond the doctrinal influence itself. It concerns the processes through which a medieval scholarly corpus becomes, through successive rereadings, a discursive matrix capable of producing political judgment, legitimizing violence, and reconfiguring the boundaries between religion and politics in the contemporary period. By tracing the ways in which al-Zawāhirī reshapes and absolutizes this Taymiyyan paradigm, this study opens a broader field of inquiry: that of the contemporary circulation of classical authorities and their instrumentalization in the political imaginaries of jihadism. It is within this wider perspective, attentive to mediations, temporalities, and contexts of use, that the place occupied by Ibn Taymiyya in the ideological reconfigurations of contemporary jihadism may be more precisely assessed.

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