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Defining the Enemy: Abū Muḥammad al-Maḥdīsī's Radical Reading of Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana

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Abstract

This article examines the interpretation of “the enemies” in Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana (60) by the Jordanian ideologue Abū Muḥammad al-Maḥdīsī, one of the most influential *jihādī*-Salafī theorists alive. Al-Maḥdīsī's reading of the *sūra*'s text and his interpretation of its context turn this part of the Qur'ān, which seems to have been meant to warn the early Medinan Muslims of the dangers of befriending hostile Meccan idolaters, into the basis of a radical ideology. Special attention is paid to the far-reaching consequences of al-Maḥdīsī's political interpretation of the text, especially when combined with his views on *kufṛ* (unbelief) and *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* (loyalty and disavowal), which he adopts from Wahhābī scholars and bases mostly on this *sūra*. Al-Maḥdīsī's particular combination of the text and context of *sūra* 60 yields a definition of “the enemy” that is rooted in the Qur'ān and Sunna but differs greatly from its traditional interpretations as well as Wahhābī writings by evolving into a radical ideology to overthrow the political rulers of the Muslim world.

Keywords

Qur'ān, Exegesis (*tafsīr*), Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana (*sūra* 60), Salafism, Wahhābism, Abū Muḥammad al-Maḥdīsī, *jihādī-Salafism*, *ḥadīth*, Sunna, Ḥaṭīb b. Abī Balta'a

Introduction

This article examines the interpretation of “the enemies” in Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana (60) by the Jordanian ideologue Abū Muḥammad

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al-Maḡdisī, one of the most influential theorists of radical Islam alive. Although he is not as well-known as Usāma b. Lādin or Ayman al-Ẓawāhirī, al-Maḡdisī's ideological influence among radical Muslims is probably greater than that of the leaders of al-Qā'ida. He has been described as “the mufti or the godfather” of the *jihādī* movement² and has inspired individuals ranging from Saudi³ and Jordanian⁴ militants to Mohammed Bouyeri⁵, the murderer of the Dutch film director Theo van Gogh. Furthermore, he was singled out by an American research project as “the key contemporary ideologue in the jihadi intellectual universe” and “the most influential living jihadi theorist”.⁶

Born in the village of Barqā (near Nāblus) on the West Bank in 1959, al-Maḡdisī, whose real name is ‘Iṣām b. Muḡammad b. Ṭāhir al-Barqāwī⁷, seems to have radicalised through his reading of Wahhābī writings and his contacts with the followers of Juhaymān

² Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy—Why Jihad Went Global*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 262.

³ Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, New York: Palgrave, 1999, pp. 3f.; Quintan Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism—Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001, p. 122; Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State—Islamic Voices from a New Generation*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 121-125.

⁴ Wiktorowicz, *Management*, p. 122; International Crisis Group (ICG), *Jordan's 9/11: Dealing with Jihadi Islamism*, Middle East Report No. 47, Amman/Brussels, 23 November 2005, p. 9.

⁵ Rudolph Peters, *The Ideological and Religious Development of Mohammed B.* (in Dutch), Expert-witness report in the case against Mohammed Bouyeri, Amsterdam, 2005, p. 20. Bouyeri is also said to have translated one of al-Maḡdisī's most important books (*Millat Ibrāhīm*), into Dutch.

⁶ William McCants & Jarret Brachman, *Militant Ideology Atlas—Executive Report*, West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center (www.ctc.usma.edu/atlas/), accessed 31-10-2007), 2006, p. 8.

⁷ In an interview, al-Maḡdisī refers to himself as ‘Āṣim instead of ‘Iṣām as he prefers the former and adds “Abū Muḡammad”, making his full name Abū Muḡammad ‘Āṣim b. Muḡammad b. Ṭāhir al-Barqāwī. See “Liḡā’ min Khalaf Qaḏbān al-Murtaddīn ‘Sanat 1418’”, www.tawhed.ws (accessed 31-10-2007), 1997, p. 2. Although al-Maḡdisī does have a son called Muḡammad, thereby explaining his use of the *kunya* Abū Muḡammad, according to Mshari al-Zaydi, a Saudi journalist, his given name is really ‘Iṣām and not ‘Āṣim. See Mshari al-Zaydi [Mishārī al-Dhāyidī], “Abū Mohammed al Maḡdisī [*sic*]: al-Zarqawī's ‘Spiritual Godfather’”, *al-Sharq al-awsat—English Edition* (www.asharqalawsat.com/english), accessed 31-10-2007), 26 July 2005.

al-‘Uṭaybī (d. 1980)⁸ in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in the 1980s. It was here and in Afghanistan, where he went during the war against the Soviets, that he was most influenced by the tenets of Salafism, a strict form of Islam that tries to emulate the pious predecessors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), a term used to refer to the first generations of Islam.⁹

Salafīs emphasise the importance of the unity of God (*tawḥīd*) as a strict form of monotheism that manifests itself not only in the belief in a single god but also in other areas such as worship, which must not include any cultural or religious innovations (*bida‘*, plural of *bid‘a*), or legislation, which must conform to Islamic law (*sharī‘a*). Any deviation from these norms is considered sinful in the eyes of Salafīs and can in certain cases even be condemned as an attempt to ascribe partners to God (*shirk*). Salafīs also apply the same strictness to their treatment of the sources of Islam, focussing entirely on a literal reading of the Qur’ān and Sunna and refusing rationalism and analogous reasoning (*qiyās*) as sources of the *sharī‘a*. They therefore do not accept the various schools of Islamic law (*madhāhib*, plural of *madhhab*) and refuse to follow the rulings of any particular tradition (*taqlīd*) but advocate a return to individual interpretation of the Qur’ān and Sunna (*ijtihād*).¹⁰

⁸ Juhaymān al-‘Uṭaybī was the leader of a group of rebels who occupied the Great Mosque in Mecca in 1979. For more on him, his ideology and the events surrounding his takeover of the mosque, see Joseph A. Kechichian, “Islamic Revival and Change in Saudi Arabia: Juhayman al-‘Uṭaybi’s ‘Letters’ to the Saudi People”, *The Muslim World*, vol. 80, no. 1, pp. 1-16; Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower—Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, New York: Knopf, 2006, pp. 88-94; Thomas Hegghammer & Stéphane Lacroix, “Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman al-‘Uṭaybi Revisited”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 39, 2007, pp. 103-122.

⁹ Hegghammer & Lacroix, pp. 115f.; see also al-Maqdisī’s short biography on his website (www.tawhed.ws, accessed 31-10-2007).

¹⁰ Wiktorowicz, *Management*, pp. 111-117. On Salafism and its ideological tenets, see also Wiktorowicz, “The Salafi Movement in Jordan”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 32, 2000, pp. 219-240; *Ibid.*, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 29, 2006, pp. 207-239; François Burgat & Muḥammad Sbitli, “Les Salafis au Yémen... la Modernisation malgré tout”, *Chronique Yéménites*, vol. 10, 2002, pp. 123-152; Bernard Haykel, “The Salafis in Yemen at a Crossroads: an obituary of Shaykh Muqbil al-Wadī‘i of Dammaj (d. 1422/2001)”, *Jemen Report*, no. 2, 2002, pp. 28-37.

Salafis, however, are not a homogeneous group. Although they share many ideological characteristics such as the ones mentioned above, there are sometimes significant doctrinal differences between them and they vary widely in their preferred ways of dealing with society and politics. A distinction has been made between so-called purists, who refuse any political involvement and concentrate on teaching and the propagation of their message (*da'wa*); politicos, who are involved in politics and actively try to influence a country's policies and laws; and *jihādīs*, whose contention is often expressed violently since they see *jihād* as a valid (or even the best) way to bring about complete *tawhīd* in society and politics.¹¹ Al-Maqdisī is an adherent to and ideologue of the *jihādī* branch of Salafism and it is as such that he became known as the mentor of the Jordanian terrorist Abū Muṣ'ab al-Zarqāwī, whom he later publicly criticised for targeting other Muslims in Iraq with suicide bombings.¹²

Central to al-Maqdisī's ideology is the concept of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'*, which refers to the complete loyalty (*walā'* or *muwālāt*) that Muslims should show to God, Islam and other Muslims while expressing disavowal (*barā'*) of and staying away from everything else.¹³ As will become clear later on in this article, *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* became particularly important to the followers of the 18th-century reformer Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb (1703-1792), who used it to keep Islam pure and cleansed of un-Islamic influences. The concept

¹¹ Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy", pp. 207f.

¹² For more on the relationship between al-Maqdisī and al-Zarqāwī, see Nibras Kazimi, "A Virulent Ideology in Mutation: Zarqawi upstages Maqdisi", in: Hillel Fradkin, Husain Haqqani & Eric Brown (eds.), *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, vol. II, Washington D.C.: Hudson Institute, 2005, pp. 59-73; Steven Brooke, "The Preacher and the Jihadi", in: Fradkin, Haqqani & Brown (eds.), *Current Trends in Islamic Ideology*, vol. III, Washington D.C.: Hudson Institute, 2006, pp. 52-66; Anouar Boukhars, 'The Challenge of Terrorism and Religious Extremism in Jordan', *Strategic Insights* (www.ccc.nps.navy.mill/si/2006/Apr/boukharsApr06.asp, accessed 31-10-2007), vol. 5, no. 4, 2006; Loretta Napoleoni, *Insurgent Iraq—Al-Zarqawi and the New Generation*, New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005, pp. 50-77; Fu'ād Ḥusayn, *Al-Zarqāwī—al-Jil al-thāni li-l-Qā'ida*, Beirut: Dār al-Khayāl, 2005, pp. 11-15, 101-114.

¹³ On the origins of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'*, see Etan Kohlberg, "Barā'at in Shi'i Doctrine", *Jerusalem Studies of Arabic and Islam*, vol. 7, 1986, pp. 140-145.

continued to be applied after the founding of Saudi Arabia, which adopted Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s ideas as its doctrinal underpinnings, to legitimise and enforce the country’s rigid moral policies. As we will see, however, in the *jihādī*-Salafī ideology of al-Maqdisī, *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’* transcends the strictly religious sphere and becomes a radical theory with great implications for politics as well. It is also through the prism of *jihādī*-Salafī ideas that al-Maqdisī views the enemies of the Muslims as mentioned in Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana. Al-Maqdisī’s radical reading of the *sūra*’s text and his interpretation of its context turn this part of the Qur’ān, which seems to have been meant to warn the early Medinan Muslims of the dangers of befriending hostile Meccan idolaters, into the basis of a radical ideology.¹⁴

In the following, this article tries to identify the “enemies” of the Muslims in this *sūra* by analysing the context of Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana, its treatment in the various books of exegesis (*tafsīr*), how this differs from al-Maqdisī’s interpretation and what political implications the latter’s opinions have. It then goes on to analyse the actual text of the *sūra* by looking at what the classical exegetes (*mufasssīrūn*), Wahhābī scholars and al-Maqdisī have written about it. Special attention is paid to the radical consequences of a political interpretation of the text, particularly when combined with al-Maqdisī’s views on unbelief (*kufr*) and *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’*, which he bases mostly on this *sūra*. Al-Maqdisī’s particular combination of the text and context of *sūra* 60 yields a definition of “the enemy” that is rooted in the Qur’ān and Sunna but differs greatly from its traditional interpretations by evolving into a radical ideology to overthrow the political rulers of the Muslim world.¹⁵

¹⁴ For an extensive treatment of al-Maqdisī’s ideology, see Joas Wagemakers, “A Purist jihādī-Salafī: The Ideology of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisī”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, forthcoming.

¹⁵ Many of al-Maqdisī’s writings, as well as some by other authors, are only available on the internet in html-format. This means that referring to specific page numbers is somewhat difficult. That is why I refer to the print-out versions of his writings, naming the number and/or name of the relevant chapter first and then the page numbers. If documents consist of only one chapter or section or when dealing with books and articles in Word, the normal page numbers are referred to.

The Story of Ḥāṭib b. Abī Balta‘a

The context in which Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana is said to have been revealed revolves around the Prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) of Ḥāṭib b. Abī Balta‘a. He was an early convert to Islam and had joined the Prophet Muḥammad in fleeing from hostilities in Mecca by making the *hijra* (emigration) to Medina in 622 AD. He had also participated in the battle of Badr against the Meccans in 624. After several years of hostile relations between the Muslims in Medina and the pagans in Mecca, the two sides decided to draw up a treaty at Ḥudaybiyya in 628, so that attacks between them would cease. After a breach of the treaty by a tribe allied to the Meccans, however, the Muslims decided to conquer that city in 630. According to Islamic tradition, it is at this point that the story of Ḥāṭib begins.¹⁶

The impending attack by the Muslims posed a problem for Ḥāṭib, since he feared this might endanger his family, who had not converted to Islam and had stayed in Mecca. He had further reason to fear for his relatives' lives as they—like Ḥāṭib himself—were not originally from Mecca and therefore had no automatic tribal protection from possible threats by Meccans who might want to take revenge for Ḥāṭib's conversion to Islam and his fighting against them. Islamic tradition has it that Ḥāṭib tried to solve his problem by secretly sending a letter to the Meccans to warn them of the attack at hand. By thus betraying the Muslims, he hoped to win the Meccans' favour and persuade them to protect his family. Muḥammad found out about this, however, and sent ‘Alī, al-Zubayr and perhaps¹⁷

¹⁶ The contextual story of Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana can be found in the *ḥadīth*-collections of both Muslim and al-Bukhārī. See *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, book 44 (“Kitāb Faḍā’il al-Ṣaḥāba”), chapter 36 (“Min Faḍā’il Ahl Badr...”), nos. 1 and 2; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. IV, book 52 (“Kitāb al-jihād”), chapter 141 (“al-Jāsūs”), no. 251; vol. IV, book 52, chapter 195 (“Idhā Uḍṭurra...”), no. 314; vol. V, book 59 (“Kitāb al-maghāzī”), chapter 8 (“Faḍl man shahida badran”), no. 319; vol. V, book 59, chapter 45 (“Ghazwat al-fath...”), no. 572; vol. VI, book 60 (“Kitāb al-tafsīr”), chapter 301 (“Lā tattakhidhū...”), no. 412; vol. VIII, book 74 (“Kitāb al-isti’dhān”), chapter 23 (“Man nazara fī kitāb...”), no. 276; vol. IX, book 84 (“Kitāb istatābat al-murtaddīn...”), chapter 9 (“Mā jā’a...”), no. 72.

¹⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. VI, book 60, chapter 301, no. 412 names only ‘Alī and al-Zubayr.

one other person (either al-Miqdād¹⁸ or Abū Marthad¹⁹) to retrieve this letter at Rawḍat Khākh.²⁰ They found it and brought it back to Muḥammad, who read it and subsequently asked Ḥāṭib for an explanation. The rest of the *ḥadīth* contains four crucial points that figure in all later exegetical attempts to make sense of Ḥāṭib's story: Ḥāṭib's explanation that he had only written the letter out of fear for his family in Mecca and that he had not done so out of disbelief or apostasy (*riḍḍa*); Muḥammad's statement that Ḥāṭib had spoken the truth about this; the remark by 'Umar, one of the Prophet's companions who would later become the second Caliph, that Ḥāṭib was a traitor who should be beheaded²¹; and Muḥammad's subsequent statement that Ḥāṭib had participated in the battle of Badr and that God had perhaps granted such men forgiveness, no matter what they do.²²

At first glance, Ḥāṭib's story may seem rather straightforward. The question is, however, why Ḥāṭib, who so obviously committed a major sin by betraying the Muslims and showing loyalty (*muwālāt*) to their enemies, is not declared an unbeliever (*kāfir*) by Muḥammad. What is interesting about the scholars who try to explain why Ḥāṭib was not accused of *kufur*, is that they all use the four crucial points from the *ḥadīth* mentioned above to "prove" that their interpretation is the correct one. The first of these scholars is Ibn al-'Arabī (1076-1148), who claims that Ḥāṭib was not declared a *kāfir* because his actions, which were undoubtedly sinful, did not emanate from

¹⁸) *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, book 44, chapter 36, no. 1; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. IV, book 52, chapter 141, no. 251; vol. V, book 59, chapter 45, no. 572; vol. VI, book 60, chapter 301, no. 412.

¹⁹) *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, book 44, chapter 36, no. 2; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. V, book 59, chapter 8, no. 319; vol. VIII, book 74, chapter 23, no. 276; vol. IX, book 84, chapter 9, no. 72.

²⁰) Referred to as "al-Rawḍa" in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. IV, book 52, chapter 195, no. 314; and as "Rawḍat Ḥājj" in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. IX, book 84, chapter 9, no. 72.

²¹) Some versions of this story have 'Umar say this twice: once before Muḥammad stated that Ḥāṭib had spoken the truth and once afterwards. See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. V, book 59, chapter 8, no. 319; vol. IX, book 84, chapter 9, no. 72.

²²) Some versions state that God may have granted such people Paradise. See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. VIII, book 74, chapter 23, no. 276; vol. IX, book 84, chapter 9, no. 72. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. V, book 59, chapter 8, no. 319 gives both phrases.

unbelief in his heart, as Ḥāṭib himself told Muḥammad. Since the Prophet confirmed that this was the truth, Muslims can safely assume that Ḥāṭib was indeed not lying. He had acted with the goal of saving his family in Mecca, which is a worldly motive (*gharad dunyawī*) and not sufficient reason for declaring someone an infidel (*takfīr*).²³ An exegete who agrees with this explanation is al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273), stating that a worldly motive for helping the enemy against the Muslims is in itself no reason for *takfīr*, provided the culprit believes in his heart.²⁴ In spite of his not being an infidel, however, both scholars do believe Ḥāṭib deserved punishment for his act. While al-Qurṭubī gives no conclusive answer as to why Ḥāṭib escaped punishment, Ibn al-‘Arabī believes the reason for this can be found in his participation in the battle of Badr. This, he believes, is the reason why Muḥammad rebukes ‘Umar for threatening to behead Ḥāṭib, a punishment that would normally have been justified.²⁵

An entirely different approach to the story of Ḥāṭib is taken by al-Jaṣṣāṣ (917-982), a medieval exegete who believes that Ḥāṭib was not spared from being labelled a *kāfir* by his believing heart but by his incorrect interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of Islam. He states that Ḥāṭib was apparently convinced that showing loyalty to the enemies of the Muslims to protect his family was allowed and that he would not cease to be a Muslim by doing so. Although Ḥāṭib was wrong in assuming this, he honestly believed it, a fact proven by Muḥammad’s confirmation of his words. Moreover, ‘Umar’s threat to execute Ḥāṭib was justified, which is why he made it in the first place, but was undone by the fact that Ḥāṭib had participated in the battle of Badr, as can be seen in Muḥammad’s statement that God may forgive such men whatever they do.²⁶

²³ Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh (Ibn al-‘Arabī), *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, vol. IV, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1996, pp. 225f.

²⁴ Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’ li-aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, vol. IX, book 18, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1988, p. 32.

²⁵ Ibn al-‘Arabī, pp. 225ff.

²⁶ Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Rāzī al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, vol. III, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1994, pp. 282f.

The relevance of this *ḥadīth* and its explanations becomes clear when the interpretations of the story of Ḥāṭib are extrapolated to the general question of *takfir*. If, as Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Qurṭubī contend, Ḥāṭib was saved from *takfir* by the belief in his heart, any modern-day lesson drawn from his story would have to include that one cannot decide whether someone is a *kāfir* or not unless one knows a person’s heart. Whereas the early Muslims could still rely on Muḥammad’s judgement in such situations, as they apparently did in the story of Ḥāṭib, this is obviously no longer the case. This means that as long as a Muslim does not openly admit to being an apostate, labelling him or her a *kāfir* is virtually impossible. If, on the other hand, al-Jaṣṣās is right and Ḥāṭib was spared the label of *kāfir* because he had made an incorrect interpretation, the situation is entirely different. In such a case, one could argue that it does not matter whether a Muslim’s sinful acts are supported by unbelief in his or her heart. Although this is not necessarily what al-Jaṣṣās intended, it does make *takfir* possible again since finding out about a person’s true beliefs is no longer needed as a condition to call someone a *kāfir*.²⁷

The latter interpretation is the one supported by al-Maqdisī and this is not a coincidence. Al-Maqdisī believes that the present-day political rulers of the Muslim world are infidels because they rule on the basis of un-Islamic laws. This, according to al-Maqdisī, is enough to declare them infidels since the Qur’ān itself says in *sūra* 5: 44 that “whoso judges not (*man lam yaḥkum*) according to what

²⁷ The debate on *kufir* in general is slightly more complicated than this since scholars consider some sins, such as concrete idol-worshipping, to be so great that it is no longer necessary to know whether such a sinner actually believes in his or her heart or not. This debate touches on questions such as the relation between actions and faith (*īmān*), what constitutes faith and whether it can increase and decrease or not. For an overview of Muslim thought on this, see L. Gardet, “*Īmān*”, in: B. Lewis, V.L. Ménage, Ch. Pellat & J. Schacht (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam—New Edition*, Vol. III, Leiden etc.: E.J. Brill, 1971, pp. 1170-1174, particularly pp. 1170f. For a treatment of this topic by a Muslim scholar who wrote extensively on this topic, see Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, vol. I, book II, Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-‘Uthmāniyya al-Miṣriyya, 1933, pp. 79-111.

God has sent down—they are the unbelievers (*al-kāfirūn*)”.²⁸ As al-Maqdisī interprets this verse as referring also to political rule that is not based on Islamic law (*sharīʿa*), he does not hesitate to apply *takfīr* to modern-day politicians.²⁹ He equates their actions with Ḥāṭib’s betrayal of the Muslims by stating that just as he showed loyalty to the enemies of the Muslims, so do political leaders show loyalty to man-made laws over those given by God. The only way al-Maqdisī can conclude this is by stating that politicians’ alleged sins should automatically lead to *takfīr*, with or without knowledge of any true belief in their hearts. If al-Maqdisī had supported the first interpretation of Ḥāṭib’s story, he would have required a concrete admission of unbelief from politicians, which is highly unlikely. Al-Maqdisī thus believes that political leaders are guilty of the same sin as Ḥāṭib, with one major difference: he contends that Ḥāṭib, who lived at a time when Islam was still developing, could use the excuse of misinterpretation to escape *takfīr*; modern-day politicians, however, who have the completed message of Islam at their disposal, cannot possibly do the same.³⁰

Because of interpretations such as al-Maqdisī’s, who is not the only *jihādī*-Salafī ideologue to espouse such ideas³¹, the story of Ḥāṭib has become quite important in Salafī discussions of this topic. In their treatment of the concept of *al-walāʾ wa-l-barāʾ*, al-Maqdisī’s ideological opponents within the Salafī movement stress that Ḥāṭib’s act cannot be called downright loyalty to the *kuffār* since that would require unbelief in one’s heart.³² Al-Maqdisī’s hotly contested inter-

²⁸ This quotation and any subsequent ones were taken from A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, New York: Touchstone, 1996 (1955).

²⁹ For a more elaborate explanation of this view, see for example Abū Muḥammad al-Maqdisī, *Imtāʾ al-naẓr fī kashf shubuhāt murjīʾat al-ʿaṣr*, www.tawhed.ws (accessed 31-10-2007), 1999/2000 (1991/1992), pp. 116-123; *ibid.*, *Tabṣīr al-ʿuqalāʾ bi-talbisāt ahl al-tajabbhum wa-l-irjāʾ*, www.tawhed.ws (accessed 31-10-2007), 1996, pp. 104-133.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, *al-Shihāb al-thāqib fī l-radd ʿalā man iftarā ʿalā l-Ṣaḥābī Ḥāṭib*, www.tawhed.ws (accessed 31-10-2007), 1996, pp. 10ff.

³¹ A relatively extensive treatment of the story of Ḥāṭib can for example be found in the writings of the first leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihād Group, ʿAbd al-Qādir b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. See his *Jāmiʿ fī ṭalab al-ʿilm al-sharīf*, vol. II, pp. 717-723.

³² See for example Wasīm Faṭḥ Allāh, *al-Walāʾ wa-l-barāʾ fī sūrat al-mumtaḥana*, www.tawhed.ws (accessed 31-10-2007), n.d., “al-Faṣl al-awwal: al-barāʾa min mawaddat al-kuffār

pretation of *walā'*, as well as his opponents' views on this subject, are all part of a wider Salafī debate on *kufṛ*, *takfīr* and the potential political consequences of these concepts.³³ The full implications of al-Maqdisī's views on *walā'* cannot be seen, however, unless they are contextualized with his ideas on *barā'*, which he mostly takes from Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana.

Explaining the Text: Who is the Enemy?

Several versions of the story of Ḥāṭib b. Abī Balta'a state that this chain of events led directly to the revelation of the first verse of Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana³⁴, which states

O believers, take not My enemy and your enemy for friends (*awliyā'*), offering them love (*mawadda*), though they have disbelieved (*qad kafarū*) in the truth that has come to you, expelling the Messenger and you because you believe in God your Lord (*an tu'minūna bi-llāh rabbikum*). If you go forth to struggle in My way (*in kuntum kharajtum jihādan fi sabīli*) and seek My good pleasure, secretly loving them (*tusīrrūna ilayhim bi-l-mawadda*), yet I know very well what you conceal and what you publish; and whosoever of you does that, has gone astray from the right way (*al-sabīl*).

The connection between Ḥāṭib's story and this verse can clearly be seen in its text. Ḥāṭib's contacts with the Meccans are referred to ("take not My enemy and your enemy for friends, offering them love") as well as their unbelief ("they have disbelieved in the truth") and their hostilities towards the Muslims ("expelling the Messenger

muṭlaqan", pp. 1f.; Abū 'Abdallāh 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abd al-Khāliq, *al-Walā' wa-l-barā'*, www.salafi.net (accessed 31-10-2007), 1986, p. 10; Ḥāṭim b. 'Arīf al-'Awnī, *al-Walā' wa-l-barā' bayna l-ghulūw wa-l-jafā'*, www.themul.org (accessed 31-10-2007), 2005, pp. 79-87; *ibid.*, *al-Walā' wa-l-barā' (bayn al-samāḥa wa-l-ghulūw)*, www.saa'id.net (accessed 31-10-2007), 2005, pp. 46ff.

³³ For examples of Salafī writings that discuss this topic in a way critical of al-Maqdisī's reasoning, see the website www.salafipublications.com (accessed 31-10-2007), which contains articles such as "Imaam Ibn Baz on Imaan, Kufr, Irjaa' and the Murji'ah", "A Treatise on Ruling by Other than What Allaah has Revealed" and "Shaikh Ibn 'Uthaymeen on al-Hukmu Bi-Ghayri Maa Anzallallah".

³⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, book 44, chapter 36, no. 1; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. V, book 59, chapter 45, no. 572; vol. VI, book 60, chapter 301, no. 412 and 413.

and you because you believe in God your Lord”). The verse also points out that Ḥāṭib’s secret plan was no use (“yet I know very well what you conceal and what you publish”) and that God considers such actions deviations (“whosoever of you does that, has gone astray from the right way”).

The rest of the *sūra*, which consists of 13 verses, can be divided into five different parts. The first part (verses 1-3) basically expands on the words mentioned above by warning the Muslims once more against the Meccans’ evil intentions (verse 2), stating that family ties—the reason Ḥāṭib wrote his letter—“shall not profit you upon the Day of Resurrection” and that “God sees the things you do” (verse 3). The second part of the *sūra* (verses 4-6) tells the Muslims of Medina how they should behave towards the pagans in Mecca. It points to the “good example” (*uswa ḥasana*) of Abraham, who disavowed his own people and their idolatry (“We are quit of you (*innā bura’ā’u minkum*) and that you serve, apart from God”) and stated that there would be “enmity and hatred” (*al-‘adāwa wa-l-baghḍā’*) between them until they accepted God alone (verse 4). Forgiveness is asked for in verse 5 while the next one refers to the example of Abraham again. The third part of *sūra* 60 consists of verses 7-9. The first two of these soften Muslim-pagan relations as described in the preceding verses somewhat by pointing out that God might bring “love” (*mawadda*) between the warring parties again (verse 7) and that he allows friendly relations with those Meccans who did not fight the Muslims for their religion (verse 8). God does prohibit, however, that those Meccans who fought the Muslims because of their Islamic beliefs, threw them out of their houses or aided others in doing so be taken as friends. This is because “whosoever takes them for friends, those—they are the evildoers” (verse 9).

Verses 10-12 form the fourth part of the *sūra* and command the believers to test the Muslim women who flee to Medina after the treaty of Ḥudaybiyya, since it was stipulated in this treaty that Meccans joining the Muslims should be sent back. This *sūra* commands, however, that if such a tested woman (*al-mumtaḥana*, hence the name of the *sūra*) is indeed a true Muslima, she should be

accepted into the community and not be sent back to Mecca.³⁵ Muslims should, on the other hand, not remain married to unbelieving women but should sever ties with them (verses 10 and 12). Unbelieving women fleeing the Medinan community for Mecca should be left to go, however (verse 11). The fifth and final part of the *sūra* is formed by verse 13. It points out again that Muslims should not take certain people as their friends. As the focus in this article will be on the definition of the Muslims' enemies in *Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana* by the classical exegetes, Wahhābīs and al-Maqdisī, verses 10-13 will not be dealt with since they do not really focus on this topic.³⁶

The Exegetes' "Enemies"

Several verses in *Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana* refer specifically to the "enemy" (*adūw*, verse 1) or "enemies" (*a'dā'*, verse 2) of the Muslims or to people whom the Muslims view with "enmity" (*adāwa*, verse 4; *adaytum minhum*, verse 7). We can get an idea of what kind of people these words refer to by looking at verses 1, 8 and 9 in more detail since they describe who the enemies of the Muslims are, while verse 4 tells the Muslims how they should deal with them. Because of the clear links between verse 1, the Mecca-Medina rivalry in general and the story of Ḥāṭib in particular, it seems obvious that the enemies referred to in this verse are Meccans. The verse further informs us that they are not Muslims ("they have disbelieved") and have fought the Muslims because of their religion ("because you

³⁵ The verses 10-12 should probably be seen in the context of the violation of the treaty of Ḥudaybiyya by a tribe allied to the Quraysh. As mentioned, the treaty stipulated that any Qurayshites who joined the Muslims in Medina without permission from their guardians were to be sent back but Muslims who went back to Mecca could stay there. After the violation of the treaty, this verse probably served as a reason to change this lopsided situation. See Maxime Rodinson, *Muḥammad* (transl. Anne Carter), London etc.: I.B. Tauris, 2002 (1971), pp. 649-652.

³⁶ Verse 13 looks similar to verse 1 but is described by almost all exegetes whose writings were consulted for this article as referring to the Jews. Several scholars state that this verse was not revealed to Ḥāṭib but to 'Abdallāh b. Ubayy. See for example *Tanwīr al-miqbās min tafsīr b. 'Abbās*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1987, p. 468; Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, vol. IV, n.p.: al-Hay' at al-Miṣriyya al-Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1988, p. 307.

believe in God your Lord”). This last part is significant because it leaves other *kuffār*, who did not fight the Muslims because of their religion or refrained from hostilities altogether, outside the realm of enemies. Verse 1 therefore seems to suggest that the enemies mentioned here are the unbelieving Meccans who fought the Muslims because of their religion and not for any other reason. This is also what almost all works of *tafsīr* consulted for this article conclude. They usually simply confirm the text with a few words of their own.³⁷ Quṭb (1906-1966), however, stresses this point by explaining that “they expelled the messenger and the believers only because they believed in God their Lord. [...] That is what the polytheists fought them for, not for any other reason.”³⁸ I have only found one exception to this almost universal conclusion by the exegetes, namely Ibn Kathīr (1300-1373), who equates *sūra* 60: 1 with *sūra*

³⁷ *Tanwīr al-Miqbās*, p. 466; Muqātil, p. 299; Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta‘wil āy al-Qur‘ān*, vol. XXVIII, n.p.: Sharikat Maktabat wa-Maṭba‘at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Awladīhi bi-Miṣr, 1968, p. 57; Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*, vol. XIX, Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-A‘lā li-l-Maṭbū‘at, 1991, p. 236; Nāṣir al-Dīn Abī l-Khayr ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Umar b. Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta‘wil*, vol. II, Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Maymūniyya, 1902, p. 314; al-Jalīl Muḥyī al-Sunna Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn b. Mas‘ūd al-Farrā’ al-Baghawī al-Shāfi‘ī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, vol. IV, Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa, 1995, p. 329; Abū Iṣḥāq Aḥmad (Imām al-Tha‘labī), *al-Kaṣf wa-l-bayān*, vol. IX, Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2002, p. 292; Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Maḥallī & Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-jalālayn*, Beirut: Maktabat al-Mathanī & Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d., p. 729; Abū Zakāriyā’ Yahyā b. Ziyād al-Farrā’, *Ma‘ānī al-Qur‘ān*, vol. III, n.p.: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1972, p. 149; al-Qurtubī, p. 36; Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī, *Tafsīr al-marāghī*, vol. XXVIII, n.p. Sharikat Maktabat wa-Maṭba‘at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Awladīhi, 1946, pp. 60-61; Niẓām al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Qummī al-Nīsābūrī, *Tafsīr gharā‘ib al-Qur‘ān wa-raghā‘ib al-furqān*, vol. VI, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1996, p. 291; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Makhluṭ Abī Zayd al-Tha‘alībī al-Malikī, *Tafsīr al-Tha‘alībī*, vol. V, Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī & Mu‘assasat al-Tārikh al-‘Arabī, 1997, p. 417; al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī, *Jawāmi‘ al-jāmi‘ fī tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-mujayyad*, vol. II, Beirut: Dār al-Idwā’ li-l-Ṭabā‘a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 1992, p. 596; *ibid.*, *Majma‘ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*, vol. IX, Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī & Mu‘assasat al-Tārikh al-‘Arabī, 1992, p. 342; Abū l-Faḍl Shihāb al-Dīn al-Sayyid Maḥmūd al-Alūsī al-Baghdādī, *Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī—Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-‘aẓīm wa-l-sab‘ al-mathānī*, vol. XXVIII, Beirut: Idārat al-Ṭibā‘a al-Muniriyya & Dār al-Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabiyya, 1970, p. 67.

³⁸ Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī zilāl al-Qur‘ān*, vol. VI, Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1980/1981, p. 3540.

5: 51, which deals with Jews and Christians in similar words. The implication of this is that, according to Ibn Kathīr, verse 1 can be seen as referring to a much broader group of enemies, including all unbelievers and not just the pagan Meccans who had fought the Muslims for their religion.³⁹

The question of who the enemies in *sūra* 60 are becomes more complicated as the verses become more specific. Whereas the exegetes are almost unanimous in their explanation of verse 1, this is certainly not the case with verses 8 and 9. These state that

God forbids you not, as regards those who have not fought you in religion's cause (*fi l-dīn*), nor expelled you from your habitations, that you should be kindly to them (*tabarrūhum*), and act justly to them (*tuqṣitū ilayhim*) [...] (8) God only forbids you as to those who have fought you in religion's cause, and expelled you from your habitations, and have supported in your expulsion, that you should take them for friends (*tawallawhum*). [...] (9)

Several exegetes state that these verses refer to a number of tribes with whom Muḥammad had established a pact before the treaty of Ḥudaybiyya and who had not been involved in the violation of the latter. Verse 8, according to these exegetes, thus confirms that the Muslims are allowed to remain on friendly terms with these tribes.⁴⁰ Some of the exegetes who apply verse 8 to specific tribes explain the enmity mentioned in both verse 8 and 9 as emanating from hostility towards the Muslims because of their religion.⁴¹ Most scholars dealing with this issue, however, apply these verses to those Meccans who fought the Muslims (without focussing on any particular reason why) or to the pagans in Mecca in general.⁴² In fact, there are even exegetes who interpret verse 8 as referring to enemies

³⁹ 'Imād al-Dīn Abū l-Fidā' Ismā'il b. Kathīr al-Qurashī al-Dimashqī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿaẓīm*, vol. IV, Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifā, 1991, p. 371.

⁴⁰ *Tanwīr al-miqbās*, p. 467; al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-bayān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. IX, Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī & Mu'assasat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabī, 1992, pp. 343f.; al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, p. 243; al-Marāghī, p. 70; Muqātil, p. 302; al-Nisābūrī, p. 292; al-Tha'libī, p. 420; al-Farrā', p. 150.

⁴¹ *Tanwīr al-miqbās*, p. 467; al-Marāghī, p. 70.

⁴² Al-Tha'libī, p. 420; al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma'*, pp. 343f.; al-Baghawī, pp. 331f.; al-Farrā', p. 150; al-Tha'labī, p. 294; *Jalālayn*, pp. 730f.; al-Ṭabarī, pp. 65ff.

who fought the Muslims for religious reasons but who apply verse 9 to all (hostile) pagans in Mecca⁴³ and *vice versa*.⁴⁴ The interpretation of verse 8 is further complicated by the theory of “the abrogating and the abrogated” (*al-nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*), according to which the problem of contradictory verses is solved by replacing the one that came first by a later verse. Several exegetes claim that verse 8 was abrogated by *sūra* 9: 5, which seems to have a more aggressive character and does not distinguish between hostile and friendly pagans.⁴⁵

In spite of the different interpretations of verses 8 and 9, there is a general tendency among the exegetes to explain the verses in the context of Mecca-Medina conflicts. This leads most of them to apply the enmity spoken of in this *sūra* to the polytheists in Mecca, the hostile polytheists from that town or only the ones that are hostile because of the Muslims’ religion. Just like with verse 1, however, one exception was found among the exegetes who tried to explain this issue and again it was Ibn Kathīr. Once more, this scholar broadens the definition of the Muslims’ enemies by including not only polytheists from Mecca or even in general but also non-Muslim monotheists by equating verse 9 with *sūra* 5: 51, which refers specifically to Jews and Christians.⁴⁶

⁴³ Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, p. 243; Muqātil, p. 302.

⁴⁴ Al-Qurṭubī, p. 40.

⁴⁵ The words from *sūra* 9: 5 often quoted by the exegetes are “...slay the idolaters wherever you find them...”. See Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. al-Ṣan‘ānī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘azīz*, vol. II, Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa, 1991, p. 230; Ibn al-‘Arabī, p. 227; al-Jaṣṣāṣ, p. 584; al-Nisābūrī, p. 292; al-Tha‘alibī, p. 420; al-Ṭabārī, pp. 65-66; al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, p. 243. It is obvious, of course, that this verse should also be viewed within its context.

⁴⁶ Ibn Kathīr, p. 374; there was one other author with an explanation that clashed with the literal text somewhat by stating that verses 8 and 9 *commanded* the Muslims to intensify their struggle with their enemies, except for those who have been useful to them. This explanation, though different from that of the rest, cannot really be considered as an attempt to broaden the group of enemies, however. See Imām al-Qushayrī, *Latā’if al-ishārāt—Tafsīr ṣūfi kāmil li-l-Qur’ān al-karīm*, vol. VI, n.p.: al-Hay’at al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma li-l-Ta’līf wa-l-Nashr, 1970, pp. 140f.

The Wahhābīs' "Enemies"

It is not clear what the exact influence of Ibn Kathīr's diverging interpretation of Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana has been. What is sure, however, is that interpreting parts of *sūra* 60 as pertaining not just to Meccan polytheists but also to other non-Muslims became more widespread among later scholars. The most prominent of these were (and are) the Wahhābīs, who have been heavily influenced by scholars like Ibn Kathīr, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) and their teacher Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328). As mentioned before, Wahhābī scholars attach great value to purifying Islam and have used the concept of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* to achieve this. In their efforts to rid Islam of religious innovations, Wahhābīs have applied *barā'* to unbelievers to make sure that Muslims would not be influenced by their supposedly corrupting religious practices and forms of worship.⁴⁷ One of the Qur'ānic passages they cite as proof of the correctness of their ideas is *sūra* 60: 4, which states that

You have had a good example in Abraham, and those with him, when they said to their people, 'We are quit of you and that you serve (*innā burā' ā'u minkum wa mimmā ta'budūna*), apart from God (*min dūn Allāh*). We disbelieve in you (*kafarnā bikum*), and between us and you enmity (*al-'adāwa*) has shown itself, and hatred (*al-baghdā'*) for ever, until you believe in God alone (*ḥatta tu'minūna bi-llāh waḥdahū*).' [...]

Read in the context of the rest of Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana, this verse should be seen as an alternative to Ḥātib's loyalty to the Meccans and as an example for the Muslims in Medina of how they should deal with their enemies. These enemies, as we have seen above, were almost unanimously seen as the (hostile) pagans from Mecca. Since Islamic tradition has it that Abraham decided to follow God while living among polytheists, just as the Muslims were to do under the direction of Muḥammad in the 7th century, his situation was comparable to the one in which the early Muslims on the Arabian Peninsula lived. This is what makes Abraham's disavowal of his pagan

⁴⁷ An early and influential pre-Wahhābī example of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* applied to Jews and Christians can be seen in Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taymiyya, *Iqtidā' al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm mukhālafat ashāb al-jahīm*, www.tawhed.ws (accessed 31-10-2007), n.d.

surroundings such a good example for Ḥaṭīb and his fellow believers, who were struggling to find the correct way to deal with their enemies. It is therefore only natural to assume that verse 4 informs us that Abraham disavowed the pagan religion and the idols of his people and not other religions in general. This is, in fact, the almost unanimous conclusion of the exegetes consulted for this article, who view Abraham's disavowal as directed at idols (*ṭawāghīt*, *awṭhān*, *aṣnām*), other gods (*ālīha*), partners (*andād*), stars (*kawākīb*), the specific religion of Abraham's people (*dīnakum*) or a combination of these terms or similar, semantically related words.⁴⁸

In spite of the narrow interpretation given by the exegetes, Wahhābīs also apply the example of Abraham to situations other than the one in Mecca and Medina in the 7th century and, more importantly, to non-Muslims in general. Early Wahhābī scholars, such as Ibn 'Atīq (d. 1883) and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb himself, are still aware of the context of *sūra* 60: 4 and see it as an answer to idolatry, although they do not mention hostility on the part of the polytheists as a condition for disavowal.⁴⁹ Later Wahhābī scholars, however, tend to apply verse 4 randomly as an answer to any un-Islamic influence, person or religious custom as part of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'*. Some of these scholars quote verse 4 in connection with supposedly obligatory enmity towards vague notions such as “the enemies of God” (*a'dā' Allāh*)⁵⁰ but others are much more specific in their attempts to broaden the definition of “the enemies”. The most prominent of the latter is probably Ibn Bāz (d. 1999), a former

⁴⁸ Qurṭb, p. 3542; al-Baghawī, p. 330; *Tanwīr al-miqbās*, p. 467; Ibn Kathīr, p. 372; Muqātil, p. 300; al-Marāghī, pp. 65f.; al-Qurṭubī, p. 38; al-Tha'ālībī, p. 419; al-Tha'labī, p. 293; al-Ṭabarī, p. 62; al-Ṭabrisī, *Jawāmi'*, p. 596; al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma'*, pp. 342f.; al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, p. 239; al-Alūsī, p. 70; al-Bayḍāwī, p. 315. The one exception I found was al-Qushayrī, p. 139, who states that this verse refers to the good example of “Abraham and the prophets before him when they disavowed the unbelievers and their people”.

⁴⁹ See Ḥamd b. 'Alī b. 'Atīq, *Sabil al-najā' wa-l-fikāk min muwālāt al-murtaddīn wa-l-atrāk*, www.tawhed.us (accessed 31-10-2007), n.d., “Faṣl: Wa hādha awān al-shurā' fi l-maqṣūd...”, pp. 4ff.; Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Risāla fi ma'nā al-ṭāghūt*, www.tawhed.us (accessed 31-10-2007), n.d., p. 1.

⁵⁰ See for example Ḥumūd al-Tawjīrī, *Tuḥfat al-ikhwān bi-mā jā'a fi l-muwālat*, www.tawhed.us (accessed 31-10-2007), 1963, chapter 1, p. 1; Ṣāliḥ b. Fawzān al-Fawzān, *al-Walā' wa-l-barā' fi l-islām*, www.saa'id.net (accessed 31-10-2007), n.d., p. 2.

Saudi grand *mufī* (Islamic legal advisor), who uses verse 4 to “prove” that Muslims should follow Abraham in showing “enmity” and “hatred” to “unbelievers” in general.⁵¹ He even applies *sūra* 60: 4 specifically to Jews and other religions, arguing explicitly against inter-religious dialogue, thereby completely ignoring the verse’s original context of (hostile) pagans from Mecca in the 7th century.⁵²

Al-Maqdisī’s “Enemies”

The interpretation of *Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana* verse 4 by many Wahhābīs is clearly devoid of any consideration for the story of Ḥāṭib or its general context. Still, at least the Wahhābī interpretations remained in the religious sphere, which cannot be said of al-Maqdisī’s explanation of *sūra* 60: 4, which is the basis of his version of *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’*. In al-Maqdisī’s view, verse 4—the only part of this *sūra* he really quotes frequently—should also be applied in a political context. As we have seen in al-Maqdisī’s interpretation of the story of Ḥāṭib, he believes that present-day political rulers should be seen as *kuffār* because of their loyalty to man-made laws over those of the *sharī’a*. Al-Maqdisī takes the matter even further by stating that rulers are not only infidels but also idols. He justifies this by quoting *sūra* 9: 31, which states that Jews and Christians “have taken their rabbis and their monks as lords (*arbāban*) apart from God [...]”. To al-Maqdisī, this means that sources of legislation, be they rabbis, monks or political rulers, should really be seen as “lords” or, more specifically, idols or gods apart from God. The fact that Jews and Christians did not actually worship their religious leaders is, according

⁵¹ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Bāz, *Mā’nā al-walā’ wa-l-barā’*, www.binbaz.org.sa (accessed 31-10-2007), n.d., p. 1. This opinion is shared by other Wahhābī scholars. See for example Ibn ‘Abd al-Khāliq, p. 20; Muhammad [b.] Saeed (*sic*) al-Qahtani, *al-Walā’ wa-l-Barā’* (*sic*) *According to the ‘Aqeedah (sic) of the Salaf*, London: al-Firdous Ltd., 1999, p. 82.

⁵² See respectively Ibn Bāz, *Wujūb ‘adawat al-yahūd wa-l-mushrikīn wa-ghayrihim min al-kuffār*, www.binbaz.org.sa (accessed 31-10-2007), n.d., p. 1; *Ibid.*, *Tā’qīb ‘alā maqālat al-Shaykh Jād al-Ḥaqq Shaykh al-Azhar bi-‘unwān: ‘Alāqat al-islām bi-l-adyān al-ukhrā*, www.binbaz.org.sa (accessed 31-10-2007), n.d., p. 1.

to al-Maqdisī, apparently no objection to seeing the latter as idols (*ṭawāghīt*).⁵³

Al-Maqdisī thus believes that political rule through man-made laws can be equated with creating an idol of oneself since other people follow this legislation, which should be seen as a form of worship. On the basis of this argument, al-Maqdisī concludes that there is no Islamic rule in the entire Muslim world and that all rulers of Islamic countries are really *ṭawāghīt*, thereby making politicians the real enemies in Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana.⁵⁴ This conclusion is entirely different from the explanations of verse 4 given by any of the exegetes or scholars cited so far. Still, al-Maqdisī does interpret the verse as referring to idol-worshipping again. This not only entails that his ideology presents rulers as fundamentally un-Islamic because of their supposed violation of the absolute monotheism of God (*tawḥīd*) but it also makes al-Maqdisī seem consistent with both earlier writings on Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana, which also saw verse 4 as directed at idols and idolatry, as well as the Qurʾān itself. This is why al-Maqdisī is able to mix his own ideas with the literal text of verse 4, coming up with statements such as

To the idols (*ṭawāghīt*) in every time and place...

To the idols[:] rulers, princes, emperors (*qayāsir wa-akāsira*), faraos and kings ...

To their fallacious keepers (*sadanatihim*) and their scholars (*ʿulamāʾihim*) ...

To their friends (*awliyāʾihim*), their armies, their police, their secret services and their guards...

To all of them... we say:

“We are quit of you and that you serve, apart from God”

Quit of your rotten laws, methods, constitutions and principles...

Quit of your rotten governments, courts, slogans and media...

“We disbelieve in you, and between us and you enmity has shown itself, and hatred for ever, until you believe in God alone”⁵⁵

⁵³ Al-Maqdisī, *al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya dīn*, www.tawhed.ws (accessed 31-10-2007), n.d., “Faṣl: Fī bayān aṣl al-uṣūl...”, pp. 1ff.

⁵⁴ Ibid., *Imtāʿ*, p. 50.

⁵⁵ Ibid., *Millat Ibrāhīm*, www.tawhed.ws (accessed 31-10-2007), 1984/1985, “Barāʾa”, p. 1.

Al-Maḡdisī even goes so far as to paraphrase the actual words of *sūra* 60: 4 by stating that

We disbelieve in you and your infidel constitutions and between us and you enmity has shown itself, and hatred for ever, until you return to the legislation of God the most high alone [...].⁵⁶

Al-Maḡdisī's attempts to look and sound consistent with the sources while actually moving away from their traditional interpretation goes even further in his version of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'*, in which all his major ideas converge. Using verse 4 as the basis of his ideology, he states that Muslims need to emulate Abraham. The exhortation to follow "the religion of Abraham" (*millat Ibrāhīm*) can not just be found in *sūra* 60: 4 but also in other verses, such as 2: 130 and 16: 123. Al-Maḡdisī, however, probably took the idea from Juhaymān al-'Uṭaybī, who proposed it years before him.⁵⁷ According to al-Maḡdisī, the *millat Ibrāhīm* consists of "loyalty (*ikhḷās*) to the worship of God alone in every meaning that the word worship encompasses" and "disavowal of polytheism and its people", in other words: *al-walā' wa-l-barā'*.⁵⁸ As we have seen in his interpretation of the story of Ḥāṭib, al-Maḡdisī sees adherence to un-Islamic laws as misplaced *walā'* and believes that politicians guilty of this are *kuffār*. Moreover, al-Maḡdisī's interpretation of *sūra* 60: 4 means that the example of Abraham's disavowal should first and foremost be applied to the political rulers who, apart from being infidels, are also idols.⁵⁹ The best way of following Abraham in showing *barā'* to idols and their followers is, according to al-Maḡdisī, *jihād* since this is the clearest

⁵⁶ Ibid., *Kashf al-niqāb 'an sharī'at al-ghāb*, www.tawhed.ws (accessed 31-10-2007), 1988, p. 157.

⁵⁷ See Juhaymān al-'Uṭaybī, *Raf' al-iltibās 'an milla min ja'lihi llāh imāman li-l-nās*, www.tawhed.ws (accessed 31-10-2007), n.d.

⁵⁸ Al-Maḡdisī, *Millat*, "al-Faṣl al-awwal", p. 1.

⁵⁹ This part of al-Maḡdisī's ideology is central to everything else and can therefore be found in most of his writings. For clear examples of this, see for instance al-Maḡdisī, *Hidāyat al-ḥalīm ilā aḥamm al-muhimmāt fī millat Ibrāhīm*, www.tawhed.ws (accessed 31-10-2007), 1995, pp. 2-5; Ibid., *Barā'at al-muwahḥidīn min 'uhūd al-ṭawāghīt wa-amānihim li-l-muḥāribīn*, www.tawhed.ws (accessed 31-10-2007), 2002, pp. 9f.

way of showing disavowal from everything that deviates from the unadulterated *tawhīd* of God.⁶⁰

Al-Maḳḳisī's *jihādī*-Salafī interpretation of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* as based on *sūra* 60: 4—calling for *jihād* against the political rulers of the Islamic world he considers infidels and idols—is quite different from the Wahhābī version of the concept. Because al-Maḳḳisī frames his own ideas on *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* with religious terminology (*kufr*, *shirk*, *ṭawāghīt*), however, he seemingly does not deviate from Wahhābīsm at all but paints himself as being firmly rooted in that tradition. Furthermore, because the idea of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* and its basis in *sūra* 60: 4 are so widespread among Wahhābī scholars, al-Maḳḳisī can quote them abundantly to support his case while actually deviating greatly from their opinions and conclusions. He quotes 'Abd al-Laṭīf Āl al-Shaykh (1810-1876), for instance, to stress the need for Muslims to be hostile to polytheists⁶¹ and cites 'Abd al-Raḥmān Āl al-Shaykh (1779-1869) to support his case for disavowal and *jihād* against them.⁶² Despite the fact that these men would probably not have agreed with his interpretation, al-Maḳḳisī thus makes his “enemies” in *Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana* seem the same as those of the Wahhābī scholars he so admires.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid., “al-Faṣl al-thālith”, p. 4; Ibid., *al-Kawāshif al-jaliyya fī kufr al-dawla al-Sa'ūdiyya*, www.tawhed.ws (accessed 31-10-2007), 2000/2001 (1989/1990), pp. 114, 143; Ibid., *Tabṣīr*, p. 143.

⁶¹ Ibid., *Millat*, “al-Faṣl al-awwal”, p. 1. His full name is 'Abd al-Laṭīf b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb. He was a great-grandson of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb.

⁶² Ibid., p. 5. His full name is 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb, a grandson of Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb. See also al-Maḳḳisī's other writings, especially *Millat Ibrāhīm*, which contains dozens of references to Wahhābī scholars.

⁶³ Al-Maḳḳisī goes to great lengths to portray himself as rooted in the Wahhābī tradition of the Arabian Peninsula, even stating that he is originally from the Saudi region of Najd. See al-Maḳḳisī, *Kawāshif*, p. 8. Interestingly, this book was originally published under the pseudonym “'Abū l-Barā' al-Najdī”, a further attestation of the importance that al-Maḳḳisī attaches to *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* as well as his supposedly Najdī roots.

Conclusion

This article has shown that the exact meaning of both the contextual story of Ḥāṭib b. Abī Balta‘a and the text of Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana is controversial. Whereas most scholars explain the *ḥadīth* of Ḥāṭib in such a way that true unbelief in a person’s heart is needed to call someone a *kāfir*, Abū Muḥammad al-Maqdisī disagrees and uses his own interpretation to justify *takfir* of modern-day politicians because of their adherence to and rule through man-made laws. The same applies to the “enemies” in Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana, who are viewed by most exegetes as the 7th-century idolaters from Mecca who challenged the Muslims in Medina. Many Wahhābīs, however, leave the historical Meccan dimension out of their own readings of *sūra* 60 by applying verse 4 to unbelievers in general as part of their interpretation of *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’*. Al-Maqdisī goes even further in this by adding a political dimension to verse 4. He deems politicians not only infidels because they follow man-made laws but also considers them to be idols because of their role in creating these laws and demanding others’ adherence to them, which he equates with polytheistic worship. This way, he turns contemporary political rulers into what he sees as the true enemies of Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana. According to al-Maqdisī, the best way to challenge these enemies is by waging *jihād* against them since this is the highest form of *barā’*. Al-Maqdisī thus uses the religious concept of *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’* to turn a *sūra* about 7th-century idol-worshippers from Mecca into a radical theory to overthrow the political rulers of the Muslim world.

In spite of the fact that al-Maqdisī’s unorthodox opinions of Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana as well as his interpretation of *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’* show a distinct lack of attention for the context in which *sūra* 60 was allegedly revealed, he does display a clever use of the sources. His views are clearly very different from those espoused by exegetes and Wahhābī scholars. Yet by painting modern-day politicians as exponents of *shirk*, his opinion on who the real enemies of Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana are, is seemingly quite similar to the one held by most exegetes. This becomes particularly clear in al-Maqdisī’s interpretation of *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’*, which he consciously positions in Wahhābī tradition. By portraying himself as doing nothing more

than taking *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* to its natural consequences, he appears to be firmly rooted in Wahhābī tradition, while in fact deviating greatly from it. Although a detailed look at al-Maqdisī's radical reading of Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana and *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* reveals a clear break with both Wahhābism and traditional Islamic scholarship, his adoption of the Wahhābī mantle is sure to increase his religious stature in the eyes of many.