FATHI YAKAN
THE PIONEER OF ISLAMIC ACTIVISM IN LEBANON

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Abstract

This article explores the ideology of Fathi Yakan, the pioneer of Sunni Islamism in Lebanon and a principal founder of the Islamist party al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*. It also traces the establishment of* al_Jama'a *as the first organized Islamist party in Lebanon. As Secretary General of* al-Jama'a*, Fathi Yakan blazed the ideological trail for Islamism's participation in Lebanon's political realm. Significantly, Yakan's political activism, in much the same vein as that of Druze "Socialist" Kamal Jumblat, was also more about removing Maronite hegemony over the state.*

THE IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF FATHI YAKAN

The ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, as articulated by Hasan al-Bannah and Sayyid Qutb, formed the core of the ideological foundation out of which Fathi Yakan's Islamic activism and orientation had been expressed. Yakan, like Bannah and Qutb, believed that the Islamic *Ummah* had lost its civilizational luster and become weak because Muslims had digressed from the principles and tenets of Islam as set forth by Prophet Muhammad and the righteous *salaf* (first generation of Muslims.) Yakan, like Bannah and Qutb, emphasized the early Muslim community as the political paradigm to be emulated. Nevertheless, Yakan's philosophy of Islamic activism did not neatly overlap with that of the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly with relation to the concept *Jahiliyah* (the age of ignorance before God's message to Prophet Muhammad) as expounded by Qutb.

Yakan embraced and built upon the definition of Bannah's Islamic movement. Bannah based the ideology of the Brotherhood on three principles: a) Islam is a comprehensive system; b) Islam emanates from and is based on two fundamental sources, the Koran and the Sunnah (Prophetic Tradition); and c) Islam is applicable to all times and places.[1] He described his movement as a Salafiyyah message, a Sunni way, a Sufi reality, a political

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[1] Zakariya Sulayman Bayyumi, *Al-Ikwan al-Muslimun wa al-Jama'at al-Islamiyah fi al-Hayat al-Siyasiyah al-Misriyah, 1928-1948* (The Muslim Brothers and the Islamic Association in the Egyptian Political Life, 1928-1948) (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1979), p. 90.

organization, an athletic group, a scientific and cultural society, an economic enterprise and a social idea. This protean exposition so as to appeal to "all men" underlined the universal program of the Brotherhood that sought to "internationalize" the movement by stressing the liberation of the whole Islamic world from foreign control and to institute an Islamic government.[2]

Yakan, a founder of the Islamic Association (*al-Jama'a al-Islamiyah*) in Lebanon, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, regarded Bannah as "an eternal leader, the pre-eminent one in the history of Islam in the Twentieth century […] for he built a *Da'wa* (Islamic propagation), created a [new] generation [of Muslims] and shook the modern history of Egypt."[3] Centering his definition of the Islamic movement on Bannah's ideology, he described the Islamic Association "as an Islamic movement, whose message is Islam and whose objective is to help people worship God as individuals and groups by establishing the Islamic community, which derives its rules and teachings from the book of Allah and His Prophet's Sunnah..."[4] Yakan added that the Islamic Association seeks a) to propagate clearly and wholesomely to the people the call for Islam, as related to the problems of the era and the requirements of the future; b) to organize, educate and nurture those who responded to the *Da'wa* as the vanguard... to forge an Islamic public opinion; c) to confront the challenge of Western civilization...; and d) to rally the different Muslim sects by going back to the fundamentals of Islam.[5]

In much the same vein, like Bannah, Yakan considered Islamic activism as essential since Islam had been fighting a fateful battle. But he leaned more toward the actionable ideology of Qutb to face the challenges of this fateful battle. Building on Abu al-A'la Mawdudi's reinterpretation of the Muslim term *Jahiliyah* (the age of ignorance before God's message to Prophet Muhammad,) Qutb transformed the designation of the term from a historic period to a condition that can exist at any time. He described *Jahili* society as "any society other than the Muslim society […] a society which does not dedicate itself to submission to God alone, in its beliefs and ideas, in its observances of worship, and in its legal regulations.

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[2] Ibid, pp. 90-91.

[3] Fathi Yakan, *Al-Mawsu'ah al-Harakiyah* (The Encyclopedia of Activism) (Amman: Dar al-Bashr, 1983), pp. 55-56.

[4] Fathi Yakan, *Al-Mas'ala al-Lubnaniyah min Manthur Islami* (The Lebanese Question from an Islamic Perspective) (Beirut: al-Mu'assassah al-Islamiyah, 1979), p. 22.

[5] Ali Lagha, *Fathi Yakan: Ra'ed al-Harakah al-Islamiyah al-Mu'asirah fi Lubnan* (Fathi Yakan: The Pioneer of the Contemporary Islamic Movement in Lebanon) (Beirut: Mu'assassat al-Risalah, 1994), pp. 263-264. See also the objectives of the Islamic Association on its website: http://www.al-jamaa.org/pageother.php?catsmktba=15.

According to this definition, all the societies existing in the world today are *Jahili*."[6] He also identified what he termed "the so-called Muslim societies" as *Jahili* societies. He explained:

> *We classify them among* Jahili *societies [...] because their way of life is not based on submission to God alone. Although they believe in the Unity of God, still they have relegated the legislative attribute of God to others and submit to this authority, and from this authority they derive their systems, their traditions and customs, their laws, their values and standards, and almost every practice of life.*[7]

Qutb buttressed his dogmatic view of *Jahiliyah* by asserting that God alone possesses sovereignty (*Hakimiyyah*) and that God alone is to be obeyed. Correspondingly, any ruler who does not govern by what God has mandated lapses into *Jahiliyah* and thus is to be resisted. Under this condition, resistance takes the form of Jihad.[8]

Yakan apparently believed in Qutb's Jihadist ideology as he centered the methodology of Islamic activism on the *Hakimiyyah* of God. He underscored the notion that the fundamental specificity of the methodology of Islamic activism is *Hakimiyyat Allah* (God's Sovereignty,) which can be accomplished by way of the Koran and the Sunnah (Prophetic Tradition.) From these two fundamental sources, al-Shari'a (Islamic law) places people on an equal footing, where no one is better than another except for his/her devoutness (*Taqwa)* to God. This "Godly" methodological Islamic activism is superior to any temporal methodology because it is worldly and flexible and can grasp the multiple, diverse and multi-faceted problems of life.[9]

Yakan also made uprooting *Jahiliyah* a focal point of Islamic activism. He believed that the existing political and economic system, complemented by a secular and materialistic ideology, threatened the very existence of Islam as a global paradigm of thought and way of life. He emphasized, as a priority of Islamic activism, the destruction of this *Jahili* system and society, and setting up in its stead an Islamic society.[10]

But, unlike Qutb who called for a break between Muslims and *Jahiliyah*, Yakan, believing in a gradualist strategy of activism, rejected Qutb's "isolation" as harmful to the comprehensive objective of Islam—the transformation of *Jahili* society into an Islamic

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[6] Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Cedar Rapids: The Mother Mosque Foundation, n.d.), p. 80.

[7] Ibid, p. 82.

[8] Ibid, pp. 53-76; See also L. Carl Brown, *Religion and State: The Muslim Approach to Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 153-159.

[9] Fathi Yakan, *Madha Ya'ni Intima'i lil-Islam* (What Does it Mean Being a Muslim) (Beirut: Mu'assassat al-Risalah, 1977), pp. 73-74; Lagha, *Fathi Yakan,* p. 57.

[10] Lagha, *Fathi Yakan,* p. 35.

community. Qutb asserted that "there would be a break between the Muslim's present Islam and his past *Jahiliyah* [...] as a result of which all his relationships with *Jahiliyah* would be cut off and he would be joined completely to Islam."[11] Yakan, despite his assertion that Islamic transformation of all *Jahiliyah* aspects is fundamental, defined Qutb's isolation as psychological. He believed that Islamic activism and *Da'wa* (call to Islam) are not possible if one is physically isolated. He explained that "psychological isolation and uplifting of faith in the course of the vastness of *Jahiliyah* detects fakeness and confronts wickedness [...] but work, movement, interaction, and *Da'wa* are not possible in isolation or seclusion."[12]

One could deduce from Yakan's postulations that, in spite of the fact that he believed in Qutb's Jihadist ideology, he typified Jihad more in terms of transformational than radical (revolutionary) activism. This does not mean that Yakan condemned Jihad as a form of resistance; rather, he based his activism in the Islamic variegated situational context according to which his tactical efforts to uproot the *Jahili* society are best served. Generally speaking, Yakan linked his Islamic activism to two operationalized concepts: *al-Mabda'iyah* (principium) and *al-Marhaliyah* (Periodicization/Gradualism.) *Al-Mabda'iyah* means "we should always be bonded to the principal objective of our existence as Muslims which is to make people worship God," whereas *Marhaliyah* in Islamic activism means to advance gradually from one step to another and to move from one stage to another, but within *al-Mabda'iyah's* circle.[13]

This approach led some Muslim scholars either to assume that Yakan's Islamic activism was ambivalent or not in line with the Muslim Brotherhood's actionable ideology and activism.[14] In fact, the praxis of Yakan's ideology manifested itself in his attitude toward Jihad as related to Palestine and Osama Bin Laden and toward the Islamic association's participation in Lebanon's realm of politics.

Yakan emphasized that the Palestine question is one of the highest priorities and duties for Muslims. He added "the truth is that military Jihad is a duty prescribed by Islam to venerate this religion..."[15] Significantly enough, speaking about Bin Laden on the Arabic al-Jazeera television station, Yakan stated that:

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[11] Qutb, *Milestones,* p. 20.

[12] Yakan, *Madha Ya'ni Intima'i lil-Islam,* pp. 120-121.

[13] Fathi Yakan, *Abjadiyat al-Tasawor al-Haraki lil-'Amal al-Islami* (The Elementary Facts of the Conceptual Movement of Islamic Activism) (Beirut: Mu'assassat al-Risalah, 1981), pp. 154-155.

[14] Lagha, *Fathi Yakan,* pp. 65-77.

[15] Ibid, p. 185.

> *There is no doubt that sheikh Osama bin Laden has a high level of faithfulness, trustworthiness, and transparency. He is faithful to his religion and to Jihad for the elevation of the word of Allah...This man has a pure, honest and believing personality. He defends all that belongs to Islam and renounces anything that is not Islamic, and therefore, he is a man after my own heart.*[16]

In response to a question about Bin Laden's terror attacks, Yakan commented: "If we examine the ideology of al-Qaeda and Bin Laden in depth, we see that he has become completely convinced that the only way to curb the disease that is afflicting the Islamic world [..., the] only way to stop this octopus is to crush the serpent's head." Then, answering the question about whether he shared Bin Laden's opinion, Yakan stated that:

> *It's fine with me. I might have crushed the serpent's head in a different way. I might have crushed it by means of the Islamic resistance in South Lebanon, by attacking Israel. But Bin Laden said: "No, I will strike it in the World Trade Center, and shake its economic status." This is his methodology, and he should bear responsibility for it, but I am not sad or depressed that this happened, and I do not condemn it. In all honesty, I have never condemned this. Just like it had negative ramifications, it had positive ones as well.*[17]

But more than anything else, Yakan's ideology and praxis manifested themselves in al-Jama'a's gradual but growing activism in Lebanon, marking Sunni Islamic activism in Lebanon's confessional system and politics.

AL-JAMA'A AL-ISLAMIYA: THE BIRTH AND EARLY STAGE OF ACTIVISM

First signs of Islamic activism transpired in Lebanon in the aftermath of the Palestinian debacle in 1948. A Muslim activist from Jaffa (born in Beirut in 1933), Muhammad Umar al-Da'uq, distressed by the Arab defeat in Palestine, fled to Beirut, whereupon he established the Muslim organization *Jama'at Ubad al-Rahman* (the Association of the Worshipers of the Compassionate One.) His organization reflected his belief that the loss of Palestine was linked to the distance of Muslims from their religion, and that it was imperative to prepare the future generation of Muslims to reclaim Palestine. He set about to bring Muslims back to "Islam as a faith, dogma, way of life, and moral values inspiring the spirit of Jihad and

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[16] See Fathi Yakan's interview on *al-Jazeera TV,* March 16, 2007; excerpts of which transcribed by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Special Dispatch No. 1518, March 23, 2007.
[17] Ibid.

sacrifice."[18] He based his propagatory (*Da'wa*) activity on the educational, cultural, ethical, and spiritual tenets of Islam. By the early 1950s, his propagatory activities reached many majority Sunni cities and towns, including the capital of North Lebanon, Tripoli, where a center for *Jama'at Ubad al-Rahman* was established.

Born in Tripoli in 1933 to a conservative Muslim family, Yakan, impressed by al-Da'uq's educational and cultural *Da'wa*, joined his organization.[19] Around the same time, Mustafa al-Sibai, the superintendent of the *al-Ikhwan* (Muslim Brotherhood) in Syria moved to Beirut following the banning of the group and the arrest of many of its cadres by the Syrian Shishakli regime in 1952.[20] Invited by Muslim associations to Tripoli, including *Jam'iyyat Makarim al-Akhlaq al-Islamiyyah,* al-Sibai organized a series of lectures and forums, which were well received. It was during these lectures and forums that Yakan came to know and forge a friendly relationship with al-Sibai. Yakan was moved by al-Sibai's Muslim Brotherhood's ideology and dedication to "liberating the Islamic nation from foreign rule" and "establishing a free Islamic state."[21] It is believed that this exposition of the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood against the backdrop of tribulations, which the Muslim world was going through, that instigated Yakan and his colleagues in *Jama'at Ubad al-Rahman* to move beyond Islamic cultural and educational activism.

At the same time, Da'uq wanted his organization to remain involved only in the Islamic cultural and educational fields so as to shield it from the lethal confrontation between Nasser and the Muslim Brotherhood. Yakan and his colleagues considered such a limited course of action to be too inadequate to withstand the challenges facing the Muslim *Ummah*. Hence, they decided to found a movement similar to the Muslim Brotherhood. Reportedly, this movement began its activities in 1957 under the name of *al-Jama'a al-*

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[18] *al-Harakat al-Islamiyah fi Lubnan* (Islamic Movements in Lebanon), *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyah* (Islamic Association), in *al-Harakat al-Islamiyah fi Lubnan* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Arabi lil-Ma'lumat, 2007), p. 110.

[19] Lagha, *Fathi Yakan,* pp. 24-25.

[20] On *al-Ikwan* in Syria, see Robert G. Rabil, "The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood," in Barry Rubin, ed., *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[21] For details on the Muslim Brotherhood's doctrine and objectives see The Information Center of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, "Introducing the Muslim Brotherhood, Part One and Two," January 29, 2007, and February 7, 2007, respectively, available at http://www.ikhwansyria.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19&Itemid=114; http://www.ikhwansyria.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=218&Itemid=114.

Islamiyah (The Islamic Association), though it was officially licensed by Lebanon's Interior Ministry on June 18, 1964.[22]

Yakan, as a principal founder and first secretary general of *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyah*, initially focused on building the hierarchy and structure of the organization and expanding its base of support. In as much as he actively propagated the objectives and paramountcy of *al-Jama'a* in Tripoli and other Sunni majority cities and villages, he relied on publicity, especially Islamic literature organs to disseminate the organization's ideology and views to laymen and students.[23] It's noteworthy that *al-Jama'a* was then trying to compete with leftist and pan-Arabist organizations, especially Nasserist forces, which had a large repertoire of literature and wide public appeal. In fact, this period was marked by a sharp hostility to all Islamists from Nasser and his political forces throughout the Arab world. Commenting on this condition, Yakan sarcastically noted that "everything was permissible in Lebanon except Islamic activism or the Islamic Association."[24]

Still, during its incipient formative stage in 1958, the Islamic Association, despite its reservations about Nasser's harsh policies against the Muslim Brotherhood, decided to stand on the side of pan-Arab Nasserist forces against the pro-Western Christian forces in Lebanon. They aligned themselves with pan-Arabist leader Rashid Karame and opened offices for recruitment and training in Tripoli, in addition to a radio station, The Voice of Free Lebanon, to drum up Muslim mass public opinion. This early episode in the history of the Islamic Association foreshadowed the organization's political stances vis-à-vis Lebanon's confessional political system.

However, this sharp thrust in domestic affairs did not entail a formulation of the Islamic Association's political program. In fact, throughout the 1960s, at the height of the Arab Cold War, the organization preoccupied itself with educational, cultural and philanthropic projects in order to expand its base of support and propagate its message to the Muslim

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[22] See al-Harakat al-Islamiyah, *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyah fi Luban,* p. 111. See also Ibrahim Bayram, "al-Jama'a al-Islamiyah min Ubad al-Rahman ila al-Intikhabat al-Niabiyah," (The Islamic Association from Ubad al-Rahman to Parliamentary Elections) *an-Nahar,* April 1, 1997. At the time, Kamal Jumblat was the Minister of Interior. Based on the official license, the founders were Fathi Yakan, Sheikh Faisal Mawlawi, Zuhair al-Abidi, and Ibrahim al-Misri.

[23] In 1958, the Islamic Association published a weekly newspaper called *al-Mujtama',* which remained in circulation for five years. In 1964, the Islamic Association began publishing *al-Shihab* and another weekly by the name *al-Iman*. In addition, Islamic Association students published a periodical by the name *al-Tali'a* which was replaced by *al-Mujahid. .*

[24] Lagah, *Fathi Yakan*, p. 29.

community. This went hand in hand with the *al-Jama'a*'s efforts to improve and strengthen its relationships with Islamic associations and groups in Lebanon, in particular the country's *Dar al-Ifta'* (office of legal opinions), which handled personal status matters and *waqf* (religious endowments) under the supervision of the Grand Mufti of the Lebanese Republic.[25]

It is in this spirit of making the Islamic Association known to as many Muslims as possible, as well as to propagate its message, that it nominated Muhammad Ali Dinawi as a candidate for Tripoli in the 1972 parliamentary elections. Correspondingly, the Association did not devise any political program or agenda, though this running for a seat in the parliament marked the first attempt by the Islamic Association to participate in Lebanon's politics.[26]

AL-JAMA'A AL-ISLAMIYAH AND THE LEBANESE STATE

The Islamic Association's detachment from Lebanon's political system was soon overshadowed by the country's civil war. It mobilized its members and created a militia, *al-Mujahidun,* and a radio station, *Sawt al-Mujahidun* (Voice of the Mujahidun.) Throughout 1975 and most of 1976, *al-Mujahidun* fought on the side of leftist and pan-Arabist forces against the Lebanese Christians. But unlike other parties, the Association decided to later dismantle its militia and move away from military activism. According to a leader and co-founder of the Association, Zuhair al-Abidi, "the Association voluntarily left this diabolical

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[25] In the early 1960s, al-Jama'a, in conjunction with independent Muslim activists, established *Jam'iyat al-Tarbiah al-Islamiyah* (the Islamic Educational Association), which served as the foundational organization for founding dozens of Islamic pedagogical and technical schools throughout Lebanon under the name *Madaress al-Iman* (The Faith Schools). Out of these schools emerged *Kashafat al-Iman* (The Faith Boy Scout). Then the graduates of these schools helped establish *Rabitat al-Tulab al-Muslimin* (The Muslim Students League) as the Islamic Association's student organ in Lebanese Universities. At the same time, the Islamic Association established the Cooperative Medical Center, which became the nucleus of the Islamic Medical Association. The Islamic Medical Association has supervised a vast network of dispensaries and health centers throughout Lebanon, in particular in Sunni populous areas and neighborhoods. For information on the Islamic Association's organizations, see its website http://www.al-jamaa.org/index.php. See also al-Harakat al-Islamiyah, *"al-Jama'a al-Islamiyah," pp.* 112.

[26] see the Islamic Association's website at http://www.al-jamaa.org/pageother.php?catsmktba=15.

game [...] for it is not the work it believes in."[27] On a closer look, however, it appears that the entrance of Syrian troops into Lebanon during the summer of 1976 had changed the dynamics of the civil war—as the Syrians initially made battle alongside Lebanon's Christians and against pan-Arabist and leftist forces led by Druze leader Kamal Jumblat. This direct Syrian involvement in Lebanon posed a conundrum for the Islamic Association, for it neither had a political position vis-à-vis the state at the time, nor did it dispose of a political program defining its activities and vision for the state. Even more so, the Association had initially been fighting on the side of pan-Arabs and leftists; forces with which it had serious ideological conflict given its Islamist nature.

In hindsight, the Islamic Association's experience in Lebanon's civil war compelled it to define its outlook towards the state, as was evidenced by the publication in 1979 of Yakan's *al-Masa'la al-Lubnaniyah min Manthur Islami* (The Lebanese Question from an Islamic Perspective.) Though falling short of outlining a political program for the Islamic Association's participation in Lebanon's politics, the book expressed in painstaking details the organization's perspective on Lebanon as a state and a confessional system.[28]

Yakan, Secretary General of the Islamic Association, believed that there is a "contradiction in the confessional belonging that made Lebanon throughout its history conducive to explosion."[29] He explained that the French mandate gave the Maronites an upper hand over the other communities by according them prerogatives that instituted Maronite ascendancy in all state matters. As such, the confessional system, which gave the Maronites political hegemony over the state, produced a confessional bureaucracy and administration that consigned to the Maronites the top positions in the state, beginning with the presidency.[30] This contradiction coincided with another one reflected in the various political currents in Lebanon, spanning the gamut from capitalism, to Islamism, to reactionary Arabism, to progressive communism. This made the allegiance of the Lebanese not to Lebanon per se, but to the aforementioned political currents, thus making the state itself incapable of imposing its own authority on the Lebanese. This is so because the state itself was a bloc of contradictions in Yakan's telling.[31] Subsequently, Yakan railed against this confessional system that did not give the Sunnis the rights that demonstrate their active participation in governing the state. He asserted that, given the authority the

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[27] Ibrahim Bayram, "Al-Jama'a a-Islamiyah min Ubad al-Rahman ila al-Intikhabat al-Niyabiyah," (The Islamic Association from Ubad al-Rahman to Parliamentary Elections) *an-Nahar*, April 1, 1997.

[28] Fathi Yakan, *al-Masa'la al-Lubnaniyah min Manthur Islami* (The Lebanese Question from an Islamic Perspective) (Beirut: Mu'assassat al-Risalah, 1979).

[29] Yakan, *al-Masa'la al-Lubnaniyah,* p. 39.

[30] Ibid, pp. 40-43.

[31] Ibid, pp. 61-62.

Maronite president had over the Sunni prime minister, the post of the Prime Minister was functionary and not authoritative.[32]

Yakan, significantly, short of calling outright for abrogating the "confessional system, linked the annulment of administrative confessionalism to annulling confessionalism on every level, calling for gradually subordinating all civil and non-civil positions to the logic of exchange and equity."[33] Years later, in an interview with *al-Diyar*, Yakan claimed that the Islamic Association was the first to pose the question of abrogating "political confessionalism (political sectarianism)" back in 1975, because the crises and civil wars tearing Lebanon apart were inherent in the prerogatives granted to one community at the expense of all other communities.[34]

Yakan, in providing the background of the Lebanese crisis, maintained that behind every crisis, including that of Lebanon, was the failure of temporal regimes to provide stability, justice and freedom for human beings. He added that "peoples governed by Islam did not know extremism, as all lived peacefully and securely in the shadow of the Islamic state."[35] He bolstered his statement by professing that *Dhimmi* people (protected Christians and Jews under Islamic rule) had all rights under Islamic law. Regarding the *Jizya* (tax), which the *Dhimmis* were required to pay to the Islamic state for protection, Yakan averred that once Christians sought to fight alongside Muslims the *Jizya* would be lifted.[36]

Finally, Yakan, taking into consideration the background of the causal factors of Lebanese crises, concluded that as a first step, the solution, which could dissolve the deep-seated contradictions in the Lebanese entity, lies in the fusion of Lebanon into a bigger entity. In other words, Lebanon should go back to what it used to be before 1920: A part of Bilad al-Sham (Syria).[37]

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[32] Ibid, pp. 116-118.

[33] Ibid, pp. 116. It's noteworthy that, to Yakan, administrative confessionalism is synonymous with political confessionalism (political sectarianism) when it comes to the distribution of political and administrative positions in the state on the basis of sectarianism (from the office of the Maronite President to the lowest position in the state).

[34] See Yakan's interview with *al-Diyar,* March 1, 1995, published in Fathi Yakan, *Adwa' 'ala al-Tajribah al-Niyabiyah al-Islamiyah fi Lubnan: al-'Ida' al-Niyabi 'Ubr al-I'lam* (Lights on the Islamic Parliamentarian Experience: The Parliamentarian Performance Through the Media) (Beirut: Mu'assassat al-Risalah, Book No. 2, 1996), pp. 93-94.

[35] Yakan, *al-Masa'la al-Lubnaniya,* p. 127.

[36] Ibid, p. 135.

[37] Ibid, 136.

The first impression of Yakan's solution to Lebanon's crisis leads one to suspect that Yakan might have been a pan-Arab nationalist as much as he was an Islamist. On closer examination, however, Yakan's ideology and gradualist approach (*Marhaliyyah)* underline with no uncertainty his solution to the Lebanese crisis. Although this book did not outline a political program for the Islamic Association, it revealed the depth of the Association's opposition to Lebanon's confessional system as headed by the Maronites. This opposition appeared to be more about Maronite prerogatives (*Imtiyazat*) than about the confessional system itself. It follows from this that the Islamic Association did not call for the creation of an Islamic state on account of the presence of multiple confessions (communities) in Lebanon; instead, it sought union with Syria as a means to strip the Maronites off their privileges. For Yakan, this was a first step in a long-term gradual process to bring about the objectives of the Islamic Association. At the same time, the arguments and concerns proffered in Yakan's book about the secondary status of Sunni political and administrative power in Lebanon only helped underscore the necessity for the Islamic Association to address this intolerable situation. No less significant, the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, besides inspiring Yakan and Islamists alike, added a sense of urgency for the Islamic Association to ponder and address the nature of Islamic activism in Lebanon.

THE NATURE OF ISLAMIC ACTIVISM IN LEBANON
Deliberating the rationale and nature of Islamic activism at a time of political upheaval in Lebanon, Yakan published *Abjadiyat al-Tasawor al-Haraki lil-'Amal al-Islami* (The Basics of the Conceptual Movement of Islamic Activism) in 1981, which complemented his previous book on Lebanon. Yakan, as Secretary General of the Islamic Association, justified Islamic activism in Lebanon within the contextual framework of how to reconcile the principium of Islamic activism with the gradualism of Islamic activism. He recognized that a) cultural pluralism and sectarian and party affiliations did not provide the appropriate grounds for establishing any ideological rule in Lebanon, be it Christian, Islamic or leftist; b) the public and economic structure of Lebanon was not adequate to create a state, let alone an ideological one; and c) the Lebanese arena was not appropriate to achieve the principal objective of Islamic activism: The creation of an Islamic state. Correspondingly, Yakan emphasized that the gradualist work of Islamic activism should focus on a) maintaining the unity of Lebanon and preventing its fragmentation into sectarian and ethnic mini-states, b) protecting Lebanese life from moral depredations and intellectual impairment so as to save the [future] generations from Westernization and secularism, and d) taking advantage of profound social problems as proof of the failure of temporal regimes, thereby affirming that the fundamental solution was the return to Islam.[38]

In sum, Yakan justified Islamic activism in Lebanon on the grounds of saving Muslims. But in responding to the charge that this Islamic activism meant partnering with non-Muslims

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[38] Yakan, *Abjadiyat al-Tasawur al-Haraki,* pp. 160-162.

in governance, Yakan made the distinction between participation of Muslims and participation of Islam. He explained that participation did not entail Islam itself participating in the rule of temporal regimes, nor was this the alternative to Islamic rule. Rather, the intention of participation (and its proposals) was to relieve Muslims from oppression and salvage their rights, while at the same time strengthening their social, economic, political, and military positions in order to better confront Westernization and degeneracy.[39]

Yakan, apparently, while calling for the abrogation of "political confessionalism," supported "equal participation" in Lebanon so as to check and prevent non-Muslim Lebanese monopoly of power, which in his opinion meant the extraction and dissolution of Islam.[40] However, Yakan's deliberations on Islamic activism blazed the ideological trail for Islamism's participation in Lebanon's realm of politics. But for the next few years this stance remained a theoretical practice, if only because Lebanon descended in the chaos and strife of a new civil war phase, whereby the struggle for the state became linked with domestic and regional considerations and concerns.

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[39] Ibid, pp. 164-166.
[40] Ibid, p. 165; see also Yakan's interview with *al-Diyar,* March 1, 1995.