



## Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and his impact on the dissemination of radical Islam

October 6, 2022

### Overview

► On September 26, 2022, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, considered for many years one of the senior scholars in Sunni Islam, died at 96.<sup>1</sup> Qaradawi, born in Egypt, arrived in the early 1960s from Egypt to Qatar, which became the center of his activity. In Qatar he acted freely, establishing among other things a network of global Islamic organizations, including the **Coalition of Good** (*I'tilaf al-Khayr*), an economic wing of charity organizations that funneled funds from the entire world, including Europe, to the Hamas movement. At the same time, he headed, until 2018, the radical Islamic organization **World Association of Muslim Scholars**, which he co-founded in 2004. Through this organization, he concentrated and coordinated the activity of radical Islamic scholars around the world, many of them members of the Muslim Brotherhood, but there were also members of other streams, some of them even more radical than the Muslim Brotherhood, shaping together the current radical Islamic discourse.

► Qaradawi is mainly known as the key figure in shaping **the concept of violent jihad** and the one who allowed carrying out terror attacks, including **suicide bombing attacks**, against Israeli citizens, the US forces in Iraq, and some of the Arab regimes. Because of that, he was banned from entering Western countries and some Arab countries.

► Concurrently with his radical activity, Qaradawi also tried to present himself as a moderate figure: he shaped the concept of the middle way (*Wasatiyyah*) between the various streams of Islam and the doctrine of the “religious law of Muslim minorities” (*Fiqh al-Aqalliyat*) concerning the conduct of Muslims in countries where they are a minority, especially in Europe, which contributed to his image as a moderate figure in the eyes of the West and established his status among Muslims in Europe. In practice, this concept was intended to promote a radical Islamic agenda and gradually undermine Western democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> Very often, Qaradawi was referred to as the “greatest scholar in Sunni Islam,” but this was not necessarily accurate since his support base has always been Muslims affiliated with radical political Islam, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood.

►Notwithstanding his enormous contribution to the development of jihad movements, Qaradawi opposed **Al-Qaeda and ISIS**. However, it should be remembered that many of his students became supporters and even operatives of these organizations and his ideology concerning the religious laws of jihad (*Fiqh al-Jihad*) represented a milestone in shaping the concept of violent jihad of these organizations.



Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi (Al-Jazeera, September 26, 2022)

## Qaradawi's biography<sup>2</sup>

►Qaradawi was born in a small Nile delta village in 1926. His father died when he was two, and he grew up in his uncle's house, in a religious environment. When he was four, he was sent to a religious school. According to stories, when he was nine, he knew the Quran by heart. As a youth, he studied at a religious school in Tanta, where he delved into the writings of Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, who al-Qaradawi said shaped his political and religious thinking.

►When he was 18, he became a student in the religion department of Al-Azhar University in Cairo. He graduated in 1953. The following year, he passed the exam to receive a teaching license. In 1958 he received a Master's degree and in 1973 a Doctorate from Al-Azhar University. As a youth, he was exposed to the Muslim Brotherhood ideology. He joined the movement and devoted himself to political Islamic activity against the local government and to preaching against the British presence in Egypt. His preaching against Nasser's regime led to his being arrested several times.

►In 1961, Qaradawi was sent to Qatar by Al-Azhar University. In that year, he was appointed head of the Religious Institute (*Al-Ma'had al-Din*) in Doha, which was established a year

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<sup>2</sup> For further details, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin, "Portrait of Sheikh Dr. Yusuf Abdallah al-Qaradawi, senior Sunni Muslim cleric affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood," <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/17948/>. In addition, see a long interview in Al-Jazeera (broadcast in two parts, on January 12 and 19, 2017) and on Qaradawi's website, <https://www.al-qaradawi.net/>.

before. The fact that he was now living in Qatar enabled him to become prominent as an independent cleric and he knew how to take advantage of the freedom of action he enjoyed there to propagate his radical ideology. In 1977, he founded the Department of Islamic Law Studies at the University of Qatar and headed it until 1990. He also founded an institute for Sunnah studies (*Markaz Buhuth al-Sunnah*) at the University of Qatar. Thus, he inculcated generations of students with his radical ideology.

► He was granted Qatari citizenship in honor of the services he performed for the country. He received some awards and decorations, among them the King Faisal of Saudi Arabia Award, the Islamic University of Malaysia Award, and the Sultan of Brunei Award.

► Qaradawi established and headed many organizations: he established and headed the **European Council for Fatwa and Research** (ECFR), a European Islamic umbrella organization for bringing together Muslim communities throughout Europe and for building bridges between the various Islamic schools so that they can integrate life in democratic Christian Europe with Islamic law. He established a network of global Islamic organizations, including the **Coalition of Good** (*I'tilaf al-Khayr*), an economic wing of charity organizations that funneled funds from the entire world, including Europe, to the Hamas movement and, to a lesser extent, to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). In 2004-2018, he headed the **World Association of Muslim Scholars**, which he co-founded in 2004. Through this organization, he concentrated and coordinated the activity of radical Islamic scholars around the world, who contributed to shaping radical Islam today. Many of the activists of this organization are members of the Muslim Brotherhood, but it also included members of other streams, some of them even more radical than the Muslim Brotherhood. This organization published, inter alia, controversial fatwas, such as blaming raped women for dressing immodestly.<sup>3</sup>

► Qaradawi authored over a hundred books in his life, published an enormous number of fatwas, gave countless interviews, lectures and sermons, and operated websites to spread his ideology. He knew how to take advantage of social media and the support he received from Al-Jazeera TV, which allowed him to freely disseminate his ideology as part of many programs and interviews.

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[https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A\\_%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A1\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86](https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A_%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A1_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86)

► Although he began as a Muslim Brotherhood activist, he later denied being a member of it and several times even refused to head the movement in Egypt (i.e., to accept the title of General Guide). In an interview he granted to Al-Jazeera TV, Qaradawi noted that he had never left the organization (Al-Jazeera, October 12 and 17, 2017); however, he had chosen not to hold any post in the organization because he did not want to limit himself to the framework of the Muslim Brotherhood since he had seen himself as an Islamic figure uniting Muslims wherever they are. He said he did not want to be identified with the Muslim Brotherhood while he was meeting with Islamic figures around the world and added that he did not approve of every single step taken by the organization members (alluding to technical moves rather than strategy). And yet, it should be pointed out that he had always enjoyed a special status among the Muslim Brotherhood members and the international networks affiliated with the movement, serving as the prime source of sharia rulings for them.

► Qaradawi referred to his religious views as “moderate Islam” (*Wasatiyyah*). He had positive attitudes toward reforms in Islam, which he called “correcting perceptions that were corrupted.” He is considered one of the foremost propounders of the doctrine of the “religious law of the Muslim minorities” (*Fiqh al-Aqalliyat*), which provides Muslim minorities around the globe with space in which to maneuver and compromise between their daily lives and Islamic law.

► Qaradawi issued a great many fatwas and wrote a large number of books, the most important of which is *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*. It was translated into many languages and has sold millions of copies. Today it is considered the best-selling Muslim book after the Quran.

► Due to Qaradawi’s attitude toward violent jihad, he was banned from entering several countries. In 1999, he was banned from entering the USA. In 2009, he was banned from entering Britain due to his support of suicide bombing in Israel. Between the years 2013-2018, he was placed on the Interpol wanted list at the request of Egyptian police, which asked to include him and several senior members of the Muslim Brotherhood, saying that he was responsible for murder and stealing of money.<sup>4</sup> In 2018, his name was removed from the list without any explanation (Anatolia News Agency, December 12, 2018).

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<sup>4</sup> Due to the fact that in 2013 he called for supporting the ousted Egyptian president Mohammad Morsi, who was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood.



Qaradawi on the Interpol wanted list in 2017

## Qaradawi's positions on various issues

► **The Palestinian issue:** Qaradawi maintained that the only way to deal with the Palestinian issue is through **violent jihad**. He allowed attacking Israeli citizens, including **suicide bombing attacks against Israelis**.<sup>5</sup> In this issue (as well as in others), he was a source of supreme religious authority for Hamas.<sup>6</sup> Qaradawi was an enthusiastic supporter of Palestinian terrorism against Israeli citizens, claiming that it is a legitimate expression of the so-called “resistance” and that Israel is a militaristic society where every civilian is a potential soldier. As mentioned above, he also established a financial apparatus (the Coalition of Good) to finance Hamas's activity. He had more than once expressed **anti-Semitic statements against the Jews** and even issued a **fatwa authorizing attacks on Jews around the world**. In that fatwa, he claimed that there is no essential difference between Judaism and Zionism, and therefore every Jewish target equals an Israeli target. In an interview granted to Al-Jazeera, he claimed that Allah struck the Jews throughout history due to their corruption.

<sup>5</sup> During the Second Intifada, in 2001, Qaradawi allowed carrying out suicide bombing attacks against Israeli citizens, claiming that the Palestinians did not have any other means but their own body. In 2016, he banned it, claiming that the Palestinians already had other means (he probably meant rockets) to fight against Israel. He probably also understood the damage suicide bombings caused to the Palestinian image. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pllgndap5S4>.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that Sheikh Yassin, the founder of Hamas, had no high religious authority in the Muslim world, so the movement required Qaradawi as a source of alternative authority.

According to him, the last time it occurred was in the holocaust, as punishment for the Jews' corruption, and "the next time, with Allah's help, it will happen at the hands of the [Muslim] believers".<sup>7</sup> On another occasion, he argued that "the Jews opposed Muhammad, therefore Allah cursed them and turned them into apes and pigs." In addition, he cited an anti-Semitic Islamic hadith, according to which "... the day of judgment will only come **when Muslims fight the Jews and kill them**. Then a Jew will hide behind a rock or a tree, and the rock or tree will say: 'O Muslim, O slave of Allah, here is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.'[...]" In addition, he claimed that one should not make peace with the Jews "due to their negative qualities, as they appear in the Quran."

► **Qaradawi's position regarding the United States and the West:** Qaradawi denounced the 9/11 attacks, claiming that it is every Muslim's duty to help bring the perpetrators to justice. And yet, three years later, following the American invasion of Iraq (April 2003), he called for attacking the Americans operating in Iraq. In a conference on "Pluralism in Islam" taking place in late August 2004 at the Journalists' Association in Cairo, Egypt, he published a fatwa **allowing to abduct and murder American citizens in Iraq** to put pressure on the US army to withdraw its forces. Qaradawi stressed that "all the Americans in Iraq are fighters, there is no difference between a civilian and a soldier, and they should be fought because the American citizen came to Iraq to serve the occupation. The abduction and killing of Americans in Iraq is a [religious] duty in order to make them get out of [Iraq] and leave immediately" (Asharq Al-Awsat, London, September 2, 2004). The difference between his attitude in 2001 and that of 2004 toward the Americans may be attributed to his regarding Al-Qaeda as a rival organization and to the fact that he perceived the invasion of Iraq as an occupation of a Muslim country, the same as when being a youth, he opposed the British occupation of Egypt. It should be noted that in parallel, Qaradawi undermined Western values through the doctrine of "the religious law of the Muslim minorities" (*Fiqh al-Aqalliyat*), which provides Muslim minorities around the globe, especially in Europe, with space in which to maneuver and compromise between their daily lives and Islamic law. The aim of implementing this doctrine was to unite and unify Muslim minorities to make it possible for them to live under non-Muslim regimes, until the final stage of spreading Islam to the entire world. Evidence of this perception may be found in a fatwa he published in 2003, in which he said that "Islam will return to Europe victorious as a conqueror, after having been expelled twice. This time the

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.memri.org/reports/al-qaradawi-qatars-islamist-empire-builder>.

occupation will not take place by the sword, but through preaching and the dissemination of the ideology... The future belongs to Islam... The spreading of Islam until it conquers the entire world and includes both the East and the West is the beginning of the return of the Islamic Caliphate...". In another quote he argued that "the next occupation of Rome will not be through the sword but through the thought [*fikr*] and preaching [*da'wa*]," that is to say, the occupation of Europe (in this context, Rome represents the symbol of European Christianity since it is the seat of the Pope) will be ideological.<sup>8</sup>

► **Qaradawi's position toward Al-Qaeda and global jihad:** Qaradawi derived his ideology from Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in 1928, who mainly advocated the promotion of education and the preaching of Islam (*da'wa*) to train generations of radical Islamists in the world. According to this perception, violent jihad should only be resorted to in the long run, after preparing the hearts and minds. Exceptions to this rule were Al-Banna's call for jihad against a foreign occupation (against the British in Egypt) and the Palestinian issue (against the Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel). By the same token, Qaradawi allowed violent jihad against Israel and the United States, which he perceived as an occupying force. Only within the Arab Spring he expanded the circle of jihad and also allowed the toppling of secular regimes in the Arab countries because he saw it as an opportunity to spread radical Islam. In contrast, the Salafi jihadists, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, advocate violent and immediate jihad, which includes violence against Muslims who do not accept their views, an attitude that Qaradawi found extremist. In an interview given in 2018, he noted that he was against ISIS and Al-Qaeda because, according to him, there is an unequivocal Islamic duty to avoid extremism. According to Qaradawi, these organizations are radical; they maintain many Muslims are infidel and they kill indiscriminately and without justice. As for the caliphate proclaimed by ISIS in 2014, he denied it and said that the caliphate should be under the rule of moderate religious scholars, accepted among the Muslims, for example, in a confederal framework, similar to the European Union (Anatolia News Agency, March 31, 2018). As far as the Salafi jihadists are concerned, Qaradawi and the Muslim Brotherhood deviate from Islam because they do not adhere to implementing Islamic religious law (sharia), they take part in the political game, accept democracy, and usually subject themselves to the laws of the secular countries. ISIS even released a video calling for the killing of "infidel clerics" in the Arab countries; the outstanding name among those who

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkVlRogvHEU>.



should be killed according to ISIS was Qaradawi (Al-Mashreq, March 23, 2017). Despite the differences of opinions, it should be remembered that Qaradawi in his long-time activity trained many global jihad operatives, who embarked on their activity after embracing his ideology, undergoing radicalization, and later joining more radical organizations. Qaradawi maintained ties with Salafists, even with Salafi jihadists, with whom he wanted to hold discussions in order to reduce the gaps since he aspired to Muslim unity.

► **Arab Spring events:** Qaradawi tried to leverage the Arab Spring to establish radical political Islam in the Arab world. He named those events “the Islamic Spring” and aspired to the rise of political Islam in the wake of those events. Following the fall of Zine el-Abidine ben Ali’s regime in Tunisia, Qaradawi called for the liberation of political prisoners (many of whom Islamists) and the reinstatement of Islamic practices banned by the secular regime of the ousted president, such as wearing hijab in university campuses. Addressing the incidents in Libya, Qaradawi called on Muammar Qaddafi to leave power and asserted that rebelling against Qaddafi was an Islamic religious duty. He called on the Libyan tribes to rebel against Qaddafi and join the protesters and called on the military in Libya “to behave the same as their brethren in Egypt, to stand together with their people in order to return to Libya its Arab and Islamic character” (Egyptian TV, February 20, 2011). Upon the fall of President Mubarak’s regime, Qaradawi returned to Egypt and gave a sermon in Tahrir Square in Cairo. During a mass rally, he called on the Egyptian people and all Muslims to fight against the tyrant rulers and banned the security forces from shooting civilians. Concluding his speech, **he called for the liberation of the Al-Aqsa Mosque** and asked the Egyptian army to open the Rafah crossing and allow the entry of aid convoys to the Gaza Strip (Al-Jazeera, February 18, 2011). After several days, on February 21, 2011, Qaradawi returned to Qatar. He later supported the Muslim Brotherhood government headed by President Mohammad Morsi in Egypt and opposed the toppling of their regime by the army in 2013. In 2012, **he allowed carrying out suicide bombing attacks when being asked about that in the context of the civil war in Syria**. In reply to the question, he said that a person is allowed to blow himself up to attack a group of people loyal to the regime even if this is liable to kill or wound civilians, as long as “the group [sending the suicide bomber] believes that it requires someone who will blow himself up among others.” **Many in the Arab world denounced this ruling which, in its wider context, legitimized suicide bombings in the Arab world.**<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.memri.org.il/cgi-webaxy/item?4202>.



► **Qaradawi and Iran:** Qaradawi vehemently opposed the expansion attempts of Shiite Islam under the auspices of Iran and criticized Iran's efforts to spread Shia among the Sunni countries. As a radical Sunni cleric, he was very afraid of the expansion of Shia at the expense of the Sunni population and the Iranian-Shiite influence on the Sunni population in the region. This was also the reason that he opposed the protest events in Bahrain as part of the Arab Spring because he was afraid that the Shiite majority would overthrow the Sunni minority regime in a way that will strengthen the Iranian influence over the Sunni world (Al-Jazeera, September 27, 2022). At the same time, he tried to cultivate dialogue between Shiites and Sunnis under the title of *Taqrib al-Madhahib*, i.e., bringing together the various schools of Islam as part of the *Wasatiyyah* (policy of compromising) concept that he adopted, to mitigate hostility between Shiites and Sunnis. It should be noted that according to Qaradawi, Shiites are not infidels but are members of other branches of Islam.<sup>10</sup>

► **The issue of nuclear weapons:** Qaradawi said that Muslims had to acquire nuclear weapons "to terrorize their enemies." However, he noted that this weapon should not be used. In this respect, he argued that Iran had a legitimate right to acquire nuclear weapons.<sup>11</sup>

► **Regarding the Lebanese Hezbollah:** Qaradawi praised Hezbollah for its war against Israel in 2006, during the Second Lebanon War, but denounced the organization for its support of the Syrian regime.<sup>12</sup>

## Comments on his death

► While the Qatari Al-Jazeera TV and the Muslim Brotherhood media lamented his death and stressed his contribution to Islam, in the Arab world, especially in Egypt, Qaradawi's activity was strongly criticized. He was accused of terrorism and spreading suicide bombing terrorism, and was even dubbed "**the blood mufti**" (*mufti al-dam*), "**the mufti of terrorism**" (*mufti al-Irhab*), etc. In addition, **he was accused of allowing terrorist attacks against Egyptian civilians, policemen, and soldiers**, and was even attributed corruption, as one who lived a luxurious life in Qatar, while it was exposed that his fortune was estimated at \$3 billion.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Sagi Polka, "Taqrib al-Madhahib – Qaradawi's Declaration of Principles Regarding Sunni–Shi'i Ecumenism", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 11 June 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Israel Altman, "Iran and the Arabs: The Shi'itization Controversy between Al-Qaradawi and Iran", *Iran Pulse*, Number 25, 24 October 2008.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.memri.org/reports/al-qaradawi-qatars-islamist-empire-builder>.

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O\\_QIsUH\\_WhA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_QIsUH_WhA).

► Outstanding among those lamenting Qaradawi's death was Turkish President **Recep Tayyip Erdoğan**, who lamented his death on Twitter and noted that in a conversation with Qaradawi's son, he said that Qaradawi served as an example and role model of the life of a Muslim who never gave up what he believed in. It should be remembered that President Erdoğan's party, AKP, is close to the Muslim Brotherhood circles and that Qaradawi had justified Erdoğan's policy on many issues, such as the Palestinian issue and his struggle against the Kurds (BBC, September 26, 2022).

► The head of Hamas's political bureau, **Ismail Haniyah**, lamented Qaradawi's death in the funeral procession in Qatar, on behalf of "Palestine – the [symbol of] standing on guard [in Arabic: *al-Ribat*] and jihad." He noted that Qaradawi had been the greatest Islamic scholar in the current era, who believed in the victory of Islam and first and foremost in "Palestine" and in his last years worked to lift the siege of Gaza (Al-Jazeera, September 27, 2022).



**Ismail Haniyah lamenting Qaradawi's death during the funeral procession in Qatar (Al-Jazeera, September 27, 2022)**

## Qaradawi's legacy

► Qaradawi had a major impact on the spread of radical political Islam throughout the world: during his life, he wrote over a hundred books<sup>14</sup> (according to him, over 200), he granted a great many interviews, gave many sermons, and published numerous fatwas. He managed to reach the hearts and minds of many Muslims through his charisma, through the generous support he was granted by the Qatari regime, and through his knowing how to take advantage of social media and the support he was given by Al-Jazeera TV to spread his ideology.

<sup>14</sup> According to him, he wrote over 200 books, although various publications noted that he had written between 100 and 170 books. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jrJStlDubc>.

►Qaradawi was engaged not only in thought and the preparation of hearts and minds, but also in world politics: in the Palestinian issue, in issues relating to government in the Arab countries, in issues relating to Islam and the West, and so forth. In addition, Qaradawi also managed to establish a huge organizational and economic infrastructure around him that is hard to quantify. He did use these funds to finance terrorism (at least as part of the Coalition of Good). In addition, he had a significant impact on the spread of suicide bombing terrorism in the name of Islam.

►Despite his success in raising generations of radical Muslims who undermine the West and its values, **it seems that over the last few years he lost his position.** This was because the Muslim Brotherhood movement has become persecuted in most of the world, and the Islam represented by Qaradawi attracted less the young Islamist target audience, which was more attracted to Al-Qaeda and ISIS than to the stream he represented. Qaradawi also failed in the attempt to leverage the Arab Spring to promote political Islam, mainly in Egypt. Furthermore, he caused hostility toward him among many in the Arab world due to his support of violence against the regimes and suicide bombing attacks. In addition, the Islamic world that Qaradawi aspired to unify around him has become more divided than ever.