

Salafism and the Islamic State: A Video Introduction

by [Jacob Olidort \(/experts/jacob-olidort\)](#)

May 23, 2016

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Jacob Olidort \(/experts/jacob-olidort\)](#)

Jacob Olidort, a 2016-2017 Soref fellow at The Washington Institute, focuses on the history and ideology of Salafi movements and Islamist groups in the Middle East.

Explore the history and ideology of Salafism, from the birth of the movement in the eighteenth century to the rise of the Islamic State in the twenty-first.

The Islamic State (IS or ISIS) is often identified as the world's leading proponent of Salafism, or fundamentalist Sunni Islam. The IS-affiliated perpetrators of the 2016 Brussels terrorist attacks had close ties with local Salafist groups. In their textbooks, the Islamic State promises to revive a Salafi understanding of Islam.

But, as Jacob Olidort points out, most of the world's Salafis do not engage in violence or political activism -- in fact, they explicitly condemn both.

In this illuminating video presentation, Institute Soref Fellow Olidort explores the history and ideology of the different strains of Salafism, from the birth of the movement in the eighteenth century through today. Turning to the Islamic State, he analyzes the violent group's vision, strategy, propaganda, and education. He explains how IS differs from other Islamist and Jihadist groups, and how it justifies its unique sectarian themes, its territorial ambitions, and its brutal methods.

This is essential viewing for anyone interested in the ideological roots of IS and how it diverges from other Islamist groups.

Dr. Jacob Olidort is a Soref Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and an adjunct professor at the Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University. He received his BA in Middle Eastern studies from Brandeis University, his AM in Near Eastern

languages and civilizations from Harvard University, and his MA and PhD in Near Eastern studies from Princeton University. Dr. Olidort has spent nearly two years in the Middle East, including a Fulbright Scholarship in the UAE and field work on Salafism in Jordan. He has given presentations on ISIS and on countering violent extremism to various academic and policy audiences. His writings have appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, the *Washington Post*, and the *National Interest*, among other publications. ❖

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[A Counterterrorism Strategy Disconnected from the Terrorist Landscape](#)

May 15, 2026

◆
Michael Jacobson

(/policy-analysis/counterterrorism-strategy-disconnected-terrorist-landscape)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[How to Accomplish U.S. Objectives in Iran](#)

May 14, 2026

◆
Michael Singh

(/policy-analysis/how-accomplish-us-objectives-iran)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Fatah Meets in Ramallah](#)

May 14, 2026

◆
Ghaith al-Omari

(/policy-analysis/fatah-meets-ramallah)

TOPICS

[Arab & Islamic Politics \(/policy-analysis/arab-islamic-politics\)](#)

[Terrorism \(/policy-analysis/terrorism\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Iraq \(/policy-analysis/iraq\)](#)

[Syria \(/policy-analysis/syria\)](#)

