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The Challenge of Terrorism and Religious Extremism in Jordan

Strategic Insights, Volume V, Issue 4 (April 2006)

by [Anouar Boukhars](#)

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Introduction

The 2005 Amman bombings prove one thing: threat intelligence services with their enhanced security postures and improved operational efficiency have failed to identify, understand, and counter jihadi threats. Hindering their efforts to counter threats involving unknown perpetrators are increasingly sophisticated transnational cells that move undetected across borders. Unknown Iraqi suicide bombers were dispatched to carry out the triple bomb attack in Jordan's capital Amman because of their ability to move unnoticed inside the target country, outwit the omnipresent security services, and succeed where local Jordanian jihadists failed.

Many of al-Zarqawi's affiliates and sympathizers in Jordan are dead or in long-term custody. The General Intelligence Department (GID) is credited with disrupting audacious and complicated scores of plots and capturing key local jihadi leaders, operatives, and facilitators. Its much vaunted agility, seamlessness, and operational efficiency are what prompted al-Zarqawi to adjust his tactics to circumvent the enhanced security posture of GID and exploit its main vulnerability—lack of information on foreign jihadists.[1]

This article argues that Jordan's security dilemma will not be alleviated through the use of military tools alone. The kingdom will not prevail in its struggle against terrorism unless it adopts a multi-dimensional security policy that promotes the values of prevention, accountability, political participation, and rule of law. A mixture of hard and soft power is badly needed to better cope with the scourge of national and transnational terrorism. Another major argument advanced in this article is that the 11/9 attacks cannot be understood except by appreciating not only the ambivalence of the population toward terrorism as a form of political action but the fractures and fragmentation that plague the jihadi and Islamist movements. A civil war is raging among jihadists and Islamists, and the outcome of this battle will, as much as anything, determine the fate of radical jihadists like al-Zarqawi.

The Origins of Radical Islam

The basic ideology of radical Islam turned into a powerful extra-political force in Jordan, as anywhere in the Middle East, on the seventh day of the Six Day War of 1967, where the humiliating defeat of the Arabs set the seal on the Arab nationalist creed and propelled Saudi

Islamism into an aura of high respectability and prominence. The dramatic increase in Saudi Arabia's strategic, political, and economic influence accrued from high oil prices in the 1970s set the stage for a strengthening of radical Islam in a Jordanian society plagued by economic deprivation, high unemployment, and few opportunities for social mobility. The success of the Iranian revolution further boosted radical Islamist ideology. But it is the 1979 Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan that served as the catalyst which sparked an increasingly violent chain of events that culminated in the internationalization of Islamic religious radicalism.

In Afghanistan, Jordanian mujahedeen received military training and extensive, rigorous ideological indoctrination in its most fundamentalist and reactionary manifestations. Such structured training rigors created alienated channels where close bonds were cemented among holy warriors who learned to share several important conceptions about the "irreligious" oppressors and the sanctity of martyrdom. In Afghanistan, Jordanian mujahedeen fought alongside jihadists inspired by the ideologies of Sayyid Qutb and his intellectual heirs, Jordanian-Palestinian scholar Abdullah Azzam, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, and the blind Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman. Qutb, who was executed by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1966, is widely regarded as the founding father of jihadism and an icon of jihadist identity. Through his many writings, he propounded what has become a classic ideological manifesto for jihadists.

Unlike their Egyptian and Syrian counterparts who had their religious or political awakening grafted from inside their countries and way before they landed in Afghanistan, most Jordanian veterans had their formative years in Afghanistan where their political, social, and religious views were molded. These foreign-born views stood in sharp contrast to the ones promoted by the retrograde but non-political Salafi school. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, many of the Mujahedeen forces returned to Jordan steeped in radical Islamist fervor and a will to topple western-influenced, "infidel" governments. Among the returnees was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who would later become one of the most notorious jihadists associated with gruesome bombings, assassinations, and the beheading of foreign hostages in Iraq.

The mujahedeen relocation to their home country occurred in parallel with a host of national shifts in Jordan's economic and social structure. Hundreds of thousands of Jordanian-Palestinians were expelled from Kuwait at the end of the Gulf War after Jordan's costly miscalculation of siding with Iraq. The massive influx of returnees, which added about 10% to Jordan's population coupled with the loss of remittances and cutting of aid from the richer Arab countries and from the United States, had severe political, economic, and social consequences. Structural shifts on such a massive scale could not occur without profound disturbances and heightened processes of identity formation, as evidenced in Zarqa where 160,000 uprooted Jordanian-Palestinians,^[2] disgruntled Trans-Jordanians and Circassians became increasingly attracted to radical ideologies like Salafi jihadism that promised redefinition and re-articulation of the values and responsibilities that comprise their shared citizenship.^[3]

As Jordan's second-largest city after Amman, Zarqa has always been a hotbed of poverty, joblessness, crime, drug addiction, and other social pathologies that it was dubbed "the Chicago of the Middle East."^[4] It produced countless criminals and served as a launch pad for numerous illegal activities. Among the criminals it produced was al-Zarqawi, a secondary school drop-out who was convicted for drug possession and sexual assault.^[5] Zarqa was also home to al-Zarqawi's intellectual mentors: Abdullah Azzam, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, and Nasr al-Din al-Albani.

By the late 1990's, the city became a hub of militancy with a fast growing network of Islamists, jihadists and their sympathizers. The Muslim Brotherhood, *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* (the Islamic Liberation Party) and *Jamiat al-Tabligh wa al-Da'wa* (the Group for Preaching and Propagation) were all at work at the slums of Zarqa. "In the late 1990s, more than 500 men from Zarqa and the adjacent al-Ruseifeh refugee camp joined the Taliban in their fight against the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan," reported the International Crisis Group. "In December 2004, more than 300

fighters from the Zarqa area were said to be in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Chechnya, and 63 reportedly were in jail, in the U.S. prison at Guantánamo in Cuba, or in Jordan.”[6]

Another central hub for a number of jihadist organizations was the town of Salt. Increasing evidence placed Salt at the center of al-Zarqawi’s terror network. More suicide bombers were recruited by al-Zarqawi from Salt than from Zarqa. Until recently, the town’s chief claim to fame was being the home town of the ruling elite and one of the power bases of the regime. Before the mid-1990s, the town was known for its liberal tendencies as well as its economic distress, deepening poverty, violence, crime, and drugs. In the second half of the 1990s, however, militant Islam fed upon the insecurities and alienation that globalization, accompanied by the regime’s mismanagement, corruption, and incompetence, generated among the unemployed, drug-crazed, illiterate, and disorderly youth. Radical Islamists successfully tapped the violent energy and frustration of petty criminal networks and gave them a virulent twist. The result was a steady growth of religious fervor and the transformation of decadent youth thugs into Islamic vigilante thugs used by radical Islamists like Abd-al-Fatah al-Hiyeri to harass people.

This reactionary drift from dominant norms into a maelstrom of destructive radicalism and the intermingling of jihadist networks with the criminal milieu took another dangerous turn with the arrival of al-Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi in 1997. Both men were serving prison sentences and were transferred to the Salt prison from the South where they already demonstrated their recruiting skills. In the Salt prison system, they bolstered their radical Islamic indoctrination of disillusioned detainees charged for petty theft and drug abuse.[7] They shrewdly capitalized on the steady leak of credibility of government-sponsored clerics.

The loss of much popular support for the Muslim Brotherhood further facilitated their proselytizing for jihad against *jahili* leadership. It also boosted their efforts to supersede the establishment clerics and political Islamists with regard to religious authority and normative reasoning. al-Maqdisi and al-Zarqawi were becoming icons of a new generation of anti-system jihadists. After their release from prison in 1999 in an amnesty granted by Jordan’s new monarch, King Abdullah, al-Zarqawi and some of his freed followers left the country frustrated by their marginalization, perceived victimization, and constant monitoring of their movements by the GID.[8]

Simmering Discontent

With the Jordanian government unable to reintegrate the massive influx of returnees from Kuwait and Afghanistan into civil structures, former mujahedeen and islamized convicts became depressed and disgruntled with a persistently weak and significantly underperforming job market. Most Afghan veterans and al-Zarqawi’s recruits felt trapped by what they saw as the sins of the monarchy and the all-pervading climate of repression and continuous harassment of the security services. These mounting feelings of betrayal and victimization prompted many veterans to leave the country in search of new glories and a pious Islamic life. Some went to Afghanistan, the Balkans, Central Asia, and Chechnya to join a jihadi contingent recruited by al-Qaeda-aligned operatives in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and other countries in the Middle East and beyond. Others remained at home, devising their own set of goals that linked with the supreme military and political goal of the wider multinational network of jihadists. This group is primarily motivated by local issues.

These discontented warriors benefited greatly from globalization and the widespread alienation generated by the painful IMF/World Bank policies of economic and financial structural adjustment programs that the Kingdom launched after 1992. They proved adept at manipulating slogans, generating themes, and appropriating them for their own purposes. Through networks of storefront or makeshift mosques, they consolidated their ability to disseminate their ideas and operate in the shantytowns of the major cities in the kingdom. According to an ICG report, “privatisation and job cuts also eroded the power of (Trans-Jordanian) tribal leaders who used to

dispense patronage in the form of public sector employment; some of these leaders, together with their followers, also turned to religion.”[9]

The 1990-1991 Gulf war, which brought American troops to stand guard over Islam's holiest sites, heightened this simmering resentment and anger. Growing discontent would enter a new stage with the 1994 peace treaty between Jordan and Israel. This development was, indeed, a catalyst for radical Jordanian and Palestinian anger.[10] It also ensured new Jordanian recruits to the jihadi trend. It is around this period where al-Maqdisi emerged as one of the most prominent leaders of the jihadi movement in Jordan. He is credited with breathing life into the jihadi Salafi movement in Jordan. His movement *Bayat al Imam (Fealty to the Leader)* attracted disgruntled Jordanian citizens and veterans of the Afghan war.

By propagating his slogans of social justice and the Islamic character of leadership, al-Maqdisi tried to inspire significant numbers of dispossessed Jordanians to rise against the existing apostate Hashemite regime and replace it with an Islamic, sharia-driven state imbued with an uncompromising radical Islamist identity.[11] His book *Millat Ibrahim (Abraham's Creed)* catapulted him into the limelight and made him the foremost jihadi ideologue of Jordan. *Millat Ibrahim* became the main pillar of the Islamic Jihad's ideology in Jordan and a measuring stick against which jihadists could test and prove their power.[12]

al-Maqdisi's intensive and aggressive campaigning for his philosophy of *al-wala wal-bara* (loyalty and renunciation) created a small constituency of jihadi activists dedicated to forming small jihadi cells like *Jaysh Muhammad* (Muhammad's Army), established by Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law, Muhammad Jamal Khalifeh, and the Vanguard of Islamic Youth.[13] These underground groups led by Afghan veterans helped strengthen al-Maqdisi's militant movement of *Bayat al Imam*. These cells were capable of inflicting attacks on liquor stores, nightclubs, and theatres but still unable to strike at the regime itself.

Different Streams of Salafism

The ideas of Salafism were introduced in Jordan from Syria and Egypt, with their ideological and revolutionary traditions, in the 1960s. Young Jordanians studying in Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon were inspired by the prophetic radicalism of the Salafi doctrine promoted by Salafi literalist scholars. The doyen of these Salafi scholars was Nasr al-Din al-Albani (1909-1999), a Syrian scholar of Albanian origin, famous for his eloquence, charisma, and dislike of all schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). al-Albani's adherence to a literal reading of the *hadith* (traditions of the Prophet's life) and Quran self-defined in the absolutes of either-or and all-or-nothing gained him wide popularity and notoriety in Jordan where he was a frequent guest speaker at student-sponsored fora. Most of these Jordanian students were long-time acquaintances from Damascus.

In 1979, al-Albani moved to Jordan after he was declared *persona non grata* by the regime of Hafez Assad who was getting alarmed by the growth of religious dissent. Al-Albani was also unwanted in Saudi Arabia where he was forced to leave his teaching position at the University of Medina in the late 1950s due to his clash with Saudi religious scholars on matters of doctrine and ritual. His firebrand sermons, provocative language, and diatribes against immorality, injustice, and corruption in the 1970s and 1980s gained him national recognition and the admiration of many discontented Jordanians whose struggles he highlighted, especially in Zarqa where he settled. His popularity also earned him the wrath of the authorities who often hindered his activities and eventually banned him from speaking in public. The government crackdown on the man who helped introduce this new system of Salafi radicalism to Jordan and his sympathizers drove the movement underground where it recasted itself into a more elusive, self-perpetuating form.[14]

In the 1990s, Salafism in Jordan developed into three distinct types of activism: Missionary (*da'wa*), reformist (*islahi*) and violent (*jihadi*). The *da'wa* current is represented by *Salafiyya ilmiyya* (scholarly or scientific Salafism) which conceptualizes orthodoxy as a static set of beliefs and sharia as fixed divine construct. This form of traditional Salafism was introduced into Jordan with al-Albani. It is fundamentalist in its doctrinal outlook, eschews politics, and is primarily concerned with religious purification as understood by the *salaf* (early companions of the Prophet) and the restoration of moral order and *sirat al-mustaqim*, the "straight path" of God in Jordanian society.

Its discourse of cultural authenticity tries to tap into the collective anger and frustration of so many Jordanians living in crowded and poor neighborhoods and shantytowns. For decades, the Jordanian state encouraged the importation of traditional Salafism to counter the growing menace of political Islam represented by a Palestine-oriented Muslim Brotherhood, without seeming to appreciate that such a stance risked diluting its monopoly on Islamic interpretation. To preserve its enormous privileges and perpetuate its hold on power, the monarchy had every reason to look favorably on this Salafi current, which—albeit being contemptuous of modernity—was distinguished by its political quietism and deference to Muslim rulers.

The GID supported the ideological and motivational sources of traditional Salafi clerics such as Ali al-Halabi, Abu Shaqra, and al-Albani in the hope that they act as a buffer against Salafi jihadists. That tactic, however, became increasingly unsustainable in the aftermath of America's multi-front campaign against terrorism and particularly its invasion and occupation of Iraq. Even the founder of the reformist wing of the Salafi movement in Jordan, Abu Anas al-Shami, a once staunch opponent of al-Maqdisi and al-Zarqawi, switched gears and joined the fight against the American presence in Iraq where he was killed in September 2004 by a U.S. missile strike on the car he was traveling in.^[15]

The second tendency is represented by the political current of the Jordanian Salafi movement. Most political Islamists envision acquiring political power through peaceful means and prioritize objectives on the basis of a calculus of the realities of the political context.^[16] This trend, largely represented by the Muslim Brotherhood, sought to strike a delicate balance between different priorities in its program of work while sustaining the movement's unity of purpose and of action. The Brotherhood's survival entailed the management of the internal tension/contradiction occasioned by the demands of recognition of the Hashemite rule and constant adjustment and re-adjustment of its opposing stand to the regime's foreign policy. The real challenge was to balance support for the regime's institutions and organizations while at the same time continuing to oppose its peace treaty with Israel and support to the American occupation of Iraq. The functioning of the movement thus involved a compromise in terms of which the brotherhood surrendered a measure of its political platform in order to pursue a common purpose—the development of a broadly based and active Islamist civil society which would potentially lead to the establishment of an Islamist state.

As a large and well-organized movement, the Brotherhood benefited greatly from its ideological legacy and used it successfully in the 1960s, 1970s and to some extent in the 1980s to sideline its rival Salafist groups like *Hizb ut-Tahrir* (The Liberation Party). The latter was an ideologically retrograde movement which advocated a radical though non-violent challenge to the existing institutional arrangements of the society. The regime tolerated the Brotherhood's pragmatic dissent while seeking to utilize its flexibility and ideological weight to discredit the most radical, uncompromising Salafists and tame disgruntled politically-inclined Islamists by incorporating them within its ranks.

Despite its strategic and ideological flexibility, the brotherhood failed to broaden its electoral and organizational base and to create an ideological realignment of Islamist politics. This failure of the movement to extend its appeal beyond its middle class membership and reshape Jordan's Islamist ideological map lost it much of its luster and seriously threatened its internal unity. Its

growing inability to respond to changing political and geopolitical circumstances alienated many of its followers. The brotherhood strategy of protesting the regime's foreign policies yet accommodating them enraged the Jordanians of Palestinian origin in the movement who vociferously opposed Jordan's rapprochement with Israel at the expense of the Palestinians. This group within the brotherhood came to be known as the *Suqour* (hawks) due to its open support of Palestinian movements that resorted to violence to challenge the Israeli occupation.

But though the brotherhood escaped the worst by keeping the unity of its movement intact, it could not stem the erosion of public support resulting from its failure to build itself into a viable and credible alternative to the *status quo*. Polls consistently showed *Jabhat al-Amal al-Islami* (The Islamic Action Front), the political wing of the Brotherhood, losing public support. Its ratings went from 14.7 percent in 2003 to 6.6 percent in 2004 to a paltry 4 percent in 2005.^[17]

The jihadi tendency is the third type of Salafi activism. It rose to prominence with the preachings of al-Maqdisi. Like the *da'wa* activists, jihadists condemn political Islamists as defeatists for seeking to exploit religion for political purposes and accommodate modernity within Islam. The jihadists' entire political philosophy is based on the belief that contemporary Jordanian society returned to *jahiliyya* (a state of ignorance and unbelief that preceded the revelation of Islam) and that armed jihad was a religiously mandated struggle. From their perspective, jihad was the "sixth pillar" or "forgotten obligation" of Islam.

The jihadi community, however, bears visible scars of polarization along regional, social, personal, and tribal lines. The movement is deeply divided over tactics and strategies. Problems of conflict, ego, and cult of personality exacerbated internal fragmentation and disputes. The jihadist movement in Jordan, as elsewhere in the Muslim world, splintered into rival factions headed by strong-willed, ambitious, self-determined, and self-centered individuals. This clash of personalities and leadership styles was accentuated by conflicts over doctrine and ideology. Not even the specter of a formidable common enemy (ruthless authoritarian governments) helped bridge the divide over strategies, tactics, and religious dogma. Like their secular and political Islamist counterparts, the jihadists lost sight of the purpose of the struggle and fell victim to internal bickering engendered by the charismatic and autocratic style of leadership.^[18] Unable to foster a coherent, unified movement and coordinate under a centralized command, the Salafi-jihadi movement slowly but steadily trended downward in prestige, status and popular support. The extremes of the ideological spectrum of jihadism alienated many of the movements' supporters. Their ruthless tactics in warfare fuelled negative public attitudes.

The tug-of-war among Jordanian radicals over the purpose of jihad and strategic objectives factionalized the movement into two main rival groups. One is headed by al-Zarqawi; the other by his spiritual mentor al-Maqdisi.^[19] No spin, no sloganeering, no common humiliations at the hand of their common enemy helped break the messianic cult of personality and the regional, social, and tribal axis on which their forces spin. The break-up between the two men occurred inside the walls of Salt prison where the pupil revolted against the religious and ideological teachings of his mentor. al-Zarqawi exhibited impatience with the rules of warfare conduct and the realities of the political context. He forcefully rejected al-Maqdisi's tactical calculus of sparing Jordan bloodshed and dissipating any remaining sympathy the jihadi movement still enjoyed in some sections of Jordanian opinion. al-Zarqawi, with his tough-minded personal style, overconfidence, and irrational ambition disregarded all notes of caution and derided his adversaries and competitors as narrow-minded defeatists. He believed that his vision for the movement would be the driving force behind his hard-line policies and attempts to legitimize his de facto role as a leader of the anti-apostate Jordanian regime and his Western backers.

The Great Divide

The first credible sign of the division and fragmentation of the Jordanian jihadist movement occurred with the publication of a letter and a booklet by al-Maqdisi while in prison titled “*Al-Zarqawi, munasaha wa munasara*” (“Al-Zarqawi: Advice and Support”),^[20] and *Waqafat me’a thamarat al-jihad* (An Appraisal of the Fruits of Jihad)^[21] consecutively. These manuscripts were the first part of a critique launched by al-Maqdisi against his former partner. Following his release from prison in 2005,^[22] al-Maqdisi gave several interviews with newspapers and the Al-Jazeera television network criticizing al-Zarqawi for his warfare tactics:

My project is not to blow-up a bar, my project is not to blow-up a cinema, my project is not kill an officer who has tortured me... My project is to bring back to the Islamic Nation its glories and to establish the Islamic state that provides refuge to every Muslim, and this is a grand and large project that does not come by small vengeful acts. It requires the education of a Muslim generation, it requires long term planning, it requires the participation of all the learned men and sons of this Islamic Nation, and since I do not have the resources for this project then I will not implicate my brothers... in a small material act that is wished for by the enemies of our nation to throw our youths behind prison bars...

...Every stage has its priorities, and at this stage I do not want Iraq or any other place to become a furnace for the sons of this movement...

...They may call these retractions or re-evaluations, let them call it what they may, this talk is not new for us and since when did we say otherwise? Since when did we speak of killing women and children? Since when did we speak of killing the laymen of the Shia? Since when did we say anything of the such?^[23]

al-Maqdisi worried that al-Zarqawi's multiple wars against the Jordanian regime, the Americans, the Shiites, other Islamists and noncombatants would do undue damage to the jihadist cause.^[24] He decried his reckless disregard for Islamic rules prohibiting attacks against civilians except in the most extreme circumstances. This doctrinal dispute over the permissibility of targeting civilians is just one example of the many ideological differences that divide and polarize the jihadist movement not only in Jordan but throughout the Muslim world. The differences are so severe that the centre cannot hold at this time of global chaos. al-Maqdisi whose job was to shape the ideological orientation of the jihadi movement in Jordan was overshadowed by al-Zarqawi's rise to prominence in Iraq and his marriage with al-Qaeda. He was also marginalized by his re-incarceration in 1999. Since he left jail in 2005, his job became to referee on doctrinal, ideological, and political disputes between the three main rival wings of the jihadi camp: Irredentist jihadists, local jihadists and transitional jihadists.^[25]

Far from being a fixed ideological monolith, jihadism does not and cannot constitute a single coherent entity because different historical, cultural, doctrinal, and social contexts and realities make for different jihadisms. Understanding the dynamics of the competing and sometimes contradictory discourses on any given issue requires an appreciation of the diversity of the contemporary jihadist experience. Competing factions of jihadi activists are engaged in a struggle among themselves over the essence and direction of the jihadi movement. The differences between jihadists in doctrinal issues, political conceptions, and social orientations should not be overshadowed by the compelling quality of lumping all jihadi movements together as an organizing principle in the war on terrorism. The problem with the Western thesis that considers jihadism as internally undifferentiated is that it is reductive in nature and fails to take account of the fragmentation of the jihadi movement in formulating effective policy to combat it.

The fragmentation of the jihadi movement has been obscured by the unified, universal, and comprehensive call of the jihadi discourse to redeem land ruled under occupation (Afghanistan, Chechnya, Kashmir, and—above all—Palestine). But disagreements over tactics, religious doctrine, strategic objectives, and proper rules of warfare have been central to the internal politics

of jihadi movements in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, and many other places, and are now arising in Jordan and Iraq. As the International Crisis Group noted, "an important distinction here is between the resort to armed struggle that is primarily determined by the situation (such as foreign rule or military occupation) and that which arises primarily out of a radical doctrine expressing a definite preference for violent over non-violent strategies despite the possibility of engaging in the latter."[\[26\]](#)

Conclusion

The Jordanian security landscape has changed dramatically in the last three years, first with the American invasion and occupation of Iraq, and again following the terrorist attacks of November 9, 2005. There has been a disturbing shift in the mood of Jordanians regarding support for political violence and suicide attacks. A majority (57 percent) of Jordanians believe suicide bombings and other violent actions are justifiable in defense of Islam, according to the findings of a survey released on July 14, 2005 by the Pew Global Attitudes Project. The same survey found a nearly 50 percent support for suicide bombings against Americans and other Westerners in Iraq. 25 percent of Jordanians expressed strong confidence in Osama Bin Laden; 60 percent had at least some confidence in him, slightly higher than the 55 percent registered in 2003.[\[27\]](#)

To be fair, Jordanians reacted with shock and horror at the three bomb attacks that targeted Amman's hotels and left scores dead and hundreds of people injured. The indiscriminate and senseless slaughter of so many lives transformed overnight the tender vision of Osama Bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as Muslim Bravehearts into despicable monsters. Jordan's most celebrated heroes became its most reviled villains. al-Zarqawi was publicly disowned by his own tribe which once shared his stated vision of defending the faith and Muslim lands from the perceived onslaught of infidel foreign invaders and occupiers.

Opinion polls now show widespread revulsion at suicide bombing as a tactic of war and terror.[\[28\]](#) Whether this change of heart lasts and whether it involves the beginning of a long overdue critical reassessment of jihadism and the catastrophic flaws of that ideology is still hard to tell. It is difficult to predict how an ambivalent population that is as shocked and horrified by the murder *en masse* of innocent civilians as it is angry at U.S. policies in the region, and the monarchy's acquiescence in them, will ultimately react.

The 11/9 attacks cannot be understood except by appreciating not only the ambivalence of the population but the fractures and fragmentation that rock the jihadi and Islamist movements. A civil war is raging among jihadists and Islamists and the outcome of this battle will, as much as anything, determine the fate of radical jihadists like al-Zarqawi. al-Maqdisi's qualified repudiation of the irrational jihadi ideology of al-Zarqawi and his reexamination of its theoretical position in light of a rational reassessment of Islamic rules of warfare and the prevailing realities on the ground are encouraging signs of the debate occurring within jihadists circles about the need for contextualized understanding of the issues of jihad and political violence. al-Maqdisi, however, has not yet moved beyond denunciation of violence against the state and excommunication of fellow Muslims to the next difficult level of effectively challenging the intellectual underpinnings of violent jihadi ideology. There are profound disagreements among Jordanian jihadists about how to redeem Muslim lands from foreign occupation and how to challenge a Jordanian leadership that failed to advance reforms that promote good governance and poverty alleviation and eliminate the frustration and the despair caused by incompetence and corruption in government.

The Jordanian regime is caught between a rock and a hard place. Having centered his foreign policy on an unpopular alliance with America that he believed would yield economic dividends, King Abdullah is struggling to cope with the fallout from throwing in his lot with George W. Bush and supporting the U.S. invasion of Iraq on the one hand, and skyrocketing oil prices and deteriorating economic conditions on the other. Despite the 7.7 percent economic growth

registered in 2004, the majority of Jordanians have not reaped the benefits of economic growth, at least not yet.[29] At this stage, the kingdom's best bet is to adopt a multi-dimensional security policy that enhances its security posture without sacrificing the values of accountability, political participation, and economic rights which are necessary to sway public opinion against radical jihadists. The government's efforts to expose the moral and practical bankruptcy of the jihadi strategy, and the intellectual impoverishment of the thinking that inspires it, will not achieve the desired results unless the regime provides a democratic space where oppressions are addressed and a culture of justice is created that provokes contestation and democratization of the forms and meanings of Muslim politics. The Jordanian monarchy would be much better off if it provides a forum for an honest debate and analysis of jihad.[30]

About the Author

Anouar Boukhars is Visiting Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for Defense and Security Policy at Wilberforce University. He is also editor of *Wilberforce Quarterly Journal*.

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References

1. U.S. diplomat Laurence Foley was gunned down in October 2002 by Salem Said Salem bin Suweid, a Libyan national; the attempted rocketing of U.S. Navy ships off Aqaba in August 2005 was performed by Syrian and Iraqi terrorists; and the three hotels bombings were conducted by a terrorist cell comprising Iraqi elements.
2. Many of the Kuwaiti Palestinian refugees were more affluent than the locals and tended to set themselves apart by their conspicuous display of their wealth and differing social mores. But a great number of the 250,000 refugees were poor and settled in Zarqa whose "lack of a strong tribal structure, turned it into an ideal recruitment ground for Salafi-inspired groups that offered a sense of identity and common cause to an uprooted community." International Crisis Group, "[Jordan's 9/11: Dealing with Jihadi Islamism](#)," *Middle East Report* No. 47, November 23, 2005, 4.
3. *Ibid.*, 4.
4. See Hazem al-Amin, "Zarqa Gave Birth to Khalaileh and Maqdisi, Where the Returnees from Kuwait Joined Them," *Al-Hayat*, December 15, 2004.
5. "After his release, he married and began frequenting the al Hussein Ben Ali mosque, a radical hotbed on the outskirts of Zarqa. Fascinated by the stories of mujahedeen fighters who regularly visited the mosque, he was easily recruited by a representative of the Arab-Afghan Bureau, the Islamic organization charged with supplying Arab fighters to participate in the anti-Soviet jihad." Loretta Napoleoni, "[Profile of a Killer](#)," *Foreign Policy*, November/December 2005.
6. See International Crisis Group, *Op. Cit.*, 8.

7. For al-Maqdisi's own account of his time in jail and how he managed to disseminate his texts, see Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi, "[An Encounter Behind the Apostates' Bars in Jordan](#)," *Nida al-Islam*, February/March 1998.

8. al-Maqdisi decided to stay in Jordan where he felt he could make a difference. He was very critical of all jihadists who decided to follow al-Zarqawi's path to international jihad. al-Maqdisi believed that the bulk of jihadi activities should be focused solely on proselytizing and gaining more recruits in anticipation of the ultimate battle with the Jordanian regime whom he branded as infidel.

9. See International Crisis Group, [Op. Cit.](#), 5.

10. See Hazem al-Amin, "Zarqa Gave Birth."

11. See Nibras Kazimi, "A Virulent Ideology in Mutation: Zarqawi Upstages Maqdisi," in Hillel Fradkin, et al., eds. [Current Trends in Islamist Ideology II](#) (Hudson Institute, Washington D.C, 2005), 60-63.

12. See article by Saud bin Saleh Al-Sarhan in Asharq Al-Awsat (London), "'Al-wala' wal bara,' al ideologiyah al-jadidah...(Loyalty and Renunciation...The New Ideology of Islamist Movements)," No. 9192, January 28, 2004.

13. Al-Maqdisi's concept of *al-wala wal bara* is based on the following verse in the Quran: "You have an excellent example in Ibrahim and those with him, when they said to their people, 'We wash our hands of you and all that you worship apart from God, and we reject you. Between us and you there will be enmity and hatred for ever unless and until you believe in God alone.'" (Surat al-Mumtahana:4). Al-Maqdisi believed that this Quranic verse leaves no doubt about the necessity of all believers to uphold the concept of *al-wala wal bara* and stand up to those regimes that have forsaken Sharia for some *nizam kufr*.

14. Abu Qatada—whose real name is Omar Uthman Abu Omar—is another major figure that helped unleash fundamentalist Salafism in Jordan. Born in Bethlehem in 1960, he lived in Jordan until 1989 when he fled the country to Kuwait, then to Afghanistan with al-Maqdisi, and finally to London where he settled. He was sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment in Jordan in 2000 on charges of conspiring to attack U.S. and Israeli tourists during the Kingdom's millennium celebrations. Since October 2002, he has been confined without trial in Britain where he faces deportation to Jordan. He is considered Bin Laden's right-hand man in Europe, or 'spiritual ambassador to the continent' as one Spanish judge has described him. *BBC News*, "[Profile: Abu Qatada](#)," December 7, 2005.

15. International Crisis Group, [Op. Cit.](#), 11.

16. See International Crisis Group, "[Understanding Islamism](#)," *Middle East Report* No. 37, March 2, 2005.

17. *Jordan Times*, September 7, 2005.

18. See Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

19. For a more detailed analysis of the break up between al-Maqdisi and al-Zarqawi, see Nibras Kazimi, "[A Virulent Ideology in Mutation: Zarqawi Upstages Maqdisi](#)," *Hudson Institute*, September 12, 2005, 65-68.

20. Available online at: <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=2979>.
21. Available online at: <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=2785>.
22. Al-Hayat, "Al-Urden: Tabriat Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi... (Jordan: Exonerating Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi, the Spiritual Father of Zarqawi)," December 28, 2004.
23. Kazimi, *Op. Cit.*, 70.
24. See "[al-Maqdisi: Indiscriminate bombings distort the picture of Jihad](#)," *Alghad*, July 5, 2005; see also Bernhard Zand, "[Zarqawi's New Strategy: Four Days of Martyrdom](#)," *Der Spiegel*, July 11, 2005.
25. al-Maqdisi was rearrested on July 6, 2005, a day after his interview with al-Jazeera.
26. See International Crisis Group, "[Understanding Islamism](#)," *Op. Cit.*
27. PEW Global Attitudes Project, "[Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics](#)," *PEWGlobal.org*, July 14, 2005.
28. "Special Report: Arab World, Iraq and al-Qaeda: Unfamiliar Questions in the Arab Air," *The Economist*, November 24, 2005.
29. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, "[Background Note: Jordan](#)," September 2005.
30. The regime's propping up of competent and respected imams is a first good step that should be complemented by allowing a free space for independent but credible clerics who, though critical of the government's policies, have the necessary legitimacy to take on radical jihadists.