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Jihadi-Salafism in Jordan and the Syrian Conflict: Divisions Overcome Unity

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ABSTRACT
Over the last decade, a rift has emerged among *Jihadi-salafis* in Jordan between the "Zarqawiyyun"—who see Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi as their model and concentrate on combat—and the "Maqdisiyyun"—who want more scholarly guidance, emphasize the establishment of an Islamic State and follow Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. The conflict in Syria, however, offered options for both: a *jihad* against a reviled regime and the possibility to set up an Islamic state. It thus had the potential to unite the "Zarqawiyyun" and the "Maqdisiyyun." This article analyzes why this did not happen.

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The Syrian conflict has shocked people all over the world and perhaps particularly so in neighboring Jordan, which is directly affected by some of the consequences of the war. At the time of writing (September 2016), for example, Jordan is said to have taken in over 600,000 Syrian refugees on a total population of some 8 million.[1] Apart from the financial burden that this constitutes to Jordan, which has a struggling economy anyway, there are indications that some Jordanians may feel that Syrians fleeing the war are getting employed in jobs that were really meant for the kingdom's own citizens, not foreign refugees.[2] Moreover, the rise of radical Islamist movements in Syria like Al Qaeda's former Syrian branch Jabhat al-Nusra (now renamed Jabhat Fath al-Sham) and the Islamic State (IS) is most likely responsible for the increase in fear among Jordanians of "Islamic extremism."[3] Recent attacks in Jordan itself[4] will probably increase such fears. The biggest Islamist movement in the country—the Muslim Brotherhood and its political party, the Islamic Action Front—are no exception, decrying the situation in Syria while blaming the regime as well as IS for their use of violence.[5]

Jordanian worries about the conflict in Syria do not just pertain to what happens in the kingdom's northern neighbor or to attacks within its own borders, but also to support for *Jihadi-Salafism* in Jordan itself. Salafism, a religious trend within Sunni Islam whose adherents claim to emulate the Prophet Muhammad and the first three generations of Muslims as closely and in as many spheres of life as possible, has a decades-long history in Jordan, going back to the 1950s.[6] Its *jihadi* branch—which I define as the form of Salafism whose adherents view *jihad* not only as

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allowed against non-Muslim enemies from outside "the abode of Islam" (*dar al-Islam*), but also see it as legitimate against the supposedly apostate rulers of the Muslim world itself[7]—came into existence in Jordan in the early 1990s.[8] While most Salafis in Jordan are quietists who refrain from political activism, reject revolutions, and vehemently disavow militant movements like Al Qaeda and IS[9], several Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafis* have gained notoriety since the 1990s. Foremost among these is Abu Musʿab al-Zarqawi (1966–2006), who—as the leader of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia—was responsible for the killing of hundreds of civilians in Iraq after the American-led invasion of that country in 2003 and was also behind the hotel bombings in Amman in 2005.[10]

Al-Zarqawi's violent behavior led to criticism even within *Jihadi-Salafi* circles, however, including from his former mentor in Jordan, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.[11] Although the latter had expressed his reservations about what he considered extremism in *jihad* and the excommunication of Muslims (*takfir*) before, his scolding of al-Zarqawi and several subsequent writings fleshed out a broader critique of *jihadi* practices. To al-Maqdisi, fighters are sometimes guilty of illegitimate acts of violence against people who do not deserve to be targeted, often wage *jihad* in an unorganized and unprepared manner and mostly fight in ways that do not yield long-term benefits for Islam. Instead, al-Maqdisi argues that *jihad* should be legitimate, effective and fruitful.[12] The Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafis* criticized by al-Maqdisi often did not take his words lying down, however, and over the last decade a rift has emerged in Jordan between the "Zarqawiyyun"[13]—who look to al-Zarqawi as their model of a brave and heroic fighter—and the "Maqdisiyyun"—who attach greater value to scholarly guidance of *jihad* and find this in al-Maqdisi.[14]

This rift between the "Maqdisiyyun" and the "Zarqawiyyun" should be seen in the broader context of debates about religious authority in *jihad*: should fighters, with their practical knowledge and combat experience, or scholars, with their theoretical knowledge of the *Sharia*, have the final word on this subject?[15] Apart from this dimension, which will not be dealt with in this article,[16] there is a second aspect about this rift that is highly relevant to the Syrian civil war, namely the latter's potential to unify the "Maqdisiyyun" and the "Zarqawiyyun" again. This is because the conflict in Syria is a fight against an internationally reviled regime that is led by ʿAlawite Muslims, who are considered deviant believers at best in the eyes of all *Jihadi-Salafis*. Moreover, through the presence of *Jihadi-Salafi* groups like Jabhat Fath al-Sham and IS and the real possibility to set up safe havens and even an Islamic state in parts of Syria "liberated" from the regime, this *jihad* could be precisely the type of legitimate, effective, and fruitful fight that could unite the "Maqdisiyyun" and the "Zarqawiyyun" after years of verbal conflict. In this article, I argue that this did not happen because IS, rather than being seen as the unifying force for *Jihadi-Salafism* it could have been, turned out to be perceived as precisely the type of "fighter-driven" effort that some of the "Maqdisiyyun" had feared and warned against so often, leading to further division instead of unity.

Based on Jordanian and international media in Arabic or English, primary sources downloaded from the Internet and semi-structured interviews with *Jihadi-Salafis* conducted in Jordan in the period 2012–2014, this article will first deal with the most important representatives of *Jihadi-Salafis* in Jordan and how they can be divided in the "Maqdisiyyun" versus "Zarqawiyyun" conflict. Next, it deals with Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafis* who have gone to Syria to wage *jihad* and the kingdom's response to this phenomenon. Finally, I will look at the impact of the Syrian conflict on Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafis* and why the conflict between the "Maqdisiyyun" and the "Zarqawiyyun" did not unite the two groups, but was transformed into a new rift.

Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafi* Leaders

Since the arrival of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi in Jordan in 1992,[17] *Jihadi-Salafism* has not only spread throughout the country and is believed to have some 6,000–8,000 followers,[18] but the number of prominent adherents to this trend has also greatly increased and include two major theorists and a much larger number of local *shaykhs*.[19]

Theorists

Since the dispute between al-Maqdisi and al-Zarqawi and the criticism between their respective supporters in the period 2004 to about 2009, the former has maintained his reputation as one of the world's most important *Jihadi-Salafi* scholars. He has since expressed support for the type of *jihad* that he sees as being waged according to scholarly directions, conducted under the guidance of a *Jihadi-Salafi* group and aimed at setting up Islamic sovereignty, such as in the Northern Caucasus, Somalia[20] and the Gaza Strip.[21] Although he has continued to speak out on various issues every now and then—especially in relation to the Syrian conflict, which this article will turn to later—his ability to do so has been severely hampered by several stays in jail. He was imprisoned in 2010 on terrorism-related charges and released again in June 2014,[22] only to be rearrested again in October of that same year for allegedly using the Internet to spread extremist ideas and recruiting for terrorist organizations.[23] He was released again quickly thereafter and is now a free man, apparently also allowed to give interviews to foreign media.[24]

A different trajectory was that of Abu Qatada al-Filastini, who is a Jordanian citizen but left the country in the early 1990s and spent most of the past two decades in Great Britain, from where he acted as a spiritual guide to *Jihadi-Salafis* around the world, including those of Algerian militant groups.[25] Because the British government felt that Abu Qatada, although technically not guilty of anything they could imprison him for, was a radical scholar whose influence they would rather get rid of, it tried to have him deported to Jordan. After years of legal wrangling, Abu Qatada eventually voluntarily went back to Jordan, where he arrived in 2013. Since he had been tried in absentia for two terrorism-related cases in Jordan, Abu Qatada was immediately arrested when he arrived in Amman, but was acquitted of both charges against him in June[26] and September 2014.[27] Since then (and even before his acquittal), it has become clear that Abu Qatada and al-Maqdisi are on good personal terms and view the situation in Syria quite similarly, as we will see below.

Local *Shaykhs*

Apart from the two important theorists mentioned above, both of whom are widely known internationally, Jordan has quite a number of less prominent *Jihadi-Salafi shaykhs* who serve as spokesmen, local leaders for mostly younger "knowledge seekers" (*talabat 'ilm*) or lower rank scholars. Among the spokesmen, perhaps the one best known is Muhammad al-Shalabi, better known as Abu Sayyaf. Hailing from the southern Jordanian city of Ma'an, al-Shalabi, who was born in the 1960s, has long been involved in actions that concern the regime, either through his militant preaching or his (violent) protest activities, which ultimately resulted in his arrest in 2002.[28] While imprisoned, he presented himself as having been arrested for his *Jihadi-Salafi* ideas and wrote a tract in which he explains the Islamic

confession of faith (*shahada*) as not only a confirmation of the one true God, but also as a rejection of idols (*tawaghit*). This may sound obvious, but al-Shalabi also includes false gods "represented by tribalism (*al-'asha'iriyya*), regionalism (*al-iqlimiyya*), nationalism (*al-wataniyya*), man-made laws (*al-qawanin wad'iyya*) and other heretical secular calls (*al-da'wat al-'almaniyya al-ilhadiyya*) that they want to separate Islam from life."[29] Given this implicit *takfir* of Muslim regimes—not to be confused with *takfir* of Muslims in general—it is not surprising that al-Maqdisi defended al-Shalabi. The latter and those arrested with him, al-Maqdisi contended, are not criminals but simply pious men who want to learn about, teach and cling to Islam.[30] Al-Maqdisi also stood up for al-Shalabi when the latter was attacked for being an extremist by Jordanian quietist Salafis.[31] Since his release, al-Shalabi has concentrated on acting as a spokesman for *Jihadi-Salafis* in Jordan.

A similarly strong relationship with al-Maqdisi can be found with 'Abd al-Fattah Shahada Hamid, better known as Abu Muhammad al-Tahawi, from the northern Jordanian city of Irbid.[32] A local leader rather than a scholar, al-Tahawi has long acted as one of the main spokesmen for *Jihadi-Salafis* in Jordan and especially for those in the north. After riots involving *Jihadi-Salafis* in the eastern city of al-Zarqa' in April 2011,[33] al-Tahawi was imprisoned by the regime, along with many other radicals, and he has not been released yet.[34] While in prison, al-Tahawi, who is in his early 60s, has suffered from repeated health problems[35] including fluid in his lungs, high blood pressure,[36] and a blood clot[37] and has been transferred to hospital on several occasions.[38] As a result of all of this, his practical influence among *Jihadi-Salafis* in Jordan has likely been reduced somewhat.

A third spokesman for *Jihadi-Salafis* in Jordan is Sa'd al-Hunayti, from Amman. Like al-Tahawi, he was also imprisoned after the April 2011 riots in al-Zarqa'[39] and was similarly said to have suffered from health problems while in prison,[40] although this may have been caused by his hunger strike over his alleged bad treatment in jail.[41] Unlike al-Tahawi, al-Hunayti was released from prison in August 2013,[42] which may have had something to do with his tribal connections, which are said to be stronger than most *Jihadi-Salafis'*.[43] After his release from prison in 2013, he rose to greater prominence after Abu Qatada al-Filastini, who had arrived in Jordan to be tried in court by that time, appointed him the official spokesman of the *Jihadi-Salafi* trend in the kingdom.[44]

There are also several local *Jihadi-Salafi* leaders who act as focal points for activities in their cities, as preachers of a radical message or as ideological guides for militants. These include two *shaykhs* from the western city of al-Salt, Abu 'Abdallah Luqman Riyalat and Jarrah al-Rahahila, both followers of al-Maqdisi, and Munif Samara, a physician from the eastern city of al-Zarqa', who has similar ties to Abu Qatada and al-Maqdisi.[45] Finally, the Jordanian lower-rank *Jihadi-Salafi* scholars include 'Umar Mahdi Al Zaydan from Irbid, Sami al-'Uraydi—who is personally close to al-Maqdisi[46]—and Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Nur al-Din Bayram from al-Zarqa'. The latter has, just like al-Maqdisi, attacked "extremism" in *Jihadi-Salafi* ideology in a book to which al-Maqdisi wrote the introduction[47] and has, subsequently, also been criticized for this by Jordanian "Zarqawiyyun."[48]

What all of these spokesmen, local leaders and lower rank scholars have in common is that they were all clearly among the "Maqdisiyyun" in the conflict with the "Zarqawiyyun" mentioned earlier. They were both ideologically and personally close to al-Maqdisi and, since his arrival back in Jordan, to Abu Qatada. Which of the two "camps" these local *shaykhs* belonged to became particularly clear after al-Maqdisi was released from prison in

March 2008, when the disputes between the "Maqdisiyyun" and the "Zarqawiyyun" were at their fiercest. At that time, a number of anti-al-Maqdisi statements were circulating in Jordan and on websites frequented by Jordanians who glorified al-Zarqawi. These "Zarqawiyyun," who do not include any prominent *Jihadi-Salafi* figures in Jordan but who mostly operate on chat rooms and Internet forums under pseudonyms, accused al-Maqdisi of lacking any *jihadi* credentials as a fighter, backstabbing al-Zarqawi and being ideologically weak.[49] Al-Maqdisi defended himself against these charges in October 2008 by releasing a statement against these writings signed by over two dozen Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafis*, including several of those mentioned above, such as Abu Muhammad al-Tahawi, Jarrah al-Rahahila,[50] 'Umar Mahdi Al Zaydan, Abu 'Abdallah al-Riyalat, and Nur al-Din Bayram.[51] Thus, when some of these men had to take sides between the "Maqdisiyyun" and the mostly anonymous "Zarqawiyyun," they clearly chose the former. This unity among the "Maqdisiyyun" would change, however, after the advent of the Syrian conflict in 2011.

Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafi* Followers in Syria

Although the leaders of the *Jihadi-Salafi* movement in Jordan are the ones best known, they are obviously not the only ones that make up this trend. With regard to the Syrian conflict, those *Jihadi-Salafis* who actually go so far as to leave the stability and relative safety of Jordan to go and fight alongside any of the militias in their northern neighbor are important too, even if for no other reason than the regime's constant efforts to crack down on this phenomenon.

Jordanian Jihadi-Salafis *Leaving for Syria*

The *Jihadi-Salafi* movement in Jordan is basically spread all over the country, but has several centers where many adherents to this trend can be found. These include al-Rusayfa and al-Zarqa' in the east of the country, al-Salt in the west, Irbid in the north, and Ma'an in the south.[52] Perhaps unsurprisingly, these also seem to be the most important cities where fighters moving to Syria are from, with reports indicating that many lived in al-Rusayfa,[53] al-Zarqa',[54] and Irbid[55] but also in Jordan's capital Amman[56] and the southern city of al-Karak.[57] Yet these reports do not give a complete picture of Jordanians fighting in Syria, as newspaper articles on those killed in combat also mention al-Salt,[58] Ma'an,[59] and the Palestinian refugee camp al-Baq'a (northwest of Amman),[60] besides al-Zarqa',[61] Amman,[62] and Irbid,[63] as places where fighters are from. Thus, Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafis* moving to Syria to wage *jihad* are from all over the country.

Age-wise, Jordanians leaving for Syria are mostly young adults, so about 18–30 years old,[64] although there are obviously exceptions of people who are older[65] and probably younger too. In terms of numbers, estimates from 2014 and 2015 of Jordanians fighting in Syria are all more or less around 2,000. The fact that this number squares with media accounts of both official estimates and those given by *Jihadi-Salafis* themselves and also gradually increased from some 250 in late 2012[66] to almost ten times as many two years later[67] suggests that it is likely to be accurate. The same applies to the number of Jordanians killed in Syria. In late 2012, one or two dozen fighters were said to have been killed,[68] a number that slowly but surely went up to between 250 and 300 in

late 2014,[69] after which the Jordanian media—for unknown reasons—basically stopped reporting on this subject.

Organizationally, Jordanians fighting in Syria have overwhelmingly joined *Jihadi-Salafi* groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra/Jabhat Fath al-Sham and IS. Although occasional reports have appeared that indicated Jordanians also joined the nationalist Free Syrian Army (FSA),[70] these were quite rare. Until at least 2013 and possibly well into 2014, the majority of Jordanians seem to have joined Jabhat al-Nusra.[71] From late 2013, however, IS was increasingly mentioned as a group Jordanians were also joining in large numbers.[72] In the summer of 2014, it became clear that IS was fast gaining Jordanian supporters in Syria and that, according to *Jihadi-Salafi shaykh* Muhammad al-Shalabi, some 800 members of Jabhat al-Nusra had switched sides to IS.[73] Shortly after, it was reported that IS supporters actually make up the majority of *Jihadi-Salafis* in Jordan.[74]

The Regime's Response

Considering Syria's proximity to Jordan, the regional or even global ambitions of some of the militias fighting al-Asad's regime and the clear support for these groups within Jordan itself, it was not surprising that the authorities in the kingdom have been worried about their country's own safety. Jordan has dealt with radical Islamist movements and individuals since at least the 1990s and the possible dangers of such groups became particularly clear with the 2005 hotel bombings in Amman.[75] Yet it still seems as if the Jordanian regime may have been caught off-guard during the initial stages of the Syrian conflict or, as some might put it, was consciously turning a blind eye to *Jihadi-Salafis* leaving for Syria because it was secretly glad to get rid of them.[76] In early 2014, however, Jordan was rumored to provide basic military training to non-*Jihadi-Salafi* fighters wanting to attack the Syrian regime. Although this was denied by the kingdom, non-*Jihadi-Salafi* fighters themselves are said to have confirmed that they were trained by Jordan.[77]

Whatever the case may be, it quickly became clear that the regime regained its footing and started arresting *Jihadi-Salafis* who wanted to cross the Syrian–Jordanian border[78] or fly to Damascus from Amman[79] in order to fight the Syrian regime. Some of the former are even said to have been killed or to have died as a result of wounds sustained during their attempts to cross over into Syria.[80] Such policies by the regime eventually led to the complete closure of the Syrian–Jordanian border—or so the regime said[81]—to *Jihadi-Salafis*, with the latter calling on the government to open it again[82] and being forced to go to Syria via Turkey.[83] Meanwhile, the regime was also engaged in arresting Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafis* returning from Syria[84] and some even surrendered voluntarily, sometimes because of wounds that they wanted treated in hospital.[85] Given this policy, *Jihadi-Salafis* sometimes express fear of going back to Jordan precisely because they expect to be arrested when re-entering the country.[86] This fear is, in fact, quite justified since even the wives of Jordanian men who died fighting in Syria are at least sometimes kept from coming back to the kingdom[87] or are even arrested.[88] *Jihadi-Salafis* have therefore accused the regime of applying a policy of stopping Jordanians (including women)[89] from going back to their country[90] and a lawyer acting on their behalf has even asked for an amnesty for all *Jihadi-Salafis* wanting to come back.[91]

Part of Jordan's policy toward *Jihadi-Salafis* leaving for or returning from Syria is based on its new antiterrorism law, which was designed precisely to deal with Syria-related security

problems. This law, adopted in April 2014, criminalizes "the intent or act of joining, recruiting, funding or arming" organizations such as the *Jihadi-Salafi* ones operating in Syria or in Jordan itself.[92] Particularly the fact that even the "intent" of joining such movements— so without actually having done so—was now seen as a terrorist act caused one Jordanian Member of Parliament (MP) to wonder whether someone who "likes" the Facebook page of a radical organization can be considered a terrorist too.[93] This law, in other words, provided the regime with sweeping powers to crack down on terrorist (and perhaps not so terrorist) activities in the name of security.[94] As such, it also had important consequences for *Jihadi-Salafis* in Jordan itself, many of whom—presumably at least partly as a result of this law—were arrested in a crackdown in cities across the country.[95] Some of these arrests included cases that showed that the Jordanian MP's question about social media comments in favor of radical groups was perhaps not an exaggeration: one of those arrested was referred to as the "WhatsApp jihadist" for allegedly spreading pro-IS propaganda on WhatsApp,[96] a popular smartphone application, while one journalist claimed that some Jordanians who had "liked" IS on Facebook had actually been arrested for doing so.[97] Some of those arrested had a rather high profile in Jordan, including Muhammad al-Zahiri, a *Jihadi-Salafi* often referred to as "Al Qaeda's poet" because of the militant poetry he writes (he was later released on bail),[98] and—as mentioned above—Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who had only been released several months before and whose arrest was said to have been directly related to the new antiterrorism law.[99]

The regime also took more long-term action against many *Jihadi-Salafis*, including trials against those who had been arrested both before and during the clampdown that took place after the adoption of the new antiterrorism law.[100] This abetted Jordan's existing policy of sending *Jihadi-Salafis* to prison for several years, which it continued throughout 2013 and 2014.[101] Yet the "hard" approach of imprisoning people was not the only way the Jordanian regime fought its citizens' attempts to leave for Syria. It also took a "soft" approach by establishing a government council "for the preparation of a specific strategy to combat extremism (*al-tatarruf*), terrorism, extremism (*al-ghuluw*) and *takfiri* thought (*al-fikr al-takfiri*)"[102] and actively laying down rules on what *imams* could preach about, referring to them as "our ground forces against the extremists."[103] *Imams* violating these rules and expressing support for *Jihadi-Salafis* in their sermons were indeed banned from preaching.[104] Such efforts all fit in with a broader Jordanian policy of portraying the kingdom as a haven for and promoter of "moderate" or "true" Islam that was rooted in an initiative in 2004 called the Amman Message,[105] a Jordanian attempt to define Islam as peaceful, inclusive, and tolerant.[106] Indeed, Jordanian King 'Abdallah II and his wife Queen Raniya were both actively involved in spreading this image of Jordan and of Islam.[107]

Dividing the United: Splits among the "Maqdisiyyun"

Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafis* were obviously against the kingdom's combination of cracking down on militancy and actively promoting a tolerant image of Islam. The frustration over seeing many of their like-minded countrymen arrested was mostly expressed through demonstrations demanding the prisoners' release, although in various ways. At first, *Jihadi-Salafi* demonstrations—perhaps inspired by the series of revolts that took place in the Arab world in the period 2010–2012—seemed to be part of a broader effort to demand not only the release of *Jihadi-Salafi* prisoners but also economic reforms.[108] This petered out fairly

quickly, however, and subsequent demonstrations seem to have been entirely about releasing *Jihadi-Salafi* prisoners,[109] including specific ones such as Mu'ammar al-Jaghbir, who was imprisoned for—among other things—aiding in the assassination of American diplomat Lawrence Foley in 2002.[110] The most prominent other form of protest engaged in by *Jihadi-Salafis* (including Abu Qatada al-Filastini[111]) was going on a hunger strike to enforce better conditions in jail.[112]

Preserving Unity

The protests against the regime's crackdown on *Jihadi-Salafis* were uncontroversial to the latter, just like *jihad* against the Syrian regime was, as we saw before. The rise of IS changed the uniting nature of the conflict in Syria, however. As has been made clear elsewhere, IS started as a branch of Al Qaeda but decided on its own to set up a Syrian affiliate and incorporate that into its own group. This clashed with the wishes of Al Qaeda's leadership, eventually leading IS (then still referred to as ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham [the Levant]) to split off from Al Qaeda altogether.[113] This not only constituted an organizational break, but IS's claim to be a state (and later even a caliphate), its controversial policies (slavery, beheadings, etc.) and its open conflict with Jabhat al-Nusra and other militias also meant that the rise of IS had the potential to break the Al Qaeda unity that the *jihad* in Syria had represented so far.

The unity-breaking rise of IS had an impact on *Jihadi-Salafism* in Jordan, too. A rift had developed between two groups in Syria that should have remained united in their legitimate, effective, and fruitful fight against the al-Asad regime. The fact that IS and Jabhat al-Nusra—which both more or less seemed to represent the type of *jihad* the "Maqdisiyyun" had always asked for—were now threatening to jeopardize the unity of *Jihadi-Salafism* altogether was a source of concern in Jordan. The main theorist of *Jihadi-Salafism* in Jordan—Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi—was quick to realize this and his response was initially one of mediation and reconciliation, stressing the need for unity and to refrain from infighting.[114] Both al-Maqdisi[115] and his fellow Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafi* theorist Abu Qatada[116] expressed mild criticism of unnamed militias because of the mistakes these made and the conflicts between them and also indicated that Jabhat al-Nusra and IS should join forces under Al Qaeda again. Until early 2014, the theorists' criticism of IS did not become any stronger and stressed unity above all.[117] This was also reflected in interviews the author conducted with local *Jihadi-Salafi* leaders in Jordan in January 2014, when it was still possible to find some "Maqdisiyyun" expressing support for both Jabhat al-Nusra and IS. Like al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada, they had not yet made up their mind about supporting one of the different militias and were unwilling to distance themselves from any of the others.[118]

The "Maqdisiyyun" Split Up

Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafi* leaders' attitude of sitting on the fence about the different militias in the Syrian conflict became increasingly difficult as 2014 progressed. This was not only because IS's violent policies became impossible to ignore, but also because the mediation efforts[119] organized to reconcile IS and Jabhat al-Nusra failed[120] and, as a result, infighting between them continued unabated. The blame for this failure to reconcile the two most important *Jihadi-Salafi* groups in Syria was put squarely on IS by al-Maqdisi, who accuses

that organization of rejecting all mediation efforts and refusing to listen to anybody's advice.[121] Similarly, Abu Qatada blames IS for its conflict with Jabhat al-Nusra and calls on the leader of the former, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, to join Al Qaeda again and leave Syria altogether.[122] In subsequent writings,[123] both theorists describe IS, its caliphate, and its often violent policies as illegitimate, deviant, and extreme and, as such, representative of neither the type of *jihad* the "Maqdisiyyun" want to see fought, nor of the Islamic state they want to see established.[124]

Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafi* followers also began to take sides more and more, but often not in the same direction as their theorists. As we saw above, the initial support for Jabhat al-Nusra in Jordan changed in favor of IS in 2014. This became apparent in increasingly open displays of solidarity with or even support for IS as expressed in waving IS's flag and gathering in large numbers while explicitly showing (and firing) guns, sometimes without police interference.[125] Several cities in Jordan, including Ma'an and al-Zarqa'[126] also witnessed openly pro-IS demonstrations by *Jihadi-Salafis*. In the case of Ma'an, however, which has long been a trouble spot and source of worry for the regime, this amounted to little more than a few dozen demonstrators.[127] Moreover, the protest—which was likely inspired by local grievances[128]—was denounced by both the leader of *Jihadi-Salafis* in Ma'an, Muhammad al-Shalabi, as well as the city's population, and its organizer later even apologised for the timing of the demonstration.[129]

Still, the real support within Jordan itself for IS, a movement that—unlike Jabhat al-Nusra—had regional ambitions, was clearly a cause for concern to the regime (as we saw above) and increasingly had repercussions for Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafis*. The conflict between Jabhat al-Nusra and IS was exported from Syria to Jordan, where it became a bone of contention between *Jihadi-Salafi* followers who used to be on good terms with one another. Several *Jihadi-Salafis* in Jordan told the author that this division sometimes even runs through families.[130] Local leader Muhammad al-Shalabi emphasized that it was not so much the members of these organizations who were causing the conflict between Jordanian supporters of both groups, but *Jihadi-Salafi* youngsters on social media.[131] Be that as it may, the consequences of the growing rifts between Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafis* could not be ignored. Ayman al-Balawi, for example, an imam from Amman sympathetic to *Jihadi-Salafism*, was physically attacked, ostensibly by IS supporters, for his criticism of their group.[132] Another vocal critic of IS close to *Jihadi-Salafism*, Iyad Qunaybi,[133] a professor of pharmacology from Amman, was also beaten up, most likely by supporters of IS.[134] Although he was not seriously wounded, this attack was roundly condemned by al-Maqdisi.[135]

These divisions among Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafis* were partly based on, but not simply a continuation of, the "Maqdisiyyun" versus "Zarqawiyyun" conflict, even though many of the arguments that had earlier been leveled against the latter were now used against IS. Precisely because it could be argued that IS constituted the ultimate realization of *jihad* through its translation into an Islamic state—which al-Maqdisi had always called for—IS proved not only popular among *Jihadi-Salafis* in general, but also among those who had been in the "Maqdisiyyun" camp before. To them, IS seems to have represented the concrete realization of the "Maqdisiyyun"'s dreams, which helps explain their decision to side with IS in Syria. To other *Jihadi-Salafis* in the "Maqdisiyyun" camp, however, IS—with its controversial policies and claims to the caliphate—was merely a more powerful and more sustained version of the type of illegitimate *jihad* they had so often criticized the "Zarqawiyyun" for.

While Abu Qatada remained ideologically close to al-Maqdisi and the same applied to Muhammad al-Shalabi,[136] Munif Samara,[137] and Sami al-'Uraydi, who even became Jabhat al-

Nusra's mufti,[138] others left this trend and joined IS: Sa'd al-Hunayti, the man who Abu Qatada had appointed spokesman for the Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafi* community, as we saw above, and who was even said to have tried brokering a cease-fire between IS and Jabhat al-Nusra[139] (although this was later denied)[140] enthusiastically joined IS later.[141] Two other former supporters of al-Maqdisi's way, Abu Muhammad al-Tahawi and 'Umar Mahdi Al Zaydan, followed similar paths. Both men had signed the document defending al-Maqdisi against the "Zarqawiyyun" in 2008 mentioned above, but it was reported that the former was now siding with IS too[142] and that the latter had even become a judge for IS in al-Raqqa, Syria.[143] In fact, Al Zaydan has even been mentioned as a possible successor to IS's spokesman Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani after the latter was killed in 2016.[144] The Syrian conflict and—more precisely—the rise of IS thus divided the formerly unified "Maqdisiyyun" over a situation that should have united not only them, but the entire Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafi* community, like nothing before.

Conclusion

Jordan's *Jihadi-Salafi* community has long known a rift between "Maqdisiyyun"—those who emphasize scholarly guidance in all things *jihad* and look especially to al-Maqdisi for this—and the "Zarqawiyyun" who find combat experience and practical knowledge more important and see al-Zarqawi as their model. The Syrian conflict, considering its struggle against a widely disliked dictatorship waged under the banner of *Jihadi-Salafi* groups fighting a regime that could perhaps be beaten, offered both groups the chance to get what they wanted: a legitimate, effective, and fruitful jihad for the "Maqdisiyyun" and a winnable fight for the "Zarqawiyyun." The conflict in Syria, in other words, had the potential to unite *Jihadi-Salafis* in Jordan.

Relatively large numbers of Jordanians have moved to Syria to wage *jihad* there since 2011, having initially joined mostly Jabhat al-Nusra and later more and more also IS. Simultaneously, the regime has increasingly cracked down on both *Jihadi-Salafis* going to Syria and those staying in Jordan itself. While this possibly unified the adherents to *Jihadi-Salafism*, the rise of IS has not. The latter may have fulfilled the wish of many *Jihadi-Salafis*—especially the "Maqdisiyyun"—of setting up an Islamic state, but its increasingly violent policies have shown to others that IS represents precisely the type of "illegitimate" conduct that al-Maqdisi had so often warned against.

Yet the rise of IS has not (only) revived the "Maqdisiyyun" versus "Zarqawiyyun" conflict, but has (also) caused a split among the former, with al-Maqdisi and several others siding with Jabhat al-Nusra/Jabhat Fath al-Sham, while some others who had previously been close to al-Maqdisi now chose IS, partly because it seemed to represent exactly the type of goal that al-Maqdisi had long called for: an Islamic state. This means that the rise of IS, besides the very concrete impact it has had in Syria, has been responsible for wreaking havoc in the Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafi* community by driving a wedge between former allies united around al-Maqdisi. The irony of all of this was that the Syrian conflict and its potential for furthering the establishment of an Islamic state, instead of unifying Jordanian *Jihadi-Salafism* like it should have, just proved to be another source of disagreement.

Notes

1. See the website of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), available at http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107 (accessed 23 September 2016).

Interestingly, Jordanian politicians themselves give much higher numbers of well over a million. See, for example, "Refugee Burden has Exhausted Jordan—Judeh," *Jordan Times*, 28 October 2014. Available at http://jordantimes.com/share-content/refugee-burden-has-exhausted-jordan—-judeh.html (accessed 30 October 2014); Petra News Agency, "Judah: Al-Urdunn Akbar Thalith Balad fi l-'Alam Istiqbalan li-l-Laji'in," *Al-Dustur*, 23 September 2013, p. 1.

2. "Syrians Grab 91% of Jobs Created by Private Sector—Study," *Jordan Times*, 28 October 2014. Available at http://jordantimes.com/share-content/syrians-grab-91-of-jobs-created-by-private-sector—-study.html (accessed 10 November 2014).
3. Taghrid al-Rashq, "Istitla' Amriki: 62% min al-Urdunniyyin Yakhshawna l-Harakat al-Islamiyya al-Mutatarrifa," *Al-Ghad*, 5 July 2014. Available at www.alghad.com/articles/812416 (accessed 10 November 2014).
4. "Jordan Soldiers Killed in Syria Border Attack," *Al-Jazeera*, 21 June 2016. Available at www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/jordan-soldiers-killed-syria-border-bomb-attack-160621064610938.html (accessed 23 September 2016).
5. See, for example, the Muslim Brotherhood's communiqué #311964 published on www.ikhwanjo.com (accessed 5 November 2012); "Hamza Mansur Yuwaddihu Rafdahu 'tibar Da'ish Irhabi," *Al-Kawn News*. 5 February 2015. Available at at www.alkawnnews.com/article/38271/%d8%ad%d9%85%d8%b2%d8%a9-%d9%85%d9%86%d8%b5%d9%88%d8%b1-%d9%8a%d9%88%d8%b6%d8%ad-%d8%b1%d9%81%d8%b6%d9%87-%d8%a7%d8%b9%d8%aa%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%b1-%d8%af%d8%a7%d8%b9%d8%b4-%d8%a5%d8%b1%d9%87%d8%a7%d8%a8%d9%8a (accessed 2 December 2016).
6. For more on Salafism in Jordan, see Muhammad Abu Rumman and Hasan Abu Haniyya, *Al-Salafiyya al-Muhafaza: Istratijiyyat "Aslamat al-Mujtama'" wa-Su'al al-'Alaqa "al-Muntasiba" ma'a l-Dawla* (Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2010); Muhammad Abu Rumman and Hasan Abu Haniyya, *Al-Hall al-Islami fi l-Urdunn: Al-Islamiyyun wa-l-Dawla wa-Rihanat al-Dimuqratiyya wa-l-Amn* (Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2012), pp. 217–279; Joas Wagemakers, "Contesting Religious Authority in Jordanian Salafi Networks," in Kacper Rekawek and Marko Milosevic, eds., *The Perseverance of Terrorism: Focus on Leaders* (Amsterdam, etc.: IOS Press, 2014), pp. 111–125; Joas Wagemakers, *Salafism in Jordan: Political Islam in a Quietist Community* (Cambridge, etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Quintan Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 111–146; Quintan Wiktorowicz, "The Salafi Movement in Jordan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32(2) (2000), pp. 219–240.
7. See Wagemakers, *Salafism in Jordan*, pp. 51–59.
8. Studies on *Jihadi-Salafism* in Jordan are Abu Rumman and Abu Haniyya, *Al-Hall*, pp. 281–393; Abu Rumman and Abu Haniyya, *Al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya fi l-Urdunn ba'd Maqtal al-Zarqawi: Muqarabat al-Huwiyya, Azmat al-Qiyada wa-Dababiyyat al-Ru'ya* (Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2009); Kirk H. Sowell, *Jordanian Salafism and the Jihad in Syria*. 12 March 2016. Available at www.hudson.org/research/11131-jordanian-salafism-and-the-jihad-in-syria (accessed 23 September 2016); Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 191–236; Wagemakers, *Salafism in Jordan*, pp. 179–200; Joas Wagemakers, "A Terrorist Organization that Never Was: The Jordanian 'Bay'at al-Imam' Group," *Middle East Journal* 68(1) (2014), pp. 59–75.
9. Wagemakers, *Salafism in Jordan*, pp. 195–198, 222–225.
10. Studies on al-Zarqawi include Jean-Charles Brisard (with Damien Martinez), *Zarqawi: The New Face of Al-Qaeda* (New York: Other Press, 2005); Fu'ad Husayn, *Al-Zarqawi: Al-Jil al-Thani li-l-Qa'ida* (Beirut: Dar al-Khayyal, 2005); Loretta Napoleoni, *Insurgent Iraq: Al Zarqawi and the New Generation* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005).
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12. Joas Wagemakers, "In Search of 'Lions and Hawks': Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's Palestinian Identity," *Die Welt des Islams* 53(3–4) (2013), pp. 388–415.
13. This term was adopted (in a slightly different form) from Murad Batal al-Shishani, who translates the term "*al-Zarqawiyyun al-judud*" as "neo-Zarqawists." See Murad al-Shishani, "The Neo-Zarqawists: Divisions Emerge between Jordan's Salafist Militants," *Terrorism Focus* 5(39) (2008). Available at www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34153 (accessed 11 November 2014); Murad al-Shishani, "Jihad Ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi Challenges Jordan's Neo-Zarqawists," *Terrorism Monitor* 7(20) (2009), pp. 3–4; Murad al-Shishani, "The Dangerous Ideas of the Neo-Zarqawist Movement," *CTC Sentinel* 2(9) (2009), pp. 18–20; Murad al-Shishani, "Neo-Zarqawists Target the Arab Christians of Jordan," *Terrorism Monitor* 7(34) (2009), pp. 4–6.
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19. Interview with the Jordanian journalist Mahmud al-Kilani, al-Salt, January 2014.
20. Wagemakers, "Protecting Jihad," p. 152; Wagemakers, "Reclaiming Scholarly Authority," p. 533.
21. Wagemakers, "In Search of 'Lions and Hawks,'" pp. 398–400, 409–413.
22. Wagemakers, *Did al-Maqdisi Make a Deal with the Jordanian Regime?* 29 July 2014. Available at www.jihadica.com/did-al-maqdisi-make-a-deal-with-the-jordanian-regime/, (accessed 11 November 2014).
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29. Abu Sayyaf al-Ma'ani, *Risala min Khalf al-Qudban ila l-Ikhwa al-Qabidin 'ala l-Jamr*. 3 November 2013. Available at www.tawhed.ws/r?i=m4hhgtgs (accessed 24 April 2014), pp. 2–3. The quotation is on p. 3.
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31. Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, *Ruwaydan Ayyuha l-Munhazimuna. Fa-A'da'una Yumayyizuna*. 24 November 2002. Available at www.tawhed.ws/r?i=za33cn8f (accessed 3 March 2014).
32. Al-Tahawi had invited al-Maqdisi, for example, to his son's wedding and allowed his name to be praised there by fellow *Jihadi-Salafi shaykh* Jarrah al-Rahahila. 26 December 2012. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=CW_Mr9pYOPU (accessed 12 November 2014), especially 1:59–2:30, 16:37–17:56 and 18:20–19:23. Al-Maqdisi is praised at 19:10–19:23.
33. Images of these riots can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=HlvOaX5jPTc, 15 April 2011 (accessed 12 November 2014); www.youtube.com/watch?v=bj7or4tJ-P0, 22 April 2011 (accessed 12 November 2014).
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39. Al-Hunayti actually acted as a spokesman for *Jihadi-Salafis* directly after the riots. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWbFudA6XIk, 22 April 2011 (accessed 12 November 2014).
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Ta'am fi 'Islah Umm al-Lu'lu'," *Al-Dustur*, 19 August 2013, p. 7; Ra'id Rumman, "'Abu Sayyaf': Tafh al-Kayl wa-Nattajihu Nahwa l-Tas'id," *Al-Sabil*, 13 August 2013, p. 1.

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49. Ibid., pp. 530–532.
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