

# Islamic Activism in Jordan

Juan José Escobar Stemmann

Athena Intelligence Journal  
Vol. 3, No 3  
July - September 2008  
[www.athenaintelligence.org](http://www.athenaintelligence.org)

**Athena Intelligence**

*Foundation for Advanced  
Research on Terrorism  
and Armed Conflicts*



# Islamic Activism in Jordan

Juan José Escobar Stemmann

## Abstract

Manifestations of Islamic activism are abundant in Jordan. Traditional allies of the monarchy, the Muslim Brotherhood has participated in politics when the regime has opted for political openness. However, their moderation in domestic politics has been accompanied by a growing radicalisation with respect to foreign policy issues. In addition, Jordan has been a leading centre for Salafi intellectual output for decades. The emergence of a Jihadi current in the 1990s led to the creation of the first armed groups and Jihadi ideas have found favour with certain sectors of society in the country. Military intervention in Iraq and, in particular, the figure of Abu Musaf Al Zarqawi have resulted in Jordan becoming a favourite Al Qaeda target.

**Keywords:** Islamic activism, Jordan, Muslim Brotherhood, Al Qaeda.

**Juan José Escobar Stemmann** is a Diplomat. He was a lecturer on Islamic movements in North Africa in the “Instituto Gutierrez Mellado for Defence Studies” and in the “Escuela Diplomática” in Madrid. His publications include “Islamic Movements in the Muslim world” in *Perspectivas Exteriores 2003* edited by FRIDE, *Política Exterior and Instituto Elcano*. He is a frequent collaborator of the magazine “*Política Exterior*” where he has written many articles about political Islam and the process of democratization in different Arab countries. His main research interests are Islamism, Democratization in the Arab world and Terrorism. He has participated in several seminars organised by the *Center of Defence Studies* in the Spanish Ministry of Defence and in different working groups in the Spanish Ministry Foreign Affairs. He intends to publish next year a book on “Islamic Activism in the Arab world”.

**M**anifestations of Islamic activism are abundant in Jordan. The country's Islamist movement has played a key role in political life virtually since independence. Traditional allies of the monarchy, the Muslim Brotherhood has participated in politics when the regime has opted for political openness. However, its moderation in domestic politics has been accompanied by a growing radicalisation with respect to foreign policy issues, as a result of their refusal to accept the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan and their diametrical opposition to the military intervention in Iraq.

In addition, Jordan has been a leading centre for Salafi intellectual output for decades. The emergence of a Jihadi current in the 1990s led to the creation of the first armed groups and Jihadi ideas have found favour with certain sectors of society in the country. Military interventions in Iraq and, in particular, the figure of Abu Musaf Al Zarqawi have resulted in Jordan becoming a favourite Al Qaeda target. However, the authorities in the country have succeeded in dealing with the Jihadi threat thanks to effective work by the security forces and initiatives such the Amman Message, which fosters a more tolerant vision of Islam and thus divert support from Jihadi ideology.

### **1. The Muslim Brotherhood. Between integration and radicalism**

Founded in 1945 with the patronage of King Abdullah I, the Muslim Brotherhood movement has played a prominent role in the political life of the Hashemite kingdom. Opposition to a common enemy - Nasserite nationalism - led the Brotherhood to support King Hussein in his battle with the nationalist movements during the 1950s. The Brothers also backed the regime during the civil war of 1970-71, which resulted in the expulsion of the PLO leadership to Lebanon. However, these ties of mutual cooperation have been characterised by high and low points, and even periods of crisis. Examples include the crisis in 1956 following the riots against the British presence in Jordan and, more recently, the crisis sparked by changes to the electoral law in 1993. Relations have been strained in particular by the regime's policy of approximation to Israel which led to the signing of the Wadi-Araba peace accord in 1994. Since then, relations between the regime and the Islamists have suffered substantial change and are now characterised by mistrust and a series of red lines which must not be transgressed at any time if the Islamists wish to avoid persecution.<sup>1</sup>

Islamists have been part of the political scene in Jordan since the regime adopted a policy of political openness in 1989. That same year, the Muslim Brotherhood created a political wing, the Islamic Action Front, which successfully contested the elections to the National Assembly, winning 22 of the 80 seats. Shortly afterwards it joined the government of Mudar Badran, securing five ministries (education, health, justice, social development and Islamic affairs). This was the golden age of relations between the regime and Jordanian Islamists, who left a significant imprint on

---

<sup>1</sup>Sabah El-Said. "Between pragmatism and ideology" .The Washington Institute Policy Papers N°39. 1995.

education. The passing of a new electoral law in 1993 heralded a period of confrontations which continue to this day. The law served to reduce the presence of the Islamists in the National Assembly and they obtained only 16 seats in the 1993 elections. Peace with Israel and the Jordanian government's refusal to amend the electoral law led the Islamists to boycott the 1997 elections, a move backed by nationalist and left-wing parties.<sup>2</sup>

After his ascension to the throne in 1999, King Abdullah II postponed the elections, initially scheduled for 2001, for two years due to the outbreak of the intifada in the occupied territories, the country's economic crisis and the growing instability that followed the terrorist strikes on the United States in 2001. The elections to the Lower House took place in June 2003. Realising that their absence from Parliament had undermined their influence, even though they were the broadest and best-organised political force, the Muslim Brothers changed their strategy vis-à-vis the government and decided to contest the elections, winning 17 of the 110 seats. A prior deal between the regime and the Islamists resulted in fewer candidates standing and limited support for the Islamic Action Front. Nonetheless, almost 56% of the Islamist candidates who did stand were elected.

The Islamists' return to Parliament did not alter their complex relationship with the Jordanian regime. The crisis in Iraq added a new element of tension to a relationship which had already been placed under strain by the process of normalisation with Israel. Following a series of government measures aimed at curbing the growing radicalisation of Islamist rhetoric concerning the Middle East conflict, several Brotherhood imams were arrested in October 2004 for failing to heed the instructions issued by the Preaching and Guidance Council on the Iraqi conflict. Mosque pulpits had become vehicles for incendiary statements designed to stir up the Jihad against American soldiers in Iraq. The imams arrested included the former government minister and President of the Shura Council, Ibrahim Zaid Kilani. Things soon returned to normal when the Brotherhood accepted the government's imposition.

In 2006 the success of the Muslim Brotherhood in the elections to professional associations and the condolences expressed by two prominent IAF leaders (Sukkar and Abu Fares, both MPs) to the family of Abu Mussab Al Zarqawi, the Al Qaeda leader killed in Iraq, once again heightened tensions between the government and the Islamists. Marouf Bakhit's government arrested and prosecuted the two IAF MPs, who spent several months in solitary confinement in prison before eventually receiving a pardon from the King. The Muslim Brotherhood carefully prepared their political apparatus for the two elections to be held in 2007 (municipal and Parliamentary). Despite being favourites to win the local elections in July, the Islamists announced on polling day that they had decided not to stand and accused the government of irregularities.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ziad Abu-Amr. "La monarchie jordanienne et les Frères musulmans ou les modalités d'engagement d'une opposition loyaliste". Les Etats Arabes face à la contestation islamiste. Institut Française de Relations Internationales. Paris 1996. Págs.125 to 144.

The decision to withdraw saw the Islamists lose municipal power and was capitalised on by the Jordanian government. At a time when Hamas was growing stronger in Gaza, the Jordanian government forced the Islamists to exclude members of the Palestinian sector from the list of candidates for the Parliamentary elections in November. Securing a number of economic and social concessions from the government, the Shura Council marginalised the IAF leadership and agreed to present a limited list of 'acceptable candidates' for the legislative elections on 20 November. The decision merely compounded the debacle of Jordan's main Islamist party, which obtained just 7 seats in 2007 (compared to 17 in 2003), plunging the official Islamists into an identity and leadership crisis from which they have still not recovered.

### 1.1. Identification of the different currents

Internal elections in recent years reveal that the Muslim Brothers are divided into three major currents.<sup>3</sup> The most radical, comprising the so-called 'hawks', is drawn mainly from the generation of Transjordanian Islamists whose support for the Jordanian regime proved decisive during the conflict with the Palestinians in the 1970s. The discourse of this sector is ideologically radical and includes open calls for an Islamic state to be installed and references to concepts such as *hakimiyya* or sovereignty of God. Its members are closer to radical Qotb discourse than to liberalising rhetoric. They are also the most nationalistic and defend the need to guarantee the pre-eminence of the Transjordanian component on the political scene. Having controlled the organisation until the 1990s, the sector is now a minority in an organisation dominated by the Palestinian faction. Its main representatives are Shura Council members Ahmed Kafaween and Ahmed Zarqa. Other prominent leaders include Mohamed Abu Fares, one of the leading exponents of academic Salafism within the Brotherhood.

The second of the three currents is the most moderate in the organisation and is known as *Wasat* (centre). The former Observer General, Abdel Magid Dneibat, and Secretary General of the IAF, Hamza Mansour, and the ex-president of the National Assembly, Abdelatif Arabiyat, were the doves in the organisation's leadership who successfully advocated ending the election boycott in the late 1990s and spearheaded the changes to the Muslim Brothers' political programme. The political heirs of this branch, including the new Observer General, Salem Falahat, dominate in the Shura Council, although their influence has waned in terms of senior positions in the Islamic Action Front, where the position of Secretary General has passed to the reformist sector. The discourse of the leaders of Wasat is reformist and they consider that Jordan's Islamists should set their own agenda rather than tie their political actions to the needs of Hamas.

The main current of the Muslim Brotherhood, although not necessarily the one enjoying broadest representation among the organisation's senior leadership, is the so-called reformist sector. The term can be misleading given that the sector is fully

---

<sup>3</sup> Interview of the author with Mohamed Abu Rahman. Editor of Al Ghad newspaper and a specialist in Islamic Movements. February 5, 2006.

supportive of the objectives of Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist group. This current comprises Jordanian Islamists of Palestinian origins who have gradually taken hold of the organisation's power bases. It benefits from the popularity of Hamas among Islamist militants in Jordan. Today, its members control virtually all the professional associations, whose main political goal is to oppose the normalisation of relations with Israel. They also control the leading Islamist newspaper, *Al Sabeel*. Their ranks include several MPs, including Hasan Huneidi, the IAF's spokesman in the National Assembly. The sector's grip on the organisation was strengthened at the last internal elections when one of its members, Zaki Bani Irshed, who is of Palestinian origin, was elected as the new Secretary General of the IAF, becoming the first Jordanian born in the occupied territories to hold the post.

A characteristic of this sector of the Brotherhood is the coexistence of supporters of the radical Qotb discourse and more moderate reformists who have embraced the reformist rhetoric and realise that the policies of openness initiated by Arab regimes should be to their benefit. However, both are united by their radical opposition to the normalisation of ties with Israel and their defence of the right to resist using every possible means. The recent election win by Hamas has served to bring into the open the question of which kind of relations should exist between Jordanian Islamists and their Palestinian counterparts. A delicate balance has been struck within the organisation. The more moderate sector of Jordanian Islamists remains in control of most of the senior positions in the new structure of the Brotherhood, while the reformist sector has consolidated its hold over the political apparatus. However, only the moderate sector has contacts with the country's government.

## 1.2. Political programme

Following the lead of their Egyptian counterparts, Jordan's Muslim Brothers recently unveiled a new political programme which reflects the evolution of their political doctrine during the course of the last decade. Realising that they have no choice but to engage in politics, the country's Islamists have fully embraced the rhetoric of political reform. Declarations that democracy was anathema to Islam and calls for an Islamic state ruled exclusively by the Sharia are very much a thing of the past. <sup>4</sup>Recognition of popular sovereignty (where before only the sovereignty of God – *hakimyya* - existed); the holding of free and fair elections; freedom of worship; the right of assembly and manifestation; freedom to create political parties; an independent judiciary and the establishment of a truly parliamentary monarchy are all concepts that feature in the programme of the Brothers. Democratic methods are applied stringently within the organisation and every four years elections are held to choose the Shura Council, which in turn elects the Secretary General and leadership of the Islamic Action Front, as well as the Observer General of the Brotherhood, a post which -unlike in Egypt- is not held for life.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ruhayel Graribeh. "Islamists and the Political Development in Jordan". Political Parties in the Arab World: Current status and future prospects. . Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. Amman 2004. Págs. 79 to 97.

Politically, Jordan's Islamists appear to partly follow the doctrinal evolution promoted by parties such as Justice and Development in Turkey and Morocco or Egypt's Wasat. However, some analysts consider that their ideology is closer to the anti-liberal, conservative and anti-western leanings of the founder of the Muslim Brothers, Hasan Al Banna, than to the new proposals of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey. They also consider that Jordan's Islamists have assumed the rhetoric of political liberalisation for purely practical reasons, not because of any deep-seated evolution in their doctrine. By way of example, they cite the economic chapter of the new political programme, which stresses that the solution to the major economic problems faced by the country's economy is to apply the Sharia. The Muslim Brothers are no exception in this regard: they remain extremely conservative on social issues and the recognition they afford to civil liberties is conditioned by considerations of public order and social decorum.

### **1.3. Organisational network and support activities**

The highs and lows experienced in their relations with the government have not prevented the Muslim Brothers from organising in many fields and putting in place an extensive nationwide network. Nursery schools, hospitals, cultural centres, youth centres and charity associations together form an institutional network used by the Brotherhood to consolidate its hold on Jordanian society. Special primary and secondary schools such as Dar Al Aqsa (which has more than 20 schools nationwide), Zarqa University, the Islamic Hospital in Amman (which employs over 1100 people), the Islamic Centre Charity Society (with its 32 committees), the Association for Islamic Studies and Research and the Society for the Preservation of the Koran (more than 100 centres nationwide) provide employment for Brotherhood members and create a social fabric that attracts new followers and rewards existing members.<sup>5</sup> The political activism of Brotherhood members has led them to involve themselves extensively in the running of professional associations which, in the absence of trade unions, are the main vehicles for representation in the country. Islamists currently control the professional associations for engineers, architects and lawyers and are the main opposition group in associations of doctors, civil servants and nurses.

The peculiar make-up of Jordan's political system and the coincidence of views on issues such as political reform or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have facilitated dialogue between the Islamists and other political forces in the country. The starting point for this dialogue can be traced back to the opposition of almost all the political forces to the 1993 electoral law, which led opposition parties to set up a Coordination Council comprising 13 parties (communists, Ba'athists, nationalists, socialists etc), including the IAF. The entire Council endorsed the boycott of the 1997 elections. Although its importance has diminished due to the lack of parliamentary representation of many of its members, it continues to table proposals and issue joint statements on a range of issues of common interest (electoral reform,

---

<sup>5</sup> Janine A. Clark. "The Islamic Center Charity Society in Jordan: The Benefits to the Middle Class". *Islam Charity and Activism*. . Indiana University Press . Bloomington 2004. Págs.82 to 102.

quotas for women, etc).<sup>6</sup> The Council is a source of pride for the IAF and is held up as a model for other Arab countries. Within the National Assembly the IAF has had few problems dealing with other political forces and has voted with them on many occasions.

#### 1.4. International issues

Like their brethren in the Middle East and North Africa, Jordan's Islamists have taken on the mantle of the heirs of Arab nationalism and have adopted the anti-western and anti-imperialist discourse which characterised the latter for many years. In recent times, their doctrinal evolution and moderation on matters of political reform have been accompanied by a radicalisation of their discourse on foreign policy questions. The peace treaty with Israel marked the beginnings of the process and led to the setting up of committees in professional associations to fight the normalisation of ties with Israel, which have been active of late. Campaigns have been launched to boycott individuals, firms and institutions who maintain ties with Israel. Initiatives such as the Road Map, which they accuse of being a road to surrender, are opposed and support is voiced openly for suicide attacks, which are considered 'martyrdom operations' and viewed as the only weapons to resist an enemy which is militarily superior. Like their Palestinian counterparts, Jordanian Islamists believe that Israel was forced to withdraw from Gaza by the military pressure exerted by Palestinian resistance.

US military intervention in Iraq is another factor in the hardening of the tone of moderate Islamist criticism, which has reached unaccustomed heights. Not only has the Jordanian government come under fire for allying itself with the United States in the Iraq war, but Arab governments have also been denounced for failing to act. Moreover, support has been expressed openly for the resistance and Jihad against American occupation. In some cases the government has been accused of apostasy and the legitimacy of the monarchy called into question. The Jordanian government clamped down hard on the criticism, which was unprecedented in its ferocity, as attested by the editorials of the main mouthpiece, the *Al Sabeel* newspaper. The newspaper has also regularly published articles by authors praising Bin Laden and the Iraqi resistance. Although openly critical of the methods employed by people such as Zarqawi (beheadings, killings of Iraqi civilians), the authors defended the use of violence by the resistance and attributed martyr status to those who give their lives for the cause. Their views concerning the right to resist foreign occupation clearly reflect the radicalisation of the positions of the more moderate Islamist as regards foreign policy.

The Islamists are also highly critical of the West, whom they accuse of double standards and of being to blame for many of the evils suffered by the *Umma*. The United States bears the brunt of the criticism on account of its support for Israel and the military intervention in Iraq. For these reasons, the Islamists refuse to have

---

<sup>6</sup> Russell E. Lucas. "Deliberalization in Jordan". *Islam and Democracy in the Middle East*. Edited by Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Daniel Brumberg. John Hopkins University Library. Baltimore 2003. Págs. 99 to 106.



any contact with the official representatives of the US government. Criticism is levelled at Europe too for its failure to act and inability to adopt a more balanced approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the Islamists stress the need for good relations with the European Union, among other reasons given the sizeable Muslim community in the EU. They underline the importance of organisations close to the Muslim Brotherhood in many European countries, where they have become the main representatives of the Muslim communities. Hence their reaction to the crisis triggered by the publication of the cartoons against the Prophet Mohammed was more muted and they advocated dialogue with the European authorities to avoid a repetition of such acts. The Islamists have a negative opinion with respect to the Barcelona Process, criticising in particular the economic basket because of the neo-liberal vision of economic ties it imposes, which benefits Europeans only.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Salafism. Between pietism and Jihad

Salafism today is a method to search for religious truth, a desire to practice Islam exactly as it was revealed by the Prophet. As a movement it is very close to Wahabism, whose ideology has spread throughout the Arab world thanks to the support received from Saudi Arabia. Two major tendencies dominate the Salafi scene: academic Salafism (*Salafīyya ʿilmīyyah*), which is the pietist and apolitical version, and fighting Salafism (*Salafīyya Jihādīyyah*), which evolved during the 1990s largely as a result of the opposition generated by the presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.<sup>8</sup> Both trends have numerous followers in Jordan.

Academic Salafism developed in Jordan in the 1980s after the arrival of Nasir al Din al Albani (who died in 1999), a Syrian who fled his country due to the government's repression of Islamists in 1979. Al Bani turned Jordan into one of the main centres of Salafi intellectual production when he created a school of thought that has since become a major point of reference for thousands of Jordanians and has spread throughout the Middle East.<sup>9</sup> Ali al Halabi and Mohammed Abu Shakra, Jordanian disciples of Al Bani, are ideological figureheads for academic Salafism in the Middle East. Their intellectual output is financed by Saudi Arabia. Their discourse, which is extremely conservative on social issues, is apolitical and highly critical of traditional Islamist movements, whom they accuse of placing political considerations above religious ones.

Fighting Salafism emerged in Jordan during the 1990s following the return to the country of the first 'Afghan Arabs' who fought the Soviet Army in Afghanistan. The

---

<sup>7</sup> Interview of the author with Abdel Magid Dneibat, ex Observer General of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan. December 18, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Juan José Escobar Stemann. "Middle East salafism's influence and radicalization of Muslim communities in Europe". Middle East Review of International Affairs.(MERIA). Vol. 10. N. 3. September 2006.

<sup>9</sup> See "Saudi Arabia backgrounder: Who are the Islamists?" International Crisis Group report No.31 September 21, 2004.

key figure in terms of intellectual development is a Jordanian national, Isam al Barqawi, better known as Abu Mohamed al Maqdisi, author of a number of works including *The Creed of Abraham* and *Proof of the Infidelity of the Saudi State*, in which he sets out a doctrine of Jihad based on the Wahibi tradition. His writings influenced the leading ideologists of the fighting Salafism which evolved during the 1990s in Saudi Arabia. Several of his works were discovered in the luggage of Mohamed Atta, coordinator of the 9/11 attacks on the United States. After a period in Afghanistan, he returned to Jordan in 1992 and became leader of the terrorist organisation *Bay'at al-Imam* until he was detained by the Jordanian authorities in 1996 and accused of plotting several attacks against Israeli interests in the country. The intellectual father of Abu Musaf al Zarqawi, Maqdisi remains in prison, although he enjoyed a brief spell of freedom as of 1999 following the amnesty granted by King Abdullah on taking up the throne that year.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.1. Salafi networks

Academic and fighting Salafists share principles, textual references and organisational experiences. The main element of friction dividing them is the issue of the Jihad against regimes and the concept of *takfir* (declaration of apostasy). Academic Salafism is essentially apolitical, whereas fighting Salafism advocates a revolutionary struggle against the Jordanian regime. Unlike the Muslim Brothers, Salafis do not engage in formal organisations. Salafi activism operates through informal networks, grounded largely on personal relations. The Salafi movement recruits its followers via social networks in which personal friendship is of paramount importance. The recruitment process is carried out directly during discussions on Islam in mosques, seminars and conferences. The crucial role played by lessons in mosques in mobilising followers has been curbed since the signing of the peace treaty with Israel, which led the Jordanian government to increase its control over the mosques. Today, the lessons have moved to private homes, where State control is more difficult. Recruitment requires social interaction, which in turn requires the physical presence of a given person, hence the importance of geographical proximity. In Jordan the Salafi movement is concentrated in three cities: Zarqa, Amman and Salt.<sup>11</sup>

Most new recruits and converts are drawn from other Islamist movements, which interact in mosques, lessons and religious meetings. The religious context ensures a favourable disposition towards Salafi thinking which is not found outside Islamist movements. The Tabligh and, above all, the Muslim Brothers form the basis for recruitment to the Salafi movement. A number of the most important academics in the organisation (Mohamed Rifat, Mashur Hasan Salam) abandoned the Brothers to join the Salafis. Several leading members of the Brothers (Haman

---

<sup>10</sup> “Jordan 9/11: “Dealing with Jihadi Islam”. ICG International Crisis Group report No 47, November 23, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz *The Management of Islamic Activism. Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan*. State University of New York Press. New York 2001.

Sayid, Mohamed Abu Fares and Ahmed Naufal) make no secret of their Salafi training and are part of the most radical sector of the Brotherhood.

The structure of the Salafi network is decentralised and segmented. In contrast to other formal organisations, Salafism lacks hierarchical structures, although there is an informal hierarchy based on the reputation of the various academics recognised by the Salafi community. The segmented nature of the organisation is the result of differences concerning religious interpretations and practices. Personal rivalries, differences in interpretation and disagreements on practices have led to rifts within the movement. Decentralisation and segmentation, the essential traits of informal networks, explain the absence of important organisations and institutions within the Salafi movement. A low-circulation magazine called *Al Qibla* publishes articles by Salafi intellectuals, although as a general rule it does not enter into political issues proper. *Al Bayan*, a magazine published in London, enjoys some popularity in Jordan. The Al Albani Centre, based in Amman, and the Society for the Sunna and Koran, which has several branches (Zarq, Salt, Irbid and Amman) are the main centres of intellectual output of academic Salafism.

## 2.2. Zarqawi and the radicalisation of Salafi discourse

Military intervention in Iraq has radicalised Salafi discourse also. The ideas of fighting Salafism have spread rapidly in recent years, spurred by the personality of Abu Musaf al Zarqawi, a Jordanian national, and his success in his personal Jihad against the United States in Iraq. Many young Jordanians were attracted by the ideas of fighting Salafism and some travelled to Iraq to fight the American soldiers. According to Jordan's intelligence services, hundreds of Jordanians have gone to Iraq to take part in the Jihad. Some cases are well-known, such as Bahaa Yahya, the country's kick-boxing champion, or Mohamed al Banna, the young lawyer from an affluent family who blew himself up in Hilla in 2004, killing over one hundred people and triggering a major diplomatic crisis between Jordan and Iraq. The Jordanian government subsequently intervened by increasing its control in the form of constant raids on Salafi circles in Zarqa and Salt to prevent clerics from rallying followers to travel to Iraq to 'avenge the killings of civilians by US troops'.

Zarqawi was a product of the Afghan experience. He first visited Afghanistan in 1989 when the Soviet troops had already left the country. However, he witnessed the fighting between the different Islamist factions and the communist government until 1993. It was during this time that he acquainted Abu Mohamed al Maqdisi, who was to become his spiritual father. Zarqawi returned to Jordan deeply marked by his experience in Afghanistan. He quickly sought out Maqdisi, who had moved to Jordan in 1992, and enlisted his help to set up his first terrorist group, *Bayat al Imam*. Together they planned actions such as the assassinations of Ali Berjak, the anti-terrorism chief of the Jordanian intelligence services (whom they tried to kill in a car bomb attack in February 2002), and Yakub Zayadin, honorary president of the Jordanian Communist Party. On 29 March 1994 Zarqawi was arrested by Jordanian police and five days later Maqdisi was also detained. In November 1996, both of them were sentenced to 15 years in prison by a military court.

An amnesty granted after the coronation of King Abdullah in 1999 led to Zarqawi's release and he returned once more to Afghanistan. On his release he spent just a month with his supporters. He resumed his visits to the mosques in Zarka and planned his revenge by joining in the preparations for the Millennium attacks. He was sentenced in absentia by a Jordanian court to 15 years in jail for his part in a plot, uncovered by the police in November 1999, to strike against American tourists in Jordan during the Millennium celebrations. Zarqawi returned to Afghanistan in the summer of 1999 and went underground to launch a global Jihad. He travelled to Herat in early 2000 to take charge of the city's training camp for Arab volunteers from 18 countries. It was here that he planned, on behalf of Al Qaeda, the gradual withdrawal of the organisation's members in Iraqi Kurdistan, in anticipation of the consequences of the 9/11 attacks. Later, in Iraq, Zarqawi took over the Kurdish Islamist organisation *Ansar al Islam* which, after several name changes, joined the Al Qaeda network in 2004 using the name Al Qaeda in Iraq.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the failure of his previous attempts, Zarqawi was resolved more than ever to strike against the Jordanian regime, Israel and American interests in the region. During 2002 he coordinated from Syria a new terrorist action, this time against American interests in Jordan. Zarqawi planned and coordinated the assassination of US diplomat Laurence Foley, who was killed in November of that year. In April 2004 the Jordanian police arrested a terrorist cell that was planning to blow up the headquarters of the country's intelligence services, for which it had produced 20 tons of chemical explosives. The operations were financed and controlled by Zarqawi from Iraq. The success of the security forces in breaking up cells forced him to change strategy and he began to recruit non-Jordanians for attacks in Jordan. The strategy led to the attacks on US ships in Aqaba on the Jordanian coast in August 2005 and the bomb attacks on three hotels in Amman in November 2005, in which over 60 people died.<sup>13</sup>

Zarqawi's death in June 2006 brought some respite for the Jordanian authorities. Al Qaeda in Iraq had made the country a priority target as a result of Zarqawi's influence in the organisation. He had scores to settle with the government and was prepared to turn the country into another global Jihad battleground. His death led to the emergence of a new leadership more interested in consolidating the Iraqi front. Meanwhile, the Jordanian government not only kept tight control over the most radical groups and succeeded in stemming the flow of combatants heading to Iraq, but also took a series of initiatives to curb the spread of Salafi and Jihadi ideas. The most important of these is the Amman Message, in which scholars and religious leaders from throughout the Muslim world denounce that the message of tolerance of the Prophet is being distorted by extremists. In the Message, they also call for an Islam open to the development of civilisation and progress of humanity. The Jordanian government has adopted other measures and put in place a new school curriculum promoting a more tolerant vision of Islam. It has also removed from

---

<sup>12</sup> Juan José Escobar Stemmann "Zarqawi. La nueva cara de Al Qaeda". *Política Exterior*. N. 107 September-October 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Nir Rosen. "Iraq Jordanian Jihadis". *New York Times*. February 19, 2006

mosques clerics who are unwilling to renounce violence as a means of fighting against injustice.<sup>14</sup>

### Conclusion

Jordan is one of the most significant illustrations today of the benefits of controlled integration of Islamists in politics. For years, the organisational success of the Muslim Brothers has been to the advantage of the regime given that it served to channel Islamic activism towards a non-violent agenda, thus enabling the most radical groups to be marginalised. However, developments in the Middle East in recent years, particularly the military intervention in Iraq, have led to a radicalisation of the discourse of moderate Islamism and facilitated the spread of the ideas of Jihadi Salafism among young people in Jordan.

The Amman attacks in November 2005 demonstrated that Jordan had become a favourite Al Qaeda target, a situation which changed the terms of the relations between the Muslim Brothers and the country's regime, obliging the former to engage in the government's battle against Jihadi ideology. As a result, Jordan's Islamists have tempered their criticism and adopted a more conciliatory tone, realising that calls for a Jihad in Iraq could prove extremely counterproductive for the country. They have unreservedly backed government initiatives to put an end to declarations of apostasy (*takfir*) promoted by certain Salafi circles, whom they accuse of straying from the true teachings of Islam.

However, the electoral victory by Hamas and the subsequent coming to power of the organisation in Gaza have set the alarm bells ringing in the Jordanian government and contributed to a worsening of relations with the Muslim Brothers. The Brothers have long-standing historical ties with Hamas which explain the links between the two. The oldest Hamas members in the West Bank were members of the Brotherhood in Jordan until 1988 when Hamas was formed.<sup>15</sup> Hence, developments in Hamas tend to have a knock-on effect among Jordanian Islamists. Although the *wasat* sector controls the organisation, the election of Zaki Bani Irshed as Secretary General of the IAF has added a new element of tension. The Jordanian government is wary of the intentions of the reformist sector and has opted to step up pressure on it while at the same time retaining, with certain conditions, avenues of dialogue with the more moderate sector of the Brotherhood. The situation in the West Bank and Gaza increasingly conditions relations between the Jordanian government and the country's Islamists.

---

<sup>14</sup> The Amman Message was published in The Jordan Times in November 24, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Beverley Milton-Edwards "Islamic politics in Palestine". I.B. Tauris. New York 1996

# Athena Intelligence Journal

## Instructions for authors:

- Athena Intelligence Journal admits original articles related to security and defense. It is possible to send manuscripts centered on the following themes: armed conflicts, terrorism, intelligence and security, armed forces, risks and threats to the international security, etc.
- The manuscripts will be sent to the following direction [publications@athenaintelligence.org](mailto:publications@athenaintelligence.org). Once intercepted, an anonymous copy of the analysis will be sent to two referees for its evaluation. The positive or negative answer will be formulated in a term of two weeks since its reception.

## Presentation norms of the articles:

- They can be written in English or in Spanish
- It is recommended that they do not exceed 14.000 words (including the bibliography)
- They must be written to one space, in Garamond letter style size 13, and with a separation space between the paragraphs
- They can include graphs and charts inserted in the text
- In addition to the main analysis, a summary not superior to 150 words in English must be sent, with also 5 or 6 keywords in English
- A short biography of the author will also have to be attached which will then appear in the document. If the author wishes, he can include his email so that interested lectors can contact him
- The articles can be divided in epigraphs and subepigraphs up to a third level. The first and the second level will be numerated in Arabic, bold type and miniscule, and the third level numerated in Arabic, miniscule and italics without bold type.

## Style of the bibliographic references (they will be located as footnotes):

- *Articles*:: Shaun Gregory, "France and the War on Terrorism", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol.15, No.1 (Spring 2003), pp.124-147
- *Books*: Peter L. Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*, (New York: Free Press, 2006)
- *Book chapters*: Mohammed M. Hafez, "From Marginalization to Massacres. A Political Process Explanation of GIA Violence in Algeria", Quintan Wiktorowicz, (ed.) *Islamic Activism. A Social Movement Theory Approach*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 37-60

## Book summaries:

Athena Intelligence Journal admits the publication of book reviews related with the paper's thematic. Their extension will not exceed 3000 words and they will be sent by e-mail. It is also possible to send books for their review to the paper's Redaction Team, even though this does not necessarily imply that they will be commented. The postal direction for the books mailing is: Prof. Dr. Javier Jordán. Departamento de Ciencia Política y de la Administración. Universidad de Granada. C/Rector López Argüeta, 4. 18071-Granada (Spain).