

JORDAN'S 9/11: DEALING WITH *JIHADI* ISLAMISM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	i
I. THE AMMAN BOMBS	1
II. THE RISE OF <i>JIHADI</i> ACTIVISM.....	3
A. THE ARAB AFGHAN PHENOMENON	3
B. THE GROWTH OF SALAFISM.....	4
C. JIHADISM IN THE 1990S.....	5
D. THE <i>JIHADI</i> EXPERIENCE IN ZARQA AND SALT	7
E. ZARQAWI VS. MAQDISI	10
III. HOW TO COMBAT <i>JIHADI</i> ISLAMISTS.....	12
A. JORDAN'S ROLE IN THE "WAR ON TERROR"	12
B. CHANGING THE MESSAGE.....	15
C. IMPLEMENTING OVERDUE REFORMS.....	17
IV. CONCLUSION	20
APPENDICES	
A. MAP OF JORDAN	23
B. ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP	24
C. CRISIS GROUP REPORTS AND BRIEFINGS ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA	25
D. CRISIS GROUP BOARD OF TRUSTEES	27

JORDAN'S 9/11: DEALING WITH *JIHADI* ISLAMISM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The horrifying 9 November 2005 suicide attacks against three hotels in Amman -- with a toll of 60 dead and over 100 wounded -- drove home two important messages. No security apparatus, however efficient, can prevent each and every attack by a person prepared to die as they kill others. And any security response must be complemented by a genuine opening of the political system and more equally shared economic opportunity if Jordan is to minimise the risk of further attacks and instability.

In the identity of their perpetrators and the background of their apparent mastermind, the attacks spoke volumes about Jordan's predicament. They were carried out by Iraqis, who were angered by events in their country, had arrived in the Kingdom only days earlier and chose America's close ally in the region as the target for their revenge. And they reportedly were masterminded by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian *jihadi* commander fighting in Iraq who elicits a measure of domestic sympathy insofar as he gives voice to popular hostility toward U.S. policy and alienation toward the country's Westernised elite.

Feeding on disaffection with a government that has failed to address basic needs and maintains an unpopular alliance with the U.S., violent Islamist militants have flourished of late. As in most other Middle East and North African countries, the victorious return of those who fought Soviet forces in Afghanistan led to the creation of a domestic *jihadi* Salafi movement in the early 1990s. Having encouraged the spread of traditional, peaceful Salafism to balance an increasingly Palestine-oriented Muslim Brotherhood, the regime was ill-prepared to deal with the arrival of these radicalised young men who turned Salafism on its head by giving it a violent bent.

The security services at first kept *jihadis* in check. But over time, their elastic reach and the introduction of more repressive laws generated new frustrations and renewed interest in radical agendas. The last few years in particular have seen growing public criticism of a leadership that allied itself with the West at a time of intense anti-Americanism and failed both to deliver anticipated economic dividends to anyone but the elites

and to implement promised political reforms. Lack of representation and participation, combined with a shortage of economic opportunities, fed into a romanticised notion of *jihad* that has sent a steady trickle of young men across the border to join the fight against the U.S. and its perceived proxies in Iraq. Others, it appears from recent events, remain in Jordan, where they can lay the groundwork for suicide attacks carried out by non-Jordanians who slip across the border and reach their targets before the security services get wind of them.

The hotel attacks produced strong but likely temporary revulsion against *jihadi* terrorism, and the regime has understandably reacted by announcing tougher security measures, but these cannot suffice and, without other, more proactive steps, may well backfire. Besides anger at U.S. regional policies and the monarchy's acquiescence in them, sympathy for the *jihadis* has its roots in an overly constricted political system, growing economic inequality, shrinking opportunities and anger at widespread corruption. For years, the regime has promised an ambitious reform program. The time has come for it to implement this at home with the same ardour with which it advertises it abroad. A three-pronged strategy is needed, addressing political, economic and cultural challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Political measures.** The regime should take advantage of its current popular support resulting from outrage at the bombings to:
 - (a) review laws and decisions that curtail political freedoms and, where necessary amend or -- as in the specific case of the draft professional associations law -- abandon them;
 - (b) draft a new electoral law providing a more accurate popular representation; and
 - (c) form a broader, more inclusive government coalition incorporating opposition tendencies

in order to carry out these political reforms and implement the proposed National Agenda, including the long-awaited new electoral law.

2. **Economic measures.** The regime should expand opportunities for the poor and unemployed to share more fairly and fully in Jordan's real growth by taking urgent steps to:

- (a) remove obstacles to job creation and provide job training and skill building programs;
- (b) cushion hardships for the least fortunate;
- (c) provide start-up financing and low-cost administrative support for small entrepreneurial efforts; and
- (d) attack corruption more strongly.

3. **Cultural measures.** The regime should seek to drive a wedge between *jihadi* and non-*jihadi* Islamists, by acting to:

- (a) promote a tolerant version of Islam in all educational institutions;
- (b) launch an ideological campaign against *fitna* (discord) among Muslims; and
- (c) provide genuine space for credible, competent, independent preachers and religious teachers who denounce violence -- including those who are critical of government policy -- to debate Salafi ideologues.

Amman/Brussels, 23 November 2005

JORDAN'S 9/11: DEALING WITH *JIHADI* ISLAMISM

I. THE AMMAN BOMBS

With the triple suicide bombings in Amman on 9 November 2005, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi¹ made good on his frequent threats to carry out attacks in his native country. He did so by resorting to a particularly effective method: the deployment of non-Jordanians in suicide operations targeting some of the capital's many "soft" targets. The use of non-Jordanians exploited a key General Intelligence Department (GID) vulnerability, its lack of intelligence about Iraqi *jihadis*.² Determined suicide bombers are notoriously difficult to stop, and Amman's hotels are hard to protect without greatly inconveniencing visitors, especially the tourists on whom the country's economy is heavily dependent.³

But, like earlier Zarqawi-inspired attacks, the method and target selection revealed inherent weaknesses and vulnerabilities in his operation. Iraqis were sent because they are difficult to detect, but also because Jordanians are under such thorough surveillance by the security services that they probably cannot at this point carry out elaborate preparations for a coordinated attack. The pervasiveness of the intelligence services also arguably constrained the perpetrators' ability to select an appropriate target; instead, they attacked a hotel in which a wedding party was in full swing⁴ and caused more fatalities among Jordanians than

non-Jordanians. Altogether, these factors seem to have lessened support for Zarqawi in the Kingdom and strengthened the regime, which quickly announced tougher security measures.⁵

Unlike with prior attacks, such as the attempted rocketing of U.S. Navy ships off Aqaba in August 2005, the domestic outcry was immediate, and Jordanians took to the streets in Amman and elsewhere for several days. The marches seemed to observers partly spontaneous, partly staged;⁶ regardless, the feeling was that a vast majority of the population condemned as barbaric the killing of innocent people. Zarqawi felt compelled to post not one but two web messages justifying his choice of targets. He claimed that it had not been his intention to hit Jordanians; that the operation had been in preparation for over a month, and the targets had been carefully chosen; that the wedding party involved "Israeli Arabs", not

to act precipitously. The killing in November 2002 of a US Agency for International Development (USAID) official appeared to be an opportunity hit by operatives who had only just arrived in the Kingdom and looked for, and found, an easy target; the result was an effective but limited strike. The August 2005 attack in Aqaba involved the launch of three rockets, none of which reached their target due to poor equipment and the need to act fast and, therefore, without the necessary precision.

⁵ In the words of King Abdullah, "we have seen the results of what the terrorists perpetrated in Amman. We saw dismembered children and women -- Jordanians and Jordan's guests. Is there any Jordanian, Arab or Muslim who, after that day, can justify these crimes?" The King then promised tougher counter-terror strategies. Quoted in "King says terror won't divide Jordan, Iraq", *Jordan Times*, 13 November 2005.

⁶ There is ground to question the spontaneous character of the marches that occurred during a four-day period following the attacks (during which all schools and government institutions were closed, in part because of the attacks, in part because of the celebration of the late King Hussein's birthday, and in part because of the two-day weekend) and continued sporadically afterwards, including a large protest on 18 November. In the past, the authorities have carefully stage-managed protests and, as a result, only a limited number of Jordanians bothered to take part. Remarking on the fact that the annual demonstration to protest the Israeli occupation attracted just 500 hardcore protesters in 2005, a local shopkeeper noted: "We don't view these marches as totally free. If they were, there would be tens of thousands of people packing the streets". Quoted in *Jordan Times*, 10 May 2005.

¹ Zarqawi's operation in Iraq, *al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* (Monotheism and Holy War), also known as al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, claimed responsibility for the attack the next day.

² King Abdullah remarked that Zarqawi had relied on Jordanians in the past for attacks in Jordan -- the security services allegedly thwarting no fewer than 150 attempts -- but his operatives slipped through this time because they were non-Jordanians. Quoted in *The New York Times*, 16 November 2005.

³ In 2004, Jordan's major hotels had instituted a policy of preventing cars from approaching the entrance or parking in garages on the premises. Although this new approach -- from Crisis Group observations -- was far from watertight, it may account for the bombers' decision to wear explosives belts instead of using car bombs.

⁴ The wedding party involved Jordanians of Palestinian origin (the families of both bride and groom come from the West Bank). Earlier successful attacks claimed by and attributed to Zarqawi likewise appeared to have been hampered by the need

"Palestinians"; that it was well-established the three hotels were "the backyard of the enemies of the faith, Jews and Crusaders"; and that he had sent a warning in August by attacking the port of Aqaba, where "there are only Israelis".⁷

In a subsequent audiotape, Zaraqawi refined his position, claiming the bomber had struck a hall where Israeli intelligence officials were meeting, and part of the roof fell on the wedding hall. "We didn't target them. Our target was halls being used by Zionist intelligence who were meeting there at the time".⁸ Ominously, he threatened further attacks against the King ("we will be able to reach your head and chop it off") and targets throughout the country (Jordan, he said, protects Israel, hosts "secret American prisons" where "dozens of mujahidin" are held, and has become "a swamp of obscenity").⁹

A fundamental question in the bombings' aftermath is how those Jordanians who are both profoundly angered by U.S. policies in Iraq and Palestine and outraged by the suicide attacks ultimately will react. "Among the majority of Jordanians, Zaraqawi will lose", predicted Adnan Abu Odeh, a former adviser to Jordan's monarchs. "The humanitarian dimension is very strong here".¹⁰ Ali Shukri, a retired general and senior adviser to the late King Hussein, agreed that, from the *jihadis'* standpoint, the attacks were "counter-productive": "This was a wedding. Not the Great Satan but your own people. Jordanians will not support this".¹¹ A poll carried out immediately after the attacks appeared to validate these views, recording a precipitous drop in Jordanians' approval of al-Qaeda.¹²

Not all Jordanians agree that Zaraqawi's popular support will be fundamentally affected. While Jordanians are likely to question the killing of nationals, many will continue to approve of his actions in Iraq (including the killing of -- Shiite -- civilians) and might even accept attacks at home aimed at government institutions, U.S. and Israeli targets, and Western civilians.¹³ As one Jordanian put it:

People are all against Zaraqawi now because he hit children, families. They supported him when he attacked the American ships in Aqaba, and they might still support him if he hit hotels and all the casualties were foreigners. But this latest attack had nothing to do with Israel or Iraq. If he has an issue with the Hashemites, let him attack the Royal Palace.¹⁴

⁷ Email communication from a researcher on *Jihadi* groups, who read the statements before they were pulled from the web, 12 November 2005.

⁸ Associated Press, 18 November 2005.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, 10 November 2005. Adnan Abu Odeh is a member of Crisis Group's Board of Trustees.

¹¹ Crisis Group telephone interview, 10 November 2005.

¹² Poll conducted by Ipsos, as reported in the daily *Al-Ghad* and cited in *The New York Times*, 16 November 2005. An earlier poll had shown 60 per cent support for Osama bin Laden among Jordanians. See below.

¹³ Crisis Group interviews, 10-14 November 2005.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 14 November 2005.

II. THE RISE OF JIHADI ACTIVISM

A. THE ARAB AFGHAN PHENOMENON

The rise of Islamism in Jordan, as throughout the region, was accelerated by mounting economic difficulties and diminishing employment opportunities, the disarray of Arab nationalism following defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and the enhanced influence of an increasingly prosperous and proselytising Saudi Arabia. The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan provided a timely outlet, as devout young Sunni Muslims -- encouraged by the success of the recent (Shiite) Islamic revolution in Iran, yet simultaneously keen to keep Shiism itself in check -- responded to calls from religious leaders to join the holy war against the Soviets.¹⁵

One of the leading proponents of this war was a Jordanian of Palestinian origin, Abdullah Azzam, who developed the notion of international participation in *jihād*.¹⁶ Azzam left his teaching position at a Jeddah university and moved to Pakistan in the early 1980s. There, he founded *Maktab al-Khidmat li al-Mujahidin al-'Arab* (the Arab Mujahidin Services Bureau), providing assistance to would-be fighters on their way to Afghanistan. He became an increasingly active propagandist for a pan-Islamic *jihād*, writing books on the subject¹⁷ and travelling around the Arab world to enlist support for the mujahidin (holy warriors). Azzam's efforts -- funded and supported by the U.S., UK, Saudi Arabia, China and others -- were largely responsible for the influx of foreign (predominantly Muslim Arab) mujahidin into Afghanistan.¹⁸

¹⁵ See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°31, *Saudi Arabia Backgrounder: Who are the Islamists?*, 21 September 2004, p. 3 (note 3), and Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°12, *Islamism in North Africa I: The Legacies of History*, 20 April 2004, p. 11.

¹⁶ Azzam was born in 1941 in Silat al-Harithiyeh, a village in the Jenin district in what was then Mandatory Palestine, subsequently (1948-1967) Jordan and today the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Following the end of the June 1967 war, Azzam moved to Jordan but remained heavily involved in the Palestinian struggle. Disillusioned with the Palestinian resistance's determinedly secular character, he developed the notion of an international struggle to preserve Islam, moving to Saudi Arabia in the mid-1970s. He is considered to have provided the ideological basis for today's al-Qaeda. See Jonathan Figchel, "Bin Laden's spiritual mentor", International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 27 September 2001, at: <http://www.ict.org.il>.

¹⁷ These include *Join the Caravan and Defence of Muslim Lands*.

¹⁸ By the end of the war, the fighting factions had fragmented along tribal and sectarian lines. Azzam and three of his sons

Most of the Jordanians who joined the mujahidin appear to have done so more out of economic opportunism than religious conviction. Generally poorly educated, they had few other prospects; becoming a mujahidin reportedly meant receiving monthly stipends of hundreds of dollars, making it a viable and attractive alternative to remaining at home. While Saudi Arabia openly encouraged its young men to go and fight,¹⁹ the Jordanian regime, concerned about growing Islamist influence and happy enough to see its Islamists depart, turned a blind eye to those who left, while keeping watch on those who returned.²⁰ Unofficial estimates put the number of Jordanians who joined the mujahidin in the 1980s in the low hundreds.²¹

Saudi Arabia became a major transit point for those heading to Afghanistan, simultaneously providing an introduction to the country's fundamentalist Wahhabi culture and religious teachers. But it was the experience in Afghanistan that most profoundly affected the mujahidin, and it is there that they received ideological grounding in a fundamentalist, violent and militaristic worldview.²² A decade of fighting was enough to create a substantial, well organised and well trained army, a strong network of contacts, and a new way of life. Samih Khreis, a Jordanian defence lawyer for Islamists, explained: "The mujahidin for the most part were supposed to live like warrior monks, cut off from the rest of the world, believing that they were fighting to protect Islam".²³

were killed in a car bomb in 1989 in Peshawar, Pakistan, an attack usually attributed to Osama bin Laden, Azzam's former pupil. See Jonathan Figchel, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ The country's Mufti at that time, Abd-al-Aziz bin Baz, issued a fatwa decreeing *jihād* in Afghanistan a collective duty, while the authorities provided financial assistance to men heading there. Crisis Group Report, *Saudi Arabia Backgrounder*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

²⁰ While some claim that clerics preached support for the mujahidin, no similar *fatwa* was issued in Jordan. In fact, the Muslim Brotherhood's refusal to issue one ultimately culminated in a split with Azzam, who had been a central figure in the movement. See Bernard Rougier, "Le Jihad en Afghanistan et la crise de l'islam Sunnite", *Revue Afrique du Nord/Moyen Orient: Espace et Conflits*, Edition 2005-2006. At least one Jordanian observer, though, maintains that the regime "persuaded young Jordanians to go to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets". This was done, he said, through the mosques, "and the *mukhabarat* (intelligence services) helped them go there via Saudi Arabia". Crisis Group interview with Samih Khreis, a trial lawyer involved in defending *jihadis*, Amman, 30 March 2005.

²¹ Crisis Group interviews, Amman, April 2005.

²² See Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°37, *Understanding Islamism*, 2 March 2005, and Vincenzo Olivetti, *Terror's sources: The ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism and its consequences* (Birmingham, 2002), p. 19.

²³ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 30 March 2005.

With the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the end of the war in 1989, the fighting factions began to fragment, and the mujahidin drifted back home. In Jordan, according to Khreis, they "became personae non gratae, without marketable skills. There was no effort to rehabilitate them. Ten years are a long time to be called a mujahid, and suddenly you are a terrorist. These people were poor and simple rather than evil".²⁴ The returnees included a man who would later gain great notoriety: Ahmad Fadhil Nazzal al-Khalaileh, better known as Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi.

Their return in the early 1990s coincided with one of the most significant shifts in Jordanian society in decades. Some 250,000 Palestinians had recently arrived in the country, having been expelled from Kuwait during the 1991 Gulf War as a result of their leadership's support for the Iraqi invasion.

This influx of refugees triggered a significant societal transformation. Largely due to their conspicuous consumption, behaviour mostly unknown within the traditionally conservative and discreet society, the relative prosperity of many Kuwaiti Palestinians highlighted the already existing gap between rich and poor.²⁵ They also brought with them more liberal social mores, from more revealing women's clothing to other more relaxed forms of behaviour. According to Abdullah Abu Rumman, a Jordanian journalist, the arrival of liberal, Westernised Kuwaiti Palestinians made the growing wealth of the Jordanian bourgeoisie more visible and shocked the Afghan returnees. "They were disgusted by the decadence they saw when they returned. Is this what they had been fighting a holy war for?"²⁶

If the immigrants from Kuwait included affluent Palestinians with a more Western-leaning lifestyle, designer handbags and an appetite for Big Macs, they also included their opposite: preachers from the Salafi branch

of Sunni Islam, such as Isam Muhammad Taher al-Barqawi, a Palestinian better known as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who had spent several years in Afghanistan in the late 1980s. A respected "Afghan Arab", he became a religious mentor to Zarqawi and a key figure in the growth of the *jihadi* Salafi movement in Jordan.²⁷ He founded *Bay'at 'al Imam* (Fealty to the Leader), an organisation that sought to mobilise Jordanian veterans of the Afghan campaign, which Zarqawi soon joined.

Of the 250,000 new arrivals, some 160,000 of the poorer settled in Zarqa, a bleak satellite town east of Amman. Its mix of Trans-Jordanians, Circassians and Palestinians from the al-Ruseifeh refugee camp and from Kuwait, combined with the 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. Some who would later join Zarqawi in Iraq and became his top lieutenants were among those who settled in Zarqa. There, they met Zarqawi and Maqdisi through a mosque in the Ma'soum neighbourhood.²⁸

B. THE GROWTH OF SALAFISM

The Salafiyya originated in Egypt at the end of the nineteenth century as a reform-oriented Islamic movement. Puritan in outlook, its adherents sought to rid Islam of "anachronistic" and corrupt practices in order to

²⁴ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 30 March 2005.

²⁵ This is especially noticeable in upscale neighbourhoods of Amman such as Abdoun, where the typically large but low-key villas of the Jordanian elite were suddenly joined by imposing, garish mansions built in open view, close to main roads. For more on this phenomenon, see E. Anne Beal, "Global Products, Embedded Contexts: The Interpretation of Consumption Practices Among Palestinian Migrants in Amman", University of Chicago, Working Paper no. 42, October 2001, available at: http://www.ccis.ucsd.org/PUBLICATIONS/working_papers.htm.

²⁶ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 2 March 2005. Abu Rumman spent three months in jail with Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi in the mid-1990s on charges of publishing remarks critical of King Hussein (lèse-majesté). He was released on bail and eventually found "not responsible" for the alleged crime.

²⁷ Another prominent cleric, Omar Mahmoud Abu Omar, better known as Abu Qatada, travelled from Kuwait to Afghanistan with Maqdisi, but then relocated to London where he continued to preach and eventually became the spiritual leader of *al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* in Europe. He was convicted in absentia for his part in the thwarted Millennium plot in Jordan (involving attacks on hotels and tourist sites in the Kingdom planned for 3 January 2000) and is held in Belmarsh prison by British authorities. Petter Nesser, "Jihad in Europe: Exploring the sources of motivations for Salafi-Jihadi terrorism in Europe post-millennium", thesis submitted at the Department of Political Science, University of Oslo & Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 15 January 2004, p. 73. Following the July 2005 subway bombings in London, the UK started proceedings to extradite Abu Qatada to Jordan. Agence France-Presse, *Daily Star*, 11 August 2005.

²⁸ See Hazem al-Amin, "Zarqa Gave Birth to Khalaileh and Maqdisi, Where the Returnees from Kuwait Joined Them", *Al-Haya*, 15 December 2004. This is the second instalment of a highly informative three-part investigative series that appeared in *Al-Haya* on 14, 15 and 16 December 2004. The original Arabic and an informal English translation can be obtained by writing to amman@crisisgroup.org. The Abdullah bin Abbas Mosque, which Zarqawi used to attend, is still an active recruiting ground for the movement according to a Jordanian analyst. Crisis Group interview, Amman, April 2005.

modernise it. Over time, however, the movement evolved in a markedly anti-Western and conservative direction.²⁹ Today's Salafis adhere to a literal interpretation of the Koran, seeking to ignore or eradicate what they consider impurities introduced by centuries of interpretation and religious practice. They hold that the Koran and the *hadith* (the Prophet Muhammad's practices) are the only legitimate sources of religious authority and should be understood literally.³⁰

In Jordan, a mainstream Salafi current has existed since the 1960s, introduced by young men who had studied in Syria, Egypt or Lebanon.³¹ Its key exponent was a Syrian scholar, Nasr al-Din al-Albani (1909-1999), who inspired many followers in the 1980s.³² He was a frequent visitor to the Kingdom throughout the 1970s, invited by students he had met in Damascus; in the wake of President Assad's violent 1979 crackdown on the Islamist movement, al-Albani was expelled, and he relocated to Jordan. Once there, he preached his message of "correcting" Islam from his base in Zarqa, but his ability to draw large crowds quickly led the authorities to ban him from public speaking. Rather than curtail the movement, however, this pushed it underground, spawning an informal network upon which it continues to rely. Jordan's Salafism remains highly unstructured; meetings are normally organised by word of mouth and held in private homes, with most recruitment occurring between close friends and family members.³³

In the 1990s, under the combined effect of the growth of Islamist movements region-wide and the mobilisation of

jihadi energies for the war in Afghanistan, salafism in Jordan developed into three basic trends: traditionalist (*taqlidi*), reformist (*islahi*) and violent (*jihadi*). The traditionalists, who had their start with al-Albani, were generally hostile to Islamist political activism, adhering to the injunction of obedience even to an unjust Muslim ruler. Theirs was a strictly religious, not political, movement. The *jihadis* arose in opposition to them with the preachings of Maqdisi from 1992 onward that emphasised the need to overthrow "impious" regimes through violent means. In 1995-1996, Salafis of a political bent who rejected the use of violence established the reformist branch, espousing peaceful opposition to the secular regime in Jordan.³⁴

C. JIHADISM IN THE 1990S

With the Jordanian government either unable or unwilling to rehabilitate them, and the country's all-pervasive GID first detaining and then keeping an eye on them, Afghan Arabs found that they had won their war but lost its aftermath.³⁵ Facing serious reintegration problems and a still-depressed job market, they often chose one of three options: return to Afghanistan, join the Muslim diaspora in Europe or go underground and try to recreate the networks they had developed in Afghanistan to attack the '*kuffar*' (unbelievers) -- in this case the Hashemites.

Those who remained in Jordan found fruitful recruitment opportunities. The privatisation drive that followed a 1992 agreement with the International Monetary Fund generated several unintended consequences, especially for Trans-Jordanians, who predominate in the public sector. Cuts in government jobs removed an important safety net, provoked a sharp rise in unemployment and harmed many who once held sought-after bureaucratic positions. Many of the newly unemployed were attracted to preachers who gave voice to their disaffection. 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.³⁶ Reduced investment in the public sector,

²⁹ The terms Salafi and Wahhabi are often, incorrectly, used interchangeably. For a more detailed analysis, see Crisis Group Report, *Understanding Islamism*, op. cit. In an earlier report, Crisis Group argued that the term "Wahhabi" is "overused and devoid of any analytical significance, serving to describe disparate groups and (individuals) across time and space, so long as they adhere to an austere or conservative view of Islam". Much the same can be said of Salafism. Crisis Group Middle East Report N°28, *Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?*, 14 July 2004, p. 1.

³⁰ See Crisis Group Report, *Understanding Islamism*, op. cit., and Juan José Escobar Stemman, "El salafismo en Europa", *Política Exterior*, no. 105, May/June 2005.

³¹ Travelling to the region's capitals in pursuit of a higher education was standard practice, as Jordan had no universities at that time.

³² For more on Nasr al-Din al-Albani, see Crisis Group Report, *Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself*, op. cit., p. 3.

³³ While this makes it difficult for the security services to infiltrate or keep track of *jihadi* Salafi groups, it also makes it harder for the latter to recruit quickly or disseminate their ideas widely. Its tight-knit community structure makes the town of Salt an ideal breeding ground for Salafism within the circle of the extended family. Crisis Group interview with Mohammad Abu Rumman, director of research at the daily *Al-Ghad*, Amman, 4 April 2005.

³⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Amman, April 2005. See also, Quintan Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism* (New York, 2001); and Crisis Group Report, *Understanding Islamism*, op. cit., and Crisis Group Report, *Islamism in North Africa I*, op. cit. The reformist Salafis in Jordan are, therefore, different from reformist *jihadis* in Saudi Arabia. See Crisis Group Report, *Saudi Arabia Backgrounder*, op. cit.

³⁵ The vast majority spent some time in custody upon their return. Crisis Group interview with Bernard Rougier, researcher at the Institut Français du Proche-Orient, Amman, 23 June 2005.

³⁶ The tribes' marginalisation is said to have contributed to the rise of Islamism: "King Hussein's decision to embrace the West

including education, prompted parents who could afford it to send their children to private schools, the least expensive of which offered an Islamic curriculum.³⁷

Other events heightened simmering anger. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and subsequent defeat at the hands of an alliance of Western and Arab forces was experienced by many Jordanians -- who manifested great sympathy for Saddam Hussein -- as yet another humiliation. The onset of negotiations between Jordan and Israel, culminating in the 1994 peace treaty, was another blow. As Hazem al-Amin, who conducted an in-depth investigation of *jihadi* groups in Jordan, put it, normalisation of relations with Israel "crowned the series of Jordanian and Palestinian frustrations".³⁸

Maqdisi, who had settled in Jordan in 1992, began travelling around the country with a small group of supporters, lecturing against the regime, democracy and elections, as well as distributing copies of his book *Millat Ibrahim (Ibrahim's Creed)*, which quickly became the seminal work for the country's *jihadis*. By 1993, small underground militant organisations had appeared, comprised for the most part of Afghan Arabs. They were bolstered by support from some of the country's youth, angered by steps to normalise relations with Israel and feeling abandoned by Jordan's mainstream Muslim Brotherhood (see below), which refused to clash openly with the government over the issue.³⁹ While these groups⁴⁰

at the tribes' expense gave the Islamists an entry point, propelling them into tribal arms. He sold out the tribes and now they are turning to Salafism". Crisis Group interview with Jordanian journalist, Amman, March 2005. Another observed: "Tribes that used to have a liberal outlook -- with women going without headress and lots of drinking on Fridays -- are now all bearded and veiled, praying and quoting Koranic verses." Crisis Group interview with Abdullah Abu Rumman, Jordanian journalist, Amman, 2 March 2005.

³⁷ Even the Jordanian public school curriculum is pervaded with religion. This is the result of King Hussein's decision to give the Muslim Brotherhood control over the education ministry, and thereby school curricula, after the movement sided with him against the Palestinian groups in what is known as "Black September" in 1970. Hazem al-Amin, "Zarqa Gave Birth", op. cit. See also, Al-Urdun al-Jedid Research Centre, *Islamic Movements in Jordan* (Amman, 1997), pp. 289-291.

³⁸ Hazem al-Amin, "Zarqa Gave Birth", op. cit. A Jordanian sociologist noted two key factors that contributed to the rise of radicalism, in addition to poverty and unemployment: "The presence of religion in many aspects of life, including education -- religion pervades every part of the formal educational sector -- and Western pressure and domination of the region". Crisis Group interview with Mousa Shteivi, Amman, 13 April 2005.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview with Muhammad Abu Rumman, a features editor at *Al-Ghad* newspaper, Amman, 4 April 2005.

⁴⁰ These included Muhammad's Army (*Jaysh Muhammad*),

began to launch small-scale attacks against "un-Islamic" targets, fire-bombing cinemas and liquor stores, they lacked the logistical or organisational capacity to strike at the regime itself.

Until that time, Jordan had contained the threat of violent Islamist militancy typically by relying on the largely co-opted Muslim Brotherhood to recruit politically-inclined Islamists.⁴¹ The Brotherhood in Jordan incorporates all Sunni Muslim schools (*madhaheb*), including Salafis and Sufis, but, with its middle-class base, it has become a party of peaceful political opposition that may protest government policies (for example, the peace treaty and normalisation with Israel) but fully accepts, and embraces, Hashemite rule. Those seeking to challenge the regime either physically or ideologically first had to confront the Brotherhood and, as of 1989, its political arm, the Islamic Action Front. As a result, public support was diverted away from more militant groups.⁴²

However, the growth of the Salafi movement came at a difficult time for the Brotherhood, which sought to combine its roles as supporter of the regime and opponent of the peace treaty with Israel.⁴³ Moreover, the Salafis drew support mainly from the lower classes, while the Muslim Brotherhood retained an essentially middle class membership. As one observer put it, the Salafi movement "tends to pick up the dregs of society -- people who are schooled in the mosques rather than at the university. While they do not have a strong influence in society as a whole, they maintain a very tight grip on their supporters".⁴⁴

established by Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law, Muhammad Jamal Khalifeh; Bay'at 'al Imam, run by Maqdisi and Zarqawi; and the Vanguard of Islamic Youth. Wiktorowicz, op. cit, pp. 122-123.

⁴¹ For more on this, see Al-Urdun al-Jedid, op. cit.

⁴² During the 1960s and 1970s, the Muslim Brotherhood successfully countered the emergence of a number of competing Islamist groups, notably Hizb ut-Tahrir (The Liberation Party). Founded in Jerusalem in 1953 by judge Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani, Hizb ut-Tahrir is an ideologically radical but professedly non-violent political movement that seeks the creation of an Islamic Caliphate administered according to *Shari'a* law. Arab governments clamped down harshly on it and imprisoned many of its members. It retains a low level presence in Jordan (and a more active if usually underground presence in other areas, including Central Asia). On 6 March 2005, it delivered a letter to parliament calling for the annulment of political and economic agreements with Israeli or face "doom in the Hereafter". To read the full text, see <http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org>.

⁴³ For further explanation, see Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°10, *The Challenge of Political Reform: Jordanian Democratisation and Regional Instability*, 8 October 2003.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview with Muhammad Abu Rumman, Amman, 4 April 2005.

Despite its proven ideological flexibility and ability to incorporate a wide range of Islamist groups and personalities, the Brotherhood could not bring the Salafis into the fold. The emergence of a militant Islamist grouping that, unlike the Brotherhood, refused to deal with the establishment, led to a schism within the Brotherhood itself. Two competing blocks emerged, one more traditionalist and peaceful, referred to as the doves (*Hama'em*), the other more militant, known as the hawks (*Suqour*). The former consisted mostly of Trans-Jordanians, the latter of Jordanians of Palestinian extraction who supported violent resistance to the Israeli occupation and, in this, came closer to the views of Maqdisi (himself a Jordanian of Palestinian origin). Despite obvious differences in outlook, however, the legitimacy and resources that membership in the Brotherhood provided kept the two currents inside the movement.⁴⁵

In addition to internal friction, the Brotherhood suffered from its ambiguous political stance. While it participated in elections and has had representatives in two successive parliaments, it has yet to formulate a clear and effective opposition role.⁴⁶ Unable to provide a credible alternative to the status quo or articulate a distinct program, the Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front (IAF) saw their support erode significantly.⁴⁷ Young people seeking to challenge the status quo were drawn elsewhere, almost by default. "For those who are disillusioned with the IAF and the Muslim Brotherhood, there is no real alternative. And so they are pushed into the arms of extremist groups".⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview with Ibrahim Gharaibeh, Studies and Research Editor at the independent daily *Al-Ghad* and a former Muslim Brotherhood member, Amman, April 2005.

⁴⁶ Once elected to parliament, the Islamists focused on the minutiae of religious practice rather than economic problems. Banning alcohol on Royal Jordanian flights is often touted as their greatest achievement.

⁴⁷ Between 1995 and 2004, surveys asking eligible voters which political party best represented their socio-economic wishes gave a steady average of around 10 per cent to the IAF -- a percentage that probably represented its support in the population at large. Crisis Group interview with Fares Breizat, head of polling at the Centre for Strategic Studies, Amman, 22 March 2005. The IAF's popularity has plummeted in the last two years, however. Polls conducted by the Centre for Strategic Studies found that the number of respondents who indicated that the IAF came close to representing their aspirations had declined from 14.7 per cent in 2003 to 6.6 per cent in 2004 and a mere 4 per cent in 2005. *Jordan Times*, 7 September 2005. Nevertheless, the Brotherhood continues to play an important role by providing needed social services. See Al-Urdun al-Jedid, op. cit., and Egbert Harmsen, "Islamic Voluntary Welfare Activism in Jordan", *ISIM Newsletter*, no. 13, December 2003.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview with Nawasfi Tell, Centre for Strategic Studies at Jordan University, Amman, 8 March 2005.

Maqdisi's ideology and tactics proved appealing magnets to a growing number of disaffected youth. Adnan Abu Odeh put it this way:

The [Salafi] Islamists offer an active response to the humiliations to which people feel subjected in their own lives or vicariously through the suffering of Palestinians and now also Iraqis. People have no way to react, to stop the insults, the injustice. The Islamist groups offer a form of therapy by doing what the masses cannot or will not do: attack the authorities. And they end up enjoying a lot of silent popular support, even in the face of attacks on innocent people, which are seen as balancing the deaths resulting from Israeli incursions and so forth.⁴⁹

D. THE JIHADI EXPERIENCE IN ZARQA AND SALT

Although during the early 1990s there had been outbreaks of unrest in southern cities such as Ma'an and Karak over hikes in the price of bread and the cost of fuel (as well as in Palestinian refugee camps over moves to normalise relations with Israel),⁵⁰ Amman's largest satellite towns Salt and Zarqa (and to a lesser extent the northern city of Irbid) became focal points for the *jihadi* Salafi movement. Referred to as the "birthplace and capital of the *jihadi* Salafi movement in Jordan",⁵¹ Zarqa

Frustration with the Muslim Brotherhood followed on the heels of the failure of secular political movements. "Baathism failed; Nasserism failed; Arab nationalism failed, and so on. But when you associate yourself with the book of God, how could that fail?", Crisis Group interview with Gen. Ali Shukri, a former chief advisor to King Hussein, Amman, 27 February 2005.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group with Adnan Abu Odeh, Amman, 16 March 2005.

⁵⁰ For an analysis of Jordan's economic difficulties and the repercussions of the IMF's austerity plan, see Crisis Group Briefing, *The Challenge of Political Reform*, op. cit., and Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°5, *Red Alert in Jordan: Recurrent Unrest in Ma'an*, 19 February 2003.

⁵¹ Hazem al-Amin, "Jordan's 'Zarqawists' Visit Their Sheikhs in Prison and Wait for the Opportunity to Join Abu Mus'ab in Iraq", *Al-Haya*, 14 December 2004. Zarqa was originally a Chechen/Circassian settlement in the area of the (Trans-Jordanian) Bani Hassan tribe that was transformed into an industrial city after the Palestinian refugee crises of 1948 and 1967. As a Bani Hassan critical of the Hashemites, Zarqawi earned the respect of disaffected Jordanians of Palestinian origin, who are his main recruits. In a way, Hazem al-Amin observes, Zarqawi may have succeeded in bridging the tensions and contradictions between East Bankers and West Bankers in one key area of Jordan. In an interesting historical footnote, some descendants of the original Chechen immigrants in Zarqa returned to Chechnya to fight there as *jihadi* Salafis.

is an impoverished working-class suburb of 472,000 inhabitants.⁵² It is the hometown of Zarqawi, Abdullah Azzam and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, and one of its first Salafi preachers was Sheikh Nasr al-Din al-Albani (see above).⁵³

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. In 1999, after his release from prison, Zarqawi followed them. 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.⁵⁴

Despite Zarqa's role in the development of the *jihadi* Salafi movement, as of May 2005 more men from Salt than from Zarqa reportedly had been killed, or died in suicide operations, under Zarqawi's leadership in Iraq.⁵⁵ In March 2005, the town acquired instant notoriety -- and caused intense embarrassment to the government -- when the family of a suicide bomber reportedly celebrated their son's 28 February attack in Hilla in which some 125 (Shiite) civilians died.⁵⁶

⁵² The 2004 census gave the population of Zarqa as 472,830, making it Jordan's second-largest city, after Amman (1.9 million) in a country of 5.323 million. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, "Background Note: Jordan", September 2005.

⁵³ Hazem al-Amin, "Zarqa Gave Birth", op. cit. Zarqa has also been dubbed by some the "Chicago of the Middle East" for its lawlessness, with some areas of the town reputed to be "no go" zones for the police after dark. Zarqa is also a stronghold of more traditional Islamists. The Muslim Brotherhood runs a number of health clinics there, and several IAF leaders originate from the city. Leaders of two other Islamist groups, the Islamic Liberation Party (*Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami*) and the Group for Preaching and Propagation (*Jamia'at al-Tabligh wa al-Da'wa*), also hail from Zarqa.

⁵⁴ Hazem al-Amin, "Jordan's 'Zarqawists'", op. cit.

⁵⁵ Estimates range from eleven to 46. Crisis Group interviews, Amman, March and April 2005.

⁵⁶ Thousands of Iraqi Shiites demonstrated against Jordan in response, and the Iraqi government recalled its ambassador in Amman "for consultations". The Jordanian government immediately went into overdrive to contain further fall-out, claiming through the media that the bomber's family had held a three-day mourning period as tradition requires, not a "celebration", and that evidence indicated that, while the man had indeed been responsible for a suicide operation, it had occurred in Mosul, not Hilla. A bombing in Mosul around the time of the Hilla attack also caused casualties but was seen as a non-sectarian attack against Iraqi/U.S. security forces, whereas the Hilla bombing was clearly designed to ignite sectarian fighting between Sunnis and Shiites. See *Al-Ghad* (Amman), 11 March 2005, and Associated Press, 14 April 2005. *Al-Ghad's* publisher promptly fired his editor-in-chief over the incident.

Since the state's establishment, Salt, a town of roughly 80,000 directly west of Amman and increasingly one of its suburbs, has been the traditional home of the ruling elite, the feeder town for army officers and one of the monarchy's mainstays.⁵⁷ Many government leaders and other senior politicians come from there. The introduction of political and economic reforms in the 1990s hit the town hard, however, diminishing the power of the traditional elites and job opportunities in the administration.

The rise in unemployment exacerbated tensions between a powerful Muslim Brotherhood tradition and mores that were highly liberal by Jordanian standards. Salt was considered the country's most liberal town but it was beset by serious alcohol and drug abuse problems.⁵⁸ In the mid-1990s, it experienced an about-face, as previously unruly teenagers converted to a conservative and more militant brand of Islam, harassing fellow townspeople with demonstrations of piety rather than drunken antics. As former IAF Secretary-General Abd-al-Latif Arabiyat noted, "they didn't cause less trouble, but they were now attacking people with Islam, which meant it was harder to criticise them".⁵⁹

This newfound religious fervour initially was sparked by Abd-al-Fatah al-Hiyeri, a Trans-Jordanian cleric who preached against the regime in general and growing Palestinian influence in particular.⁶⁰ Given the growing

⁵⁷ It has been half-jokingly referred to as "Jordan's Tikrit".

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interviews with Adnan Abu Odeh, Amman, 16 March 2005, and Abd-al-Latif Arabiyat, former IAF secretary-general, Amman, 29 March 2005. See Associated Press, *Daily Star*, 16 April 2005.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 29 March 2005. A local politician declared: "It is usually the former drinkers who turn extremist. They are searching for themselves and for any meaning in life". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 3 April 2005.

⁶⁰ There has long been a deep divide between Jordan's original population of Trans-Jordanians and those of Palestinian origin. While many of the latter continue to reside in refugee camps, a significant portion of Palestinian-origin Jordanians, including those returning from the Gulf after 1991, have been enormously successful in entrepreneurial pursuits and are primarily responsible for Jordan's high business profile. Their economic rise is viewed with a mixture of envy and suspicion by some Trans-Jordanians, who fear loss of their hold on power and the transformation of Jordan into the Palestinian state. King Abdullah alluded to this issue in a speech to national leaders in August 2005, when he declared: "I know and do appreciate the fears of some of you that plans exist to redraw the map of the region and to settle some historic issues at the expense of Jordan...If such a plan exists, it is a plot against the Palestinian people as much as it is a plot against Jordan". See, "His Majesty's Address to National Leaders", Amman, 16 August 2005, at: http://www.kingabdullah.jo/main.php?main_page=3&lang_hmka1=1.

number of disaffected, unemployed young men, his vitriolic statements found a receptive audience.

This cleric's status as Salt's chief agitator was soon usurped by Maqdisi and Zarqawi, who were transferred to the town's prison in 1997. From that unlikely base, they trumped his narrow vision with the breadth of their agenda and the scope of their anti-regime activities.⁶¹ Zarqawi had been arrested in 1994 on charges of possessing illegal weapons and belonging to a banned organisation and received a fifteen-year sentence; Maqdisi was detained in 1996 on similar charges. Already, during their detention in the south, they had substantially increased membership in Bay'at 'al Imam, recruiting especially among "Afghan Jordanians"⁶² but also ordinary criminals;⁶³ Salt prison, with its flexible visiting policy and town-centre location, brought them into contact with many more potential recruits, mostly petty criminals who rotated in and out of jail. Maqdisi was able to publish and distribute his essays from jail, further spreading his message and bolstering recruitment.⁶⁴

Detainees disillusioned by a system they felt had already failed them and was unlikely to welcome them upon their release were ideal targets for a discourse that denounced a corrupt and decadent society. According to Muhammad Abu Rumman, "Salt became the perfect breeding ground. After Maqdisi arrived, the refrain [among disaffected youths] became, 'the problem isn't us, it's the situation'".⁶⁵ Salt's tight-knit community was especially suited to the *jihadis'* informal recruitment network. A number of Crisis Group interviewees spoke of brothers from the same family fighting in Chechnya, Afghanistan and/or Iraq.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview with Abdullah Abu Rumman, Amman, 2 April 2005.

⁶² A group of "Afghan Jordanians" had been sentenced to death for setting off explosions and burning down a cinema in Zarqa. They were not included in the 1999 amnesty that led to the early release of Zarqawi and Maqdisi, but their death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment.

⁶³ Crisis Group interviewees agreed that Bay'at 'al Imam's initial membership was probably around ten. While in prison, Maqdisi and Zarqawi recruited five times as many, mostly common criminals lacking an education, and began to train and organise them.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Amman, March, April and May 2005. For 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, available at: <http://www.islam.org.au>.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 4 April 2005.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Amman, March and April 2005. Social networks of militant Jihadi groups are normally composed of family and friends (who then marry into the family). Most cells are made up of just eight people, generally from the same area, social class, etc. Marc Sageman, "Presentation to the

Jihadis also took advantage of the lack of credibility of government-sponsored clerics and the Muslim Brotherhood. According to a local politician, "the *Awqaf* [religious endowment] sends weak imams with strong *Mukhabarat* [intelligence service] links but little religious authority", who often read the same sermon throughout Salt on any given Friday.⁶⁷

The authorities eventually clamped down on Maqdisi and Zarqawi, restricting visiting hours, searching and monitoring anyone who came to see them, then moving them to a small complex in al-Balqa, on the outskirts of Amman, where they separated Islamist prisoners from other detainees.

Maqdisi, Zarqawi and some 30 of their new recruits were released from prison in 1999 as part of a general amnesty declared shortly after King Abdullah's accession to the throne (others had already been released, having served out their sentences). Following their discharge, however, many of the group's members found GID pressure combined with censure from their local community unbearable. They left the country, either returning to Afghanistan to fight alongside the Taliban⁶⁸ or joining the new *jihadi* struggle in Chechnya.⁶⁹ Zarqawi, unemployed and without other sources of income, went to Pakistan

World Federation of Scientists Permanent Monitoring Panel on Terrorism", Erice (Sicily), 7 May 2005, and Scott Atran, "The Virtual Hand of Jihad", *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 3, no. 10, 19 May 2005.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, Amman, April 2005. The Muslim Brotherhood in Salt also aligned itself with clans and used their structure during parliamentary elections. By contrast, the *Jihadis* distanced themselves from their clans, a stance more appealing to young people, many of whom went to Iraq precisely to escape their clan's grip. Hazem al-Amin, "The Salafis of Salt Stage Weddings for Those Killed in Iraq and Urge Others to Leave and Fight", *Al-Haya*, 16 December 2004.

⁶⁸ Many Arab fighters had lingered on in Afghanistan after the war, and their numbers rapidly increased after the Taliban seized Kabul in 1996. The new Arab Afghans were more numerous, better organised, better equipped and more ideologically focussed than those who had fought the Soviets. But while intelligence sources put the number of foreign *jihadis* in Afghanistan in 2000 at between 8,000 and 12,000, only around 150 of those are thought to have been Jordanians. See "Foreign pro-Taliban fighters inside Afghanistan (pre-hostilities)", *Jane's World Armies*, 8 October 2001, and Kim Ghattas, "Afghanistan's Arab fighters", BBC, 15 December 2001, at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1712906.stm.

⁶⁹ Russian Intelligence services allege that Jordanian fighter Abu Hafs is Osama bin Laden's representative in Chechnya. Little is known about him or when he arrived there. For more on Jordanian *jihadi* Salafi ties to the war in Chechnya, see *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 2, no. 1, 15 January 2004. A number of Jordanian mujahidin also travelled to Kurdistan in Northern Iraq to join with Ansar al-Islam.

and then Afghanistan.⁷⁰ To the authorities, the departure of Zarqawi and his group was "a cause for comfort".⁷¹

E. ZARQAWI VS. MAQDISI

Early allies, Zarqawi and Maqdisi fell out in jail, reportedly as a result of Zarqawi's increased assertiveness as the leader.⁷² Once Zarqawi was released and left the country, Maqdisi began openly to criticise him,⁷³ alluding in particular to his turn away from support for Palestinian resistance as a *jihadi* priority,⁷⁴ but their differences were first of all personal⁷⁵ and doctrinal: Maqdisi opposed the use of violence in Jordan, while Zarqawi advocated it. Both retained significant followings, especially after the U.S. invaded Iraq but Zarqawi's reputation grew as a result of extensive media coverage and descriptions of him as "America's most wanted man".⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Zarqawi reportedly asked Maqdisi for permission to go to Pakistan, but Maqdisi refused. Angered, Zarqawi left for Pakistan anyway. When his visa expired, he was detained in Peshawar. Unable to return to Amman, where he was charged in absentia with involvement in the newly-discovered Millennium plot, he had little choice but to move to Afghanistan. Crisis Group interview with Abdullah Abu Rumman (who questioned Maqdisi about this in June 2005), Amman, 15 November 2005.

⁷¹ Hazem al-Amin, "Zarqa Gave Birth", op. cit.

⁷² Hazem al-Amin quotes a Jordanian associate of Zarqawi and Maqdisi who spent time with them in prison as saying: "The tribal dimension, which characterises Abu Mus'ab, enabled him to obtain followers inside the prison, for he is confrontational and the young men that surrounded him in prison were *jihad*-prone and practical. They rejected the command of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and preferred the command of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi due to his bravery, determination and ideas. They thought that his command would enable Abu Muhammad to focus on his studies and fresh interpretation of religion [*ijihad*]", Hazem al-Amin, "Jordan's 'Zarqawists'", op. cit.

⁷³ Websites used by Maqdisi (www.tawhed.ws, www.abuqatada.com and www.alsunnah.info) contain an anti-Zarqawi tract listing his mistakes. Zarqawi, in turn, has accused Maqdisi of being a government agent.

⁷⁴ Hazem al-Amin, "Zarqa Gave Birth", op. cit. Maqdisi is a Jordanian of Palestinian extraction, while Zarqawi is a Trans-Jordanian.

⁷⁵ Zarqawi tried to seize the leadership of the *jihadi* community while he and Maqdisi were in prison, claiming that as a pure Trans-Jordanian he had greater legitimacy with which to counter the Hashemite regime. Maqdisi reportedly consented, reckoning that he would remain de facto leader due to his stature as a man of learning. Over time, however, Zarqawi's reputation grew, and therefore his following relative to Maqdisi's.

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interview with Abdullah Abu Rumman, Amman, 2 February 2005. Hazem al-Amin suggests that Zarqawi owes his support mainly to his reputed bravery, ardour and image as an outlaw. Hazem al-Amin, "Jordan's 'Zarqawists'", op. cit. That said, Zarqawi was mostly an unknown in Jordan until

While Zarqawi returned to Afghanistan in 1999, Maqdisi remained in Jordan to capitalise on the work already done but was re-arrested six months later. The scale of the charges against him this time and the size of the group eventually arrested suggested the progress they had made in jail in recruitment, organisation and capability.⁷⁷ On 28 March 2000, 28 defendants were put on trial (including thirteen in absentia) on charges of planning attacks against U.S. and Israeli targets in Jordan, the Millennium plot. U.S. authorities directly linked the Jordanian plot to two other attacks scheduled to take place on American soil.

Zarqawi, for his part, believed he could run his *jihad* by remote control. In Afghanistan he joined forces with Osama bin Laden, but he soon fell out with both the Taliban and al-Qaeda, whose members in his view "were not sufficiently pious and did not adhere strictly enough to the Islamic laws of punishment. He was more extreme than the Taliban".⁷⁸ To avoid damaging debates over doctrinal differences (al-Qaeda was focused on the "far enemy" -- the U.S. -- while Zarqawi preferred to target the "near enemy" -- the Hashemites in Jordan) and to accommodate Zarqawi's penchant for independent operations, Taliban leader Mullah Omar asked him to establish a mujahidin camp near the Afghan town of Herat. Here Zarqawi blossomed, forming *al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* (Monotheism and Holy War) and training recruits primarily from the Levant: Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan.

According to al-Amin, it is this camp that Zarqawi supporters "repeatedly mention in the historical narrative of their movement" as the place where his *jihadi* trajectory truly took off and as "the main sinew" in the structure of his current organisation.⁷⁹ The camp attracted

Colin Powell's speech at the UN Security Council in February 2003, unlike Maqdisi, who had an international following owing to his writings.

⁷⁷ David Benjamin, in charge of transnational threats at the White House at that time, commented, "We were astonished ...at the amount of firepower that was involved...also the number of conspirators." CBS, "60 Minutes", 26 December 2001.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview with Muhammed Abu Rumman, Amman, 4 April 2005. Conceivably, Osama bin Laden also held Zarqawi at arm's length because of the realisation that the Jordanian GID had been particularly effective at infiltrating the Jordanian *jihadis'* ranks.

⁷⁹ Hazem al-Amin, "Jordan's 'Zarqawists'", op. cit., and "Zarqa Gave Birth", op. cit. During the U.S. war in Afghanistan, Zarqawi travelled to northern Iraq where he set up a camp in the area of Halabja with a number of Jordanians, most of whom were from Salt, joining forces with local Kurdish *jihadis* belonging to Ansar al-Islam. That camp was destroyed by joint U.S. and Kurdish forces in March 2003, its population scattered or killed. Remnants later established Ansar Jaysh al-Sunna, or Ansar al-Sunna, which has claimed responsibility for a number

some 100 recruits and while its initial aim was to overthrow the Jordanian regime and attack Israel, Zarqawi broadened his agenda to include attacks on Israeli and Jewish targets in Europe after a number of recruits refused to return to Jordan.⁸⁰

Zarqawi's absence and Maqdisi's incarceration led to an apparent downturn in *jihadi* activity in Jordan over the next two years and a renaissance of the *Islah*, or reformist, branch of Salafism.⁸¹ However, the events of 11 September 2001, the ensuing U.S. "war on terror" and the invasion and occupation of first Afghanistan and then Iraq effectively acted as a call to arms for *jihadi* groups.⁸² The GID had frequently looked to the traditional Salafi movement to curb *jihadi* tendencies, hoping that militants would follow the religious teachings of leading traditionalist clerics such as Ali al-Halabi, Abu Shaqra or al-Albani.⁸³ But in the polarised atmosphere that emerged, the strategy appeared to have run its course.⁸⁴ Even the founder of the reformist current, Abu Anas al-Shami, went to fight in Iraq, where he was killed.⁸⁵

of suicide killings in Iraq resulting in hundreds of deaths. For background, see Crisis Group Iraq Briefing N°4, *Radical Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan: The Mouse That Roared?*, 7 February 2003.

⁸⁰ This testifies to the GID's dissuasive powers. See Gary Cambill, "Abu Musab al-Zarqawi: A Biographical Sketch", *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 2, no. 24, 16 December 2004. In 2002, two Jordanian members of *Al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* were arrested in Germany and accused of conspiring to attack Jewish targets there. At his trial, suspected *Tawhid* operative Shadi Abdallah stated that while the group was linked to al-Qaeda, its main aim remained the overthrow of the Jordanian monarchy. Nesser, op. cit., pp. 72-82.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interviews with Abdullah Abu Rumman, Amman, 2 March 2005, and Mohammad Abu Rumman, Amman, 4 April 2005.

⁸² Crisis Group interview with Muhammad Abu Rumman, Amman, 4 April 2005.

⁸³ Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "An Encounter", op. cit. By the mid-1990s, reformist Salafi clerics in Jordan were denouncing *jihadis* as non-Salafis. Wiktorowicz, op. cit., p. 127.

⁸⁴ Maqdisi was released from GID custody on 28 June 2005 and re-arrested on 5 July 2005 after he appeared on Al-Jazeera TV. The authorities provided no explanation for either his release or subsequent re-incarceration, though the state prosecutor later charged him with "plotting subversive acts" (*Jordan Times*, 21 July 2005). In the interview on Al-Jazeera, he offered muted criticism of attacks on civilians, but his comments betrayed disagreement on tactics rather than principle: "I have reservations on expanding *jihadi*, or what others call suicide or martyrdom [*istishhadiyah*], operations. I see that expansion is only needed when it is essential." See, <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/D7BCF40E-5376-4B19-A170-9AA2C914DF09.htm>.

⁸⁵ Al-Shami, who reportedly acted as Zarqawi's spiritual mentor, was killed in Baghdad in September 2004 when a missile hit the car in which he was travelling. Al-Shami was a founder of the reformist wing of the Salafi movement in Jordan, which

The rivalry between Zarqawi and Maqdisi continued, fuelled by unresolved doctrinal differences. Following his release from prison in 2005, Maqdisi gave an interview to Al-Jazeera in which he criticised Zarqawi for the mass killing of fellow Muslims in Iraq, arguing that "the indiscriminate attacks might distort the true *jihad*".⁸⁶ Zarqawi, by contrast, has expressly called for the killing of Shiites, whom he refers to as apostates.⁸⁷

This debate has come on top of one within *jihadi* circles over the wisdom of carrying out attacks inside the Kingdom. Maqdisi had already expressed his opposition to attacks inside Jordan, though he appears to have been motivated by concern that *jihadi* ranks were infiltrated by the GID.⁸⁸ Following the foiled "chemical" attack in Amman in April 2004 (see below), several Zarqawi followers in Jordan criticised their mentor for taking the risk of using Jordanians in an operation in the country. As Hazem al-Amin reports, Zarqawi's supporters in Jordan "realise that the Jordanian security forces have infiltrated their ranks in a major way.... Many of them say that they are with Abu Mus'ab [al-Zarqawi] in his war in Iraq but do not support operations inside Jordan". A Zarqawi supporter, al-Amin continues, told him that "Abu Mus'ab erred in asking Jayousi [the alleged leader of the thwarted

was established in reaction and opposition to the emergence of Maqdisi and Zarqawi. But the 2003 Iraq war apparently persuaded him to join forces with the latter. Crisis Group interview with Abdullah Abu Rumman, Amman, 2 March 2005.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Reuven Paz, "Islamic Legitimacy for the London Bombings", Occasional Paper of the Project for the Research of Islamist Movements at the Global Research in International Affairs Centre (Israel), vol. 3, no. 4, July 2005. Paz cites a doctrinal dispute over the "symmetry of revenge" (the killing of Western civilians to avenge Muslim casualties from Western violence), in which Maqdisi and others who "lead the doctrinal 'umbrella' of global *Jihad*" are outpaced by the violent tactics of operatives such as Zarqawi. A letter released by the Pentagon in September 2005, which it said was from Al-Qaeda's number two, Ayman al-Zawahiri, to Zarqawi, was in fact signed by "Abu Muhammad", suggesting instead Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi as its author. Its content -- largely a critique of Zarqawi's decision to target fellow Muslims in Iraq -- is consistent with Maqdisi's known position on this issue. The letter is available at: http://www.dni.gov/letter_in_arabic.pdf.

⁸⁷ See Mohammed Ramahi and Faris Mehdawi, "Zarqawi declares war on Iraq Shi'ites", Reuters, 15 September 2005.

⁸⁸ He reportedly supports armed attacks only in Palestine, at least for now. In Jordan, he has opposed armed attacks and has advocated efforts at conversion (*da'wa*) and recruitment only, fearing that attacks in Jordan would trigger a crushing response from the security services that would undo all the work he and his comrades have accomplished. In a move that particularly angered Zarqawi, Maqdisi reportedly forbade him to use violence in Jordan. Crisis Group interview with Muhammad Abu Rumman, Amman, 4 April 2005.

"chemical" attack] to carry out the...operation against Jordanian intelligence [headquarters], because the mujahidin do not have the capability to open additional fronts".⁸⁹

III. HOW TO COMBAT *JIHADI* ISLAMISTS

A. JORDAN'S ROLE IN THE "WAR ON TERROR"

In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks and the war in Iraq, Jordan witnessed a steep increase in terrorism-related arrests. While some sixteen Islamists were detained on suspicion of belonging to al-Qaeda in 2000⁹⁰ and 50 in 2001,⁹¹ it climbed into the hundreds following the end of the Iraq war in April 2003.⁹² Moreover, after uncovering the Millennium plot, authorities linked nearly every suspected terror plot to Zarqawi and al-Qaeda.

Such claims and arrests have provoked ambivalent popular responses. Despite widespread local media coverage of terrorism-related trials and prolific use of the al-Qaeda tag, the general public long remained sceptical about the actual threat posed by *jihadi* violence. Indeed, while concrete evidence regarding Zarqawi's financing and direction of planned attacks in Jordan has been put forward in various trials, links to al-Qaeda or Osama bin Laden, beyond the ideological, have been far less clear.⁹³

⁹⁰ In total, 1,700 people were arrested in connection with their religious beliefs in 2000. Cited in the Jordan section of Amnesty International's 2001 Annual Report, at: <http://web.amnesty.org/web/ar2001.nsf/webmepcountries/JORDAN?OpenDocument>.

⁹¹ U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, "International Religious Freedom Report", 2004, available at: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/2004/35500.htm>.

⁹² Amnesty International, "Jordan Country Report", years 2000-2005; Crisis Group interviews with a court correspondent, Amman, 28 March 2005, and with Samih Khreis, defence lawyer and member of the Jordanian Bar Association, Amman, 30 March 2005. No official statistics have been published on how many of those standing trial for these charges were in Afghanistan at one time, but observers believe they constitute a majority.

⁹³ While media reports frequently link Zarqawi and al-Qaeda, there is conflicting evidence over their relationship, as suggested by the al-Qaeda leadership's ambivalent reaction to Zarqawi's 17 October 2004 pledge of allegiance to the organisation. One of the main differences between the two is Zarqawi's willingness to attack other Muslims (especially Shiites) and foment sectarian strife. Al-Qaeda, meanwhile, has emphasised that Muslims should stand united until their common enemies are defeated. German intelligence goes so far as to contend that the two groups are working against one another. See Nesser, *op. cit.* Jordanian GID sources, on the other hand, contend that the networks operate in parallel. See Mathew Levitt and Julie Sawyer, "Zarqawi's Jordanian Agenda", *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 2, no. 24, 16 December 2004. If al-Qaeda is understood as a loose global network rather than a structured organisation, then its association with Zarqawi is more easily established. For

⁸⁹ Hazem al-Amin, "Jordan's 'Zarqawists'", *op. cit.*

The use of the organisation's name most likely reflects a tendency to blame domestic unrest on external factors -- downplaying internal friction while emphasising Jordan's role in the U.S.-led war on terror.

At least until 9 November 2005, the substantial increase in prosecutions fuelled suspicions about the veracity of the alleged plots more than fear of future attacks.⁹⁴ Contributing to these doubts is the fact that in all but two instances⁹⁵ the defendants were caught while purportedly planning attacks and that most who confessed subsequently claimed to have been beaten or tortured while in custody.⁹⁶ Some observers have qualified the arrests as rounding up "the usual suspects" and commented that defendants appeared to have only tenuous links to the group on trial. As a result, Jordanians have questioned whether the GID's actions reflected vigilance and efficiency or overzealousness in rounding up suspects and exaggerating the scope of potential attacks.

To the regime, the benefits of such actions, however overbroad, are clear. Defendants who are found guilty can be closely monitored; even if their links to militant groups are loose, this arguably provides added security. Moreover, by demonstrating not only the existence of radical elements but also the security services' success in fighting them, the authorities demonstrate their mettle in the war on terror to the local population as well as to the U.S., and can hope to gain increased assistance in exchange.⁹⁷ Still, casting a net widely can be a double-edged sword. As one follower of terror trials noted, "if the defendants are clean shaven at the beginning of their

further information on its structure, read Jonathon Schanzer, "Al-Qaeda's Armies: The Middle East Affiliate Groups and the Next Generation of Terror", Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2004, available at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org>.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Amman, March, April and May 2005.

⁹⁵ The two terror attacks that were implemented prior to 9 November 2005 were the fatal shooting of senior USAID administrator Laurence Foley outside his home in Amman on 28 October 2002 and the rocket attack on two U.S. Navy ships in the Bay of Aqaba on 19 August 2005.

⁹⁶ See local press coverage of the trials, e.g., "Four Suspects Say They Confessed Under Duress", *Jordan Times*, 6 October 2005, *Jordan Times*, 10 May 2005; and Amnesty International country reports on Jordan, especially its report on Ra'ed Muhammad Hijazi, 12 October 2004.

⁹⁷ In 2003, Jordan received \$700 million from the U.S. government's Economic Support Fund. In 2005, it was granted a further \$100 million "to support ongoing counter-terror operations" on top of \$350 million in economic aid and \$200 million in military aid. This is a subject that feeds into the regional pastime of conspiracy theories. The U.S. is frequently accused of creating the plots itself to prove it is winning the war on terror. Crisis Group interviews, Amman, March and April 2005.

trial, you can bet they will have grown beards and be praying in court by the end".⁹⁸

Prior to 9 November, Jordan had been spared both large-scale attacks and suicide bombings. The most high-profile case that, if successful, would have combined both elements was the alleged April 2004 thwarted "chemical" attack targeting GID headquarters, the prime ministry and the U.S. embassy. The GID alleges the attack could potentially have killed 80,000 people and injured a further 160,000,⁹⁹ though this claim has been met with a good deal of justifiable scepticism.¹⁰⁰

There are several possible explanations for this overall pattern. First, it demonstrates the security services' pervasive presence. Their thorough penetration of families and tribes is facilitated by the fact that family members tend to be aware of their relatives' inclinations, even if they can do nothing to prevent them.¹⁰¹ In conducting his investigation in 2004, Hazem al-Amin found that all the *jihadi* Salafis he met or heard about were focussed on carrying out attacks in Iraq, not Jordan.¹⁰² Committed *jihadis* appear to prefer emulating the Afghan Arab experience in Iraq to staging domestic attacks -- even if evidence suggests there are comparatively few who actually go to Iraq to fight or carry out suicide operations.¹⁰³ Those who remain in

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Amman, April 2005. Defendants in terror-related trials frequently adopt Maqdisi's tactic of praying and chanting in court to disrupt proceedings. See, for example, "Court Hearing Turns Into Zarqawi Rally", United Press International, 10 May 2005.

⁹⁹ For more details, read: <http://www.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/04/26/jordan.terror/>.

¹⁰⁰ The attack entailed driving a truck filled with explosives and chemical agents into the target. The chemicals were of a very crude nature and had not been weaponised; they might have compounded an explosion but would likely have evaporated instantly. A chemical expert brought to the court by the defence lawyer argued that while the materials the defendants possessed were hazardous, it would have required great expertise to turn them into an effective weapon. "Chemical Expert Testifies That Defendants Had Dangerous Chemicals", *Jordan Times*, 6 October 2005.

¹⁰¹ For example, a retired Jordanian government official mentioned that one of his relatives was in U.S. detention in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Crisis Group interview, Amman, September 2005.

¹⁰² Zarqawi reportedly contends that the *jihadi* groups' leaders should remain outside their home countries as a way of staying beyond the authorities' reach. Crisis Group interview with Muhammad Abu Rumman, Amman, 4 April 2005.

¹⁰³ Information on Jordanian mujahidin posted on a popular *jihadi* message board lists most of them as martyred in Iraq or in other locations outside Jordan. While Zarqawi's role in Iraq has given Jordanian participation in the insurgency prominence, the number of actual Jordanian participants is estimated to be low.

Jordan may lack both the operational experience and motivation required to launch successful attacks at home.¹⁰⁴ Tellingly, in a pattern that foretold the 9 November bombings, the only two successful prior attacks within the Kingdom -- in November 2002 and August 2005 -- were carried out primarily by foreigners who had arrived a few days earlier and, unlike Jordanians with known family and tribal ties, did not appear immediately on the GID's radar.¹⁰⁵

Still, Jordan's relative good fortune was bound to run out sooner or later, as no security system can be fail-proof in the face of determined suicide bombers.¹⁰⁶ Many had been expecting a major attack, possibly targeting hotels, for at least a year.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, terrorism experts had been predicting that with Iraq the new ground for *jihadi* training and operations, the longer the insurgency

Of the 100 alleged foreign insurgents captured in Iraq in early 2005, for example, only eight were Jordanian. Of the 154 Arab fighters listed as dead on Islamist websites from October 2004 to March 2005, only four were from Jordan. And figures covering the period March-September 2005 suggest that of 328 foreign nationals captured in Iraq, seventeen (slightly over 5 per cent), were Jordanians. See Search for International Terrorist Entities (SITE) Institute, 8 February 2005, available at: <http://www.siteinstitute.org>; "Captured Foreign Insurgents Named", *Al-Mada* (Baghdad), 12 May 2005; Reuven Paz, "Arab Volunteers Killed in Iraq: An Analysis", PRISM Occasional Paper, vol. 3, no. 1, March 2005; and information gathered by the Multi-National Corps-Iraq, October 2005.

¹⁰⁴ Four men from Irbid are on trial in the State Security Court accused of plotting to attack foreign tourists in Aqaba and target Amman liquor stores in January 2005. The men stated they had chosen this course of action after abandoning an earlier plan in December 2004 to join the insurgency in Iraq, due to the deteriorating situation there. *Jordan Times*, 8-9 July 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Salem Ben Suwayyed, a Libyan national, and Yasser Freihat, a Jordanian, were sentenced to death for the killing of a USAID official in Amman in November 2002. Six other men, including Zarqawi, were sentenced to death in absentia. See *Jordan Times*, 7 April 2004. Following the August 2005 rocket attack on two U.S. warships anchored in the Bay of Aqaba, authorities arrested a Syrian and stated they were looking for his two sons and a further accomplice, who were thought to have come from and returned to Iraq. *Jordan Times*, 23 August 2005. The three suicide bombers who struck hotels on 9 November 2005 were all Iraqis, as was the one would-be suicide bomber captured after the attacks.

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Amman, April and May 2005. On 8 February 2005, the SITE Institute reported that exchanges on a leading *jihadi* internet message board called for mujahidin in Jordan to "show themselves". The Institute report noted that the increase in chatter regarding attacks in Jordan was reminiscent of the increased focus on Kuwait shortly before an attack there in November 2004. See <http://www.siteinstitute.org>.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interviews and observations in Jordan, 2003-2005.

continued, the higher the threat would be to Jordan.¹⁰⁸ In October 2005, Iraq's interior minister, Bayan Jaber, told Jordanian authorities that documents found on a dead Zarqawi associate suggested he had ordered some of his men to move to neighbouring countries, possibly to carry out attacks.¹⁰⁹

One of the GID's principal challenges is to limit the appeal of home-grown militant groups and halt further recruitment, as Jordanian *jihadis* may travel to Iraq to fight, then return to carry out attacks at home. According to one Jordanian analyst:

The government isn't taking the internal threat from the Salafis seriously enough. It thinks that the security services alone can keep a lid on them. It needs to start engaging with the people to find solutions for the problems that drive them to this. These people are brave, stupid and hate the King. If you just stick them in jail, you give them time to recruit and organise.¹¹⁰

A number of analysts are calling for a more sophisticated approach that seeks to divide the *jihadis* and disarm their rhetorical arsenal by exposing the sophistry of their thought and stressing the rejection of their methods, not only by ordinary Jordanians but above all by credible Muslim clerics.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ See remarks by Michael Scheuer, former chief of the Bin Laden Unit at the CIA's Counterterrorist Centre, on Osama bin Laden's 2003 call for attacks on Jordan, "Jamestown Debate on Insurgency and Jihad: The Iraqi Theatre and Beyond", 11 April 2005. For a full transcript see:

http://www.jamestown.org/downloads/Transcript-Panel2_041105.pdf. A classified CIA assessment made public in June 2005 states that Iraq was proving a more effective *jihadi* training ground than Afghanistan prior to the fall of the Taliban regime, given the potential for honing skills in urban combat, assassinations, kidnappings and car bombings. *The New York Times*, 22 June 2005. The Jordanian border with Iraq remains highly porous. See *Chicago Tribune*, 19 April 2005.

¹⁰⁹ United Press International, 2 October 2005, available at: <http://www.washtimes.com/upi/20051002-110701-9762r.htm>.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Amman, April 2005.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interviews, Amman, 13 September 2005 and 12 November 2005. Adnan Abu Odeh noted that the issue of *jihadi* violence had opened the fourth intra-Muslim battle in history. The first -- the battle over the Prophet Muhammad's succession -- was over in 24 hours and peaceful. The second -- the "Great Sedition" that led to the establishment of the Shiite branch of Islam -- was violent. The third constituted an intellectual debate among jurists and philosophers in the ninth century over whether the Koran is eternal or was created. The current battle -- over whether Muslims can be killed in the name of Islam -- has started with violence, which is now sparking a much-needed debate. "It may encourage

B. CHANGING THE MESSAGE

The lack of a functioning political opposition¹¹² and a low tolerance for criticism of the regime have turned mosques into privileged forums for expressions of dissent. "People's anger at the current situation is being expressed through the mosques because you can't ban God. How do you fight God? You use sound, secular reasoning. But you can't openly criticise the government, and there is no civil society, nor a coherent opposition".¹¹³ Imams for the most part are government employees, assigned to mosques by the Ministry for Religious Affairs (*awqaf*), with the GID playing a critical role in their vetting and appointment.¹¹⁴ In addition to the *awqaf*-run mosques with government-appointed imams, there are privately funded mosques, many of a Sufi or Salafi bent, that appoint their own imams, who preach uncensored sermons.

A core question for the authorities is how these private mosques ought to be regulated. Clearly, the GID keeps an eye on what is being preached;¹¹⁵ some imams are required to submit their sermons for *awqaf* vetting. In September 2004, the government arrested roughly 30 mainstream imams, preachers and scholars for allegedly whipping up anti-U.S. sentiment and turning mosques into "political meeting halls".¹¹⁶ Among them were two

those who have been silent to speak up", said Abu Odeh. Crisis Group telephone interview, 10 November 2005.

¹¹² There are 31 political parties, 30 of which are almost completely unknown to the majority of the public. The quasi-opposition IAF is the exception.

¹¹³ Crisis Group interview, Amman, March 2005, as well as Crisis Group interviews with Mousa Shteivi, Amman, 13 April 2005, and Adnan Abu Odeh, Amman, 16 March 2005.

¹¹⁴ Officially, around 20 to 30 per cent of the country's 3,000-plus *awqaf*-run mosques are without a regime-appointed imam, due largely to a lack of funding. Unofficially, however, that figure is as high as 40 per cent, with imams in some areas being rotated around different mosques. Additionally, only a small percentage of all imams have academic qualifications beyond their high school certificate. In an interview, King Abdullah publicly acknowledged that the lack of well-trained imams is a serious issue: "Until now...the students with the worst grades on their *Tawjihi* [high-school graduation] tests had two options -- journalism or religious affairs. The result is obvious, in both fields". Interview with Robert Satloff, "Iraq is the Battleground -- The West against Iran", *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2005.

¹¹⁵ According to an informed observer, imams are not only aware that the GID is listening to their sermons but often know which member of the congregation is a spy or an informer. One imam caustically remarked that at least this gets them to the mosque. Crisis Group interview with David Patel, PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at Stanford University, Amman, 28 June 2005.

¹¹⁶ A published record of a sermon by a 60-year-old preacher -- who had previously taught at a secondary school -- in the

members of the Brotherhood's executive committee, Ahmad al-Zarqan and a former IAF member of parliament, Ahmad al-Kafawin.

At the time, the Muslim Brotherhood warned that repressing moderate preachers would increase frustration and encourage extremism.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, in mid-February 2005, three more IAF members were detained, again on charges of making political statements in a mosque without prior permission.¹¹⁸ The manner of the arrests -- armed police arriving after midnight -- and the message it conveyed were at odds with regime promises of greater democratisation. They also risked further straining relations with the Muslim Brotherhood and its significant constituency at a sensitive time. In the words of Abd-al-Latif Arabiyat, former IAF secretary-general:

Nasser's crackdown in Egypt led to greater resistance. People left the Muslim Brotherhood and formed [the radical] *Al-Takfir wa al-Hijra*. We fear that this could happen here. The IAF and its branches are working to explain that cooperation is the way, not radicalism. Some believe us, but adding pressure will put everyone in a critical position.¹¹⁹

In March 2005, then Minister of Interior Samir Habashneh presented legislation that further reduced space for political activity. The draft professional associations bill clearly targeted the unions' predominantly Islamist leadership,¹²⁰ and a political parties law banned the

Osama Ben Zaid mosque in Irbid in mid-2003 is an example of the messages being conveyed during the Iraq war: "When a group abandons jihad, it is humiliated....If Muslims want a happy and dignified life, and if they want a true and sincere religion, they must teach soldiers and heroes and form battalions of the brave and the intrepid, fed on military spirit". Transcript courtesy of Bernard Rougier, researcher at the Institut Français du Proche-Orient, Amman.

¹¹⁷ Suleiman al-Khalidi, "Jordan Islamists Say Crackdown Fuels Extremism", Reuters, 12 September 2004.

¹¹⁸ The three, including Muhammad Abu Fares, a member of parliament, were held under a February 2004 law requiring people to seek permission three days in advance of staging public rallies or demonstrations. See *Jordan Times*, 23 February 2005. Offenders face a fine or prison term of up to three months. The former IAF secretary-general, Abd-al-Latif Arabiyat, called the arrests "a provocation designed to make it look as if the government is actually doing something". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 29 March 2005.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 29 March 2005.

¹²⁰ The March 2005 publication of a draft law banning professional associations from engaging in political activities was emblematic of continuing constraints on democratisation and freedom of expression. The draft law would change voting procedures in an attempt to weaken the Islamists and authorise the Audit Bureau to ensure that union funds were used for internal purposes only. Regime loyalists defended the bill by

use of mosques and other public spaces for political party activities.

As typically has been the case, the regime accompanied its show of force with an attempt at persuasion. In this instance, it actively promoted its brand of tolerant Islam. The most vivid example was the "Amman Message", a November 2004 Ramadan sermon on tolerance delivered by Chief Justice Sheikh Iz-al-Din al-Tamimi in King Abdullah's presence. The sermon stressed the need to re-emphasise Islam's core values of compassion, mutual respect, tolerance, acceptance and freedom of religion.¹²¹ Likewise, at an Islamic Conference in July 2005, religious leaders representing the eight traditional schools of Islam (including Shiites) endorsed *fatwas* forbidding Muslims from being declared apostates (*takfir*) and barring unqualified clergy from issuing edicts, and reaffirmed the schools' agreement on the fundamental principles of Islamic belief and practice.¹²²

The regime also has plans to tackle the poor quality of imams' religious education by creating a master's program and a centre of excellence at Ahl al-Bayt University (with all other programs currently on offer to be transferred there). Adequate funding for preachers is likely to remain an issue, although in late June 2005 the cabinet approved a 30 per cent increase in their basic salary, on top of an

citing the need for professional associations to concentrate on their basic duties toward members and leave politics to the politicians, allowing the required space for political parties to develop. Crisis Group interviews with a former government minister, Amman, 14 April 2005, Senator Nader Theiherat, Amman, 10 April 2005, and Senator Osama Malkawi, a lawyer and member of the National Agenda Steering Committee, Amman, 19 April 2005.

¹²¹ "The ultimate goal", declared King Abdullah, "is to take back our religion from the vocal, violent and ignorant extremists who have tried to hijack Islam over the last 100 years". Quoted by Petra (news agency), 14 September 2005.

¹²² See *Jordan Times*, 6 July 2005. According to the Petra news agency, conference participants issued a final statement that "forbids declaring any adherent to any of the eight schools of jurisprudence or to Sufism an apostate, acknowledges the agreement among the eight schools on the fundamental principles of Islamic belief and practice, instructs the eight schools to establish a mechanism by which only qualified clergy could issue religious edicts and forbids the issuance of edicts by unqualified clergy, affirms the necessity and benefit of dialogue among the eight schools and urges Muslims to eschew discord and instead unite and fortify affinity among Muslim people and states". The statement was based on prior edicts issued by such religious luminaries as Grand Imam Muhammad Tantawi, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Grand Mufti Iz-al-Din al-Tamimi and Sheikh Yusef al-Qaradawi. See <http://www.albawaba.com/en/countries/185952>.

earlier 20 per cent raise, while mosque assistants enjoyed a 10 per cent increase.¹²³

However welcome -- and the Amman Message in particular struck an important note in a context of increased sectarian polarisation in the region -- these initiatives are likely to have only limited impact, both because their content targets the elite and because those who deliver them often lack popular legitimacy.¹²⁴ According to Suhail Nakhouda, editor-in-chief of the Amman-based *Islamica* magazine,

The problem with the Amman Message is that it bears no relation to the situation on the ground. There is no water, no pavements; the economy is bad, and many young people are out of work. Peoples' lives, as well as the images they see, stay the same. And the more anti-U.S. sentiment grows, the more this and similar messages are seen merely as U.S. propaganda.¹²⁵

Another observer commented, "the Amman Message appeals to many liberal, progressive Jordanians, myself included, but not to the other 99 per cent of Jordanians. Moreover, the King's message is weakened by the lifestyle he leads", which has been the subject of criticism.¹²⁶

In an attempt to bridge the gap between weak and discredited imams and the militant Salafi alternative in Salt, the *awqaf* and the GID are placing more charismatic imams or even respected community patriarchs in the city's mosques.¹²⁷ Again, the impact is open to question. Government-sponsored clerics are unlikely to enjoy significant credibility; on the other hand, competent, independent imams can make a difference -- the emphasis being on their popular credibility and position on Islam

¹²³ As one analyst commented: "The *awqaf*-appointed Friday preachers are half-illiterate because they earn less than JD 100 a month [about \$140]. A well-educated preacher will not go to, say, Ma'an or Tafila for that little money, but stay in Amman, where he can find additional work to supplement his income". Crisis Group interview, 13 September 2005.

¹²⁴ King Abdullah implicitly acknowledged this in a speech in Washington in September 2005 in which he noted that "God willing, [the Amman Message] will expand to engage the popular preachers and grassroots activists -- what is called the 'Muslim street'". Quoted in *Jordan Times*, 14 September 2005.

¹²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 17 April 2005.

¹²⁶ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 13 September 2005. The reference is to the King and Queen's Western ways, which are not always well received in a predominantly conservative society.

¹²⁷ Crisis Group interview with a local politician, Amman, 3 April 2005.

rather than their political views vis-à-vis the regime.¹²⁸ Such preachers should be afforded the necessary space to engage radicals such as Maqdisi publicly, just as televised debates between moderate *ulema* and ideologues of the Islamic Group in Egypt helped expose the poverty of the latter's ideas and weakened their support. "Jordan should use the Egyptian way of confronting the *jihadis* by exposing their sophistry", said a critic.¹²⁹

C. IMPLEMENTING OVERDUE REFORMS

In forging a close alliance with the West, and especially with the U.S.,¹³⁰ King Abdullah banked on an important trade-off: the alliance might not go over well with the general population, but the ensuing economic benefits would compensate for its unpopularity.¹³¹ Instead, the entrepreneurial class has taken advantage of enhanced trade,¹³² while most citizens are confronted with economic austerity measures dictated by skyrocketing oil prices and have experienced little if any material progress.¹³³

¹²⁸ To trump local extremists, the Algerian regime used to bring in widely respected Islamic authorities from outside. For example, the Chadli government brought in the distinguished Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood cleric and leading light Sheikh Mohammed Ghazali in the early 1980s.

¹²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 13 September 2005.

¹³⁰ For graphic examples of this relationship, including the policy of "extraordinary renditions", see Ken Silverstein, "U.S., Jordan Forge Closer Ties in Covert War on Terrorism", *Los Angeles Times*, 11 November 2005.

¹³¹ Jordan received \$700 million in development aid in 2004 and 2005, making it the fifth-highest recipient in the world (after Iraq, Israel, Egypt and Afghanistan). USAID official quoted by United Press International, "Jordan a Top Recipient of U.S. Aid", 11 August 2005.

¹³² Economic growth reached a healthy 7.7 per cent in 2004 (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, "Background Note: Jordan", September 2005) but the sectors driving it do not provide the general population with economic improvements in the short term. Foreign labour powers both construction and manufacturing, while the high-tech sector provides only a limited number of niche jobs. Opposition leaders have called for a revision of the government's economic policies, claiming that the "7 per cent gross domestic product growth was not felt". Ahmad Yousef, quoted in Alia Shukri Hamzeh, "Opposition Parties Present their 'Vision' for Political Reform", *Jordan Times*, 20 June 2005.

¹³³ In July 2005, Prime Minister Adnan Badran announced an across-the-board rise in the price of oil products, including a 10 per cent hike in petrol prices. Badran wisely flagged the decision two weeks before it came into effect and attempted to soften the blow by adding five to ten Jordanian dinars (\$7-\$14) to the salaries of civil servants earning less than JD 300 a month. Besides the long-overdue step of cutting the government's oil subsidy -- which had been costing the country JD 600,000 per day -- Badran announced other belt-tightening measures to

Such measures come on top of high unemployment¹³⁴ and widespread poverty.¹³⁵ With the population growth among the highest in the region, between 2.4 and 2.8 per cent,¹³⁶ and nearly 70 per cent of the population under the age of 29, 100,000 new jobs and economic growth of 8 per cent would be needed each year to lift the country out of stagnancy.¹³⁷ Additionally, the poorest are most likely

reduce the expected record JD 950 million budget deficit in fiscal year 2005. These measures were dictated by the Kingdom's loss of access to subsidised Iraqi oil (since March 2003), its inability to negotiate similar arrangements with other oil-producing states, and the rising price of oil on the world market. The 2005 budget was premised on a price of \$42 per barrel, whereas in November it was about \$58; every \$1 increase brings an extra burden of \$35 million to the \$ 3.3 billion budget. An agreement with Saudi Arabia to provide \$500 million in oil subsidies ran out on 30 April 2005, replaced with an agreement covering just \$200 million in the form of a cash payment, to be used to purchase oil at market prices. Crisis Group interview, Amman, 12 May 2005. The government intends to liberate fuel prices fully by 2007. For more details on the costs of Jordan's oil imports see, *Jordan Times*, 7 July 2005. In a public opinion poll released in September 2005, 87.5 per cent of respondents said they felt that the differences between rich and poor had increased in the last ten years. Jordan Centre for Social Research, "Democratic Transformation and Political Reform in Jordan: A National Public Opinion Poll", 18 September 2005, available at: <http://www.mjcsr.go.com.jo>.

¹³⁴ The government reported that at the end of 2004, 13.4 per cent of the economically active population was unemployed. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, "Background Note: Jordan", op. cit. In 2005, it revised this to 12.5 per cent. *Jordan Times*, 20 May 2005. With no system for distributing unemployment benefits, unemployment figures are difficult to calculate and different methodologies produce significantly differing results. The Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, for example, which includes the long-term unemployed, estimates the total at around 17 per cent. Crisis Group interview with Ibrahim Seif, Amman, 18 May 2005.

¹³⁵ The estimated percentage of those living under the poverty line ranges wildly between 11.6 (UNDP) and 30 per cent (Ministry of Social Development). Ministry of Social Development, "Poverty Alleviation for a Stronger Jordan: A Comprehensive National Strategy", 2002. Zarqa has been one of the worst-hit areas in recent years, with economic activity rates falling, unemployment rising and average per capita income dropping from JD 694.90 to JD 684.60 (\$980 to \$965). While literacy rates in the governorate are high, educational enrolment figures have been falling, a fact that is particularly worrisome given that almost 16 per cent of the country's population lives there. United Nations Development Program, "Jordan Human Development Report", 2004.

¹³⁶ See *Jordan Times*, 7 September 2004. The UNDP's "Jordan Human Development Report" for 2004 (p. 2) put the population growth rate as high as 3.7 per cent.

¹³⁷ Figures quoted by then Minister of Finance Bassem Awadallah in a speech to the Washington Institute for Near

to be adversely affected, at least in the short term, by new policies (such as privatisation) which are geared to producing macro-economic stability.¹³⁸

This is bad news. Asked what would push an already frustrated population over the edge, most Jordanians interviewed by Crisis Group mentioned increases in the price of fuel or basic necessities.¹³⁹ Ibrahim Seif, an economist at Jordan University's Centre for Strategic Studies, summarised these difficulties:

In terms of access to health care, education and other basic services, there is a comparatively good standard of living in Jordan, but people have been told it will improve and now they expect more. Economic literature has long noted poverty as a contributing factor to violence, and the relationship is applicable in Jordan. *Jihadism* offers a sense of hope that is otherwise absent. But a real economic "trickle-down" is going to take a generation -- by the time people are properly equipped to compete in global markets.¹⁴⁰

In a context of growing economic hardships, citizens are left without a meaningful way to express their frustrations, let alone participate in public life. By regional standards, Jordan is far from being a brutal police state; still, it features disturbing autocratic tendencies that can only alienate its people. These include:

- A system of government that, in one analyst's view, is the most centralised in the region,¹⁴¹ a fact that enhances public alienation. Decentralisation plans announced in early 2005, e.g. having fully

East Policy's Special Policy Forum in April 2005, available at: www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2308. Jordan is already largely dependent on donor money to keep it afloat, a situation that will only worsen when its debt rescheduling through the Paris Club ends in 2007. With no more extensions available, half its estimated \$7 billion debt not serviceable and oil prices continuing at high levels for the foreseeable future, economic difficulties lie ahead. When Jordan was faced with the same problem in 1988, price rises led to local protests and the introduction of an IMF-sponsored austerity plan, which led to more widespread protests.

¹³⁸ UNDP, op. cit.

¹³⁹ In a September 2005 poll, respondents referred to rising living costs (38.2 per cent) and unemployment (26.6 per cent) as the most important problems facing Jordan today. Jordan Centre for Social Research, op. cit.

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group, Amman, 18 May 2005.

¹⁴¹ Paul McCarthy, "The Role of International Assistance in Decentralisation and the Devolution of the Decision-Making Process", presentation at a workshop on "Reforms in the Arab World: Chances and Obstacles for an 'Izdihar-Scenario'", organised by the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Amman, 15 November 2005.

elected municipal councils and mayors, have yet to be implemented.

- Pervasive control by the security and intelligence services. The GID, in particular, has carved out a critical role since King Abdullah's accession in 1999 and, according to one analyst, "regional developments over the past few years have only helped entrench the *Mukhabarat's* role in politics and society".¹⁴²
- Strict limits on freedoms of expression, association and assembly. The media, while free in theory, consistently exercises a degree of self-censorship that reflects keen awareness of its limits, encouraged by occasional arrests or threatening phone calls.¹⁴³
- The absence of an effective political arena. Aside from the Islamic Action Front, no viable political party exists, while political expression by other entities, such as professional unions, is actively discouraged. Parliament has been sidelined and, apart from occasional outbursts when members feel that their patronage is threatened, acquiesces in the government's overbearing power.¹⁴⁴
- Corruption, including *wasta* (using well-placed connections for personal gain). Widely perceived as being on the rise,¹⁴⁵ it caught the attention of

¹⁴² Crisis Group interview, Amman, April 2005.

¹⁴³ In a September 2005 poll, only 35.2 per cent of respondents indicated they believed that freedom to publicly criticise the government is guaranteed. Jordan Centre for Social Research, op. cit.

¹⁴⁴ The King, in turn, is perceived as running the country from the Royal Court rather than the government. "By taking all the files to the Royal Court, the King is taking a huge risk", commented a political analyst. "If he fails to deliver, as everyone else apparently has, where do you go from there? He can't fire himself". Crisis Group interview, Amman, March 2005. Long-time critic Laith Shubeilat referred to the King as "a presidential monarch, unelected, unaccountable and conducting all the business of government". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 26 March 2005. While this is micro-managing for some (and an undemocratic way to bolster democracy), for others it is a sign that the monarch is willing to take charge personally. As a Western diplomat commented, "at least he is trying to do something about it. People would complain equally if he didn't". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 23 March 2005.

¹⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviewees stated that corruption has, if not increased, at the very least become more blatant in the past five years. Transparency International, however, assigned Jordan a score on its "Corruption Perceptions Index" for 2005 that constituted "a slight improvement compared with [2004] and over the past decade". It attributed the change to "numerous new laws based on international standards that have accompanied the reform process". Quoted in *Jordan Times*, 18 October 2005.

King Abdullah, who made it a focal point of an August 2005 speech.¹⁴⁶

That public confidence in the government is low should come as no surprise. A poll released a day before the Amman bombings noted that approval ratings for the Badran government were the lowest of any administration after 200 days in office.¹⁴⁷ Whereas criticism of the regime has traditionally been strictly off-limits, one Western diplomat noted that it has now become "open season" on the Hashemites and even the King himself, a remark echoed in many other Crisis Group interviews.¹⁴⁸

More troubling is the apparent growth in support, at least before the November attacks, for violence as a form of political action¹⁴⁹ -- and for its protagonists and perpetrators. A veteran journalist observed in March 2005 that: "Ordinary people have become more polarised. You hear them in the streets supporting Saddam Hussein and bin Laden. Perhaps not for their actions in the region, but for the international implications of standing up to the U.S".¹⁵⁰ The Pew Global Attitudes Project released figures in July 2005 that 60 per cent of Jordanians expressed at least some confidence in Osama bin Laden (up from 55 per cent in 2003), including 25 per cent who said they had a lot of confidence in him. Moreover, a majority of respondents (57 per cent) indicated they saw suicide bombings and other violent actions as justifiable in defence of Islam, and nearly half felt that suicide bombings against Americans and other Westerners in Iraq were justifiable.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, Jordanians were beginning

In a September 2005 poll, respondents mentioned corruption as today's most important political problem. Jordan Centre for Social Research, op. cit.

¹⁴⁶ See, "His Majesty's Address to National Leaders", op. cit. In June 2005, King Abdullah instructed the Badran government to establish an independent commission to combat corruption and nepotism.

¹⁴⁷ *Jordan Times*, 9 November 2005.

¹⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 23 March 2005. Likewise, a Jordanian politician noted: "People are really speaking out against the King. It is growing and growing, all the way up through the ranks". Crisis Group interview, Amman, April 2005. For more on the unusual level of criticism and the gap between rhetoric and reality, see Rami Khoury, "Jordan as Democratic Model: Still an Enticing Prospect", *Daily Star*, 25 May 2005.

¹⁴⁹ In a September 2005 poll, a surprising 16 per cent of respondents declared they supported violent actions to change the government. Jordan Centre for Social Research, op. cit.

¹⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview with a veteran journalist, Amman, 28 March 2005.

¹⁵¹ Pew Global Attitudes Project: "Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics", 14 July 2005, at: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=248>. In 2003, a Pew survey showed that 55 per cent of Jordanians had at least some confidence in Osama bin Laden to "do the right thing

to look differently at home-grown *jihadis* as the U.S. penetrated more deeply into the region. "After the U.S. attacked Iraq, the shameful Salafis suddenly became the mujahidin again".¹⁵²

Paradoxically, Jordan's efforts to promote itself abroad as a regional model for democracy has been a major source of irritation at home, as it coincided with a crackdown by security forces on dissent and with the reversal of key elements of the reform process. Not a single substantive political reform has been carried out in the last five years,¹⁵³ and with the world's attention focused on democratisation efforts across the Middle East, Jordan has found itself under some pressure to act on its promises.¹⁵⁴ The much-touted National Agenda, which was supposed to be released at the end of September 2005, has yet to see the light of day, and reports suggest that deep divisions remain over key issues, such as reform of the electoral law.¹⁵⁵ By cheerleading its own reform programs, while remaining unable or unwilling to implement them, the regime is scoring repeated own-goals, disappointing and disillusioning an expectant audience.¹⁵⁶

The 9 November attacks have put the regime in a stronger position to sharpen anti-terror legislation. "Political

regarding world affairs", against merely 35 per cent for King Abdullah. Available at: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=185>.

¹⁵² Crisis Group interview with Abdullah Abu Rumman, Amman, 2 April 2005.

¹⁵³ This is not for lack of rolling out new initiatives. Successive governments initiated a rash of reform programs. The adoption of the ill-fated 2002 "Jordan First" (*Al-Urdun Awalan*) scheme (introduced to improve unity within the country following the outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada and ahead of the anticipated war in Iraq), was followed by announcement of the need for a "National Agenda" (replacing the 1991 National Charter), along with a Municipalities Reform Program and then an initiative to divide the country into three administrative regions to devolve power from centralised authorities. A draft parties law aimed at reinvigorating the political scene was announced in February 2005, and efforts reportedly were being made to revise the unpopular electoral law as part of the National Agenda.

¹⁵⁴ As one prominent observer explained, "when a new initiative is introduced, it's done as if it had already been successfully implemented, falsely raising people's expectations". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 23 March 2005. A former minister noted: "There are many, many things that need to be done. Only then can we get around to designing slogans for them". Crisis Group interview with Abdullah al-Laqtib, Amman, 7 April 2005.

¹⁵⁵ See March Lynch, "Jordan: Knives Out for the National Agenda", *Arab Reform Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 9, November 2005.

¹⁵⁶ According to a Jordanian analyst: "This is a reformist government only from the Western perspective. It is all done for foreign applause. They just want it to look like something is happening". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 11 April 2005.

reform will be postponed", predicted Adnan Abu Odeh. "There are other priorities now -- 'Security First' -- and there won't be popular pressure".¹⁵⁷ Nor is there likely to be much pressure from Jordan's Western allies.¹⁵⁸ Putting off long-promised reforms would be a serious mistake, however, because the attacks should also be seen as a wake-up call regarding the urgent need to implement them.

Economic hardships and many young Jordanians' lack of prospects added to anger over Western intervention, the lack of genuine political openness and a religious ideology providing militants with moral legitimacy together produce a combustible mix. For Muhammad Abu Rumman, a features editor at *Al-Ghad* newspaper, "the *jihadi* Salafis here remain strong, largely as a result of the political situation. There is corruption and no sense of democracy. This naturally leads to radicalism. It is the only way people have to express their feelings".¹⁵⁹ To rely on security-based solutions only, even leavened with abstract messages of tolerance, is hardly the way to confront them.

IV. CONCLUSION

In early September 2005, Jordan arrested a handful of Islamists following a rally in an Amman mosque during which a leader criticised the U.S., Israel and corrupt Arab rulers. What was surprising was neither the content of the speech nor the arrests -- these were consistent with past practice -- but the fact that a group of activists, in this case reportedly linked to Hizb ut-Tahrir,¹⁶⁰ had the temerity to stage an unlicensed public protest.

Deprived of legal avenues of political expression, Jordanians are left to vent their frustrations in mosques. When that venue is closed off as well, only the most courageous raise their voices, but in doing so they stand out and are likely to be seen as heroes -- or martyrs. This is all the more true for those who, for whatever personal motivation, slip away from home to join the insurgency in Iraq, in many cases becoming mere cannon fodder in an increasingly bloody, and increasingly successful, *jihadi*-led effort to jump-start a sectarian conflict there.

The traditional response to incipient protest has been to tighten the screws: to extend the tentacles of the already-pervasive security apparatus and detain not only those suspected of hatching violent plots but also those seen as inciting the masses -- "incitement" being a notoriously elastic concept. The security approach, however, has shown its limits: by trying to rein in opposition or criticism, the government has traded too heavily on continuing goodwill toward the monarchy. By stifling freedom of expression and providing no alternative outlet, the regime risks alienating the population further and feeding the radical fringe. Security alone, in other words, can do little to dampen frustrations or discourage violence. As the events of 9 November have shown, it cannot even prevent attacks from occurring on Jordanian soil, and it is generally recognised that it will take only one or two more successful attacks on hotels or historic sites to collapse the tourist industry, one of the economy's mainstays.

The regime is caught in a vice -- between an unpopular alliance with the U.S. and deteriorating economic conditions as oil subsidies reach their end. Its most promising option is to implement a strategy that, in addition to necessary security steps, focuses on reducing unemployment and poverty and gradually opening up the political system.¹⁶¹ At the same time, it should try to

¹⁵⁷ The main opposition movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, will stay quiet about reform, he predicted, because it does not want to be associated with the *jihadis*: "That would be fatal for them." Crisis Group, Amman, 14 November 2005. "Security First" is a play on the slogan "Jordan First".

¹⁵⁸ There is unlikely to be much U.S. pressure, as the 9 November attacks could be seen as Jordan's punishment for its close alliance with Washington. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, visiting the Middle East, made a point of making a special stop in Jordan in a gesture of solidarity. During an earlier visit to the Kingdom in June 2005, she had praised Jordan's reform effort: "We have no better friend than Jordan, a good friend, a strategic partner in the shared vision of peace and stability and increasingly a shared vision of reform in this region.... We believe... the political reforms can serve as a model for what can be done in the region". Quoted in "Jordan's Security Vital to U.S.", *Jordan Times*, 20 June 2005.

¹⁵⁹ He added: "The people don't care about reforms. It is a buzz word for the elites to chatter about. They just see the rich getting richer while they are getting poorer. What people want is a redistribution of wealth". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 4 April 2005.

¹⁶⁰ The party, outlawed in Jordan, espouses peaceful means to re-establish the Islamic Caliphate. (See earlier footnote.)

¹⁶¹ Of course, this goes beyond allowing for a greater degree of press freedom. "There is no single simple solution", noted Abdullah al-Laqtib, a former minister. "They need to exercise

isolate *jihadis* by allowing independent clerics who reject violence to voice their views and influence public opinion.¹⁶² In particular:

- The government should refrain from using the November 2005 bombings as justification for a clamp-down on freedom of expression, association and assembly or for mass arrests of suspected *jihadis*. Instead it should concentrate on border control and on monitoring non-Jordanians visiting or residing in the Kingdom. Furthermore, in keeping track of the activities of Jordanian citizens, the security services should make careful distinction between those who express dissent and those who are advocating violence.
- The government should promote a tolerant version of Islam in educational institutions and encourage competent, credible clerics to debate the *jihadis'* ideological mentors.¹⁶³ It should also encourage clerics and religious scholars publicly to abjure violence as a method of fighting perceived injustice.¹⁶⁴
- In its economic policies, the government should create more opportunities for those in traditionally poor and neglected areas to share in the national wealth and growth by tackling unemployment through intensive job training and skill-building programs; spreading benefits that flow from its alliance with the West while minimising the impact of necessary belt-tightening measures on

good governance and allow for real power sharing, not just permission for a tabloid newspaper to open here or there". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 7 April 2005.

¹⁶² Such clerics, as well as lay writers, should build on the anti-*takfiri* consensus expressed by the July 2005 conference of religious scholars to press the theme that resort to violence inside the country is *fitna* (discord), and hence entirely illicit, not *jihad*, which by definition is licit in Islamic doctrine.

¹⁶³ In the words of one analyst, "the young Islamists are being driven out of the country, and the only open space for them is Iraq. In other words, the regime is dealing with the symptom, not the cause. It needs to have an open dialogue with these people and allow them to seek political representation". Crisis Group interview with Muhammad Tarawneh, a social commentator, Amman, 17 March 2005. Clerics allowed to engage in the public debate should include not only *awqaf*-appointed clerics but all those who espouse tolerant views of Islam, regardless of their political positions or whether they have links with the intelligence services.

¹⁶⁴ To the extent such clerics and scholars take an active interest in politics, they should fight peacefully for a broadening of political space in Jordan and combine any condemnation of U.S. policies in the region with constructive proposals on how to address the serious political, social and economic problems that the country faces.

the most vulnerable; and vigorously attacking corruption.¹⁶⁵ Community leaders and teachers should be encouraged to inculcate the virtues of a range of jobs, not only public sector positions.

- On the political front, the government should open up political space and promote genuine participatory politics. This could be done, for example, by allowing vehicles for a vocal opposition, such as professional associations, effective parties, a freer media and even mosques, rather than muzzling critical debate by closing off these avenues and leaving no legitimate alternative. As a matter of priority, the government should abandon the draft professional associations law and amend the laws on press and publications, political parties and non-governmental organisations, as well as other laws limiting basic freedoms.¹⁶⁶ It should also continue to work on an electoral law that allows for a more accurate representation of Jordan's diverse population in parliament.¹⁶⁷ Finally, a new, more inclusive government should be appointed, one that reaches out to the opposition and carries out the reforms outlined in the proposed National Agenda.

Such a proactive approach is not only necessary, but also very timely. Even in the absence of pressure, the regime has a unique opportunity to chart a new course. For all practical purposes, its enemies are on the ropes, at least temporarily, and the public, perhaps also for the moment, has expressed its loyalty and desire for protection from further attacks. In announcing tougher anti-terror legislation, the King reiterated his motto of "law, openness and security"; he hastened to reassure his

¹⁶⁵ In particular, the government should remove obstacles to the creation of jobs and the creation of wealth; provide start-up financing and low-cost administrative support for small businesses; and publicly support young risk-takers through the media and government-sponsored activities, such as praising and awarding young entrepreneurs.

¹⁶⁶ Many Jordanian politicians and analysts already have called for such measures. In a paper they pledged to submit to the National Agenda committee, opposition leaders in June 2005 called for changes in a number of laws that they said restricted public freedoms, including the electoral law, as well as laws pertaining to public assembly, political parties, municipalities, professional associations, youth, labour, women's rights, the judiciary and the media. See *Jordan Times*, 20 June 2005.

¹⁶⁷ Jordan's electoral law under-represents urban centres on electoral lists and prescribes a system that favours family or tribal personalities over national parties. Because Jordanians of Palestinian origin are concentrated in urban centres and are particularly strong in parties such as the Islamic Action Front, the law encourages election of a conservative and predominantly Trans-Jordanian parliament. See Crisis Group Briefing, *The Challenge of Political Reform*, op. cit., pp. 16-19.

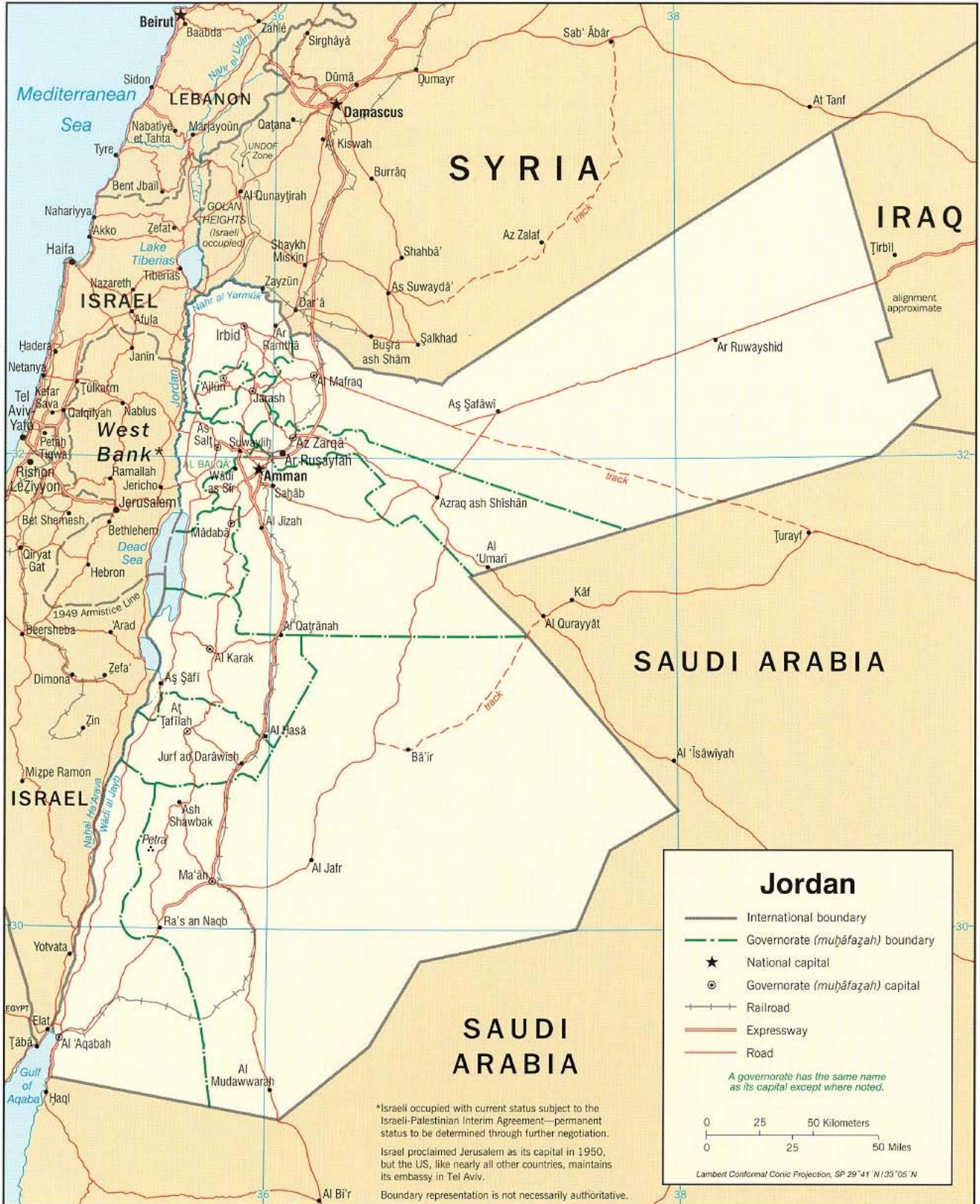
public that the 9 November attacks would not force Jordan into becoming a police state but that instead the regime would seek to strike a balance between freedom and security.¹⁶⁸ Getting this balance right is the challenge.

Amman/Brussels, 23 November 2005

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in *Jordan Times*, 13 November 2005.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF JORDAN



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APPENDIX B

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

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Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and printed copy to officials in foreign ministries and international organisations and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

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