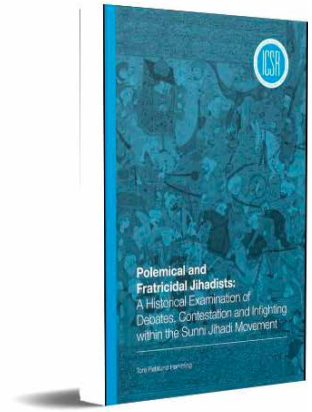

Debates, Disputes, and Divides in the Salafi-Jihadi Movement

Polemical and Fratricidal Jihadists: A Historical Examination of Debates, Contestation and Infighting within the Sunni Jihadi Movement
by Tore Refslund Hamming
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This monograph about polemics and infighting among the ranks of jihadists comprises a collection of articles based on primary sources written by Tore Hamming, a prominent researcher of the Salafi jihadi ideological movement. Assisting him were a team of researchers at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR).

The monograph gives a chronological account of the development of differences of opinion among religious leaders, opinion shapers, and senior activists in the Salafi jihadi movement. It begins with a description and analysis of the ideological approaches that were common in the 1960s in Egypt, moves to the internal struggles among jihadists in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and presents an array of other dilemmas on various issues. These include the questions facing senior Sunni members in view of Bin Laden's declaration that the war should be focused on the United States, and in particular his decision to attack the US on its own soil on September 11, 2001.

The purpose of this monograph as defined by Hamming is "to foster a better understanding of the contemporary struggle between al-Qaida and the Islamic State," in the broad historical context of past divides (p. 5). It does not go into today's bitter disputes between the two organizations, but rather presents and analyzes the deep disagreements that emerged among senior members of the Salafi-jihadi movement in the past, some of which are still current. These disagreements give readers conceptual access to the rift today between al-Qaeda and Islamic State supporters; the background and contextual discussion enables readers to understand the roots of these rifts.

The author explains that Salafi-Jihadi ideology is commonly perceived as sharing established, coherent, and united goals on issues such as restoring the glory of Islam and establishing the caliphate, and sharing a definition of the primary enemy—"the Jewish-Crusader alliance." However, the movement is in fact locked in internal struggles over the order of priorities, the urgency of its aims, and the correct religious way to achieve them. According to the author, the disputes among senior Salafi jihadists are driven by personal and strategic factors as well as theological principles, and these have shaped the theological and conceptual development of the movement over the years.

The monograph opens with a description of the disputes that emerged in Egypt in the 1960s around the legitimacy of using force against rulers, when jihad is permitted, and who has the obligation of performing jihad. It describes the dispute over strategy and principle in the ranks of al-Qaeda around the September 11 attacks; the criticism of the organization some four years later for the cruelty of the rebellious proxy in Iraq and its leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi toward Shiite Muslims; and criticism of senior ideologue

Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who is close to Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the organization's current leader, for the excessive violence used by al-Qaeda in Iraq.

In addition, the monograph stresses that the disputes were not only ideological, but also personal, and illustrates this by examining the tension among the al-Qaeda leadership and its rivals in other groups with the return of Bin Laden from Sudan to Afghanistan. During those years, Bin Laden's ambitions to make his organization the main driving force behind an international struggle to establish the caliphate became a bone of contention and sparked opposition. His opponents included Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, which hosted him in Afghanistan—Mullah Omar took over the country by force the year of Bin Laden's return to the country and offered protection to him and his followers—and Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, a senior ideological figure in the Salafi-jihadi movement in Afghanistan. Another example concerns the liquidation of senior members of al-Shabaab, a result of personal struggles and the drive by key figures to seize the leadership.

Criticism of the monograph concerns the disputes and conflicts that the author chose to omit, or alternatively, to mention. For example, a central issue in the doctrine of the Islamic State is the *tamkin* principle, which holds that the establishment of an Islamic caliphate with a territorial basis is overwhelming proof that Islam is the true religion and Muslims are the chosen people. While al-Qaeda sees this principle as very important but not an immediate imperative in the absence of the right circumstances and conditions, the Islamic State sees *tamkin*—that is, the link between territory and the ability to implement the correct Islamic way of life, based on *sharia*—as a concrete, achievable goal. The Islamic State began working to implement this objective as soon as it was established.

The withdrawal from civilian society, the isolation, and the assumption of the way of life of a sect in the spirit of Islam was already present in Egypt in the 1960s, in the Takfir al-Hijra group of Shukri Mustafa. However, the caliphate—or the intermediate stage in the form of an emirate, as a timeless vision in the doctrine of Abdullah Azzam—became the focus of a dispute that is not mentioned in this monograph within the network of alliances of global al-Qaeda, between its branch in Yemen and the senior leadership and Bin Laden. The Islamic State's interpretation of the *tamkin* issue as an existing, valid, and even expanding caliphate became a magnet for thousands of volunteers and was in total contravention of al-Qaeda's orderly plan for implementing the vision. Al-Qaeda, apart from the fact that it saw the declaration of the caliphate as a move made without the consent of the religious leaders, saw it as a disastrous step that would arouse global anger against the movement, and it became a touchstone in the venomous discourse between the parties.

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In addition, one of the core issues that distinguishes al-Qaeda from the Islamic State is the question of *takfir*—declaring that someone, Muslim or not, is an apostate and may therefore be killed, in effect condemning him to death. Although this issue is discussed at length in this monograph, by means of test cases from the dispute among training camps in Afghanistan and in the review of the Algerian struggle, the argument that emerged in the ranks of the Islamic State is not discussed. This argument even created two camps, supporting different approaches to *takfir*—the Hazimi and the Benali. The former is identified with Ahmad al-Hazimi, a preacher who wrote a book called *Ignorance is no Excuse in Islam* and attracted supporters in the fighting in Syria and Iraq; the second is identified with a senior *sharia* figure from the Islamic State, Turki Benali. While the first camp

supported and encouraged the *takfir* declaration for anyone who did not join the Islamic State or live according to its religious doctrine, the second camp feared the consequences of a "chain *takfir*"—widespread license to kill that would spiral out of control and become an impediment to the establishment of the Islamic State when it faced complex military and morale-building challenges.

Apart from the main purpose—to give readers an understanding of the existing rift and gaps between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State—the monograph provides an understanding of other disputes, such as the ties between the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and the nature of their relationship, now at a crossroads in view of the peace agreement being implemented between the United States and the Taliban. In the agreement, the United States requires, as a condition for its withdrawal from Afghanistan, the removal of al-Qaeda and a ban on any activity in the country by the organization or its allies.

The monograph describes in detail the set of considerations behind the alliance between the Taliban and al-Qaeda over the years, its dynamic, and the motives of both sides, which shaped this complicated relationship. The relationship rested on similar world views combined with particular interests, and mutual recognition of the benefits and disadvantages for each of them. The drawbacks included the decision by Bin Laden to pursue an ambitious independent policy, driven by his pretensions to lead the Sunni jihad movement with a prominent media presence, which was extremely bothersome to his Taliban hosts. The Taliban at that time were under great financial pressure, and they agreed to help Bin Laden by providing refuge after he was expelled from Sudan, because of the financial resources he brought with him. Bin Laden's autonomous decision to carry out the attack of September 11 from within Afghanistan, without consulting Mullah Omar, led to the Taliban's loss of control of the country.

Against the background of the dispute between Bin Laden and the Taliban, an argument emerged within the organization between Bin Laden and a senior ideologue who supported the claims of the Taliban, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, who authored the book *The Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, which formulated the Islamic "strategy of a thousand cuts." According to this strategy, the principles of jihad, which are binding on every Muslim and whereby he must overcome religious hurdles before starting to perform this duty, are void. His thesis is that this personal-individual obligation to perform jihad applies to every Muslim wherever he may be (with no need to move to a religious battlefield), with every means at his disposal. This doctrine was the spur to the "inspirational attacks" that flooded Europe in recent years, in which individuals and groups decided to initiate terror attacks inspired by the Salafi-jihadi movement where they lived and using any means available—firearms, explosives, knives, and vehicles.

In addition to refuting the common opinion that the global jihadi movement is united and coherent, the author, by examining various disputes in the movement over the years, points to the various causes of disagreement. These causes are arrayed along a continuum that includes the ideological-territorial development proposed by Sayyid Qutb against the global approach of al-Qaeda and how to manage the struggle; disputes over the most suitable military doctrine for achieving these objectives; and struggles that ultimately arose from competition for resources, funding, manpower, and territory, including power struggles and leadership ambitions.

In addition, the author distinguishes between the nature of the disputes that existed before and after the September 11 attacks. Before the attacks, the jihadi arena was characterized by a large number of organizations and training camps, each of which was governed by some religious indoctrination alongside military training. Therefore, the disputes at that time

arose from competition for reputation and resources, but also from ideological and strategic definitions of jihad; these were bound up with an inter-generational struggle, in which the younger, more aggressive generation pushed aside the older generation of jihadis who had fought in Afghanistan (1979-1989). After the attack in the United States it was clear that al-Qaeda had imposed an ideological alliance between the belligerent younger members and the older jihadis, exploiting the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban and the foreign invasions of Muslim countries. The disagreements that the organization struggled with until the conflict with Islamic State, which was unusual in its scope, could be managed and settled by means of uncompromising extremism on the one hand, and pragmatism with rapid switches between universal strategic principles on the other.

Tore Hamming is very careful to use an accurate and original transcription of every concept or document translated from Arabic; he does not skirt the challenge to add to knowledge about the Salafi-jihadi movement, and refutes erroneous and unfounded conceptions. This monograph serves his purpose of educating the public, mainly thanks to the exposure of the theoretical depths and shades of the Sunni jihadi movement. In this important collection, Hamming illustrates the relevance of the movement, based on original writings, and thus contributes information and expands the knowledge of his readers.

Further importance of this monograph lies in the fact that can it add to the knowledge both of those who are familiar with the Salafi-jihadi organizations from studies they have read or conducted, and even more so of those who receive their information through the media or from politicians, whose knowledge of the subject is limited. Thus this monograph provides important additional knowledge essential for anyone involved in the process of decision making on contemporary issues relating to the struggles with the Salafi-jihadi movement worldwide, in countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, but also for the general public, who follow the movement's activities and wish to form an opinion that is based on facts.

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