

## Zarqa City's Impact on Jihadism: Inspecting Salafism's Role

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### ABSTRACT

Particularly over the past two decades, Salafism, a commonly misunderstood Islamic school of thought, has become synonymous with terrorism. However, in depth and specified research into this transition has largely fallen short of providing a plausible explanation. This also accounts for the inadequate response of regimes and intelligence in countering the ideology of Salafist Jihadism. This study sets out to answer how Salafism turned into Jihadist Salafism, and why specific leaders were able to impact the region and its application of Salafism. This study presents a case study of Zarqa city as the origin of Jihadist Salafism, its most recognised leaders, and the city's on the regional movements, ISIS and al-Nosra, in order to better understand modern day terror and impact how such a volatile ideology can be primed for a more positive relationship with the Jordanian regime. Following an historical approach, the study considers key geopolitical factors with reference to changing attitudes and identity crises occurring specifically in Zarqa during these periods, revealing how key players such as Nasser Eddin al-Albani, the Arab Afghan mujahidin, and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi transformed the face of Jordanian jihadism and global jihadism.

**Keywords:** Zarqa, Salafism, Jihadism, al-Albani, Zarqawi, Arab Afghans, ISIS, al-Nosra.

### Introduction

A wealth of literature has been produced on the subject of Salafism, analysing the movement generally in regards to its theology, its impact on theocracies such as Saudi Arabia, and most recently, its impact on terrorism. Salafism does not have a singular body and is interpreted on a case-by-case basis, with factors such as economy, geopolitics, and local culture affecting understandings widely. However in recent years a strain of Salafism has gained increasing homogeneity in the Levant, known as Jihadist Salafism. Again, a wealth of literature has been produced on Islamic terrorism and regional Levantine conflict, however, despite overwhelming statistics, little attention has been paid to Jordanian-grown Salafist terrorism. This is despite it being known that approximately 3,000 Jordanians went to fight in Syria and Iraq (The National Interest, 2018). Although this ranks Jordan as the top origin of foreign fighters in both conflicts (Barrett, 2017, p. 12), little research has attempted to explore the connection between locations in Jordan and how localised geopolitical factors have affected Salafism's impact on global terrorism. Furthermore, there is also a shortage of understanding in regards to how the movement behaves inside Jordan, and why it was able to create such a substantial impact upon the region, which is what this paper sets out to explore.

Jordan represents an important case study for understanding the Salafist movement and how it behaves in different spheres as many of the significant leaders that changed the movement's political attitudes and relations with various states were, or are, Jordanian. This is despite the ideology originally being practiced in a non-violent, noninterventionist manner, therefore the main question of this study is: how did Salafism in Jordan turn into Jihadist Salafism, and why were these leaders able to create such a significant impact on the region and its application of Salafism?

The first part of this study aims to determine the foundations of Jordanian Salafism and its appeal to their believers by mapping the history of the movement. By focusing on the Jordanian city of Zarqa's impact on the movement, this section will firstly answer the question: what constitutes a Salafist in terms of region and nation? The study will then

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seek to answer the second question: how does the city's political and economic climate effect citizens' understandings of how to enact social and political change? This section concludes by answering the third question: have Salafists in Zarqa adopted a path of jihadism by associating themselves with violence and regional jihadist groups?

The second section of this study will progress to explore the fourth question: which key national and regional events motivated Zarqa's Salafists to commit jihadism abroad? This section will move on to answering the fifth question: how have these Salafists become further radicalised and professional in their jihadism? This section will conclude by exploring Zarqa's role in the division of regional Jihadist Salafist groups, and the impact that had on Jordan and the confusion it caused among Jordanian Jihadis regarding which path of jihadism they should take. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn with the findings of the study and an analysis of how to interact with the ideology in order to effectively manage it for a more positive relationship with the Jordanian regime in the future.

To answer the aforementioned questions and deal with the key assumptions of this study which is that Salafism has turned into Jihadism in Zarqa, a case study approach will be employed, utilising a historical timeline of the development of the main events and leaders that turned the movement into what it is today. The historical approach that this study employs allows the researcher to follow the progression of Salafism in Zarqa city from the early 1980s when the charismatic religious personalities Nasser Eddin al-Albani and Isam Muhammad Tahir al Barqawi (al-Maqdisi) introduced two different interpretations of Salafism to Zarqa. The paper then moves on to the 1990s to consider the Jordanian jihadists who returned from Afghanistan to find Zarqa struggling economically and that unpopular decisions had been taken, such as the 1994 Wadi Arabah Peace Treaty, which impacted the returning fighters deeply and further radicalised the course of Salafism in Zarqa. The paper moves on to considering the growth of cells in Zarqa in the 1990s that adopted the concept of jihadism and spread across Jordan. Finally, the timeline concludes with the 2014-2018 period, exploring how the aforementioned cells were able to develop their methods to reach a wider scope in the region, infiltrating al-Nosra and ISIS on an international level.

This approach is considered as one of the wildly used tools of enquiry in social sciences. Moreover, it enables the researcher to conduct an in-depth investigation and provide understanding of the correlation between different variables such as the religious personalities and specific events that occurred during the timeline, and dynamics that influenced the nature of the Salafism movement. Therefore, this approach will enable the researcher to provide a detailed analysis of a unique case study and successfully test how Salafism turned into jihadism in Zarqa.

## 1. An Introduction to Salafism

As defined by the Political and Economic Dictionary of the Middle East, the precise significance of Salafism varies considerably in various contexts, but generally implies a return to basic Islamic tenets and the Salaf (Seddon, 2004, p. 594). According to the Historical Dictionary of Islamic Fundamentalism, a Salafist "follows Islamic movements that are based on the patriarchal, or Salaf, period of ancient Islam" (Guidère, 2012, p. 309). In other words, Salafism can be identified as an Islamic school of thought calling for the understanding of the Quran and *Sunnah*<sup>1</sup> through the practices of the Salaf, which were the first three generations of the Prophet Mohammed's companions and followers. By replicating their practices, Salafists believe they will be closer to the Prophet and on the true path of Islam. Further, by doing so, they distance themselves from all foreign intrusions or interpretations of Islam. In summary, Salafism is a Sunni school which aims to reform society from a fundamental perspective in compliance with Islamic Shariah and the practices of the Salaf, taking a hard line against political involvement (Wagemakers, 2016, pp. 28-39).

According to Mohammed Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Hanieh in "Conservative Salafism: A Strategy for the "Islamization of Society" and an Ambiguous Relationship with the State" (2010), the historical trends of Salafism appear in distinct ways, the most important of which are the concepts behind Ahmed Ibn Taymiyyah's Salafism, and Wahhabism.

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<sup>1</sup>*Sunnah* (Arabic): the way of the Prophet Muhammad Peace Be Upon Him. Pertaining to the words and actions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his first followers.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, political Islamic scholar Ahmed bin Taymiyyah crystallised the concept of Salafism by setting forth the main principles of political Islam [*al-Hisbah*]<sup>2</sup> and Salafism, claiming that the Quran and Shariah should be the primary sources for legislation of the Ummah in Islamic states. Ten centuries later, WahhabiSalafiyyah (Wahhabism), a track of Salafism associated with Mohammed Bin Abd al-Wahhab, took over. Bin Abd al-Wahhab, who stressed increased conservatism through the meticulously detailed rejection of all foreign practices, such as male-female proximity and the smoking of tobacco, solidified the main prohibitions associated with Islam today (Stanley, 2005). When Bin Abd al-Wahhab successfully established Shariah law in the first state of Saudi Arabia, he gave Wahhabism a legitimate existence within a state authority (Commins, 2006, pp. 104- 205).

Over time, Saudi Arabia became increasingly recognised as the legitimate representative of Salafism due to it being a model for Wahhabism. Saudi Arabia observed the historical understanding of Salafiyyah Ibn Taymiyyah, and embodied it within the state. A council of senior scholars were appointed to ensure the correct path of Islam was being followed, and to issue *fatwas* where necessary,<sup>3</sup> all under the authority of the Saudi royalty. This model is considered a conservative branch of Salafism, which accepts the ruler and constitutes the state, meaning the state became Salafist. As indicated by Shiraz Maher, in “Salafi Jihadism: The History of an Idea”, Salafists would not oppose the Islamic leadership of the state indicating the beginning of Conservative Salafism, and its rejection of opposing leadership or state decisions, as “Salafism is a philosophy that believes in progression through regression” (2016, p. 7).

In other regions of the Arab world, however, Salafism had to adapt to different contexts, such as colonisation and national calls for independence and freedom. In response, a new branch of Salafism was influenced by scholars such as SayyidQutb, who motivated followers with the call of jihadism as an Islamic means to fight a shared oppressor.

Since gaining independence in 1946, Jordan’s Salafist ideology was not embodied in a particular movement. During this period, leftist ideology driven by socialist movements was more popular, and Islamist movements such as the Salafists, Muslim Brotherhood, and Hizb al-Tahrir, all existed under the same general umbrella of ‘Islamic opposition to leftists’. However, this changed slowly when Hizb al-Tahrir was banned in 1956, resulting in the remaining two ideologies, Brotherhood and Salafist, adopting the shared association of ‘Islamist’, which was emphasised by a mutual appreciation for the academic leadership of SayyidQutb, among others, who, despite previous affiliation to the Brotherhood, was an iconic leader and mentor for the Salafists.

However, from the Salafist perspective, the Muslim Brotherhood did not accurately adhere to his teachings, as he had a clear stance against participating in politics or forming political parties. In fact, the Brotherhood’s deviation from Qutb’s teachings led to a division within the Muslim Brotherhood itself when the first elections were held in Jordan in 1956 (Wiktorowicz, 2003, pp. 207-239). Therefore, although the Muslim Brotherhood became recognised as a political movement, it developed an internal division, with some members leaning towards the Salafist belief of not participating in politics. Due to overlapping beliefs and trends in the two movements, it became easy to mistake a Salafist for a Qutbist Brotherhood member, or vice versa. Thereby, in the early 1960s and 1970s, there was no clearly identifiable separation between Islamic movements in Jordan. These differences were not clarified until later on, when the country stabilised in the late 1980s and was able to revisit democratisation and the issue of political participation resurfaced, making political participation the main issue dividing the two movements.

Jordanian Salafism became an identifiable movement during the 1980s when Jordan hosted Islamist asylum seeker Nasser Eddin al-Albani, who fled Syria following a clash with the Syrian regime (Wiktorowicz, 2001, pp. 111-120). Being recognised as an author and respectable religious reference, al-Albani settled in Zarqa and propelled the Salafist movement forward. Around him, he built a solid circle of followers and students who became the first group to embody Salafism as a physical existence, represented by authentic leadership, rather than just being an ideological reference.

Jordanian Salafism became identified through al-Albani’s teachings in the mid 1980s. Al-Albani reached a

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<sup>2</sup>*Al-Hisbah* (Arabic): AnIslamicdocorineguardingagainstinfringements of Islam.

<sup>3</sup>*Fatwa* (Arabic): Rulingonanissue of Islamiclaw

fundamental understanding of Salafism under the Saudi umbrella of Conservative Salafism, which became known as al-Salafiyyah al-Albaniyyah, the Jordanian Conservative Salafism. This understanding is based on non-involvement in politics, making it clear to all potential followers that if they were seeking political action their only choice was to go to Muslim Brotherhood, whose main agenda for affecting change was via political participation. Due to this non-involvement policy, the movement became clearly differentiable to the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic movements in Jordan.

### 3. Salafism in Zarqa City: Mobilising the Arab Afghans

Zarqa is a densely populated industrial city 24km northeast of Jordan's capital, Amman. It has been a refuge for immigrants and refugees dating back to the early 1900s, when Chechen refugees fled Russia. In more recent years, after the 1948 and 1967 wars with Israel, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians also sought refuge there, later gaining citizenship (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); Hejoj, 2007). Further, following the US-led intervention in Iraq, Zarqa later hosted some of Iraq's poorest refugees (Hear, 1990), and most recently, nearly 100,000 refugees of the Syrian Civil War (UNHCR, 2019). However, around 50,000 of these Syrian refugees fled the camps seeking perceived livelihood opportunities in Zarqa city which is home to an oil refinery, 'free zone', and various factories (UNHCR, 2019). This influx of refugees from various regional and religious backgrounds who were already economically and otherwise vulnerable, entered a city that was already suffering from poor economy, resulting in greater poverty (UNDP, 2013; Hejoj, 2007) and high rates of unemployment (Banta, 2008).

Due to these conditions, a cross-section of individuals in Zarqa adopted increasingly religious approaches to their daily struggles from the early 1980s onwards, priming the environment for the growth of movements such as the Salafists and Muslim Brotherhood (Durie, 2013). Indeed, the Salafist identity was constructed when al-Albani came to Zarqa in the 1980s, and was later picked up by the charismatic leader Abdallah Azzam, who, despite being linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, became a follower of al-Albani after attending his seminars at the Jamil al-Arab Mosque in Zarqa. In time, Azzam developed his own understanding of both al-Albani and the Muslim Brotherhood's ideologies, which were intrinsically separated by their policies on politics.

Azzam's thought process derived from his confusion regarding the Islamic movements' situation in Zarqa. He believed that al-Salafiyyah al-Albaniyyah's quietist approach could not create the change that he saw need for, while the Muslim Brotherhood's participation in politics had not led to any results benefitting Islam nor Islamic lands. Further, seeing Islamic lands invaded by the west on all borders, he concluded that jihadism was the only way to respond to the threat of invasion and outside influence. While the Muslim Brotherhood was following the technique of founder Hassan al-Banna, to enact change from the grassroots, Azzam believed that radical change had to start from the top, violently rejecting the status quo. Therefore, he issued a *fatwa* that jihad to defend Islamic lands had become *fardayn*,<sup>4</sup> and called on Muslims from Zarqa and all over the Islamic world to join him in supporting the Afghans in the 1979-1989 Afghan-Soviet war (Azzam, 1985, pp. 131-184; Azzam, 2011). Within this war, the concept of Salafist Jihadism first appeared, calling those who believed in the methodology of the Salaf and in jihad as one of the main pillars of Islam to make change against colonisers, and against the Islamic regimes that replaced Shariah law with their own man-made laws.

Azzam established the first unit of al Qaeda, The Arab Afghan Bureau, which was responsible for leading the Arab fighters and new recruits on their spiritual jihadist path against the Soviets. Individuals such as Osama Bin Laden heard Azzam's call and joined him in Islam's war against the West, as well as a cross-section of some of Zarqa's younger Muslims who were frustrated by Jordan's political and economic conditions, and saw the possibility for both escape and reform by liberating Islamic lands through jihad (Anas, 2002, pp. 100-147). Azzam's call to mobilise was considered revolutionary, appealing to a new Salafist generation, particularly those from Palestinian origins

<sup>4</sup>*Fardayn*(Arabic): AnobligationuponMuslims.

(Napoleoni, 2005, p. 35). It enabled him to mobilise hundreds of Jordanians in the early 1980s, many of which originated from Zarqa, although the *Mujahidin*<sup>5</sup> recruited around 35,000 fighters between 1982 and 1992 (Commins, 2006, p. 174). Azzam had successfully paved a new path for the understanding of jihad in Islam linked to Salafism's core ideas. Until this call for a new kind of jihadism, both Salafism and politics were practiced in a non-violent manner in Zarqa, but due to Azzam, individuals were mobilised and the city became more obviously Islamically orientated (al-Shishani, 2009). It was during this period that Zarqa became known for Jihadist Salafism as well as al-Salafiyah al-Albaniyyah.

Furthermore, the recruits who followed Azzam left a lasting impression on Zarqa in their absence. Particularly during that time, the city consisted of tight-knit communities both inside and outside the camps in tenement-style housing, and citizens relied on word-of-mouth, which is to say that information passed quickly and organically throughout the city. Therefore, with pride that many of the *Mujahidin* were Zarqa-based, locals kept abreast of their successes in Afghanistan, supported through "al Jihad", a magazine disseminated by the Arab Bureau Services, promoting the fighters' work abroad, and "Signs of the Merciful in the Jihad of the Afghan" [Ayat al-Rahman fi jihad al-Afghan] (Azzam, 1985), which also promoted their heroism and successes in a bid to further influence the speed of recruitment. During the ten years that the Arab Afghans were fighting abroad, these publications were distributed among Zarqa's youth, meaning they grew up surrounded by the propaganda of jihad's glory, with the dreams of following in the *mujahidin*'s footsteps and looking up to Azzam like an idol (Kurzman, 2019, p. 79; Bell, 2005).

Further, Jordan took a lenient position towards these activities due to the US's support of Afghanistan against the Soviets. Indeed, the Soviet-Afghan War was a chance for the US to avenge for the Soviet Union supporting Vietnamese fighters during the Vietnam War. As a result, the US's allies such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt, Kuwait, and Jordan were supporting the US by supporting the *mujahidin* by recruiting Arab Afghan fighters, conducting rescue missions, providing tickets to Afghanistan, and establishing hospitals and schools in the country. Therefore, the Jordanian government was lenient in dealing with the Afghan Arab's ideology and allowing them to publish their magazine in Jordan.

However, Zarqa was also experiencing other identity-based transitions in the 1980s and 1990s. While there was a growing trend for heightened religiosity, the hardship in Zarqa was increasing with new waves of Palestinian-origin Jordanian refugees fleeing to the city during the Gulf War of 1990 (Robins, 2004, pp. 176- 184). From an Islamic perspective, the Gulf War was considered a foreign invasion of Islamic lands, occurring during a time when Jordan was taking a liberal economic approach to open up its economy to the rest of the world, touching Zarqa with increasingly westernised influences, which was accelerated by the 160,000 new Palestinian-origin refugees from the Gulf and the western influences they were bringing in (Hear, 1995; Tabarani, 2011, p.261).

Therefore, Zarqa experienced drastic changes from the 1980s to the mid-1990s, directly effecting its essential values and sparking frustration in Zarqa's Salafist movement, which was intensified when the other Zarqa-born movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, began taking part in parliament in 1989. The two movements may have had opposing beliefs, but they were amicable and existed side-by-side, however the government being able to pass the 1994 Wadi Arabah peace treaty while the Brotherhood was in parliament caused a degree of indifference in the Salafists, who able to use it as an example of why politics cannot create the kind of change they wanted for the Islamic world (Abu Rumman, 2012).

#### **4. The Return of the Arab Afghans: A Surge in Jordanian Terror**

When the Salafist members who fought in Afghanistan began returning to Zarqa ten years later in in 1990, they found westernisation, increasing poverty, and frustration among remaining Salafists towards the Muslim Brotherhood's failed political participation, and what they considered significant failure of the state to protect Islamic lands, allowing in the same westernisation that the Arab Afghans had been fighting abroad (International Crisis Group, 2005).

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<sup>5</sup>*Mujahadin*(Arabic): jihadistfighters.

Therefore, the fighters who had been waging jihad abroad and had brought home with them the return of the Salafist path, created Jihadist Salafism in Zarqa by continuing to fight violently for the Salafist change they wanted to see. Indeed, this approach was more favourable to the existing al-Salafiyyah al-Albaniyyah in the city who were dissatisfied by Conservative Salafism not confronting the changes in the city, and were influenced by the returnee fighters' successes abroad, led by Azzam. However, similarly, the new group also inspired younger Brotherhood members from Zarqa who existed in the space between both movements, unconvinced by the Brotherhood's political participation, and attracted to the concept of jihadism. While Salafism represented fundamental, quietist readings of Islam, the Brotherhood set to reinterpret Islam and accept the so-called 'foreign intrusions of Islam' that Salafism rejected, in its attempt to enact change. Therefore, the ideology of Jihadist Salafism gained traction in the meeting point between both movements where the most frustration lay.

However, the real catalyst taking jihadism from an idea to be applied abroad, to application inside Jordan, was the appearance of two Islamic intellectuals living in Jordan in the early 1990s, al-Maqdisi, from the city of Zarqa, (Abu Rumman & Abu Hanieh, 2010, p. 49) and Mahmud Abu Omar Abu Kutada, who specifically targeted Zarqa with his lecture series. Their stream of publications during that period such as al-Maqdisi's "The Religion of Abraham", and Abu Kutada's "Jihad and Interpretation", criticised the political path of other Islamic movements, reasserting concepts like *al-Hakimiyyah*<sup>6</sup> and *al-Jahiliyyah*,<sup>7</sup> which is to say that Islam had lost its path, and that Jihadist Salafism was the best solution to restoring the proper order.

Due to their call for immediate action, a number of terrorist cells emerged in Jordan, many with direct links to both Zarqa and the Afghan Arabs, and all attacking westernisation and the state. Groups quickly mobilised, such as Jaysh Muhammed in 1991 which attacked the French Centre, British banks, and planted a bomb in an intelligence officer's vehicle. Also, the Islamic Call for Mobilisation [*al Nafir al Islami*] cell consisted of two parliamentarians, including YacoubQirsh, who represented the constituency of Zarqa. Both were convicted for plotting to commit a terrorist act and were sentenced to death in 1992, however both cell's members were released soon after due to the 1992 general amnesty. This was followed the Jordanian Afghan cell, which consisted of Arab Afghan fighters, and bombed cinemas in Zarqa and Amman as a rejection of westernisation. However these minor cells were superseded by Pledge of Allegiance to the Imam [*Bayat al-Imam*] in 1993 (Mohammed Abu Rumman, 2014, pp. 13-39). Despite never conducting an attack, the importance of this movement was that it reintroduced the main leaders of the worldwide jihad movement as a united front, including al-Maqdisi and Abd al-Majid al-Majali,<sup>8</sup> who later recruited Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, also an Afghanistan returner (al-Majali, 2005).

In 1997 these small units became increasingly professional, organising the Reform and Change [*Islah w Itlahdi*] cell, linked financially to Abu Kutada, which was accused of bombing an Israeli car and the surrounding wall of Amman's only American school (at the time). The peak of their efforts culminated in the Millennium Plot, a series of terror attacks planned with al-Qaeda to occur in various Middle Eastern countries, the US, and Canada (Piszkiewicz, 2003, pp. 121-131).

During this period, Jordanian jihadism had progressed significantly from small, independent cells committing random and individual acts, into an organised body with strong leadership, battle-field experience, and a solid relationship with regional organisations such as al-Qaeda, giving Zarqa's Jihadist Salafists a substantial position in international terror networks. Indeed, despite the active role of Jordan's intelligence in counter terrorism efforts, Jordan's Salafist unit was able to grow and thrive because it had linked itself to outside cells during a time when terror was becoming more organised and professional on a global scale.

<sup>6</sup>*Al-Hakimiyyah* (Arabic): [The principle of divine governance] asserts God's total authority as the ruler and source of legislation and governance in the Islamic state. The term also suggests that to deviate from this path, on to the path of, say democracy, is inherently un-Islamic.

<sup>7</sup>*Al-Jahiliyyah* (Arabic): was the era of ignorance before Islam. By asserting the concept in the present day, it is implied that Muslims are living un-Islamically, and are ruled un-Islamically by infidel regimes.

<sup>8</sup>Abd al Majid al Majali, commonly known as Abu Qutaiba, is a Salafist Jihadist who recruited al-Zarqawi to fight in Afghanistan during the Soviet War. He managed the Arab Bureau Services in Jordan and was arrested in the late 1990s for joining the Jaysh Muhammed organisation. He was later arrested in 2014 for recruiting for terrorist organisations.

It was ultimately through Zarqawi, however, that the Salafist movement in Jordan was linked to the jihadist movement internationally, and in 1999 Zarqawi established Unity and Jihad [*Al Tawhid w Jihad*] in Iraq. Following the path of his Zarqa-bread idol, Azzam who believed in fighting the 'near enemy' and prioritised Palestinian liberation, Zarqawi began mobilising in order to wage war against the Jordanian regime, and later, the US invasion of Iraq. Conversely, Bin Laden's al-Qaeda aimed for the far enemy,<sup>9</sup> targeting the US and Europe in order to liberate Palestine and thus solve the Islamic World's problems. However in 2004, while Zarqawi was conducting jihad in Iraq, the movements' understanding for near and far enemy met in Iraq. A merger took place in which Zarqawi allied himself to Bin Laden and established the al-Qaeda of Iraq (AQI), a global platform that he would lead, becoming one of the most wanted terrorists in the US, hugely increasing his influence (CNN, 2003). With this secure platform at his back, he tried to expand his movement's activities in the region to include Jordan (Tri Collage Digital Repository, 2005) by demonstrating the new, highly organised, face of Jordan's Salafist movement in an attack on three hotels in Amman in 2005, primarily targeting tourists.

The main character responsible for those attacks was Zarqawi, who was sentenced to death in absentia after fleeing Jordan (MSNBC, 2005), although his death would come a year later in Iraq. The particular significance of the Amman Bombing is not in regards to the advanced technical and organisational skills, nor the number of fatalities, but rather the fact that Zarqawi elected Iraqis, not Jordanians to commit the attack, signifying that Jordan's problem was part of Islam's global problem and that it was not the responsibility for Jordanians alone to wage jihad in Jordan, but the whole region. Ultimately, Zarqawi's message was that his jihad was not localised, but a combined effort and responsibility.

By 2005, the understanding of Salafism in Zarqa had turned from following the basic rules of the Salaf and the teachings of al-Albani towards Jihadist Salafism. The participation of Zarqa-origin fighters in Afghanistan and Iraqi wars was estimated to be around 300, with up to 63 imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay (Tabarani, 2011, p. 265). Zarqa's unfavourable conditions mobilised the city and it became a major location for recruitment and the exportation of jihadists across the region. Indeed, those who taught and embodied the main understandings for Jihadist Salafism today, such as Azzam, al-Maqdisi, Abu Kutada, and Zarqawi, all came from Zarqa. However this was short-lived, and the implementation of Zarqawi's jihad plans were unsuccessful due to his death two years later by 2006 US airstrikes.

During this period Zarqawi's influence had reached back to Jordan, and there was a divergence of approval regarding his jihadism in Iraq and Jordan among Jordanians who remembered the devastation of the 2005 Amman bombings. However, in this period, the Jordanians had also witnessed the rise and fall of Hamas after they adopted the policy of political involvement to enact change and led to a divide among Palestinians between Fateh and Hamas in 2006, which ended up using jihad and resistance again after failing politically.

During this period, the Centre for Strategic Studies in Jordan issued a public opinion survey, asking the increasingly confused Jordanian youth if al-Qaeda in Iraq was legitimate or not. The findings stated that just 50% of Jordanians took a decided stance against the group. Similarly large numbers were found when asked about the death of Zarqawi, with 30.3% feeling "angry, sad, frustrated, or upset" about it, indicating a much larger support base for the jihadist organisations in Jordan than expected (Burayzat, 2006, p. 6). This indicated that jihad had become a term imbued with confusion among Jordanian youth with affiliation to Islamic movements who were confronted with the confusion between the value of participation and the value of jihad.

## **5. The Zarqa Rally**

In 2011, when waves of protests engulfed the Middle East, in what quickly became known as the Arab Spring, Salafists throughout the region began reconsidering the value of democracy as a force for change. During this period,

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<sup>9</sup>The Near-Enemy Theory came to the surface after Afghanistan was liberated from the Soviet Union and Al Qaeda was faced with the dilemma of whether to fight the physically near enemy, Israel, or the far enemy, America, who is thought to be ultimately behind Israel. Therefore, Zarqawi adopted the Near-Enemy Theory in Iraq.

Conservative Salafists broke form and began establishing political parties, as seen with Egypt's Hizban-Nour and al-Asala, which began participating in elections and calling for protests (McTighe, 2014). Jordanian Jihadist Salafists experienced the same confusion regarding Salafism's core principles in regards to political participation (Wagemakers, 2017), and continuing Zarqa's longstanding influence on Salafism, the city quickly became a base for believers' divisions to assert themselves. Appearing to be an extension of the Arab Spring, Jordanian Jihadists took to the streets of Zarqa, calling for the application of Shariah law, the release of Salafist prisoners who were involved in the prior mentioned raided cells, and the loosening of security precautions against them.

The Zarqa rally marks a vital turning point in Jordanian Salafism, reviving the argument of democracy, which is the original point of contention between Conservative Salafism, Jihadism, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Jordanian Salafism in general opposed the Muslim Brotherhood for taking a democratic path, however seeing the will of the people regionally, their ability to collapse regimes, and the possibility of affecting change or creating new states based on new ideologies greatly influenced the Salafists, who adopted the same path despite it being fundamentally against their theology.

The impact of the rally was that it divided Salafist Jihadists across the country into two ideological camps led by Abd al-Fattah Shahada al-Tahrawi,<sup>10</sup> and Omar Mehdi Zaydan (Wagemakers, 2016, p. 186),<sup>11</sup> marking a new generation of Salafist leadership originating from Irbid, but sharing his message in Zarqa. Influenced by the momentum of the Arab Spring, Tahrawi argued in favour of protest as a way of passing the movement's message to the government and Jordan's population, using Zarqa as a platform to launch his leadership bid. Tahrawi supported his argument for democracy by attesting to the Prophet Muhammed's (PBUH) *hadith*<sup>12</sup> "fight them with tongue and spears" (Al-Arasan, 2018), and by using a *fatwa* issued by Abu Kutada in his letter, "The Islamic Judgement on Strikes" (al-Filistini, 2014), which asserted the legitimacy of protesting in Islam (Wagemakers, 2018). With this reasoning, protest became a religious duty in order to satisfy the practice and dissemination of true Islam. Further, Tahrawi was influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood, who started rallying before the Jihadist Salafists (Wagner, 2012, p. 312). While the Brotherhood chose Amman as a central location for their rally, more likely to receive media attention, the Salafists returned to Zarqa, the core of Jordanian Salafism, thus also reinforcing their existence in the city.

The 350 armed Salafi Jihadists in central Zarqa quickly led to brutal clashes with the police who responded with force to rock throwing, chanting, and the threatening use of unconcealed weapons (Tobin, 2019, p. 161). The event culminated with the detainment of 144 protestors, including the organiser, Tahrawi, who was later sentenced to nine years imprisonment, five of which were served. Out of those protestors, around 70 went to conduct jihad in Syria, indicating the return of Salafists to disbelieving in the power of democracy after their first exercise of democracy resulted in violence. Further, in response to the event, Jordan changed its security state law, adding terror to the security court roles, and issued a list of wanted people. Zarqa retained biggest share of those wanted arrests, with 26 in the city itself, and 12 others in the wider Zarqa governorate (Ammon News, 2015).

Jordanian Salafism's new opposition leader, Zaydan, had condemned the event, arguing that rallying is a form of democracy, and that using democracy is a kind of incitement against Islam itself. He built this argument upon the argument of Maqdisi's book, "Democracy and Religion", (al Maqdisi, n.d.) which claimed that any form of democratic expression such as protesting is heathenism. Zaydan's path of Salafism took an entirely different direction to Tahrawi, and while his opposition was in jail, Zaydan was able to join ISIS and become one of their Shariah judges, making him intrinsic to the organisation's establishment (Wagemakers, 2018).

However, although division between the two Salafism camps became clear as a result of the rally, a bigger problem emerged within the movement. The Conservative Salafists could no longer defend al-Albani's quietist approach in light of the regime's reactionary measures, whilst the protesting division could no longer cooperate democratically with a

<sup>10</sup>Tahrawi, an ex-Muslim Brotherhood member, was impressed by Hassan al-Banna's gradual change technique for Islam, through participation and education.

<sup>11</sup>Zaydan belonged to a Jihadist Salafist family. One brother who was a companion of Bin Laden died in a US-led raid in Pakistan in 2009, another was taken to Guantanamo, and his son in law detonated a suicide bomb in Iraq in 2015.

<sup>12</sup>*Hadith* (Arabic): Collective body of traditions and daily practices of the *Sunnah* acting as a major source of guidance for Muslims in addition to the Quran.

regime seen to be infidel and which did not appear to show any kind of consideration for their requests. This was made clear a year after the rally, when the Syrian Civil War broke out, and Jordanians were faced with the choice of which path of jihadism they should take – ISIS, or al-Nosra.

#### **6. Division between al-Nora and ISIS**

Al-Nosra, originally a Zarqa-based project, was conceived when then-AQI leader and successor of Zarqawi, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, sent six fighters, including trusted Jordanians such as Iyad at-Tubasi, Zarqa-born relative of Zarqawi, to establish al-Nosra Front as al-Qaeda's base in Syria in 2011 (Ammon News, 2015). In addition to Tubasi, other charismatic Jordanian figures, such as Sami al-Oride, participated in organising this new platform in Syria, and through his Twitter account (@Sami\_Oride) (McCants, 2015, p. 212), became an instrumental figure for recruiting others, especially Jordanians, to follow the call of jihad. Oride targeted those who had attended the Zarqa rally, such as Mustafa Abd al-Latif Abu Anas, who was imprisoned during the event, and who followed Oride's call when he was released, later becoming one of the leaders of al-Nosra.

Despite both al-Nosra and ISIS representing al-Qaeda at the beginning of the Syrian war, it was easier for al-Nosra to incubate Jordanian jihadis early on due to its existing Jordanian leadership and the geographical proximity between al-Nosra's territories and Jordan. Therefore, it was easier for this branch of al-Qaeda to incubate Jordanian jihadis. However, when al-Baghdadi declared ISIS a caliphate state in 2014 and ended his allegiance to al-Qaeda, the Jordanian regime responded by joining the coalition against ISIS (Abbad, 2015). Jordanians who were considering going to conduct jihad were thus confused as to how to choose between al-Qaeda as represented by al-Nosra, or the new movement, ISIS.

In order to declare ISIS's existence to Jordanians and answer the regime's decision to join the coalition, a video was circulated of Amer al-Khalyeh (another Zarqa-born relative of Zarqawi), confronting the Jordanian regime publicly from Iraq and Syria, declaring Jordan an enemy of Islam by burning his passport, and vowing to "slaughter" King Abdullah. This call was intended for Jordanians in general, Khalyeh's Bedouin tribe of the middle of the country, and to the people of Zarqa. This call was followed by a declaration of brutality by burning the Jordanian pilot MuathKasabeh, alive, and on camera (Schenker, 2014).

However, the dilemma regarding al-Nosra vs ISIS was not only upon the potential recruits, but existed internally in al-Nosra, where Jordanian leadership such as Abu Sami al-Urdini, and Abu Saif/Ahmed Harabi al Obaydi, left al-Nosra due to the appeal of ISIS's project leaving behind Jordanian leadership who favoured al-Qaeda's project (Mezran & Varvelli, 2018, p. 167). Soon the division between two movements caused them to their guns away from the infidels and coalition and towards one another, sparking doubt into the hearts of Salafist Jihadists who desired to conduct jihad abroad (Reuters, 2014).

Further confusion occurred when in 2016, the head of al-Nosra, Abu Mohammad al-Julani, turned al-Nosra into JabhatFateh al-Sham, breaking allegiance to al-Qaeda due to their setback in the conflict with the Syrian regime. This caused the Jordanian leaders Tubasi and Oride, who still had belief in al-Qaeda, to establish their own branch, Guardians of the Religion [*Horas AdDin*], allied to al-Qaeda (Joscelyn, 2018). The confusion of having so many platforms for jihad led to a significant decrease in the amount of recruits crossing the border. However, this is not to say that Jihadist Salafists lost interest in the cause. In fact, 2016 marked one of the most active years for internal attacks and terrorist activities across Jordan, including locations such as al-Rockban, Irbid, al-Balqa, and Karak. This is due to the increased security at Jordan's borders since entering into the coalition, making it harder to go abroad in the name of jihadism, and essentially trapping jihadis who wanted to take revenge from Jordan's participation in the coalition, inside Jordan.

The Jordanian jihadis of 2016 can be known for their increasingly professional preparation, organisation, and technical skills compared to anytime since 2000, or the 2005 Amman Bombing. This advancement is due to several reasons; the most important being that some of the perpetrators gained their skills from their time with the Afghan

Arabs, while others were trained and funded by ISIS. Particularly in the 1990s when Jordan experienced a surge of terror attacks, jihadis were independent or made up minor, unsupported cells. However the jihadis of 2016 had a stable support base, strong allegiances, and a precedent to learn from. As the table below indicates, they used these new skills effectively in taking revenge for Jordan's participation in the coalition.

**Table 1: Timeline of Terror-Related Incidents in Jordan, 2000 – 2005**

Date	Location	Group	Leader/ Perpetrator	Details
2000	Worldwide	Al-Qaeda	Osama Bin Laden; Abu Zubeida; Abu Kutada	Millennium Plot: In Jordan, targeting Christian holy sites such as Mount Nebo, hotels such as Radisson, and borders between Jordan and Israel. 28 suspects, 22 guilty, 6 linked to Bin Laden (Sawyer, 2004; Swann, 2013).
2002 Oct 28	Amman	Al-Qaeda	Zarqawi; Salem Sa'ed; Salem bin Suweid	Plan to attack embassies and diplomats resulted in assassination of American diplomat Lawrence Foley (CNN World, 2002).
2004 Apr 19	Amman	Unity Group (AQI Affiliate)	Zarqawi/Azmi al-Jayusi	Plot to detonate 20 tons chemicals, destroying US embassy, Jordanian intelligence HQ, and 80,000 civilians (The Associated Press, 2006).
2004 Aug 19	Aqaba, Eilat	Brigades of the Martyr Abdullah Azzam	Unknown	Three Katyusha rockets aimed at two US Navy ships accidentally hit a Jordanian military hospital. Another exploded near Israel's Eilat airport (WONG, 2005).
2005 Nov 10	Amman	Al Qaeda	Zarqawi	Amman Bombing: 3 hotels targeted, 60 killed (SLACKMAN, n.d.).

Between 2005 and 2015, regional events occupied jihadists' attention, with recruitment occurring in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. In 2014 a new counter-terror law in response to the threat of ISIS and al-Nosra allowed Jordanian forces to take higher security measures, which resulted in small cells being caught before developing into real threats.

**Table 2: Timeline of Terror-Related Incidents in Jordan, 2015 – 2018**

Date	Location	Group	Leader/ Perpetrator	Details
2015 Nov 9	Amman	No affiliation	Anwar Abu Zaid	Attack on US-funded King Abdullah Training Center. Two Jordanians, 2 Americans, and 1 South African killed (Al-Khalidi, 2015).
2016 Mar 2	Irbid	ISIS affiliate	Omar Zaydan	During a raid, cell entered into a clash with the security forces, resulting in the death of seven terrorists and one Jordanian lieutenant after 12 hours of resistance. Perpetrators were targeting the military and civilians in sensitive positions (The Jordan Times, 2016).
2016 Jun 6	Al-Baqa'a	ISIS affiliate	Mohammed Ali Masharefeh	Five intelligence shot and killed on the first day of Ramadan. Perpetrator had been detained in 2012 for recruiting for al-Nosra in the camps, and was then arrested earlier in 2016 for communicating with ISIS (Al Jazeera, 2016).

<b>2016 Jun 21</b>	Ar-Rockban	ISIS	NejhmAdbullah Amor; Ahmed Makhshi, al-Abdoor; FadiIrsheid; KhalifFendi; Ahmed Hilal	Seven Jordanian security killed after car bomb detonated on Syrian border (Al Jazeera, 2016).
<b>2016 Dec 18</b>	Karak	ISIS	Mohammed al-Khoteeb; Mohammed al-Qarawneh; Assem Abu Rumman; Hazen Abu Rumman et al	During raid, terrorists opened fire, fled to Karak castle, and exchanged fire with police. Seven police, two civilians, and one tourist were killed (Husseini, 2016). Four of the terrorists involved had a record of short-term imprisonment after attempting to go to Syria during the civil war (Jordan News Agency, 2018).
<b>2018 Aug 11</b>	Salt	ISIS affiliate	Ahmed Al-Nsur; Ahmed Aodeh; Deeya al-Fawaeer	Raid following attack on Gendarmerie vehicle in Fuheis which killed one security officer. Perpetrators detonated the building the raid was occurring in. Four Jordanian security officials and three militants were killed (Shay, 2018).

Jordan’s Salafist youth lack a positive and structurally sound support network within the country, leading them to seek organisations abroad in Syria and Iraq, which have unity and identity, and Zarqa constitutes 40% of all Jordanians who followed this path (Shteivi & Abu Rumman, 2018, p. 86). Indeed, based on the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, the participation for Jordanians within the beginning of the Iraqi intervention was around 2000 members, but when the Syrian civil war began, 700 to 1,000 Jordanians were estimated to have joined ISIS, making Jordan the second largest country after Tunisia to provide soldiers for ISIS (Alami, 2014). Considering the lack of a conservative Salafist movement in Jordan, these numbers are not surprising.

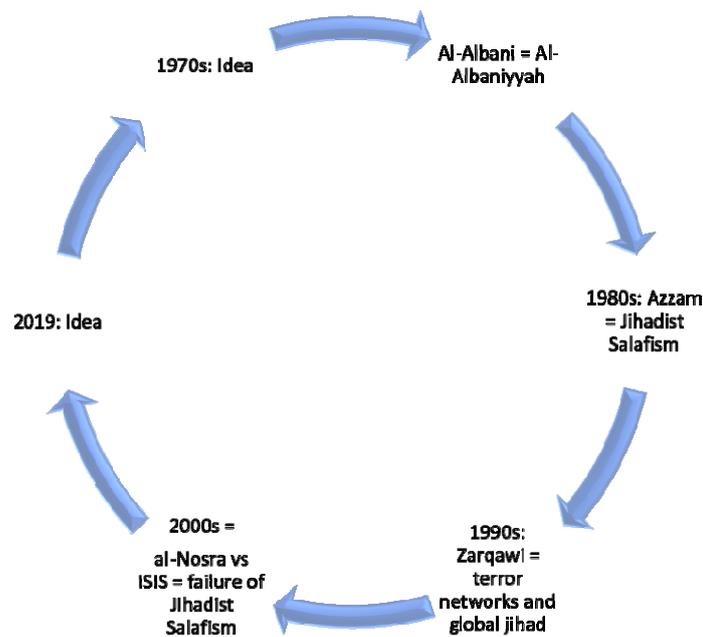
Indeed, the events in Table 2 reflect the huge division in the Salafist movement today, as when the unity of al-Nosra and ISIS shattered, and doubt was cast over how they were serving Islam, Jordan’s jihadists began to reconsider their efforts abroad. This is seen clearly between 2016 and 2018 when Jordanian jihadists turned their focus from Syria and Iraq towards Jordan. Therefore, after the setbacks of al-Nosra and ISIS, Jordan’s Salafist movement was reduced to the core of an ideology, which has the potential to return to its original peaceful state of al-Salafiyyah al-Albaniyyah. However, if it continues to circulate without form, it is expected that independent attacks will continue to occur in Jordan.

### **7. Conclusion & Findings**

The hardship experienced in Zarqa due to overwhelming numbers of refugees impacting on an already struggling economy has resulted in it becoming an incubator for Jihadist Salafism. As explored in Musa Shteivi and Abu Rumman’s study, “The Sociology of Extremism and Terrorism in Jordan”, 40 percent of those who follow extremist organisations in Jordan come from Zarqa(Shteivi & Abu Rumman, 2018, p. 86).

However, despite clear indicators of the scale of Zarqa’s jihadist problem, Jordan’s 2004 counter-terror law, nor its 2016 amendment, criminalised Salafist Jihadism. Therefore, although the security forces were strengthened to deal with jihadism after Jordan joined the coalition, measures were not taken to deal with the ideology, which is still active.

Since the Zarqa rally there has been a rise in Salafist Jihadism in locations that foster the same conditions as Zarqa, such as Irbid, which was home to rising Salafist leaders Tahrawi and Zaydan, who brought the debate of protest and democracy back to Jordan’s Salafists. A prime example for this is the refugee and poverty stricken residential block, Hanieh in Irbid, which is home to Tahrawi, as well as leaders of al-Nosra and ISIS, Khaled al-Alool and Anwar abu Fares, thus indicating how dangerous these unstable conditions are to the development of the Salafist Jihadi movement in Jordan.



**Diagram 1: The Progression of Jordanian Salafism**

As shown in Diagram 1: The Progression of Jordanian Salafism, the movement has come full circle. Starting life as a formless idea, it later flourished at the hands of al-Albani via a non-intervention model following Saudi Arabia's model of Conservative Salafism. Later, however, in response to regional and local frustrations, Azzam developed the ideology further to wage war against foreign invaders of the Levant. Those who fought beside him became the foundation that transformed quietist al-Salafiyyahal-Albaniyyah into Jihadist Salafism.

Later, regional events in Iraq and Syria united Zarqawi with al-Qaeda, a network which conceived the concept of establishing the Islamic State through al-Nosra and ISIS. However this unity did not last and battles between the branches led to the eventual collapse of al-Nosra, and the territorial setback of ISIS. With the failure to create the Islamic state, nor protect Islamic lands, jihadis returned to Jordan with the intention of waging jihad at home. However upon being met by a hostile state and the dissolution of the Jordanian Salafist movement, the jihadis were reduced to mere individuals, and Salafism returned to being a formless idea rather than a movement, similar to its state thirty years ago when al-Albani first began preaching.

Jordan's Jihadist Salafism problem lies in the disappearance of a positive leadership representing the path of al-Salafiyyahal-Albaniyyah, which called for a quietist, peaceful stance towards the regime. The lack of such a leadership has resulted in the movement deviating from its originally peaceful path, seeking jihad both nationally and internationally. Indeed, while al-Albani provided ideology that resonated with Jordanians, he did not provide the means to abide by this ideology, leading to the confusion Jordanian Salafists have experienced, as presented in this study. It can thus be derived that Jordanian Salafists are seeking new leadership to unite them and create a new face for the movement. Whether this leader shows them a peaceful path such as al-Albani's, or a jihadist path like Zarqawi's, is yet to be seen.

However, as it stands, the Jordanian Salafist movement suffers from a schizophrenia due to its lack of leadership and direction. The Salafists no longer have control over their members, or a tangible body to uphold, and there is now an historical trend for its believers to become jihadist, and more recently, ISIS, making the separation between what constitutes a Salafist and a Jihadist unclear. Further, it means that Salafists, regardless of their beliefs or past, are constantly accused of violence and terrorism. Indeed, by marginalising the quiet tune of conservative Salafists in Jordan, the presence of those outside the country were empowered. Therefore, by taking a moderate stance towards Conservative Salafists, al-Albanist Salafists, and Salafists who condemn the events in Iraq and Syria, an alternative route could be made available for youth that

otherwise would emigrate for foreign jihad.

If the aforementioned Salafists were encouraged towards taking positive steps for change, reinstating them as a positive presence in Jordanian society, by, for example, forming charitable or educational associations, they would be able to communicate Salafism in a peaceful manner, rather than violent, to those on the ground that the regime cannot reach. It is therefore highly recommended that the regime find channels of communication with the ex-leadership of traditional al-Salafiyyah-Albaniyyah or even participate to creating a new leadership. This would result in a positive relationship between the movement and the regime, giving the Jordanian Salafist movement shape as a controlled and understood ideology, and also providing the regime with the authority and ability to monitor and negotiate on key issues.

At this stage, this is vital. As shown in Table 2, the increase of expertise in those calling for jihad in Jordan who also employ the model of those outside Jordan. Indeed, in his article, "Unknown Knights: Countering Terrorism with Conviction", Fares Braizat reports that in 2018 alone the Jordanian intelligence department "thwarted 62 operations abroad and 32 internally" (Braizat, 2019). This indicates that despite successful counterterrorism efforts, the belief in the ideology remains strong, and these numbers may indicate leftover cells in Jordan regrouping for a larger revenge attack, particularly in light of ISIS's territorial setback, Fateh al-Sham collapsing, and Jordan's role in the coalition.

However, it is important to note that the main limitation of this study is the lack of public information regarding solid numbers and facts regarding how many Jihadist Salafists exist in each city, and who recruiters or possible leaders may be. This is due to the on-going and sensitive nature of the Syrian war, and the security department not revealing statistics that could inadvertently promote terror. To counter this limitation, a case study approach was employed to closely consider Zarqa's role in the development of Jihadist Salafism including known statistics and facts, thus being able to draw reasonable conclusions about the state of the movement in Jordan today.

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## تأثير مدينة الزرقاء على الجهادية: (دراسة دور السلفية)

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### ملخص

على مدار العقدين الماضيين، أصبح مصطلح السلفية التي تُعرف بأنها مدرسة فكرية إسلامية، ويساء فهمها بشكل عام، مصطلحاً مرادفاً للإرهاب، وإنّ الأبحاث الدقيقة والمتعمقة في هذا التحول لم توفق بتقديم تفسير منطقي لهذا الترابط، وهو ما قد يفسر أيضاً قصور استجابة الأنظمة وأجهزة المخابرات لمواجهة أيديولوجية الجهادية السلفية التي تهدف لدراسة للإجابة على كيفية تحول السلفية إلى السلفية الجهادية، ولماذا تمكن قادة سلفيون معينون من التأثير على المنطقة وتطبيق السلفية فيها، وتقدم هذه الدراسة حالة دراسية لمدينة الزرقاء باعتبارها أصل السلفية الجهادية، وقادتها الأكثر شهرة، وتنتقل إلى تأثير المدينة على الحركات الإقليمية: داعش والنصرة، حتى يتسنى فهم الإرهاب المعاصر بصورة أفضل، وطريقة التعامل مع بيئة تطوير هذه الأيديولوجية المتقلبة واستخدامها لتكوين علاقة أكثر إيجابية مع النظام الأردني من خلال اتباع نهج تاريخي، وتتناول هذه الدراسة العوامل الجيوسياسية الرئيسة مع الإشارة إلى تغير المواقف والسلوكيات، وأزمة الهوية التي تحدث على تحديداً في الزرقاء خلال هذه المدد الزمنية، وتكشف عن أدوار شخصيات مثل: ناصر الدين الألباني، والمجاهدين الأفغان العرب، وأبو مصعب الزرقاوي في تغيير حالة الجهادية الأردنية والجهادية العالمية.

الكلمات الدالة: الزرقاء، السلفية، الجهادية، الألباني، الزرقاوي، العرب الأفغان، داعش، النصر.

\*كلية الأمير حسين بن عبدالله للدراسات الدولية، الجامعة الأردنية، تاريخ استلام البحث 2019/5/15، وتاريخ قبوله 2019/7/17.