

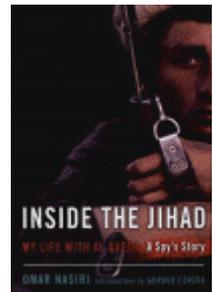


The Changing Face of Jihad – Culture Trumps Ideology

By: Raouf Ebeid – PI Online

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Analyzing radical Islam, author *Thomas Hegghamer*¹ writing in *TLS*² concluded his article by stating that “six years after 9/11, the study of Jihadism is still in its infancy.” In his review of *Omar Nassiri*’s book³ detailing the inside operation of *Al-Qaeda*, Hegghamer provided an all encompassing commentary touching on the research of many western political authors.⁴ In particular, Hegghamer’s reference to Mark Sageman’s finding that “radicalization is above all a social, not an ideological profile” provides a useful social context within which to continue our special series on Jihad [see [PI 901 to 906](#)] with *Hossam Tammam*⁵’s article: “Is the Egyptian Influence Giving Way in the Al-Qaeda Movement?”⁶



Tammam examines how the composition of the Jihad movement’s membership has changed since its inception on February 22nd 1998. The writer notes that a certain competition seems to be present recently between *Bin Laden* and his deputy *Al-Zawahiri*. According to *Tammam*, the latest broadcasts by both over the past few days reveal a lack of coordination between them as evidenced by the overlap in their coverage of the issues. *Tammam* notes that the Saudi factions in the movement also seem to exhibit a certain wariness towards the numerous speeches by *Bin Laden*’s deputy *Al-Zawahiri*, seeing them as an attempt to take over the leadership.

The Egyptian Nucleus

Tammam refers to the latest book appearing on internet sites in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the birth of Al-Qaeda: “Martyrs during Time of Exile”. The book was published by the “Al-Fajr Center”, considered an arm of Al-Qaeda. It is devoted in large part to eleven Egyptian members who occupied important positions in the movement. The unknown author, writing under the pseudonym ‘*Abu Ubaydah al-Maqdisi*’, dedicated the book to the Egyptian *Sayyed Qutb*. Both of these facts, according to *Tammam*, seem to be an attempt to remind people of the importance of the Egyptian influence on the movement.

¹ *Thomas Hegghamer* is a post-doctoral research fellow at Princeton University and a research fellow at the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment in Oslo. He specializes in the study of violent Islamism and is the author of the soon to be published “Jihad in Arabia: The Paradox of Saudi Islamism”. [TLS, 4/2/2008]

² *Commentary* was published in the Times Literary Supplement (TLS) on April 2nd, 2008

³ *Nassiri*’s book, “Inside the Jihad: My life with al-Qaeda”, has also been translated into French under the title. “Au Coeur du Djihad” [Flammarion 2006]. *Omar Nassiri* is a pseudonym for a Belgium-Moroccan whose real name is believed to be *Sa’id al-Majda* [source]

⁴ In his analysis he covered *Peter Bergen*’s portrait of *Bin Laden* whose earlier texts have been translated and edited by *Bruce Lawrence*. He also mentions the work of *Marc Sageman* on the cultural emphasis in recruiting terrorist members and *Robert Pape*’s views on territorial considerations taking precedence over religious ones.

⁵ *Hossam Tammam* is an Egyptian analyst who specializes in Islamic movements.

⁶ http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1203758597837&pagename=Zone-Arabic-Daawa%2FDWALayout Date 4/11/2008

Since the birth of Al-Qaeda, the question regarding the national origin of its members has often been raised. The early days, according to *Tammam*, favored the Egyptian factions with their expertise in many forms of military training. Following the murder of President Sadat several Egyptian Jihadi factions were born. That Egyptian nucleus is considered the first generation of Jihadi centered around *Bin Laden*, with *Al-Zawahiri* at the head. *Al-Zawahiri* was the strategic brain and the most influential person in the movement. At that time and aside from *Bin Laden*, the Saudi presence on the Jihadi scene was still in its infancy.

The Saudi Salafi Presence

Tammam presents a different picture of the past few years. The Egyptian supply of Jihadi members dried up, due mostly to the continuous assault on their members by the regime and to reconsideration by their members of Al-Qaeda's militant position. That change coincided with the opening of the Saudi front, triggered by the discovery of a substantial reserve of Salafi-indoctrinated individuals that, according to *Tammam* "rivaled the reserve of Saudi oil."

While *Bin Laden* is almost the only known figure coming from the Gulf, there is no doubt that the region contributed a substantial number of Salafi-indoctrinated members to fight in Afghanistan and later in Iraq. That new supply of members came at the expense of the Egyptians whose presence diminished by comparison.

The New Comers

A strong branch of the Salafi ideology is also supplying new members from North Africa (Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco) and from the coastal countries, Mauritania and Mali. According to *Tammam*, the clamp down on Islamists in Tunisia and Libya benefited the movement's efforts to recruit youth to Al-Qaeda. That was coupled with the lack of a government presence in vast areas of Algeria, particularly in the south. This allowed Jihadi members relatively free movement, similarly to Mauritania and Mali. The Libyans currently make up the third largest nationality in the movement. The Moroccans are the group most drawn to Iraq, and the Mauritians have been the most active jihadis over the past year.

The Egyptian influence is no longer significant, except in the very visible presence of *Al-Zawahiri* who still wields considerable strategic influence, but the charisma and funding is *Bin Laden's*.

The mere presence of articles, such as *Tammam's*, which address the changing national make-up of the Jihadi movement's membership reinforces *Sageman's* findings that the cultural relationship between members, rather than ideology, remains the most influential factor in recruitment. If *Tammam* is correct that the rivalry between the Egyptians and the Saudi is a real factor, this is further support for his point that cultural considerations are trumping ideology.

When ideology fails to produce territorial deliverables and passion for the cause diminishes, the floundering movement becomes heavily dependent upon members attracting others through their shared culture and nationality. To sustain and grow a movement built on such camaraderie requires constantly reaching out to different nationalities and an ever younger pool of recruits who may be attracted by mythical successes of the past.

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