

Articles

Downplaying Jihad in Jordan's Educational Curriculum, 2013-2017

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Abstract

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is often thought of as a relatively liberal Muslim country - the quintessential "moderate Arab Muslim ally". However, Jordan has paradoxically made a disproportionate contribution to the phenomenon of modern Islamist terrorism, both in terms of leading figures and foot soldiers. On a per capita basis, Jordan has made a very strong contribution to terrorist groups such as al-Qaida and Islamic State. Jordan is also a country which from its foundation has had a weak sense of identity. This article takes as its premise that Jordan's own heavily Islamic, quasi-jihadist education system has aggravated the identity problem, making Jordan more vulnerable to recruitment. It examines three versions of the core curriculum Islamic studies textbook used in universities to both provide a baseline for how Islam is conceived and show that Jordanian authorities recognised that this was a problem. The textbook used up to 2014-2015 set forth a classical Islamic view of the role of the state and jihad as a means of expanding Islamic rule, a view much closer to the world view of al-Qaida than the modern Jordanian state. A new 2015-2016 edition made substantial changes, de-emphasizing jihadist-friendly teachings. A 2017-2018 edition has completed the transformation, finally bringing the university Islamic curriculum in line with the "tolerant, moderate" vision Jordan's leaders espouse.

Keywords: Curriculum, Education, Jihad, Jordan, Salafi-jihadism, Terrorism

Introduction

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan enjoys an awkward distinction of being both a strategic ally of the United States with close relations with other Western countries and yet also a major contributor to the global Salafi-Jihadist movements. While Jordan's leaders consistently attribute the country's terrorism problems to external forces or purely economic causes, the disproportion of its contribution to jihadist recruitment makes such claims suspect.

With a citizen population of 6.7 million, Jordan makes up only about one-half of one percent of the Muslim world and just over two percent of all Arab Muslims. Yet at the leadership level, any list of the top dozen global jihadist leaders over the last generation would almost certainly include four Jordanians: Abdullah Azzam, Abu Qatada al-Filistini, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, and Maqdisi's infamous pupil, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Similarly, an estimated 3,000-4,000 Jordanians had traveled to fight during the war in Syria by 2016, despite intense security monitoring that has meant many are arrested before they can leave.[1] On a per capita basis, Jordan appears to be the leading Arab and Muslim exporter of foreign jihadists.[2]

One straightforward explanation for this is that since the beginning of the 1980s, Jordan has had an energetic and well-organized traditionalist Salafist movement.[3] While traditional Salafism is politically at opposite poles from a Salafi-Jihadist group like al-Qaida, the theological worldviews of the two on issues like the role of the state, foreign relations with non-Muslims and jihad largely overlap, and many Salafi-Jihadists begin with exposure to ordinary Salafism. Yet Jordan is not alone in having a Salafist movement from which these groups can recruit, so this explanation alone is insufficient to account for Jordan's disproportionate contribution.

Jordanians weak sense of national identity is also an important factor. Created by Britain in the early 20th century in a territory where there had not before been a unitary state, Jordan's sense of national identity was weak from the beginning. As Jordan grew and developed over the decades, by the time the transnational Islamic ideology known as Salafi-Jihadism arose in Jordan – following Maqdisi's return from Kuwait in 1992[4]

– the country already had a well-developed identity problem. The Muslim Brotherhood was much closer to the regime during Jordan’s early years than more recently, and Jordan’s education system became heavily Islamist (but not Salafist), even though Jordan was never an Islamic state, and this only reinforced the country’s identity quandary. An April 2017 article in the *CTC Sentinel* addressed this issue, noting not only deprivation of education but also the nature of the Islamic education. As the authors noted:[5]

[Researchers have found] that in many societies, the impetus for radicalization was linked to concrete problems felt by youths, including economic deprivation, social disenchantment, and most of all, lack of political voice and identity.... Less understood to the outside world, though, is how the antiquated curricula is saturated with Islamic symbolism rather than Jordanian nationhood and civic identity... expressions of injustice, helplessness, and powerlessness are symptomatic of the weak attachment Jordanian youths have with their state and society. At the heart of the problem lies the absence of any robust sense of Jordanian nationalism or national identity.

Two policies have been put in place since 2014 which show the monarchy must have become convinced that it needed to act to bridge the chasm between the country’s cultural and religious orientation and its modern condition. One was an effort to establish more uniform control over mosque sermons throughout the kingdom, creating a “unified sermon” system and excluding jihadist-friendly imams from mosques.[6] A second policy change was education reform, which among other changes resulted in a substantial reduction in the role of Islam in education, with changes to secondary education becoming the main focus of public controversy in 2016.[7] Some study of both of these policies would further help illuminate Jordan’s counter-jihadism policies.

A further reform, which is the focus of this article, has involved dramatic changes in the core curriculum Islamic studies text used in Jordan’s universities, transforming a curriculum immersed in what might be called “soft jihadism” – consistent with historical conceptions of jihad and the Islamic state – to a vision of Islam more in line with the modern Jordanian state. The second part of this article will look at the 2013 edition of the *Islamic Culture* textbook and shows that its emphasis on the concept of the Islamic state, jihad as a means of spreading Islam and various rules adopted during Islam’s early centuries meant that it cultivated a worldview which, though in some ways distant from the Salafi-Jihadist worldview, was much closer to the ideology of al-Qaida than to that of the Hashemite monarchy, making a transition from mainstream Islam to jihadism easier.

The third part of this article continues the case study by examining new editions of the Islamic studies textbook published in 2015 and 2017; these are so dramatically revised that they may be taken as an admission of the problem. The 2015 edition makes broad-based changes, deleting many passages inconsistent with modern Jordanian society and policy. It also dramatically recasts interpretations of jihad, reframing the doctrine as entirely focused on self-defense and emphasizing minority rights. The 2017 edition completes this transformation, rendering an interpretation of Islam devoid of classical definitions of jihad and the role of the state and more directly endeavoring to counter Salafi-Jihadist thinking. Only with this new version, published in September 2017, does Jordan’s university curriculum now align with the vision of Islam its leaders espouse.

While Jordanian officials have never expressly acknowledged that their Islamic education was responsible for Jordan’s contribution to global jihadism, the revisions have been consciously made. It is especially notable that the academic at the University of Jordan’s Sharia College who oversaw the revisions, Dr. Sharaf al-Qada, is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood Society, a splinter group from the Muslim Brotherhood which many Islamists view as a regime front. The group’s 2015 founding, according to Brotherhood Shura Council member Riyadh al-Adhayaleh, was “a decision by the government to form a new group, [which] does not mean anything to the Brotherhood, simply a coup created by the state.”[8] Comments by Qada from an interview are included in part three of this article.

The dramatic changes have not been discussed publicly. Jordan University President Azmi al-Muhafatha discussed it openly only in general terms in October 2016, saying that in terms of fighting “extremism,” the *Islamic Culture* curriculum was expected to undergo changes.[9] Examining whether these reforms and others at the pre-university level have an impact will only be measurable in the years ahead.

Teaching Islam: A University Curriculum Case Study

Up through the 2014-2015 school year, the standard Islamic studies text across Jordanian universities for their core curriculum was a textbook entitled *Islamic Culture & Modern Issues*. [10] The book and its successors were produced by the Sharia College at the University of Jordan, but were used throughout the country. Except for students who took Islamic law (*sharia*) as a course of study, it was the only Islamic studies textbook which the typical student was likely to read. Whether the class is required or elective depends on the university. Jordanian universities have a very narrow core; at the country's flagship institution, the University of Jordan, only four classes are mandatory: Arabic, English, Civics and (for males) Military Education. [11]

In contrast to the information environment defined by Jordan's media as well as core curriculum materials dealing with Jordanian history and civics, to enter into that of *Islamic Culture* was to enter a world in which modern Jordan did not exist. While Jordan's Hashemite monarchy claims descent from Islam's founder, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as such is absent. Even when discussing the concept of terrorism, where the text focused heavily on Israel as a contemporary manifestation of terrorism, the 2004 "Amman Message," Jordan's primary statement with other Muslim nations against terrorism, only appeared in a later edition.

Instead, *Islamic Culture* presented a world in which public affairs were governed by an Islamic state, a state in which Islamic rather than secular legal codes prevail, a state ruled not by a dynastic monarchy but by a figure appointed by religious scholars who was obligated to follow their dictates. It was a state which wages jihad to spread the rule of Islam, and while respectful of the religious freedoms of minorities under Muslim rule, imposes a special tax on non-Muslim subjects, who are not citizens of the state but *dhimmi* in the classical Islamic sense – subordinate subjects rather than equal citizens.

Given the contemporary focus on a terrorist group which calls itself the Islamic State (IS), it is necessary to note that the phrase "Islamic State" wherever it appears in this article does not refer to this group. Instead "the Islamic state" is a mainstream Islamic concept referring to the political entity which Islamic tradition states Muhammad founded after his migration to the Arabian city of Medina in 622. The term is used so commonly that any Muslim in Jordan with even a slight degree of Islamic education will be familiar with it. What makes this important is that embedding the concept in the education system makes it an easy reference point for Islamist movements competing with a state like Jordan, which is very clearly not an Islamic state.

The textbook's 2013 edition contained six units: introduction, sources and key elements (the Quran, Hadith, Arabic language, Islamic history), aspects of Islamic culture (beliefs, worship, morals), "Islam and Human Relations" (dialogue, jihad, human rights and terrorism), "Islamic Culture and International Issues" (secularism, globalisation, cosmopolitanism, and modernism), and "Cultural Issues and the Formation of the Muslim Person" (youth, gender relations, the status of women in Islam, customs, beauty and the "Place of the Aqsa Mosque in Islam"). The focus of this article relates to how Islamic education has provided a friendly environment for the spread of jihadist ideas in general and al-Qaida recruitment in particular. Therefore, the material presented here largely comes from Unit One, "An Introduction to Islamic Culture," which defined the nature of Islamic identity and community, and Unit Four ("Human Relations") and the subsections within it that focused on jihad and the nature of the state.

Defining Islamic Culture & Identity

Unit One of the curriculum presented an idealized Islamic State reflecting true Islam, yet the vision presented bears no real resemblance to the modern Jordanian state. It is easy to see how someone believing that the Islamic model presented is the only appropriate model for a Muslim society – which is how the text presented it – might cast in doubt the legitimacy of the Hashemite State.

Unit One, entitled "An Introduction to Islamic Culture," included sections on the basic concepts and characteristics of Islamic culture and how Islam was better than other religions or belief systems. The first mention of an Islamic state comes in a section on "Freedom from Sin," which begins with a discussion of common problems in human societies. In explaining why other cultures fail in preventing crime generally and

theft in particular, the textbook explains that (purportedly) there is little theft in Muslim societies because there is an “Islamic state” which provides welfare services and education (although it notes that Islamic education is currently “weak”) as well as a deterrent through “the cutting off of the hand” of those not prevented from theft by these services (see the Appendix and translation section A).

A further segment of relevance in Unit One to the nature of the state comes in discussing the concept of “Balance in Islam.” Several aspects of “balance” are given from different parts of life, and one of them is political life:

Balance in the Political System Between the Authority of the Ruler and the Authority of Religious Scholars: it is religious scholars who appoint the ruler, and then play an advisory role, and he is obligated by the majority of scholars who have authority to issue binding rulings, to establish justice. It is also upon the religious authorities to monitor the ruler and hold him to account, and remove him if desired, and likewise the ruler has the right to be heard and obeyed in things which are obligatory.[12]

Aside from religious education and a limited welfare state, these conceptions are completely alien to modern Jordan. Not only has neither Jordan’s monarchy or any of its ministers ever claimed it to be an Islamic state, while the Islamic punishment of cutting off the hand for theft does not exist in Jordan. Indeed, it would be extremely controversial for a Jordanian public figure to even advocate such a policy. Furthermore, the political model presented here of the role of religious scholars and the ruler stands in stark contrast to how the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan works – the Jordanian king is chosen by rules of succession which are controlled by the previous king, and religious scholars are mere employees of the state who do not even have the right to draft their own sermons.

Unit One also includes section on “Positive Action,” by which it means ways in which Islam aims to change society for the better; it further estranges modern Jordan from the student’s understanding of Islam. This section deepens the association between Islam and the establishment of the state and of jihad - both to spread Islam and intervene in other countries. It is much more consistent with the worldview of a group which calls Muslims to engage in military action abroad, than the modern Jordanian state.

This section presents Islam as being carried out through four kinds of action. One, *dawa wa risaliya*, meaning missionary effort (*dawa*) and the message of Islam (*risaliya*), is entirely peaceful and non-political, focused on preventing moral corruption in society. The second “positive action” relates to the founding of an ill-defined Islamic state:

Two: The **obligation to found a State** of Truth and Goodness. And thus the prophetic migration to the holy city of Medina was obligatory upon all those capable, either men or women. They migrated and risked their lives, sacrificing the financial well-being in the cause of God and in order to found a **State of Islam** [the phrase here is *dawlat al-islam*, not *al-dawla al-islamiya*]. [13]

Note that here as elsewhere, the text takes for granted that students are familiar with the concept of the Islamic state, although in this segment it is described as a “State of Truth” and then “State of Islam,” so the implication is that these are different ways of presenting the same concept.

The segment then goes on by quoting Quran sura 8:72 regarding people’s different obligations, depending on whether they have joined a new entity, exempting Muslims who have not yet migrated to the Islamic state from fighting against a people with whom they have a treaty. This verse has potential implications for modern Jordan given its close, often warm relations with non-Muslim states and frosty but vital peace treaty with Israel. Yet as elsewhere in the book, there is never a connection made between the Islamic principles laid out and Jordan’s current policies, or modern Jordan society in any way.

Three: The **obligation of jihad** in the way of God. For God has imposed upon Muslims an obligation to not stand passively in the face of tyranny and oppression, for God has said, “Fight in the way of God against those who fight you but do not transgress, for God does not love transgressors.’ For Muslims are thus charged with jihad to spread the religion of God to His creation, and to raise oppression on those who are oppressed and

viewed as weak among non-Muslims.[14]

The text then cites Quran sura 4:75, which address those who “are not fighting” to help the oppressed who call upon God to “appoint a protector” and a “helper” – providing a basis for calls of military intervention to either relieve “oppression” or to “spread the religion of God.”

A fourth point, “Depending Upon God,” defines dependence upon God in a way which emphasises the relationship between religion and the state. Summarising the life of the Prophet Muhammad as being “entirely devoted to work, jihad, thinking and planning,” the textbook explains that, “Thus Islam did not suffice with a call to reform and change, but offered to mankind Islamic law which is to be considered a practical path and program to reform societies in every time and place.”[15]

Islamic Culture & Human Relations

Unit Four, dealing with how Muslims relate to non-Muslims, sends contradictory messages, with some passages teaching dialogue and coexistence but others the spread of the rule of Islam through warfare, overlapping heavily with an Islamist (including Salafi-Jihadist) worldview while being foreign to modern Jordan.[16] These deal both with the nature of the state and its foreign relations, in which spreading Islam, including through jihad, is a major goal. Aside from jihad, the unit’s other three sections are Dialogue, Human Rights and Terrorism.

Consider first the topic of foreign relations, where the text explains the purpose of diplomacy as follows:

For it is among the functions of the Muslim state (here *al-dawla al-muslima*, not *al-dawla al-islamiya*) to work for peaceful coexistence, civilizational exchange and promote the spread of Islam in the world through missionary work and dialogue. For the Prophet Muhammad sent letters to kings and rulers to call them to Islam, and these letters which the prophet sent to nearby countries are evidence that the Islamic State is permitted to open embassies in non-Muslim countries in order to foster mutual acquaintance...[17]

There is nothing controversial or “extreme” about this statement regarding the historical basis for diplomatic relations with non-Muslims. Nonetheless, yet again the framework of the “Islamic State” and of foreign relations framed as promoting Islam brings up the contrast between the model of Islam put forward and Jordan’s modern state, which has a peace treaty with Israel and plays a subordinate role as a client state of non-Muslim powers in the international system.

The unit’s section on “Jihad in Islam” was the 2013 edition’s systematic treatment of the concept of jihad (see the Appendix section B).[18] While not inconsistent with mainstream Islamic interpretations, the curriculum’s teachings are a world away from how the contemporary Jordanian state functions, both in terms of how it projects itself rhetorically, and in terms of its actual policy. The text repeatedly refers to the “spread of Islam” as a key function of jihad, and says that jihad “empowers Muslims” to, among other things, “to command the good, and this means that righteousness prevails with guidance from God, and also to prevent that which is prohibited...” Yet not only does Jordan not engage in jihad to spread Islam, it also does not have a police force similar to Saudi Arabia’s Commission for the Enjoining of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, which would be needed to carry out what this text defined as a key goal of jihad.

One key segment lays out a three-fold outline for how to deal with non-Muslims living in the Muslim state. The first step is to proclaim Islam peaceably. If non-Muslims refuse Islam, they are to be given the option of retaining their religion under Muslim rule while pay a religious tax, or *jizya*. What is implicit in this passage and those which precede it is that the rule of an Islamic state comes with the spread of Islam. The third step, for those who rejection option two, is warfare.[19]

What is notable here is that Jordan has a substantial Christian minority, and it does not require them to pay a *jizya* tax, but instead extends to them equal rights. The footnote citation for the term “*jizya*” defines it as “money which the infidel pays in exchange for his safety and security under the rule of Islam.” Furthermore, while textbook’s definition of jihad does set down civilized rules of war – to not engage in abuse, plunder or unnecessary killing – it makes clear that the purpose of jihad is to spread Islam, or at least, the rule of an Islamic

state. The section ends with a passage which presents relations with non-Muslims as being characterised by perpetual warfare, contradicting other sections of the book which talk of dialogue.

Thus God established this truth in His book, that infidels' combat against Muslims is something which continues, and their efforts to achieve their goals do not end, and reality also establishes this. Thus we find that the infidels' fight against Muslims never ends, and their efforts to push others away from the religion of God have not ended, and thus there was a commandment to confront their force and aggression, with force that deters them and prevents their aggression.

The 2013 curriculum followed this with a section on "Types of Jihad" (see Appendix section C). The teachings are mainstream and uncontroversial, discussing topics such as the different ways in which a believe can engage in jihad (missionary work, personal engagement in warfare, support for those who do), the difference between individual and collective duty to jihad, and how jihad relates to the well-known division between "Mecca Suras" and "Medina Suras" in the Quran. The segment dealing with members of other religions teaches that jihad does not mean forced conversion, but as with the passage above, treats the religious rights of non-Muslims as linked to the acceptance of Muslim rule. This passage is followed by the section on "Human Rights," which includes an instruction on religious freedom. The instruction is framed in very broad terms consistent with classical Islamic concepts of religious freedom for non-Muslims.

Unit Four also has a section on terrorism, but it defined the problem in a way entirely unrelated to modern Jordan's conflict with Islamist terrorist groups. After a discussion of general definitions, the text focuses on pre-1948 Zionist organizations and after that the state of Israel as key examples of terrorist actors, along with other non-Muslim groups such as the Italian mafia, Neo-Nazi groups and drug cartels. The one Muslim example it gives is the historical example of the group known as the 11-12 century Assassins (*al-hashashin*). The book's one reference to al-Qaida and its activities read:

And following the events of September 11, America declared its war on terrorism, and this war focused on Afghanistan. Thus the Taliban regime was brought down and the al-Qaida organization was driven from the country, and America also occupied Iraq. And thus combatting terrorism became a means of imperial occupation of peoples.

This may be contrasted with both the public rhetoric and actual policy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which is an ally of the West and is solely engaged in military action against organisations which claim to be based on Islam, notably al-Qaida and IS. This section of the 2013 edition made it hard to imagine that at the time the book was published Jordan was engaged in a war against the organisation mentioned, or that the modern Muslim world had a problem with terrorism at all.

Islamic Education Moves Toward Modern Jordan, 2015-2017

Signaling a clear move away from the classical Islamic framework for university education, two revisions to the curriculum brought about a dramatic recasting of some of the issues highlighted in the 2013 version – anything resembling the classical Islamic state disappeared as the text was rewritten in what appears to have been a conscious effort to counter jihadist thought. The doctrine of jihad was both de-emphasized and recast to focus entirely on self-defense – no more jihad to spread Islam or impose virtue. The third edition was published in 2015 under the title *Lectures in Islamic Culture* [20]. It was followed two years later with a fourth edition entitled simply, *Islamic Culture* [21] (referred hereafter as simply the 2015 or 2017 editions).

The de-emphasis on the framework of the "Islamic state" mainly takes place in the 2017 edition. Thus the 2015 edition retains teachings on how the Islamic State provides for the welfare and education of subjects, and includes the punishment of cutting off the hand,[22] one of the most obviously antiquated aspects. Because it was placed in the section explaining why "Divinity" was a key characteristic of Islamic culture, this reinforced the identification of Islam with these concepts. The 2017 edition deletes this entire segment of the "Divinity" discussion – both the Islamic state as a welfare provider and the cutting off the hand are removed. The only reference to the "Islamic State" comes later in the section in a discussion of the concept of Shura, or

“consultation,” and is framed purely as a historical reference to the 7th century and not as a permanent feature. [23] By contrast, the passage presenting the king as being appointed and subject to accountability by Muslim scholars is retained through the 2017 edition.[24]

Perhaps spurred by concern of Jordan’s contribution to foreign fighter flows, which by early 2015 was widely recognized to be a problem,[25] the 2015 edition made a notable change with regard to Unit One’s “Positive Action” section - the one focused on the founding of an Islamic state and jihad to spread Islam. Both the 2015 and 2017 editions delete the reference to hijra for the purpose of building a “State of Islam” and the references to jihad which follow, including the one “to spread the religion of God.” The only reference to a “state” which remains is in the heading, but it is changed from “The Obligation to Establish a State of Truth and Goodness,” to “The Obligation to Establish a State of Truth and Goodness in Practice.” Then the paragraph the phrase “in the way of God” originally preceded “in order to establish a State of Islam,” but with the latter deleted the changes present “hijra” as a spiritual or charitable effort instead of one oriented toward affairs of state or warfare.

2015: Teachings on Jihad Transformed

The most dramatic change comes over the course of the 2015 and 2017 editions in terms of the doctrine of jihad and with it the broader discussion of how Muslims are to engage with the non-Muslim world. As is clear from the discussion above, the original textbook’s fourth section, “Islam and Human Relations,” was written as if it were a compromise between the view which prevailed during and shortly after the Arab conquests in Islam’s early centuries and modern Jordan’s peaceful relations with other states, having one section on the need for dialogue and the next on the role of jihad in spreading Muslim rule. This ends in 2015.

The 2015 edition modified the “Jihad in Islam” section to remove any sense of jihad as a means of spreading Islam. While the section maintains the structure of the 2013 edition, passages which referred to “spreading Islam” through jihad are removed and jihad is reframed as entirely revolving around two purposes: “self-defense for Muslims,” and “the defense of the right of non-Muslims to choose their own religion”.[26] Thus references to “fighting polytheists” which appear in early Islamic sources are imaginatively reinterpreted to be about religious freedom: “Thus God commanded Muslims to fight polytheists because they were preventing people from hearing the call of Islam, and to enter into it if they wish, which fulfills the second purpose of jihad.”[27] Nonetheless the “three options” of (i) preaching, (ii) acceptance of Muslim rule and (iii) fighting remains, while the keeping of the passage on the application of the *jizya* as a tax on religious minorities[28] is the most glaring inconsistency with contemporary Jordanian practice.

The 2015 edition also reprints in full the “Amman Message,” a 2004 declaration among 84 governments coordinated by Jordan which condemned religious terrorism and put forward a vision of Islam focused on coexistence. This allowed the modern state to enter into the textbook for the first time, as part of the statement declares, “For the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has adopted a path which brings into focus the true picture of Islam...”[29]

2017: Completing the Transformation to Modern Jordan

The 2017 edition completes this transformation, with the unit dealing with relations with non-Muslims now the first time setting forth a systematic polemic against interpretations of Islam which are more militant than those held by the Jordanian monarchy, nearly erasing jihad entirely. For unclear reasons the “Amman Message” section is deleted, but “Jihad” is no longer surfacing in the table of contents, but instead is relegated to a short subsection.

The first two parts provide a 10-page section which for the first time contains a systematic argument against jihad-focused interpretations of Islam which conflict with the kingdom’s official stance. This includes explanations of how Islam is compatible with religious diversity and the “wisdom in disagreement.” It also puts forward reasons for rejecting Salafi-Jihadism – without ever referencing this concept directly – by talking about different points of view in Islam and how extremist narratives are created by selective citations from Islamic sources. The segment is rather superficial – for example, it does not mention the four Sunni schools of law by

name or discuss the differences between them in any degree of detail – but there is present a conscious effort to counter what Jordan officials views as hostile ideologies for the first time.[30] The section on “Dialogue with Others” then lays out the case for dialogue as a component of Islam, including dialogue with not only Christians and Jews but also “worshippers of idols.”[31] The multiple positive references to Muslim-Jewish coexistence and dialogue in both sections are notable.

With jihad deemphasized, the new unit dealing with relations with others is entitled, “The Theory of the Clash of Civilizations.”[32] The purpose of the chapter is to frame conflicts between societies in general terms unrelated to Islam, explaining that the concept began with the Greeks and was accentuated by the Cold War, followed by an extensive discussion of Samuel Huntington’s famous book by this title. The text explains that civilizational clash is a negative aspect of human life but a real one, and that this is the reason Islam established jihad, but solely as a means of self-defense.[33]

The discussion of jihad itself covers just one page and omits all the passages contained in the previous two editions which are incompatible with current Jordanian policy. The core “three options” passage on (i) preaching, (ii) submission and (iii) fighting is gone, and with it any reference to the *jizya* as well as all citations to the “Jihad and Righteousness” hadith collection by Bukhari, one of the chief collectors of the sayings of Islam’s founder during the early centuries. The text repeats the formulation from the 2015 edition about jihad being solely related to self-defense for Muslims and the defense of religious freedom for non-Muslims, and tells a famous story of the Caliph Omar visiting a church and promising to make sure it is not converted into a mosque. The only source cited is a Quranic version related to people who are oppressed engaging in fighting.[34] Ultimately, Huntington gets more space than jihad.

The 2017 edition also adds new material in a reorganized Unit Six on “Extremism” and “*takfir*,” both of which are written in general terms but are sufficiently direct that the average reader will understand that they are attempting to refute the Salafi-Jihadist worldview. In discussing *takfir* – the practice of declaring a Muslim to be an apostate, thus allowing him to be killed under traditional interpretations – this is framed as a “dangerous” doctrine which can only be applied by the community of scholars. Yet even this treatment illustrates the weakness of the text since the treatment is so superficial that it is unlikely to convince anyone who already has opinions about the matter, giving no positive examples or even mentioning the widely-known fact that a Muslim can be executed for apostasy. Finally, the section on Terrorism, contained in this same unit, contains the same superficial and biased treatment as the 2013 edition. [35]

Correcting “Misunderstandings” – A Guided Revision

Jordanian officials never admit that the country’s Islamic education was responsible for its contribution to modern jihadism. Instead they portray curriculum changes as necessary only to correct “misunderstanding” by certain students. This came across in three interviews with academics at the University of Jordan’s Sharia College, including one with Dr. Sharaf al-Qada, the lead editor of the 2015 and 2017 editions of the Islamic Culture textbook.[36] When asked about any relationship between Jordan’s Islamic education and recruitment by groups such as al-Qaida, Qada emphasised that the texts had always taught coexistence and dialogue, but that some passages – such as references to jihad as a means to “spread Islam” – were “misunderstood” by some students. As this article has already noted, Qada is correct in asserting that even the 2013 text did include segments promoting coexistence and dialogue. Yet Qada also commented that Jordan had long had a problem with students holding erroneous views, recollecting that after the attacks of September 11, 2001 he had gotten into arguments with students who believed the attacks were legitimate.

Regarding the new textual material in the 2017 edition, Qada acknowledged that this had been drafted with the intent of countering what the Sharia College viewed as erroneous views of Islam, and especially of jihad. Regarding segments of sections of the pre-2017 edition which on their face taught that jihad should be used to extend the rule of Islam, Qada insisted that this had never been the intent, since references to fighting always related to self-defense. Nonetheless the text itself did not expressly say there is a right of non-Muslims to reject not only Islam but also Muslim rule. As noted above, this problem is eliminated in the 2017 edition as all passages linking jihad to Islamic rule of non-Muslims were deleted.

Conclusion

Jordan's transformation of its university core curriculum on Islamic studies is a notable attempt to reduce factors which have helped make it a major jihadist recruiting ground. At a minimum, the reform ensures that the university curriculum is not reinforcing the Salafi-Jihadist narrative - something which was the case up to 2015. While Jordan's international partners will be pleased that it is bringing its university curriculum into line with its public rhetoric, one might also consider the impact of having waited this long - 30 years from al-Qaida's founding and two decades after it became globally prominent - in order to stop promoting "soft jihadism." This study may be viewed as a starting point for broader changes instituted in parallel over the past three years, including to education at lower levels and also restrictions on pro-jihadist imams preaching in mosques, which further studies may expand upon.

Appendix: Translations from *Islamic Culture* (2013 edition)

Section A

"By contrast, in Islam God has laid down beforehand preventative measures to the crime of theft, and these include:

Guaranteeing support for each subject of the **Islamic State**, whether through the state itself by providing work and helping those in need - and this is something also present in many Western countries - or through societal aid (mutual assistance from relatives). This is an obligatory system for which Islam is exemplary.

Faith education which purifies a person from crime by reminding him of God [describes religious education further].... A range of societal institutions participate in this education, such as the family, the mosque and schools and the state by all its parts, including official media. This education is not present in western countries, and weak at the present time in the **Islamic State**."

Declaring publicly the punishment for theft, which is a means of deterrence, because simply declaring the punishment deters many [discusses the concept of deterrence further].... And furthermore Islam has established a solution to the crime of theft for those who are not prevented from it by previously discussed measures - and they are just a few - and thus a punishment has been established, which is the **cutting off of the hand**, upon establishment of guilt with all the conditions of this crime beyond doubt.[37]

Section B - "Jihad in Islam" [38]

1 - The term "jihad" is taken from *jahd*, sincerity in a matter and excess of exertion in it, or else *juhd*, which means exertion of energy, and here it is meant to mean exerting all possible in the spread of the call of Islam and defense of it.

And thus **jihad** comes to mean fighting infidels and fighting them, and responding to their aggression. The truth of jihad: the greatest possible exertion in beating back the enemy by hand or through speech. For among the goals of Islam is to achieve peace, to spread justice and mercy among people, to provide security to all God's creation [cites a series of Quranic verses of a general religious nature, not related to warfare].

For Islam has commanded its followers to repeat the words of peace in their day after each prayer [cites a Quranic verse], in order to teach them that peace is one of the names of God, and to explain to them that peace can only be achieved through compliance with the commands of God. To confirm the importance of peace in life, God has made the greetings of peace to Muslims, commanding them that they are to say this to one another. For it causes wrongs to be forgotten and entrance into Paradise, as it is a greeting of the people of Paradise to one another, and the greeting of the Angels upon entering it.

And thus looking into jihad and judgments related to it finds that it was established to provide security, **spread Islam**, to achieve goodness, push back evil, prevent oppression, and to prevent the rule of the law of the jungle.

2 – “The legitimacy of fighting in previous divine messages” – The textbook further describes jihad as a principle continued by Islam from earlier revelations:

Islam is not alone in legislating jihad, but we find it established in the message of all prophets for the same reason it exists in Islam....[quotes the Quran].

3 – “The Place of Jihad in Islam” – This section is the most systematic explanation of the theological purpose of jihad. It introduces the idea by citing a hadith which says, “Prayer is the pillar and head of Islam, while its core and summit is jihad,” and then cites a Quran version which refers not to jihad but to Muslims being “empowered” to carry out Islam, including the principle of “commanding the good and forbidding vice.”[39] The text explains that jihad is to fulfill Islam, and not to be carried out for bad motives or in a way that is abusive:

Thus jihad empowers Muslims upon the earth, and by this empowerment makes it possible to command the good, and this means that righteousness prevails with guidance from God, and also to prevent that which is prohibited, which means the elimination of evil and corruption on the earth, and the suppression of error, and put an end to the forces of oppression and tyranny. For the verse makes clear that Muslims, upon being empowered, are not to fall into contentiousness, are not to engage in brutality or oppress people... [lists other abuses such as theft, “to find delight in shedding blood,” etc.]... but instead it is to empower them to undertake prayer, and give zakat, and seek to achieve goodness through commanding the good and forbidding the prohibited.

The text goes on to explain purposes for which jihad was established.

And jihad was established for two main reasons:

First: **to spread Islam**, to open the way before it, to remove obstacles which are in its way, following God’s command to spread His religion, and extend His law to all people. As the prophet said, if the Emir is to give an order to an army or raiding party, the order would be that if it came upon polytheists, then the emir would present three options:

1 – To call them to Islam, and inform them about it and call them to enter into it, and if they agreed, then they would become among the assembly of Muslims.

2 – If they do not adopt Islam, and do not enter into it, the Emir would offer to allow them to stay within their religion, on the condition that they not raise their hands to fight Muslims, and agree to pay an amount of money called the “jizya,” which is a tax upon non-Muslims as their participation in the Muslim state, similar to how Muslim contribute the zakat [Islamic charity].

3 – If they were to reject the first and second options, then Muslims are to declare war on the enemy, and prepare a number of men to fight them. For the third choice meant calling upon God for help in fighting them, to requite them for their error, strike their forces which interfere with the spread of Islam and thus prevent giving guidance to people and spreading the word of God.

Second: To defend Muslims, and their doctrine, to protect their security and their land, to defend them against danger which threatens their state. For God has said that the infidels will not end their fighting of Muslims with the intent of pushing them from the religion of God, or to tempt them away and mislead them. [The text quotes a verse in support.[40]]

Thus God established this truth in His book, that infidels’ combat against Muslim is something which continues, and their efforts to achieve their goals do not end, and reality also establish this. Thus we find that the infidels’ fight against Muslims never ends, and their efforts to push others away from the religion of God have not ended, and thus there was a commandment to confront their force and aggression, with force that deters them and prevents their aggression.

Section C[41]

4 – “Types of Jihad” – This section sets out three kinds of jihad. The first is jihad “by word and by missionary work,” corresponding with the peaceful spread of Islam already laid out. The second is “Jihad by one’s resources and oneself,” which is framed as obtaining paradise through sacrifice of one’s self and funds. Interestingly, the Quranic verse cited does not mention either jihad or any other word for fighting, but simply obtaining paradise through self-sacrifice, but the textbook’s context makes the martial intent clear. And indeed this is immediately followed by a third kind of jihad, which is “Jihad by equipping warriors – providing them with what they require in terms of weapons, equipment and other needs,” and then quotes a hadith saying, “He who has equipped a warrior in the way of God has himself gone to war, and he who succeeds a warrior in the way of God through good has also gone to war.”

Note that this last hadith is one of a number of points in the 2013 edition in which it cites “The Book of Jihad & Righteousness,” a collection of hadith from Bukhari, one of the two prominent classical collectors of the purported sayings of Islam’s founder. What makes it notable is that the 2013 edition relied on it heavily, but it disappears completely in the 2017 edition. Citations to it are reduced, but still exist, in the 2015 edition.

5 – “The Obligation to Fight” – This section explains the theological distinction between when jihad as *fard kifaya* (a collective obligation, or one fulfilled if a sufficient number of Muslims engage in the activity) and a *fard ayn* (an individual obligation, or an obligation incumbent upon all Muslims). The text explains that the latter applies especially when there is a sudden attack on Muslim territory. It does not explain when the collective jihad obligation comes into play.[42]

6 – “The Wisdom in Delaying the Sanctioning of Jihad” – This section explains the distinction often made between “Mecca Suras” and “Medina Suras” in that the former are entirely peaceful and the latter contain injunctions related to warfare. It explains that the reason for the distinction is “likely” due to the need for spiritual preparation and the presentations of proofs before jihad is authorized, mirroring the chronological order established above.[43]

7 – “Jihad and members of other religions” – This section explains that jihad does not mean forced conversion, citing examples of the protection of the rights of religious practice by other religions in the Muslim world. Unlike the classical definition of jihad, it does not limit this right to monotheistic minorities like Jews and Christians, but simply states “followers of other religions.” Given changes made to later editions of the book to focus on the defense of minorities’ religious rights, it is worth quoting the text’s application of jihad to protecting non-Muslim subjects of a Muslim state:[44]

It is necessary to emphasize that jihad not only sanctions the defense of Muslims, but it is also to defend non-Muslim subjects (*ahl al-dhima*) who are under the protection of Muslims and who are their subjects. And jihad is also sanctioned to raise oppression from people in every land....

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Notes

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[2] Richard Barrett, *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*, The Soufan Group, October 2017, 12. The figure given by this source is lower than those quoted in *al-Ghad*. However, on a per capita basis, Jordan is the largest contributor of foreign fighters in the Arab world by a wide margin - even if the lower number of 3,000 is taken as more accurate; URL: <http://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017.pdf>.

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- [10] Ahmad Nufal et al, *Islamic Culture & Modern Issues (al-thaqafa al-islamiya wa qadaya al-asr*, which can also be more literally translated as "Islamic Culture & Issues of the Age), Amman: Hamid House (*dar hamid*) for Publishing & Distribution, 2013. A. Nufal is the lead editor of an editorial team with 19 other members from the Sharia College faculty at the University of Jordan in Amman.
- [11] For example, see course syllabi at the University of Jordan; URL: <http://registration.ju.edu.jo/StudyPlans/2202frnci.pdf> ; Irbil National University; URL: <http://www.inu.edu.jo/Uploads/%D9%85%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AA-pdf/11791123631.pdf> ; Zarqa University; URL: http://zu.edu.jo/ar/Collage/Science and Technology/Dept InternetTechnology/files/A_its_s_7.pdf and Balqa Vocational University; URL: http://www.bau.edu.jo/bauar/Colleges/Alia/media/Diploma_Accounting.pdf
- [12] A. Nufal, p. 32.
- [13] A. Nufal, pp. 40-41.
- [14] A. Nufal, p. 41.
- [15] A. Nufal, p. 41.
- [16] A. Nufal, pp. 163, 212.
- [17] A. Nufal, p. 181.
- [18] A. Nufal, pp. 183.
- [19] A. Nufal, pp. 186.
- [20] Sharaf al-Qada et al (Eds.). *Lectures in Islamic Culture*, Amman: The Hamid House and Office for Publishing, 2015.
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- [27] al-Qada 2015, p.171.
- [28] al-Qada 2015, p. 171.
- [29] al-Qada 2015, pp. 188-194.
- [30] al-Qada 2017, pp. 94-103.
- [31] al-Qada 2017, pp. 104-108.

[32] al-Qada 2017, pp. 109-114.

[33] al-Qada 2017, pp. 110-113.

[34] Sura Hajj 39.

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[36] Interview with Dr. Sharaf al-Qada in Amman, October 22, 2017.

[37] A. Nufal, pp. 24, 25.

[38] A. Nufal, pp. 185- 187.

[39] The hadith is cited to from the Kitab al-Iman from the Stories of al-Tarmathi, while the Quranic verse is al-Hajj 41.

[40] Baqara p.217.

[41] A. Nufal, p. 188.

[42] A. Nufal, p. 188-189.

[43] A. Nufal, p. 190.

[44] A. Nufal, pp.190-191.