



2008.12.01

Bernard Rougier, *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam among Palestinians in Lebanon*. Trans. Pascale Ghazaleh. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007. Pp. x, 333. ISBN 978-0-674-02529-5.

Review by John P. Sullivan, Emergency Operations Bureau, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (jpsulliv@lasd.org)

Radicalization is a hot topic in intelligence, national security, law enforcement, and international relations circles these days. Policymakers and security analysts are trying to understand the global allure of Islamist extremism in order to contain its violent expression as terrorism. While radicalization and the emergence of militant groups are not new, understanding specifically of the Islamist case is poor. Similarly, while many think tank reports attempt to fathom Islamist radicalization, few get beyond the basics. *Everyday Jihad* by Bernard Rougier is a welcome exception.

Rougier, a researcher in Middle East Affairs at Sciences-Po in Paris, uses southern Lebanon as a case study for understanding contemporary Islamist radicalization. In doing so, he synthesizes academic research and fieldwork to penetrate the mysteries of Lebanon's Palestinian refugee communities. There are currently about 370,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Rougier examines the lives and ideological evolution of Palestinian nationalists, Shi'a and Sunni fundamentalists, and the path toward salafist-jihadism in the refugee camps. The interpretation of sacred texts is conditioned by unemployment, poverty, despair and deliberate indoctrination to fuel global jihad.

The five Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon stem from the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948: Burj al-Barajneh near Beirut; Nahr al-Barid near Tripoli; Ain al-Helweh near Saida; and Rashidiyyeh and Burj al-Shamali near Tyre. One camp in particular—Ain al-Helweh—is the focus of much of this book. Islamism flourishes in these long-term settlements, excluded as they are from the Lebanese mainstream. Rougier describes this marginalization, the competition with Maronite Christians, the impact of Israeli-Syrian conflict, the rise and decline of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as an ideological force, the impact of the *Intifadas* in Israel, and Lebanon's civil wars.

Everyday Jihad is divided into two major parts. Part One looks at the Salafist dynamic, including the competition between Iranian Shi'a influence (in part, via Hezbollah) and Sunni fundamentalism. Part Two looks at the impact of civil war, Salafist proselytization (*Da'wa*), and particularly the central place of Islamist Institutes, as well as the role of the jihadi underground in forging the jihadist vision. In addition, the book features a comprehensive conclusion, a table of groups discussed, and ample notes to verify and expand upon Rougier's findings.

The introduction examines the political geography of Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps. These camps initially favored the nationalism expressed by the various factions of the PLO, especially Yassir Arafat's Fatah movement. After a series of confrontations between Syria and the PLO, Palestinian groups were marginalized, in order to limit their participation in internal Lebanese politics. A weakened Fatah reduced challenges to Syrian

hegemony. After the 1990 war, the camps were subjected to severe security measures. In addition, the Palestinian population in the camps was dispersed to forestall any coordinated political leadership.

Ain al-Helweh near Saida is the most politically diverse member of the camp constellation. Built in 1949, it spans about 300 square miles and is home to an estimated 32,645 inhabitants. Until the 1982 Israeli invasion, Fatah effectively governed Saida and its environs. When the Palestinian factions evacuated the camp for points north, Islamists organized its defense, building their resistance credentials. Groups close to Iran and with a Khomenist orientation briefly filled the political-military vacuum. This base of religious support in turn weakened the PLO and its hold on nationalist politics. At the same time, the camps effectively became ungovernable zones of poverty and delinquency.

This authority vacuum also attracted the first expressions of the Salafist ideology nurtured in Peshawar, Pakistan, a staging area for Arab volunteers fighting against the Soviet Union in the Afghan War of 1979–89. As a result, Islamism steadily supplanted nationalism as a unifying force in the camps. This included an Islamist duality between Hezbollah and emerging salafist-jihadism with an emphasis on jihad as an individual duty. The concomitant Islamic sense of belonging strengthened the development of a closed society:

By looking closely at the jihadist networks in the Ain al-Helweh camp, it becomes possible to understand the real-time production of the salafist-jihadist ideology, the way preachers played a decisive role in reframing social reality exclusively in religious categories, and the deep changes that these networks effect in self and other (21).

The replacement of the influence of traditional Sunni schools of jurisprudence by salafist-jihadism laid the ideological foundations for violent action in the camps during the 1990s:

Rhetorical violence has paved the way for physical violence, whose legitimacy is trumpeted through the teaching and preaching networks It was not an accident that a video aired by al-Qa'ida in September 2006 showed a young Saudi—one of the nineteen operatives who died on September 11—dedicating a poem to “Abu Mahjin the Palestinian,” the main leader of the Ain al-Helweh jihadist network (22).

The shift from Iranian to Sunni influence is examined in chapter 1. The ideological influence of the Iranian Revolution led to the displacement of the PLO and Fatah by Shaykhs linked to Hezbollah and Iran. Rougier provides a detailed description of the birth of Palestinian Islamism and the subsequent transition from Iranian to salafist-jihadist tutelage. In the camps, Hezbollah was hampered by a combination of nationalist, pro-Fatah, pro-Arafat loyalties and Shi'a-Sunni sectarian differences. Salafist-jihadi Islamists exploited these factors to secure their own ascendancy. A jihadist core resulted. An example is the clandestine *Ushat al-Ansar* militia in Ain al-Helweh: “The network may be decentralized, but it is not fragmented: despite the names that distinguish them, members share an ideological core, a militant, jihadist conception of Islam” (65).

The ideological influence of Peshawar on Ain al-Helweh is amply detailed in chapter 2, which treats the influence of Abdallah Azzam, films of whose martyrdom dominate student life and the influential Muslim Student Union. Saudi influences, the growth of al-Qa'ida, and the insertion of religious parties in the camps are also discussed. Rougier considers key

religious parties that identify with the global Islamist movement, including the Combatant Islamic Movement (al-Haraka al-Islamiyya al Mujahida) and the Partisan's League (Usbat al Ansar). Chapter 3 expands this discussion to illustrate the struggle for primacy against traditional non-jihadist movements.

The profound influence of the civil war is a pervasive topic of Part Two. Chapter 4 describes inter-group conflict in the struggle to control the Ain al-Helweh camp. Chapter 5, "Topics for Preaching," explores the deep influence of teachers and preachers, stressing the writings of Egypt's Sayyid Qutb. The role of Islamic institutes, and of their students and faculty as an Islamist vanguard is the subject of chapter 6, while chapter 7 is devoted to underground jihad, with attention to the solidification of Islamist thought as a dominant influence in the camps and an examination of network development.

In his book's conclusion, Rougier highlights the interplay between global and local jihadism:

Whatever the nature of the ties between Islamists in Lebanon—or some of them—and Osama bin Laden or Ayman al-Zawahiri, the salafist-jihadist phenomenon exists autonomously: its development does not depend on "international terrorist networks" (275).

This is an important observation. Privatized utopia and violence replaced reliance on states. Where once Palestine was central to a *Palestinian national* struggle, it is now the locus of a *global Islamist* struggle. As a police officer dedicated to understanding the causes and proliferation of political violence, I find the underlying group dynamics that triggered and sustained this shift essential to understanding the emergence and spread of extremist groups. Rougier's contribution here is significant.

The rich—albeit sometimes dense—documentation of *Everyday Jihad* provides valuable insight into Lebanon's contested political space and shows how radical religious ideology has replaced traditional nationalism as a driver of jihadist networks. This illumination of the intricate social relationships used to seize political control and stimulate violence on a global plane is a valuable contribution to our understanding of Islamist extremism and contemporary political violence. Students of the Middle East, strategic analysts seeking to understand the Shi'a-Sunni divide, and counterterrorism analysts will find this book a useful and thoughtful counterbalance to the many sensationalized accounts that cross their desks.