Review Exchange

Lessons in Political Anatomy and Interdisciplinary Translation

***A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi*. By Joas Wagemakers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 290 pp. $28.99 Paper**

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In *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi*, Joas Wagemakers introduces Abu Muḥammad al-Maqdisī's writings as important parts of the complex intellectual terrain of Salafi movements today: movements constituted by diverse actors with different notions of how to emulate their pious forbearers (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥīn*). Today, the term Salafism (or *Salafiyya* in Arabic) is one that particular Sunnis use to represent themselves and their austere approach to Islam. These Sunnis apply a strict creed and religious methodology to achieve what they deem to be Islamic purity (Henri Lauziere, "The Construction of Salafiyya: Reconsidering Salafism from the Perspective of Conceptual History," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 [2010]: 369). Wagemakers aims to classify the identities of Salafis according to specific social-scientific terminology (e.g., jihadi-Salafi, quietist-jihadi Salafi, etc.), to describe how violent or peaceful they are. In particular, he seeks to situate the identity and intellectual contributions of prominent Salafi thinker Abu Muḥammad al-Maqdisī within one of these social-scientific groups. Wagemakers also attempts to render al-Maqdisī's name more familiar to Westerners, who are largely unaware of Maqdisī's intellectual influence on Islamists today (such as September 11, 2001 mastermind, Abū Muṣ'ab al-Zarqāwī).

   With this book, Wagemakers contributes to a body of literature on the "anatomy of the Salafi movement," which aims to classify the identities of particular Salafis according to their respective proclivities for violence

(see Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29 [2006]: 207–40). Wiktorowicz distinguished three types of Salafis: "purists" (who focus on non-violent methods of propagation), "politicos" (who engage in political debate to espouse their beliefs), and "jihadis" (who use violence to advance their cause). He contended that all Salafis shared a common creed, which involved strict adherence to God's oneness and a desire to eliminate human involvement in dictating the law. Yet, Wiktorowicz found that Salafis differed with respect to their perceptions of how to live according to that creed today. Ultimately, Wiktorowicz's goal was to guide American counter-terrorism policy on these subjects, and to help American policy-makers promote peaceful actors (i.e., "purists"), who might counterbalance the influence of violent activists within Salafi movements.

Wagemakers begins his analysis of al-Maqdisī by suggesting that Wiktorowicz's typology is incomplete, that it distorts our understanding of Salafi activists by failing to address the fact that all Salafis support jihad. Wagemakers wishes to hyphenate social-scientific terms for representing Salafi identities (e.g., "quietist-jihadi") to show that some Salafis (such as al-Maqdisī) support certain violent acts but generally endorse peaceful modes of promoting their beliefs (8–10). Wagemakers terms al-Maqdisī a "quietist-jihadi" to connote both al-Maqdisī's commitment to propagate a Salafi message through teaching and his support of violent jihad, and suggests that such hybrid classification categories better capture the identities of the Salafi thinkers.[1] This aspect of the book puts Wagemakers in conversation with policy-oriented research on how to use social-scientific typologies to understand the identities of radical Islamists.

Yet, Wagemakers' account of al-Maqdisī goes beyond an attempt to classify his essential identity and analyzes al-Maqdisī's works to show how he transforms key Salafi concepts for political purposes. He shows, for instance, how al-Maqdisī draws upon Wahhabi sources to reconfigure important notions of communal belonging (notions al-Maqdisī's readers associate with their Islamic identities), and argues that al-Maqdisī redeploys these concepts in ways that urge his readers to protect their community by waging jihad against their governments. In particular, Wagemakers shows how al-Maqdisī develops Wahhabi notions of *al-walā' wa'l barā'* — notions that connote "loyalty to the worship of God alone and the disavowal of polytheism and its people and showing enmity to them" (167) — to urge Salafis to renounce their governments. Al-Maqdisī, like other Salafis, apparently depicts this practice of loyalty

and disavowal as a requisite act for being a true Muslim. Wagemakers, however, suggests al-Maqdisī differs from other such Salafi writers in that al-Maqdisī depicts the laws all Muslim governments currently uphold as man-made laws that violate the *sharī'a*. Al-Maqdisī asserts that following such laws and following the men who endorse them, is tantamount to worshipping idols, which stand in the places of Allah and his laws. For this reason, al-Maqdisī calls upon all Muslims to renounce their governments. From Wagemakers's analysis, the political theorist can see al-Maqdisī's rendering of *al-walā' wa'l barā'* as a conceptual cue that urges his readers to protect their community by casting out false idols and waging jihad against them.[2]

   This aspect of *A Quietist Jihadi*, in which Wagemakers explores how al-Maqdisī redeploys Salafi categories for political ends, stands in contrast to his analysis in other parts of the book, in which Wagemakers casts al-Maqdisī as a "quietist," a "jihadi," or both. The passages in which al-Maqdisī's work is depicted as part of a discursive tradition, constituted by utterances and writings over time, would find a methodological home amid certain scholarship in comparative political theory. In comparative political theory, diverse scholars (from Roxanne Euben to Michaelle Browers) analyze intellectual contents of Islamists' works as part of a dynamic discursive tradition. Unlike the policy-oriented scholars mentioned above, who seek to anatomize an essential Salafi identity, political theorists generally depict forms of Islamic identity as dynamic, fluid expositions of ideas — ideas that are malleable human constructs. As Euben puts it, "[u]nderstood as a discursive tradition, rather than a fixed essence, Islam captures what is imagined as continuous and unitary in dialectical relationship to those concrete articulations and enactments by which it is transformed and adapted in different contexts for plural purposes" ("Review Symposium: Understanding Suicide Terror," *Perspectives on Politics* 5 [2007]: 131).

   We find in Wagemakers' book a tension between two fields of scholarship and how they study identity: those who search for the essential and those who analyze the malleable; those exploring things anatomical and those contemplating things discursive. We find an implicit desire to borrow teachings from these two distinct philosophies of knowledge, without a clear map of how to bring them together. Wagemakers seeks, on the one hand, to understand the rudiments of al-Maqdisī's ideas and to explain their influence on other Salafi thinkers. Yet he also wishes to offer policy-oriented readers shorthand for how to classify al-Maqdisī within a complex group of thinkers and activists. It is unclear, from this

account, how al-Maqdisī's ideas relate to his identity as an influential Salafi thinker.

Wagemakers' work on al-Maqdisī, which straddles a methodological line between excavating his political anatomy and analyzing his works as part of a Salafi discursive tradition, shows policy analysts a way toward a social-scientific middle ground that could offer greater clarity on Salafi writings, their novel intellectual contributions and how such novelty could inspire their students. Yet this work shows us that to reach that middle-ground, scholars will need to bring their analysis of Salafi political theory, as part of a discursive tradition, into greater conversation with their analysis of (a non-essentialized) Salafi identity. Wagemakers, for instance, characterizes people like al-Maqdisī as "quietists" — those averse to engaging in direct political action and favor *dawa'* (or teaching to call Salafis to action) — and classifies certain ideas, such as loyalty and disavowal, as "quietist." However, such categorization of people and ideas as "quietist" or "jihadi" keeps us from understanding how the vague lines between these scholarly communities break down, and how someone or some idea that seems "quietist" can inspire al-Zarqāwī or the plotters of September 11, 2001. Policy-minded scholars who wish to understand the conceptual basis for Salafi identity should borrow more from political theory. That is, they should integrate three areas of study: (1) how Islamists render key concepts in their texts (concepts like loyalty and disavowal); (2) how those concepts relate to the ways they characterize their own identities; and (3) how both of those things relate to the actions these writers espouse. Such an integrated approach would help scholars appreciate complex relations between Salafi writings, how they resonate for those who read them, and how those writings inspire readers to diverse sorts of political action. All of this is to say that Wagemakers investigation of al-Maqdisī encourages political theorists and policy-minded scholars alike to join in conversation about the diversity and complexity of Salafi ideas and their relation to the forms of identification and actions Salafis will embrace in the future.

NOTES

1. Wagemakers uses this classification of al-Maqdisī as a "quietist-jihadi," as opposed to another sort of jihadi, to account for the extent of his influence in different Islamic contexts. So, for instance, he suggests that al-Maqdisī's "quietism" makes him more popular at certain moments in Saudi Arabia, an environment Wagemakers claims is more conducive to such "quietism," and less popular in Jordan, where Salafi students favored more violent modes of opposition (e.g. those espoused by al-Maqdisī's student al-Zarqāwī).

2. Also helpful is the way that Wagemakers shows political theorists, unfamiliar with Quranic injunctions, how al-Maqdisī amends Quranic suras to advocate for his political vision. He shows, for instance, how al-Maqdisī re-deploys a Quranic sura that esteems Abraham (as representative of ideal behavior in his renunciation of false idols) as a sura that advocates renouncing Islamic governments. In this way, Wagemakers introduces al-Maqdisī's ideas and the rhetorical means by which he espouses them to spur his students to jihad.

Religious Freedom: Jefferson's Legacy, America's Creed. By John Ragosta. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2013. 313 pp. $33.93 cloth

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While the religion clauses of the First Amendment provide the framework for the creation and protection of religious freedom in the United States, the question has always been precisely how we are to understand the meaning of religious freedom and the way the clauses protect it. In particular, we have usually understood the clauses to mandate governmental neutrality toward religion, a concept that has generated conflicting conceptions. Strict neutrality typically requires that government may not favor religion A over religion B, but also that government may not favor religion over non-religion or vice versa. Benevolent neutrality, by contrast, agrees that government may not favor religion A over religion B, but allows that government may favor religion over non-religion in order to accommodate the free exercise of religion. Thus, for benevolent neutrality, the only requirement is what is called non-preferentialism.

There have been two principal ways of addressing these questions about the religion clauses: one, an historical approach typically associated with originalism, and the other, a more theoretical and jurisprudential approach. The new book by John Ragosta, *Religious Freedom: Jefferson's Legacy, America's Creed*, is a very interesting example of the historical approach directed to Thomas Jefferson's conception of religious freedom and especially to the centrality of his conception to the American understanding of religious freedom. Specifically, Ragosta wants to make an originalist case against Chief Justice Rehnquist's originalist argument in *Wallace v. Jaffree* that "relying on Jefferson and Madison and their experience in