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Oxford University Press. pp. 261.

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ISBN 9780197765159.

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Zouhir Gabsi (2024). *Muslim Perspectives on Islamophobia: From Misconceptions to Reason*. Palgrave Macmillan.
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Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	‘
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	’
ض	ḍ		ي	y

Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
اَ	a		آ، اِ، اِي	an
أ	u		و	un
إ	i		ي	in
آ، اِ، اِي، اَ	ā		وَ	aw
و	ū		يَ	ay
ي	ī		وَو	uww, ū (in final position)
			يَ	iyy, ī (in final position)

Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: <http://rotas.iium.edu.my>

Book Review

Jerome Drevon (2024). *From Jihad to Politics: How Syrian Jihadis Embraced Politics*. Oxford University Press. pp. 261. ISBN 9780197765159.

Reviewer: Mohamed Fouz Mohamed Zacky, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: zackyfouz@iium.edu.my

On December 8, 2024, Syrian rebel forces led by *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham* (HTS) successfully overthrew former President Bashar al-Assad in a swift military operation. Many had previously thought that the Syrian crisis had subsided, as Assad maintained control over most of the country, except for the north and east, where Sunni rebels and leftist Kurdish groups held power. It was widely believed that Assad had emerged victorious from the civil war and would dictate Syria's future. Contrary to this prevailing narrative, HTS not only succeeded in ousting Assad and dismantling his security apparatus but also established a de facto government led by Ahmad Al-Sharaa, a former jihadist who transitioned into a statesman. These developments raised a puzzling question: How were the leaders of HTS able to evolve from being jihadist rebel forces to political leaders, and what contributed to this transformation? Drevon's '*From Jihad to Politics*,' published just a few months before HTS's rise to power, explains how and why jihadists transformed into politicians during the Syrian civil war. As such, this book offers revealing insights into the evolution of jihadist movements in the Syrian conflict.

Drevon's main argument in the book is that the politicisation of jihadists is not solely a result of ideological revisionism; rather, it is shaped by their internal and external relationships. The ideological shifts they undergo arise from their complex interactions with other actors in the ground, which Drevon refers to as 'internal and external

institutionalisation' (pp. 08-14). Interestingly, Drevon notes that politicisation did not begin with *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham* (HTS). In his perspective, the dynamics were initially set in motion by *Ahrar al-Sham*, a Salafi militant movement that played a significant role in the early stages of the Syrian civil war. HTS is viewed simply as the next phase of this developing trend, making the understanding of *Ahrar al-Sham*, the earliest anti-Assad rebel group, more fundamental than that of HTS itself. Therefore, the book focuses more on the politicisation of *Ahrar al-Sham* than on HTS.

In his analysis of formation and evolution of *Ahrar al-Sham*, Dervon discusses several factors that contributed to the politicisation of the movement from the beginning. Unlike jihadists in other parts of the world, Syrian Jihadists are compelled to fight for a cause that is local, making it essential to seriously consider domestic factors and dynamics. This focus on local considerations significantly influenced their behaviour in terms of garnering local support for their struggle (pp. 50-54, p.165). Furthermore, the local nature of jihad in Syria is tied to the lessons learned by jihadi groups from their experiences in fighting the U.S. occupation in Iraq. *Ahrar's* popular leaders carefully studied past experiences of jihadist movements and analysed reasons for their failures—particularly in Iraq—during their time as prisoners in Syrian jails. They concluded that Al-Qaeda-linked jihadists had failed to establish a strategic objective for their actions and had alienated themselves from the people by becoming elite fighters. For the new leaders of *Ahrar al-Sham*, even with their commitment to jihad, it is essential to operate as politically manageable actors and as part of a broader popular movement if they want to achieve meaningful political gains (p.172-180). This understanding has been influenced by the dynamics of the Syrian conflict itself as it unfolded. For example, the rise of the Islamic State pushed *Ahrar al-Sham* to adopt a more moderate stance in order to garner local and international support. Additionally, Russia's intervention in 2015 forced rebel groups into a defensive position, highlighting the necessity for a united front disregarding ideological differences. The situation was further complicated by Turkey's shift, from supporting Syrian opposition forces to confronting Kurdish armed groups along its borders (pp.130-150). In navigating the rapidly changing landscape, *Ahrar al-Sham* had to maintain its relationships with other opposition groups and external partners. As

a result, it tempered its Salafi jihadist tendencies and made it more nuanced, politically strategic decision makers (pp.175-185).

Dervon writes that as *Ahrar al-Sham* began to weaken due to Russian airstrikes and the regime's counteroffensives in 2017, HTS emerged as a significant counterforce. Unlike *Ahrar al-Sham*, HTS possesses ideological coherence, organisational cohesion, and a selective approach to recruitment and training. This structured strategy gave HTS a competitive advantage in influencing the dynamics of the Syrian conflict after 2018 (pp. 145-150). Initially, HTS criticised *Ahrar al-Sham* for its ideological openness to attract support from radical fighters of the *Ahrar*. However, HTS eventually adopted a similar strategy after it became a dominant governing force replacing *Ahrar al-Sham*. Already HTS demonstrated extreme pragmatism when it officially disassociated itself from Al-Qaeda, collaborated with other rebel groups to combat ISIS, and refrained from attacking foreign countries (pp. 125-140). In line with this trend, HTS eventually became *politicised* by engaging with public sentiment, addressing demands for stable governance, and communicating with external partners like Turkey, after it took over *Ahrar*'s role in Northeast Syria.

All in all, one of the major strengths of the book is that the author situates the dynamics of these jihadist groups within socio-political, geopolitical, and ideological contexts, explaining how each of these factors encourages them to become manageable political actors while still believing in armed resistance as a means of struggle. In other words, the author emphasises that jihadists are political actors who evolve and adapt in response to socio-political and external influences. In addition to that, this multifaceted perspective on Syrian jihadists has profound implications for understanding and countering jihadism as a phenomenon. Conventional wisdom suggests that these jihadists are ideologically driven fanatics who further radicalise as conflicts escalate, with the only way forward being to silence their leaders and supporters to eradicate the problem. However, the Syrian case offers a different approach: engaging with them, addressing the root of the problem, and providing incentives to encourage them to become accountable actors in a political conflict while acknowledging partly at least the legitimacy of their demands. The greater question is whether these strategies that worked in Syria would also be effective with other groups, such as the Houthis in Yemen, Al-Shabaab in Somalia, and other places. Moving

ahead, one of the significant limitations of the book is that it addresses the politicisation of *Hayat Tahrir al-Sham* (HTS) to a lesser extent than that of *Ahrar al-Sham*. As a result, readers seeking to understand HTS after its rise may find the content somewhat lacking. However, the author seems to acknowledge this limitation, as he will be publishing a follow-up book exclusively focused on HTS in July 2025. The new title will be '*Transformed by the People: Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham's Road to Power in Syria*,' to be published by Hurst. It seems that the book would be an in-depth study on HTS's role in governing Northern Syria and its impact on their politicisation and experience in statecraft.

Zouhir Gabsi (2024). *Muslim Perspectives on Islamophobia: From Misconceptions to Reason*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Reviewer: Arief Arman, Research Fellow, Peace, Dialogue and Xenophobia Studies Centre (PEDIXS), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Email: 705243@alumni.soas.ac.uk

In the context of a post 9/11 world and increased immigration into the Global North by Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim, there are bound to be clashes between the hosts, and the unwelcome guests. Such hate pertains to the notion of 'Islamophobia,' a term recently coined, but with historical antecedents. *Muslim Perspectives on Islamophobia: From Misconceptions to Reason* by Zouhir Gabsi of Deakin University is a timely exposition of the origins of Islamophobia, and the many ways it is actualised in both politics and praxis.

The book contains nine chapters which is broken into four parts. Chapters I, II, III, and IV pave the way for the conceptualising and contextualising of the term 'Islamophobia.' Citing Āli 'Imrān āyah 120, Zouhir hits the ground running with a bold statement that intolerance towards Islām has been predicted by both the Qur'ān, and Ḥadīth (Prophetic tradition). Such a statement sets the stage for a convincing engagement with the dichotomy between the East and West, where Samuel Huntington's (in)famous 'Clash of Civilizations' is referenced. Historically, Islamophobia is rooted in colonialism and amalgamates

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

Intellectual Discourse is an academic, refereed journal, published twice a year. Four types of contributions are considered for publication in this journal: major articles reporting findings of original research; review articles synthesising important deliberations related to disciplines within the domain of Islamic sciences; short research notes or communications, containing original ideas or discussions on vital issues of contemporary concern, and book reviews; and brief reader comments, or statements of divergent viewpoints.

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2. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with a 1-inch (2.5 cm) margins. Use 12-point Times New Roman font.
3. Manuscripts should adhere to the *American Psychological Association* (APA) style, latest edition.
4. The title should be as concise as possible and should appear on a separate sheet together with name(s) of the author(s), affiliation(s), and the complete postal address of the institute(s).
5. A short running title of not more than 40 characters should also be included.
6. Headings and sub-headings of different sections should be clearly indicated.
7. References should be alphabetically ordered. Some examples are given below:

Book

In-text citations:

Al-Faruqi & al-Faruqi (1986)

Reference:

Al-Faruqi, I. R., & al-Faruqi, L. L. (1986). *The cultural atlas of Islam*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Chapter in a Book

In-text:

Alias (2009)

Reference:

Alias, A. (2009). Human nature. In N. M. Noor (Ed.), *Human nature from an Islamic perspective: A guide to teaching and learning* (pp.79-117). Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press.

Journal Article

In-text:

Chapra (2002)

Reference:

Chapra, M. U. (2002). Islam and the international debt problem. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 10, 214-232.

The Qur'ān

In-text:

(i) direct quotation, write as 30:36

(ii) indirect quotation, write as Qur'ān, 30:36

Reference:

The glorious Qur'ān. Translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (1977). US: American Trust Publications.

Ḥadīth

In-text:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, 88:204 (where 88 is the book number, 204 is the ḥadīth number)

(ii) Ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 1

Reference:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, M. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.

(ii) Ibn Ḥanbal, A. (1982). *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari.

The Bible

In-text:

Matthew 12:31-32

Reference:

The new Oxford annotated Bible. (2007). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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