



The Caravan

Abdallah Azzam, the Palestinian cleric who led the mobilization of Arab fighters to Afghanistan in the 1980s, played a crucial role in the internationalization of the jihadi movement. Killed in mysterious circumstances in 1989 in Peshawar in Pakistan, he remains one of the most influential jihadi ideologues of all time.

Here, in the first in-depth biography of Azzam, Thomas Hegghammer explains how Azzam came to play this role and why jihadism went global at this particular time. It traces Azzam's extraordinary life journey from a West Bank village to the battlefields of Afghanistan, telling the story of a man who knew all the leading Islamists of his time and frequented princes, CIA agents, and Cat Stevens the pop star. It is, however, also a story of displacement, exclusion, and repression which suggests that jihadism went global for fundamentally local reasons.

THOMAS HEGGHAMMER is a Senior Research Fellow at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) and Adjunct Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Oslo. Trained in Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Oxford and the Sciences Po, Paris, he is the author of the prize-winning book *Jihad in Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) and is the editor of *Jihadi Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2017). He has conducted extensive fieldwork in the Middle East, including interviews with former militants, and he has testified on jihadism in front of the US Congress and the British Parliament.

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Abdallah Azzam and the Rise of Global Jihad

THOMAS HEGGHAMMER

Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI)



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To Arne and Haldis

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Contents

<i>Timelines</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>List of Maps</i>	xiii
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xiv
<i>List of Table and Figure</i>	xvi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xvii
Introduction	1
Prologue	9
1 Palestinian	11
2 Brother	28
3 Fighter	47
4 Scholar	66
5 Vagabond	88
6 Writer	125
7 Pioneer	143
8 Diplomat	172
9 Manager	205
10 Recruiter	244
11 Ideologue	288
12 <i>Mujahid</i>	328
13 Resident	369
14 Enemy	409
	vii

viii	<i>Contents</i>
15 Martyr	436
16 Icon	463
Conclusion	493
Note on Sources	509
Overview of Abdallah Azzam's Works	511
<i>Notes</i>	515
<i>Bibliography</i>	647
<i>Index</i>	682

Timelines

Azzam's life

Life events		Political events
Born in al-Sila al-Harithiyya (West Bank)	1941	
	1942	
	1943	
	1944	
	1945	
	1946	
	1947	
	1948	Palestine War
	1949	
	1950	
	1951	
	1952	
Joins Muslim Brotherhood	1953	
	1954	Muslim Brotherhood banned in Egypt
	1955	
	1956	
Enrolls in Kadoorie Agricultural School in Tulkarm (West Bank)	1957	
	1958	
	1959	
Graduates from Kadoorie, teaches in Adir (Jordan)	1960	
Starts teaching in Burqin (West Bank)	1961	
Enrolls at Damascus University (distance learning)	1962	Muslim World League founded in Mecca

(cont.)

Life events		Political events
	1963	Ba'athist coup in Syria
	1964	
Marries Samira Awatila	1965	
Graduates from Damascus University	1966	Sayyid Qutb executed in Egypt
Emigrates to Amman, moves to Baha (Saudi Arabia)	1967	Six Day War
Returns to Amman, teaches in high school	1968	
Joins the Fedayin in northern Jordan	1969	
Demobilizes, works in Jordanian Awqaf Ministry	1970	Black September in Jordan
Moves to Cairo for Ph.D.	1971	
	1972	
Gets Ph.D., starts teaching at Jordan University	1973	Yom Kippur War, oil crisis, Afghan monarchy toppled
	1974	
	1975	
	1976	
Publishes first book	1977	
Makes first trip to the United States, meets Bin Ladin	1978	Afghan Communist coup
	1979	Russian invasion of Afghanistan, Iranian revolution
Emigrates to Mecca	1980	
Visits Yemen, Emigrates to Islamabad	1981	
	1982	
	1983	
Founds Services Bureau, <i>al-Jihad</i> magazine	1984	
	1985	
Moves to Peshawar	1986	
	1987	Outbreak of Palestinian Intifada
	1988	
Is assassinated in Peshawar	1989	Russian withdrawal from Afghanistan

Afghanistan war

Political–military events		Azzam activities
	1980	
	1981	Meets al-Sananiri in Jeddah (around March) Meets al-Sananiri in Mecca (around August) Meets Sayyaf (October), moves to Islamabad (November)
	1982	
	1983	Publishes <i>Signs of the Merciful</i>
Badr project (February)	1984	
Founding of Services Bureau (September)		
Launch of <i>al-Jihad</i> magazine (December)		
	1985	Publishes <i>Defense of Muslim Lands</i>
	1986	Moves to Peshawar (May–June)
Battle of Zhawar (April)		
Sada camp for Arabs founded (July)		
al-Ma'sada camp founded (October)		
	1987	
Battle of Jaji (May–June)		
al-Qaida starts forming (winter)	1988	

(*cont.*)

Political–military events

Azzam activities

First record of al-Qaida
 organization (September)

Visits Massoud in Panjshir
 (September)
 Dispute with Ahmad Sa‘id
 Khadr (December)

1989

Battle of Jalalabad (March–May)

Assassination (24 November)

Maps

1: Middle East and South West Asia	<i>page</i> xxi
2: West Bank and Jordan	xxii
3: Afghanistan–Pakistan border areas	xxiii
4: Afghanistan	xxiii

Illustrations

- 1 Abdallah Azzam's native village, al-Sila al-Harithiyya, in 2008. View from the southeast, with the road from Jenin in the foreground (Thomas Hegghammer). *page* 271
- 2 Abdallah Azzam as a young schoolteacher, around 1961 (*al-Jihad* magazine, no. 74 p. 31). 271
- 3 Abdallah Azzam as a teacher in Amman, around 1968 (Azzam family collection). 272
- 4 Abdallah Azzam and his children in Cairo, around 1972 (Azzam family collection). 272
- 5 Cover of Abdallah Azzam's book *The Red Cancer*, published 1980 (Internet Archive image). 273
- 6 Azzam lecturing at the University of Da'wa and Jihad, around 1985 (*al-Jihad* magazine, no. 64 p. 22). 274
- 7 Azzam relaxing during a visit to an Afghan Mujahidin camp, early 1980s (*al-Bunyan al-Marsus* magazine, no. 30 p. 28). 274
- 8 Azzam writing, location unknown, mid-1980s (*al-Jihad* magazine, no. 65 p. 7). 275
- 9 Cover of the first edition of Abdallah Azzam's book *The Defense of Muslim Lands*, published in Peshawar in March 1985 (*al-Jihad* magazine, no. 7 p. 3). 276
- 10 Cover of *al-Jihad* magazine in March 1986. Cat Stevens in the picture below on the left (*al-Jihad* magazine, no. 17 p. 1). 277
- 11 Advertisement for propaganda materials in *al-Jihad* magazine, September 1987. Among the products on offer is a cassette tape containing "Anashid of jihad by the British Muslim preacher Yusuf Islam [Cat Stevens]." (*al-Jihad* magazine, no. 34 p. 29). 278
- 12 Facsimile of *al-Jihad* magazine report on the al-Sada camp in August 1986 (*al-Jihad* magazine, no. 21 p. 33). 279

List of Illustrations

xv

- | | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 13 | Abdallah Azzam, Tamim al-Adnani, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and Abd Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf at Jaji in May 1987 (<i>al-Jihad</i> magazine, no. 31 p. 18). | 279 |
| 14 | Abdallah Azzam in Afghanistan in the mid-1980s (<i>al-Bunyan al-Marsus</i> magazine, no. 30 p. 26). | 280 |
| 15 | Abdallah Azzam (middle) with Ahmed Shah Massoud (second from left), Azzam's son Ibrahim (far left), and Azzam's aide and driver Abu Harith (far right). Fifth man unidentified (<i>al-Bunyan al-Marsus</i> magazine, no. 30 p. 17). | 281 |
| 16 | Ahmed Shah Massoud, Burhanuddin Rabbani, and Abdallah Azzam inspecting Massoud's troops in the Panjshir valley, September 1988 (<i>al-Bunyan al-Marsus</i> magazine, no. 30 p. 24). | 281 |
| 17 | Abdallah Azzam speaking about Palestine in the Muslim Student Union Centre in Islamabad during the "Solidarity week with global movements of liberation," November 1985 (<i>al-Bunyan al-Marsus</i> magazine, no. 5 p. 14). | 282 |
| 18 | Abdallah Azzam and Rachid Ghannouchi in Peshawar in 1989 (<i>al-Bunyan al-Marsus</i> magazine, no. 30 p. 22). | 283 |
| 19 | Abdallah Azzam and his father Yusuf Azzam in Peshawar, around 1988 (Azzam family collection). | 284 |
| 20 | The wreck of Abdallah Azzam's car after the assassination on 24 November 1989 (<i>al-Bunyan al-Marsus</i> magazine, no. 30 p. 6). | 284 |
| 21 | Drawing from <i>al-Bunyan al-Marsus</i> magazine of the area around the site of Abdallah Azzam's assassination in Peshawar on 24 November 1989. Azzam's house on the left; the Sab' al-Layl mosque on the right (<i>al-Bunyan al-Marsus</i> magazine, no. 30 pp. 6–7). | 285 |
| 22 | Abd Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf grieving before the dead body of Abdallah Azzam in Pabbi on the evening of the day of his assassination (<i>al-Jihad</i> magazine, no. 74 p. 29). | 285 |
| 23 | Pro-al-Qaida photo montage from around 2011 showing Abdallah Azzam (far right) alongside (from left) Usama Bin Ladin, Abu Yahya al-Libi, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, and Ayman al-Zawahiri (jihadi website). | 286 |
| 24 | The author and Hudhayfa Azzam in Amman, July 2018 (Thomas Hegghammer). | 287 |

Table and Figure

Table

- 10.1 Author's Best Estimate of the Number of Foreign Fighters
in 1980s Afghanistan *page 267*

Figure

- 10.1 Approximate number of Arabs present in Peshawar and
Afghanistan, 1979–1989 268

Acknowledgments

“Smell it!” he said, as he passed me the bloodstained jacket. “Can you smell it? The musk? The blood of martyrs smells of musk.” I could not for the life of me sense anything other than a whiff of old garment. Not that I knew what musk smelled like, for that matter. I was holding the jacket that Abdallah Azzam had worn on the day of his assassination in 1989, and I was in the Azzam family house in Amman with Hudhayfa, his oldest surviving son. It was September 2006, and I had come to interview Hudhayfa for my doctoral dissertation on jihadism in Saudi Arabia, a story in which his father was an important support actor. I had just had dinner prepared by Azzam’s widow, so the smell of roasted chicken made the olfactory challenge even harder. “I know you probably don’t believe this stuff,” Hudhayfa said, breaking the silence. “You would, though, if you had been to Afghanistan.”

At that moment I realized my next book would have to be about the jacket’s owner. I already knew that Abdallah Azzam was a towering figure in the history of Islamism. I had encountered his name numerous times in my research on al-Qaida, starting in July 2001, when, as a young intern at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), my boss Brynjar Lia put me to work on something called “the Bin Laden network.” By August 2001 I had learned about Azzam, the Services Bureau, and the Afghan Arabs, and I had discovered Azzam.com, the main English-language jihadi website at the time. Over the following years, as I immersed myself in the world of jihadi literature, collecting texts and films, I saw the Azzam folder on my hard drive grow conspicuously large. When I started going to Saudi Arabia in 2004 for my Ph.D. research (which became the book *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*), many of my interviewees highlighted Azzam’s inspirational role.

In late 2007 I was able to devote myself fully to writing Azzam’s biography thanks to a postdoctoral fellowship and a travel grant from Princeton University, where I enjoyed the generous support of Bernard

Haykel. I was then allowed to continue my research at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center thanks to the hospitality of Monica Duffy Toft and Steven Miller. The next year (2009–2010) a William D. Loughlin fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton allowed me to keep working on Azzam and to bounce ideas off Patricia Crone, Avishai Margalit, and other great minds at the Institute. Then, having written half the book, I put the project on hold because the Arab Spring and the Syria war gave me too many other things to do. In late 2015 I was able to get back to it, thanks to my FFI bosses Espen Berg-Knutsen and Espen Skjelland, who allowed me to withdraw to the attic of the Norwegian Nobel Institute, where Olav Njølstad kindly hosted me.

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I have also benefited tremendously from the help of colleagues in the field. Stéphane Lacroix and Brynjar Lia have long been my closest intellectual sparring partners, and their influence is all over this manuscript. Brynjar also provided detailed comments, down to the diacritics in the footnotes, on the entire final draft. My former supervisor Gilles Kepel also provided important support and inspiration, especially in the project's early stages. I am also very

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I also thank the many people who agreed to be interviewed for this book. The list of names in the Note on Sources (see the end of the book) does not give justice to the scale of the goodwill from which I benefited. Behind each name is the memory of one or more warm encounters in

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This project has been so long in the making and involved so many generous people that there are almost certainly some I have forgotten to mention. I hope they will forgive me, as I hope you readers will forgive me for other errors and inaccuracies that have slipped into the book. It has been a long journey, and I have learned a lot. I have even found out what musk smells like.



Map 1: Middle East and South West Asia

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Map 2: West Bank and Jordan

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Map 3: Afghanistan–Pakistan border areas



Map 4: Afghanistan

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