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Table of Contents

Welcome from the Editors.....1

Articles

The Islamic State After the Caliphate.....2
by *Truls H. Tønnessen*

Ideological Infighting in the Islamic State.....12
by *Cole Bunzel*

The Islamic State's Way of War in Iraq and Syria: From its Origins to the Post Caliphate Era22
by *Ahmed H. Hashim*

Who are the ISIS People?32
by *Vera Mironova*

From Directorate of Intelligence to Directorate of Everything: The Islamic State's Emergent Amni-Media Nexus40
by *Asaad Almohammad and Charlie Winter*

Making Sense of Jihadi Stratcom: The Case of the Islamic State53
by *Charlie Winter*

Not Gonna Be Able To Do It: al-Qaeda in Tunisia's Inability to Take Advantage of the Islamic State's Setbacks.....62
by *Aaron Y. Zelin*

The Failing Islamic State Within the Failed State of Yemen77
by *Elisabeth Kendall*

The Islamic State's Provinces on the Periphery: Juxtaposing the Pledges from Boko Haram in Nigeria and Abu Sayyaf and Maute Group in the Philippines.....87
by *Jacob Zenn*

Research Notes

Understanding Muslims' Support for Suicide Bombing in West Africa: A Replication Study.....105
by *C. Christine Fair and Samta Savla*

Resources

Counterterrorism Bookshelf: 14 Books on Terrorism & Counter-Terrorism-Related Subjects.....123
by *Joshua Sinai*

Henry Prunckun and Troy Whitford, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: A Comprehensive Introduction to Actors and Actions*130
Reviewed by *Joshua Sinai*

Robin Maria Valeri and Kevin Borgeson (Eds.), *Terrorism in America*132
Reviewed by *Joshua Sinai*

Bibliography: Humanitarian Intervention, Responsibility to Protect, Peacekeeping.....134

Compiled and selected by Judith Tinnes

Bibliography: Genocide (since 1980) Part 2.....163

Compiled and selected by Judith Tinnes

475 Academic Theses (Ph.D. and MA) on Countering Violence Extremism (CVE), Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and Terrorism Prevention.....197

Compiled and selected by Ryan Scrivens

Recent Online Resources for the Analysis of Terrorism and Related Subjects.....229

Compiled and selected by Berto Jongman

Announcements

Conference Monitor/Calendar of Events.....261

Compiled and selected by Reinier Bergema

Announcement: Award for Best Ph.D. Thesis Submitted and Defended in 2018.....271

Words of Appreciation.....272

About *Perspectives on Terrorism*.....273

Welcome from the Editors

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to announce the release of Volume XIII, Issue 1 (February 2019) of *Perspectives on Terrorism*, available now at: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/PoT>.

Our free and independent online journal is a publication of the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI) and the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) of Leiden University's Campus The Hague. Now in its thirteenth year, *Perspectives on Terrorism* has over 8,200 regular e-mail subscribers and many more occasional readers and website visitors worldwide. The Articles of its six annual issues are fully peer reviewed by external referees while its Research and Policy Notes, Special Correspondence and other content are subject to internal editorial quality control.

The articles of this Special Issue are the products of a conference held in Oslo 18-19 October 2018, entitled "Jihadism after the Caliphate". The conference was organized by the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), in cooperation with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It brought together leading specialists on the Islamic State and al-Qaida, along with senior policymakers and government analysts from Norway and other countries.

This Special Issue on the evolution and future trajectory of the Islamic State has been prepared by Guest Editor Truls H. Tønnessen and his colleagues at FFI, in collaboration with Co-Editors James J.F. Forest and Alex P. Schmid. In his introduction to the issue, he argues that the primary strength of the Islamic State is its ability and willingness to exploit conflicts that exist independently of the group, and that specific historical circumstances enabled the dramatic rise of the Islamic State. This is followed by Cole Bunzel's analysis of ideological infighting within the Islamic State. Ahmed Hashim explains how one of the group's key traditional strengths has been its ability to relocate to other areas that offered opportunities for territorial control, while Vera Mironova examines critical human resources dimensions of the group. Assad Almohammad and Charlie Winter offer unique insights about Islamic State's Director of General Security, focusing in particular on his role in media production, which is then followed by Charlie Winter's analysis of two key Islamic State doctrinal texts on media jihad.

The following articles examine the Islamic State's challenges in specific countries, beginning with Aaron Zelin's analysis of the group's setbacks in Tunisia. Then Elisabeth Kendall describes how and why the Islamic State is struggling for traction in Yemen, and this section concludes with Jacob Zenn's comparative analysis of Islamic State affiliate groups in Nigeria and the Philippines.

This issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* also features a Research Note by Christine Fair and Samta Salva examining Muslims' support for suicide bombings in West Africa.

In addition, the Resources section includes our regular contributions from Joshua Sinai (book reviews), Judith Tinnes (bibliographies), Ryan Scrivens (theses), Berto Jongman (web resources), and Reinier Bergema (conference calendar). We also provide our annual Words of Appreciation to all the peer reviewers, Editorial Board members and others who volunteer their time and expertise to make this open-source journal respected and valuable to the scholarly community.

Articles

The Islamic State after the Caliphate

by Truls Hallberg Tønnessen

Abstract

Following the Islamic State loss of most of its territorial control and the fall of its self-declared Caliphate, many have warned that it is too early to declare that the group is defeated. The group has previously been able to come spectacularly back from defeat. However, this article will argue that while the Islamic State is roughly following the same strategy as last time when it was also weakened, it was specific historical circumstances that then enabled the dramatic rise of the Islamic State. The article will also argue that in order to be successful, the group is dependent on conflicts and root causes that exist independently of the group, but which it can exploit.

Keywords: Islamic State, Iraq, Syria, jihadism

Introduction

The aim of this Special Issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* is to discuss various aspects and potential developments for the Islamic State in particular and the jihadi movement in general following the fall of the group's self-declared Caliphate. The aim of this introductory article is to use the group's history to highlight some factors that have been important for the evolution of IS and that might be important for its future trajectory.

Since the group's dramatic takeover of Mosul in mid-2014 and the subsequent declaration of the Islamic State and the Caliphate there has been an avalanche of publications on various aspects of the Islamic State.[1] Some of this literature is focused on factors that have been more or less constant throughout the existence of the group, including its ideology and overall strategy.[2]

The group currently known as the Islamic State (IS) has a long history and its origin is often traced back to the training camp established by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Herat, Afghanistan in 1999.[3] Throughout its history, the group has gone through an almost cyclic process of rising and falling. The group's first rise culminated when al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI), the group founded by al-Zarqawi, together with some lesser-known Sunni Arab insurgent groups established the so-called Islamic State of Iraq in October 2006. The combination of a Sunni Arab uprising against the group (often referred to as *al-sawha* or "The awakening") and improved U.S counterinsurgency strategies led to a gradual weakening of the group, and by 2008 both the U.S and Iraqi governments declared that the group was close to defeat.[4] It was, however, far too early to conclude that the group was defeated for good.[5] Not only did the Islamic State of Iraq make a comeback, it was able to establish what has been referred to as the most powerful jihadist group in modern history.[6]

The latest comeback started a long time before 2014. After Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in May 2010, the group gradually regained strength. The comeback was to a large extent facilitated by the U.S withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 and by the increasingly violent conflict in Syria from 2011 and onwards. This period of rising prominence culminated with the group declaring the establishment of the Islamic State and the Caliphate in June 2014. The group's territorial expansion, its brutal violence against the Yazidis and other ethnic and religious groups in the region, and its threats against the West, all combined to trigger a multinational offensive against the group. As a result of this offensive the group has lost most of its territorial control, and Iraqi, Russian and U.S governments have declared that the group has been defeated.[7] However, many analysts have also cautioned that it is too early to declare victory and indeed there are already signs of a resurgent Islamic State, especially in Iraq.[8]

If we are to understand the cyclic process of rising and falling—in other words, to explain the dynamics of *change*—it is necessary to focus on those factors that have evolved over time. Although the group's ideology is key to understanding its behavior, it does not explain changes in its behavior and why it succeeds during some periods of time and fails during others.

The three factors emphasized in this introductory article are: 1) leadership and recruitment dynamics, 2) the size and strength of the group, and 3) the opportunity structure within the operating environment. The first two factors are internal to the group, while the third factor (the opportunity structure) refers to all the external factors that are outside the control of the group—such as the overall security and political situation that the group has to operate in—but which the group can to some extent influence and exploit through its armed activities. Throughout the group's existence, these parameters have changed considerably, and as this article aims to illustrate, these variations have had important ramifications both for the group's behavior and its potential for success. They can also suggest potential future developments for the group.

The article will argue that in the past changes in the opportunity structure the group has operated in have been most consequential for the group's potential for success. It will illustrate that although the group never went away and has roughly been following the same overall strategy and ideology, the *impact* of this strategy has varied considerably due to changes in the opportunity structure. Furthermore, the article will argue that the primary strength of the Islamic State is its ability and willingness to exploit conflicts that exist independently of the group, and that specific historical circumstances enabled the dramatic rise of the Islamic State.

Leadership and Recruitment Dynamics

Leaders of terrorist organizations involved in violent conflict are frequently killed or arrested, and the Islamic State is by no means an exception. Throughout the history of the Islamic State, many of the top leaders have been killed and replaced with a new generation. Throughout its 20-year long history the group only had three or four paramount leaders (Abu Musab al-Zarqawi until 2006, Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Umar al-Baghdadi 2006-2010, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi from 2010), but among the leaders in the layer immediately below the top and in the surroundings of the paramount leader there have been frequent changes. For instance, most of those leaders who rose to the top together with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2010 have been killed during the latest offensive, and as far as we know, there are few leaders within the group today who represent continuity.[9]

At the same time, it is likely that a core of central but largely unknown leaders still remain within the organization, and might be in a position to replace the killed top leaders. The articles by Vera Mironova and by Asaad Almohammad and Charlie Winter in this Special Issue both demonstrate how members of the Islamic State's security-intelligence apparatus (*amni*) can be vital for the survival of the group.[10] As Mironova points out, *amni* was a secret organization within IS and its members often used masks in public, making it more difficult to identify them. Thus, if al-Baghdadi is killed his replacement might be someone whom few observers have heard about but who climbed the ranks within the group, not unlike when al-Baghdadi became the new leader of the group in 2010. Very few outsiders knew much about this individual until around 2014, when he was declared a Caliph.

In contrast to (for instance) Jabhat al-Nusra, which operated more as a small elite organization, the Islamic State was joined by a very large number of recruits. The estimates on the number of fighters in the ranks of Islamic State after 2014 varies widely, from 9,000 up to 200,000. The high estimate of 200,000 members also includes personnel who joined its police and security-intelligence apparatus.[11] Although it is difficult to get a correct estimate of how many joined the Islamic State, all estimates agree that the number was in the thousands.

As Mironova illustrates in her article in this Special Issue, the recruits to the Islamic State joined for different reasons. Some joined the group for ideological reasons, others for personal gains.[12] The article by Cole

Bunzel further demonstrates that there have been ideological tensions and disagreements within the group. [13] This underscores the fact that the Islamic State was far from a monolithic organization, and that many joined (or at least cooperated with) the group simply because the Islamic State was the dominating actor in large chunks of territory in Syria and Iraq, and because joining the group could potentially provide recruits with access to money, power and protection. Now that the group has lost most of its territorial control and clearly has been on the losing side, it is reasonable to assume that those who still remain as members of the group are a combination of a hardcore of the most ideologically motivated members, along with those who have no other option than to remain. This also indicates that the group might splinter into different factions.

The composition of the recruits has also changed over time. For instance, there have been huge variations in the number and the influence of foreign fighters within the group. AQI, the predecessor of the Islamic State, was founded mainly by Jordanian and Syrians, but over time the leadership became more and more dominated by Iraqis, culminating in 2010 with the appointment of al-Baghdadi as the top leader of the group. Despite the influx of a large number of foreign fighters, and despite that most of the known Iraqis in the top echelon have been killed, there are few known examples of foreigners who have risen to the top ranks of the group. Two important exceptions are the Georgian Chechen Abu Umar al-Shishani, who was killed in 2016, and the Tajik Gulmurod Khalimov, who was killed in 2017. They both reportedly served as the group's Minister of War.[14] Another important exception is the group's current spokesperson Abu al-Hasan al-Muhajir.[15]

Why and how might the composition of the top leadership and the recruits be important for the potential future development of IS? The history of the group indicates the importance of a common background for establishing new units or networks, such as a common nationality or sharing a common experience or acquaintances from a particular recent conflict. For example, while several of the founders of AQI were veterans of the conflict in Afghanistan before 2001, the leaders of IS after 2010 were almost exclusively veterans of the conflict in Iraq, who had never been to Afghanistan nor met the top leadership of al-Qaida. On the other hand, the Syria-based al-Qaida affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra was mainly established by the Shami (Levantine) members of ISI.[16] Although there are several other reasons, the lack of deep historical ties between the leadership of the Islamic State and al-Qaida helps explain the conflict between the two groups.

When Jabhat al-Nusra announced in July 2016 that it split from al-Qaida and rebranded itself as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, a small group of mainly Jordanian Afghan-veterans with historical ties to the al-Qaida leadership broke away and established a group that pledged allegiance to al-Qaida's leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. In March 2018, this break-away faction announced that it took the name *Hurras al-Din* (Guardians of Religion).[17] Interestingly, this pro-al-Qaida faction included close associates of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, such as the Jordanian Khalid al-'Aruri, Zarqawi's childhood friend, brother-in-law and one of the original founders of the Herat camp in Afghanistan in 1999.[18] What the leaders of this group—with veterans of both al-Qaida's and Zarqawi's networks—had in common was that they roughly belonged to the same generation, had been to Afghanistan and had a long history of interaction with central members of the al-Qaida network. This group (which included several close associates of Zarqawi, often referred to as the Godfather of the Islamic State) was described by IS as "apostates" (*murtaddin*) and mockingly referred to as *Hurras al-Shirk* (Guardians of Polytheism).[19]

The networks and connections established during the recent conflict in Iraq and Syria will most likely also affect the international terrorist threat against Europe. As Petter Nesser has demonstrated, many of the terrorist cells in Europe trace their origins back to networks established in Afghanistan during the 1980s and 1990s. [20] Given the historically high number of foreign fighters who have fought in Iraq and Syria, it is likely that some of the connections made and experiences gained during the conflict will provide the basis for future terrorist groups and networks.

There are also indications that the nationalities of the top leaders have had implications on their target selection and agenda. There was, for instance, an increase in threats and plots against Sweden following the promotion of the Swedish-Moroccan Mohamed Moumou to the top ranks of the ISI in the late 2000s.[21] And one of the reasons why there have been so many plots and attacks by IS in France is that the French foreign

fighters within IS had important leadership positions in the group's external operations branch (*al-amn al-kharji*).[22]

Therefore it is relevant to note the influence of fighters from former Soviet states in the Caucasus and Central Asia, both within the Islamic State and amongst the Syrian jihadist groups in general. Combined with Russia's central role in the fight against IS and its support for the Assad regime, this helps explain why Russia has become a more important target for the jihadis.[23]

Size and Strength

Throughout its existence the size and strength of the group has also changed dramatically—from being a handful of Arab-Afghan veterans arriving in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2002-2003, to establishing in 2014 something tantamount to a de-facto state, ruling a territory the size of the UK with an estimated population of 10 million people.

The group has also moved back and forth between operating as an underground terrorist group without territorial control and having various degrees of territorial control. As Ahmed Hashim illustrates in his contribution to this Special Issue, these developments had obvious implications for the group's *modus operandi*. [24] Throughout the group's history one of its key traditional strengths has been its mobility and ability to relocate to another area if the pressure was too much in one place.[25]

After the group succeeded in establishing territorial control of large cities like Mosul and Raqqa, it had to defend its territorial control from potential aggressors, and police the population internally in order to avoid a rebellion or uprising.[26] Since the Islamic State has lost almost all of its territory by early 2019, it has reverted back to its roots—operating mainly as a terrorist organization with only sporadic attempts to re-establish territorial control. It is, after all, easier to survive as an underground movement that does not need to defend a particular territory, but that instead can hide in areas that are difficult for the authorities to control.

The *modus operandi* of the group following its territorial losses is reminiscent of the tactics the group followed prior to 2014. It has, for instance, established sleeper cells in some of the territories that were liberated from the group.[27] The group has also succeeded in establishing a presence in areas that are difficult for the authorities to patrol, such as rural and remote areas, especially in the border regions between territories controlled by the Iraqi federal forces and the Kurdish peshmerga.[28] IS has also systematically removed potential competitors for influence in Sunni-Arab dominated areas of Iraq by eliminating local leaders and by intimidating the local populations.[29] This has fostered fear among the locals and deters them from informing on the group to the authorities, while also creating power vacuums that the Islamic State can exploit.[30]

The variations in the group's size and strength have also had an impact on the group's behavior vis-à-vis potential allies, and helps explain its cyclic process of rising and falling. When the group is weak, it tends to take a less prominent role and instead concentrates on reorganizing and preparing for a comeback. For instance, there were several indications of improved cooperation between ISI and other Sunni Arab actors in 2009-2010, when the group was in a weak position.[31]

There are also several examples in the history of the group when its presence initially was tolerated and even welcomed by other Sunni Arab actors as long as it did not seek to become the dominant actor, and as long as it contributed to the fight against a common enemy. But each time the group has gained strength, it has gradually attempted to establish a monopoly of violence by either co-opting or targeting competing actors and those who did not submit to the group's authority.[32] The group's attempts to establish a monopoly of violence has, however, also often backfired and generated Sunni Arab resistance against the group. For instance, in January 2014 Sunni Arab rebels cooperated in successfully expelling the Islamic State from Western Syria. Similarly, one of the main reasons why Sunni Arab insurgent and tribal leaders turned against AQI in 2006 was the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq, as they claimed that the group attacked insurgents and other Sunni Arabs who did not acknowledge the authority of their "state".

As many of the Sunni Arab insurgents in Iraq laid down their arms following the Sahwa process in 2007-2008, the Islamic State—which had continued to maintain a presence in its core areas—was in a prime position to exploit the Sunni uprising against the Iraqi regime that escalated in 2012-2013.[33] Together with the influx of foreign fighters into the group, this was an important explanation for why it was able to establish itself as the dominant actor in large areas of Iraq and Syria.

The group also has a tendency to be expansive and tries to increase the size of the area it is controlling, as reflected in the official motto of “remain and expand” (‘baqiyah wa tatammadad’). This approach increases the risks of provoking a military offensive against the group, which over time can jeopardize its territorial control.[34]

However, despite the fact that the Islamic State is roughly following the same strategy as the last time it was weakened, it was specific historical circumstances not created by the group that enabled its dramatic comeback, as the next section of this discussion will make clear.

Opportunity Structure

The third factor that has changed significantly throughout the group’s history is the opportunity structure, defined as all the exogenous factors outside the control of the group and the environment that the group had to operate in. These factors created constraints and limitations, but also opportunities that a group like the Islamic State could exploit—for instance, by triggering a sectarian conflict between Shiites and Sunnis by means of one of the most comprehensive suicide attack campaigns in history.[35]

The history of the group clearly illustrates that even if it has been roughly following the same overall strategy, the *impact* of this strategy has varied considerably due to changes in the opportunity structure. It also demonstrates that the primary strength of the Islamic State is its ability and willingness to exploit conflicts that existed independently of the group.

There is not room here for an exhaustive history of the origins of the Islamic State, but there is a general agreement that one of the most important roots of the group lies in the U.S invasion of Iraq and the toppling of the Sunni-Arab dominated regime of Saddam Hussein.[36] The dissolution of the Baath party and the Iraqi army led to a historical transfer of power in Iraq from the Sunni-Arab minority to the Shia-majority and the Kurds. The dissolution of the Iraqi army was particularly important for the rise of the Islamic State, as illustrated by the prominent role played by former Iraqi officers within the group’s top leadership, especially after 2010.[37] This process resulted in the disenfranchisement of a Sunni Arab ruling elite and a feeling among Sunni Arabs of being politically and militarily marginalized by consecutive regimes which were all dominated by the Shia-majority. Although AQI initially was just a small group within a much larger Sunni Arab insurgency, this grievance has been a consistent recruitment tool for the group. AQI could exploit the fear and rage many Sunni Arabs felt towards U.S. forces and Shia militias, especially amongst those Sunnis who had been victims of atrocities committed by U.S. forces or Shia militias.

Pollings of Iraqis illustrate how the Sunni community’s support for violent activities tends to be correlated with how the Sunni community perceived its security situation, and provides an indication of how IS has thrived in periods of insecurity. The Sunni Arabs’ support for violence increased as the security situation deteriorated, and conversely, when the security situation improved, the support for violence decreased. This is illustrated by the “Where Things Stand” (WTS) series, consisting of six polls conducted in Iraq from 2004 until 2009. [38] The WTS series documents a continuously deteriorating security situation from March 2004 until March 2007, as a rapidly growing proportion of Iraqis—especially among Sunni Arabs—described a difficult security situation.[39] However, from March 2007 to March 2008 the view among the Sunni Arabs turned dramatically more positive - a turnaround coinciding roughly with the fall of AQI.[40] The relationship between the fall of AQI and this feeling of an improved security situation may have been spurious, as there were additional fac-

tors accounting for the reduction of violence during 2007-2008, such as Muqtada al-Sadr's announcement of a cease-fire in August 2007 and his efforts to rein in the violence of the Sadr-led Jaysh al-Mahdi.[41] However, the polls do at least indicate that the potential to mobilize Iraqis to participate in violent activities correlates with the Sunni community's perception of their own security, and reflects how AQI thrived in a climate of fear and insecurity.

Despite the group's decline in the period 2008-2010, the group was responsible for several large and coordinated terrorist attacks throughout Iraq. Based on statistics from the U.S National Counterterrorism Center, Iraq led the world in the number of terrorist attacks and in the numbers of people killed from 2008 to 2010. [42] The Global Terrorism Index ranked Iraq as the country most impacted by terrorism in 2011.[43] Based on empirical data, such as the number of attacks ISI were responsible for and the production of propaganda, the beginning of ISI's "comeback" might specifically be pinpointed to 21 July 2012, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the beginning of the so-called "Breaking the Walls" campaign.[44] If we are to measure by the numbers of Iraqi civilians killed by violence, it was not the increase of ISI activity in 2012 that triggered the increase of violence in Iraq and the deteriorating situation in Iraq. Rather, it appears to have been the Maliki regime's crackdown on a protest camp in Hawija, in April 2013.[45] Based on the Iraqi Body Count database of violent civilian deaths in Iraq, the level of violence against civilians in Iraq was fairly constant from 2009 until April 2013, despite the increase of activity from ISI. The crackdown on the Hawija camp took place 23 April 2013, and from May 2013 there was a rapid increase in the number of civilians killed.[46] This increase is also reflected in the United Nations casualty figures from Iraq.[47] Incidentally, it was also in April 2013 that ISI announced its presence in Syria under the new name of Islamic State of Iraq and Sham.

The relationship between the rise of the Islamic State and the escalating conflicts in Iraq and Syria is detailed elsewhere, but the important point here is that the group initially played only a minor role in both of these conflicts. There were primarily other Sunni Arab actors who led the uprising in Syria against Bashar al-Assad and in the demonstrations in Iraq against the regime of Nuri al-Maliki. But these two conflicts eventually led to a breakdown of security and a fragmentation of the political and military authority in the traditional core areas of AQI/IS, the Sunni-Arab dominated areas in Northern Syria and Western Iraq. This provided IS with an opportunity to use its long experience of organizing militant activity, access to resources and ability to recruit the incoming foreign fighters in order to exploit the power vacuum and fragmentation, and to establish itself as one of the dominant actors in these areas.[48] Thus, one of the most important reasons for the resurgence of the group was that it was one of the strongest and most organized actors in a highly chaotic environment of otherwise weak, uncoordinated and fragmented actors. This means that the group operated within a vastly different opportunity structure compared to the years 2003-2011, when there were over 100,000 U.S. troops stationed in Iraq pursuing the stated mission of fighting and defeating al-Qaida.[49]

Concluding Remarks

This article has argued that specific historical circumstances enabled the dramatic rise of the Islamic State. Although the group was never completely defeated and would most likely have been able to survive in Iraq as a terrorist organization even without the outbreak of the conflict in Syria in 2011, it would have been impossible for the group to become so strong.

To be successful, the group was—and arguably remains—dependent on conflicts and root causes that exist independently of the group, but that the group can exploit. Unfortunately, there seems to be no lack of root causes which the Islamic State (or another extremist group) can exploit. In Iraq, IS has recruited amongst what we might term a "lost generation" of Sunni Arabs who have grown up after the fall of Saddam Hussein and who have experienced much conflict and loss and grievances throughout their life. This generation has

been even more lost during recent years due to the destruction inflicted upon the Sunni Arab areas, both due to the activity of the Islamic State itself and by the offensives against the group. These once occupied cities that became targets of allied aerial and artillery are today in dire need of reconstruction, but this process has hardly gotten off the ground.[50]

Another important challenge will be to re-integrate the family members of former Islamic State fighters. According to some estimates, as many as around 100,000 Iraqis had at least one family member who joined the Islamic State, and a large number of these family members have been driven out of their homes, and are kept imprisoned in camps. This means that there exists a large pool of potential recruits for a group like the Islamic State or some other extremist organization.[51]

It is also a challenge and a potential grievance that much of the Sunni-Arab areas that were controlled by the Islamic State are currently controlled by forces who liberated these areas. In Iraq, these forces are mainly Shia militias with strong links to Iran, and in Syria, Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) now control these areas.[52]

A U.S. withdrawal from Syria will most likely intensify the conflict between Kurdish militias and Turkey and Turkish-backed insurgent groups in Syria.[53] This implies that the Kurdish militias—some of the most effective local forces against the Islamic State—will need to shift their focus from combatting the remnants of IS to fighting against Turkey-backed groups, something that might provide IS an opportunity to come back.

Meanwhile, as it becomes more difficult for the Islamic State to operate in Iraq and Syria, and increasingly difficult for foreign fighters to enter Iraq and Syria, the foreign fighters might travel elsewhere. The leadership of the Islamic State has recommended that potential recruits travel to other provinces (*wilayat*) of the Islamic State, or that they stay at home and carry out terrorist attacks against countries that were involved in the multinational coalition against the group. As Aaron Zelin and Jacob Zenn point out in their articles in this Special Issue, the affiliates of Islamic State might increase in importance following the decline of the Islamic “core” State in Iraq and Syria.[54] At the same time, as Elisabeth Kendall discusses in her article on the Islamic State in Yemen, the group has to compete with an al-Qaida affiliate (AQAP) that is more firmly rooted in Yemen than the Islamic State.[55]

The foreign fighters, especially those from the Middle East, already present in Syria and Iraq might establish new groups or join other jihadi groups active in the region. One of these groups might, for instance, be Hurras al-Din. According to a recent report, this group has been able to recruit foreign fighters both from the Islamic State and from Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).[56] Given the historical relationship between the leaders of this group and al-Qaida’s top leadership, Hurras al-Din might be able to establish itself as the leading AQ affiliate in the region, especially if it succeeds in attracting more recruits from both HTS and IS.

As Charlie Winter points out in his article in this Special Issue, the propaganda and media warfare of the Islamic State will play an important role in the group’s strategy to maintain its “brand”, even if its media output has declined as it has lost territorial control.[57] The group has also adapted its propaganda to the new circumstances, focusing more on surviving and urging terrorist attacks against countries involved in the offensive against the group.[58]

To conclude, the Islamic State will most likely remain a security threat for many years, in one form or another. Despite its apparently rigid ideology, the group has shown a remarkable ability to survive and to adapt to changing circumstances. This is one of the most important reasons for the group’s resilience, and there are several indications that the group has adapted following its recent loss of territorial control. These measures are, however, primarily reactive measures that the deteriorating situation has forced the group to implement. Whether the group will also be able to do more than just “remain” and “expand” again is to a large degree dependent on factors beyond the control of the IS.

Note: The author wishes to thank Petter Nesser, Henrik Gråtud, Anne Stenersen and Brynjar Lia for their useful

and insightful comments and input to earlier versions of this article.

About the Author: Truls Hallberg Tønnessen is a Senior Research Fellow at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, focusing on Salafi-jihadi insurgent groups in Iraq and Syria. In 2016, he was a visiting scholar at the Center for Security Studies, Georgetown University. He obtained his PhD in history from the University of Oslo in 2015, with a dissertation on the rise of al-Qaida in Iraq in 2003-2006. He can be followed @trulstonnessen

Notes

[1] For a comprehensive overview of the literature and an illustration of the magnitude of publications on the Islamic State see the 4-part bibliography compiled by Judith Tinnes and published in *Perspectives on Terrorism*. “Bibliography: Islamic State (Part 1),” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2015), “Bibliography: Islamic State (Part 2),” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2016), “Bibliography: Islamic State (Part 3),” *Perspectives on Terrorism* Vol. 11, No. 3 (2017) and Bibliography: Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh), [Part 4], *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2018)

[2] See, for instance, Cole Bunzel, “From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State,” *Brookings Institution*, March 2015, 13, Erin Marie Saltman and Charlie Winter, “Islamic State: The Changing Face of Modern Jihadism,” *Quilliam Foundation* (2014), 27-28, Howard J. Shatz and Erin-Elizabeth Johnson, “The Islamic State We Knew: Insights before the Resurgence and Their Implications,” *RAND*, September 2015 and McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*.

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Ideological Infighting in the Islamic State

By Cole Bunzel

Abstract

Drawing on leaked documents and other original sources in Arabic, this article examines the internal struggles over defining the Islamic State's ideology during the period 2014 to the present. Since the Islamic State declared the caliphate in summer 2014, disagreements over doctrinal matters—primarily related to *takfir* (excommunication)—have sparked furious debates among different factions of the group. The earliest bout of infighting culminated in 2014 in the execution of a number of “extremist” scholars and activists. Infighting would reemerge in 2016, however, and grow increasingly more contentious, leading to the release of dueling pronouncements on *takfir*, the dismissal of numerous officials in the Islamic State's executive council, and later their defection and flight from the group. The disaffected include both those who believe the group has become too extreme and those who believe it has become too moderate. The ideological incoherence in the Islamic State may well affect its long-term prospects.

Keywords: Islamic State, jihadism, ideology, theology

Introduction

Beginning in 2013, it became increasingly clear that al-Qaida and the Islamic State were deeply divided over ideology, each representing a competing strand of the ideological movement known as Jihadi Salafism (*al-salafiyya al-jihadiyya*).^[1] As the Islamic State of Iraq restyled itself the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, then the Islamic State in full caliphal garb, its ties with al-Qaida unraveled and the ideological fissures in Jihadi Salafism, once held in abeyance, came rushing to the fore.^[2]

The Islamic State, representing the more hardline wing of the jihadi movement, accordingly embraced a more doctrinally exclusivist brand, encouraging *takfir* (excommunication) of Muslims deemed insufficiently pure in regard of *tawhid* (monotheism). The Taliban, for instance, once the vaunted ally and defender of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida, was cast as beyond the pale: a “nationalist” movement all too tolerant of the heretical Shi'a.^[3] Even the Islamic State's jihadi competitors in al-Qaida could be targets of *takfir*. In a 2015 statement, for instance, the Islamic State pronounced Jabhat al-Nusra, then al-Qaida's affiliate in Syria, an apostate group;^[4] a subsequent statement in 2016 established that the charge of apostasy applied to both the group as a whole and its individual members.^[5] Al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri was generally spared explicit accusations of unbelief, but nonetheless was frequently derided as wayward and misguided.^[6] In May 2014, Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani, the Islamic State's official spokesman until his death in August 2016, called on al-Zawahiri to “correct” (*tashih*) his “methodology” (*manhaj*) by publicly condemning the Shi'a as unbelievers and being clearer about the infidel nature of the military forces of the Middle East's apostate regimes.^[7] In saying this, al-'Adnani was distinguishing the Islamic State from al-Qaida ideologically. The ideological discrepancy between the two groups was soon confirmed when al-Zawahiri portrayed the Islamic State as “Kharijites,” “*takfir*is,” and “extremists.”^[8]

In distancing itself from al-Qaida, the Islamic State was adopting a distinctly rigid and uncompromising version of Jihadi Salafism around which its members and supporters could rally and unite. Yet ideological differences within the Islamic State itself were no small matter, and soon these began manifesting in controversy and dissent. Indeed, ideological infighting in the Islamic State has been rampant, with serious consequences for the group's unity and even perhaps its long-term survivability. Until recently, little was known about the precise nature, extent, and severity of these disputes, as the group's leadership sought to keep them under wraps. Over the past year and more, however, leaked documents and other sources have emerged that allow us to give an account of these ideological quarrels and to see where they might be headed.^[9]

Theological Background

First, it will be helpful to begin by introducing something of the theological background against which these wars over *takfir* have been fought. Of greatest importance are two competing imperatives in Sunni Islamic thought, one discouraging *takfir* and one encouraging and even requiring it.

The first imperative is deeply rooted in Sunni tradition. It is the general prohibition against wrongfully excommunicating fellow Muslims, combined with the warning that misplaced accusations of unbelief will boomerang on the accuser. The prohibition is grounded in a number of *hadith*, or prophetic statements, in which the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have cautioned against *takfir* and pointed to the potential boomerang effect. According to one such statement, found in the most authoritative Sunni *hadith* collections, the Prophet declared, “If a man says to his brother, ‘O unbeliever,’ it redounds upon one of them.”[10] The implication is clear: Do not call someone an unbeliever unless you are absolutely certain.

The second imperative also has deep roots in Sunni tradition but is primarily associated with the Wahhabi movement in Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism, a Sunni revivalist movement founded in the 18th century, historically has been concerned above all with the distinction between pure monotheism (*tawhid*) and polytheism (*shirk*). To enforce the distinction, the Wahhabis decreed that those seen as committing polytheistic acts—in the traditional Wahhabi view, acts such as calling upon or seeking the aid of saints or prophets—must be declared unbelievers. In other words, *takfir* of polytheists was a duty. Furthermore, the Wahhabis made it a duty to excommunicate those who failed or hesitated to excommunicate polytheists. Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792), the founder of Wahhabism, articulated this doctrine in a short treatise known as “The Nullifiers of Islam” (*nawaqid al-Islam*). The third nullifier in the list states, “Whoever does not excommunicate the polytheists, or is doubtful about their unbelief, or affirms the validity of their doctrine—he is an unbeliever by consensus.”[11] This idea—that one must pronounce *takfir* on those failing or hesitating to pronounce *takfir*—is known commonly in jihadi circles as “the third nullifier” (*al-naqid al-thalith*).

In the Islamic State, as in Jihadi Salafism at large, the Wahhabi heritage (under the guise of Salafism) enjoys pride of place as representing the correct approach to theology. Most ideological infighting in the Islamic State has revolved around the question of how exclusivist the group ought to be—that is, how narrowly the boundaries of Islam and unbelief ought to be drawn. In this context, it is Wahhabi principles, and the third nullifier in particular, that are being debated.

The Hazimis

The early phase of ideological contestation in the Islamic State can be traced to the rather obscure figure of Ahmad ibn ‘Umar al-Hazimi, a middle-aged Saudi religious scholar from Mecca.[12] To all appearances, al-Hazimi is not himself a jihadi, but his views on *takfir*, including especially his strict interpretation of the third nullifier, would have a tremendous impact on a group of jihadis who went on to join the Islamic State. Most of these came from Tunisia, where al-Hazimi had traveled as a preacher following the 2011 revolution there. In 2013, following his trips to Tunisia, he delivered a series of lectures on the third nullifier in which he elaborated doctrine that he called *takfir al-‘adhir*, or “the excommunication of the excuser.” The excuser, al-Hazimi explained, is “one who excuses polytheists on account of ignorance.” In other words, it is someone who excuses a person’s unbelief or polytheism on the grounds that the person is ignorant of the fact that he or she is committing unbelief or polytheism. At question here is the theological concept known as *al-‘udhr bi’l-jahl*, or “excusing on the basis of ignorance,” which many Salafi Muslims, including jihadis, have seen as a restraint on excessive *takfir*. Al-Hazimi is categorically opposed to *al-‘udhr bi’l-jahl* when it comes to so-called “greater polytheism” (*al-shirk al-akbar*) or “greater unbelief” (*al-kufr al-akbar*), categories that include acts such as supplicating the dead or voting in elections. He therefore deems those who excuse polytheists on the basis of ignorance to be unbelievers in accordance with the third nullifier.

Those in the Islamic State who adopted al-Hazimi’s views came to be known as “the Hazimis” (*al-Hazimiyya, al-Hazimiyyun*).[13] Chief among them was a Tunisian named Abu Ja’far al-Hattab, a former member of the

Shari'a Committee of Ansar al-Shari'a in Tunisia who became an early supporter of the Islamic State. In June 2013, he authored a book calling on Muslims in Iraq and Syria to give *bay'a* (the contract of allegiance) to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[14] According to one source, al-Hattab belonged to an early Shari'a committee in the Islamic State (probably set up in 2013) that also included the Bahraini Turki al-Bin'ali and the Iraqi Abu 'Ali al-Anbari.[15] Unlike these other men, however, al-Hattab was a fierce advocate of al-Hazimi's concept of *takfir al-'adhir*. Al-Bin'ali, in a mid-2014 tweet, denounced the concept of *takfir al-'adhir* as an innovation;[16] later that year, Abu Sulayman al-Shami (aka Ahmad Abu Samra), a Syrian-American high-level official in the Islamic State, authored a scathing critique of al-Hazimi and his views, describing him as a supporter of the Saudi regime and explaining that the notion of *takfir al-'adhir* had plunged its proponents into an endless spiral of *takfir*. [17] This was the main critique of the Hazimis: namely, that their obsession with *takfir al-'adhir* inevitably led to *takfir* in infinite regress, or an endless chain of *takfir* (*al-takfir bi'l-tasalsul*). In September 2014, it was rumored online that al-Hattab had been executed by the Islamic State.[18]

A document from the Islamic State's General Security Department (Diwan al-Amn al-'Amm), dated November 14, 2015, confirms that al-Hattab, among other leaders of the "extremists" described here, was indeed arrested and executed.[19] The document, which is dedicated to examining "the extremism phenomenon in the Islamic State," highlights the influence of al-Hazimi on a "current" (*tayyar*) of Islamic State members who adhered to the doctrine of *takfir al-'adhir* and who believed that most Muslims ought to be regarded as unbelievers. These men had even reached the conclusion that certain leaders of the Islamic State were unbelievers on account of their failure to excommunicate Ayman al-Zawahiri. Approximately 70 of the extremists, according to the document, were killed after being arrested and interrogated, while more than 50 managed to flee to Turkey. Abu Ja'far al-Hattab is named first in a list of 11 leaders of the current. Following the leaders' execution, the document says, a number of secretive extremist cells were formed, some of which plotted against the caliphate. The document concludes that while "the danger of the extremists" has been alleviated, "the extremism phenomenon" is beginning to take a different form, its members practicing *taqiyya* (dissimulation).

The Islamic State said little in public about the Hazimi extremists, though in late 2014 the General Committee (al-Lajna al-'Amma), the predecessor of the Islamic State's executive body known as the Delegated Committee (al-Lajna al-Mufawwada), issued a statement prohibiting discussion of the "secondary issues" related to *al-'udhr bi'l-jahl* and forbidding distribution of related audio, visual, and written materials.[20] In late 2014, a video was released from "Raqqqa Province" featuring the arrested members of an "extremist cell," who are seen confessing to having excommunicated the Islamic State and plotted to rebel.[21] An English-language article in the Islamic State's *Dabiq* magazine also discussed the rounding up of this "Khariji cell." [22] This was likely one of the cells mentioned in the document that were formed in the wake of al-Hattab's death.

The Methodological Committee

Others in the Islamic State agreed with the General Security Department's conclusion that extremism remained a problem. One of these was Turki al-Bin'ali, the young Bahraini who had become the head of the Islamic State's scholarly research outfit, the Office of Research and Studies (Maktab al-Buhuth wa'l-Dirasat).[23] In a February 2016 letter to the Delegated Committee, al-Bin'ali offered his appraisal of the problem.[24] "It saddens me to tell you," he wrote, "that from time to time the troublemaking of the extremists continues in the ranks of the brothers." Yet "the new extremists," he continued, were not quite the same. For one thing, their leaders were Saudis, not Tunisians as before. For another, they "have appeared in a new garb and with a new issue." The issue was whether *takfir* was to be considered "part of the foundation of the religion" (*min asl al-din*) or "one of its requirements" (*min lawazimih*). According to "the new extremists," al-Bin'ali said, *takfir* was "part of the foundation of the religion," meaning that it was a foundational religious principle that one could not shirk without falling into unbelief; those claiming otherwise were to be excommunicated. For al-Bin'ali, this insistence on *takfir* as foundational was no different from the Hazimi doctrine of *takfir al-'adhir*, since if *takfir* is foundational then it is not permitted to engage in *al-'udhr bi'l-jahl*. It is simply *takfir al-'adhir* stated another way.

However, not all agreed with al-Bin'ali that extremism remained such a problem. On the contrary, around this time an important segment of the Islamic State's leadership was coming to the view that the greater problem was in fact excessive theological moderation, or restraint in *takfir*. This was the conclusion reached by a special committee formed in mid-February 2016 to assess the doctrinal views of the Islamic State's scholars in Iraq and Syria. The committee, which bore no official title but was known as "the methodological committee" (*al-lajna al-manhajyya*), was overseen by Abu Muhammad al-Furqan, the head of the Central Media Department (Diwan al-I'lam al-Markazi), and staffed by, among others, Abu Sulayman al-Shami, the forenamed Syrian-American leader, and an Egyptian named Abu Khabbab al-Masri (aka Shu'ba al-Masri). According to an internal report written by al-Masri in July 2016, the committee began its activities at a time when the "new extremists" were allegedly on the rise; but after interviewing several dozen of the Islamic State's scholars, the committee concluded that the "new extremists" were for the most part a reaction to the greater problem of moderation.[25] The word used to indicate the latter was *irja'* (Murji'ism, or "postponement"), a theological term denoting an early Islamic sect that postponed judgments of unbelief.[26]

The scholars suspected of *irja'* included Turki al-Bin'ali, who was himself interviewed by al-Furqan's methodological committee on April 10, 2016. A summary of the meeting, written by al-Masri, shows that the committee regarded al-Bin'ali with great skepticism, deeming some of his views on *takfir* to be inadequate.[27] This included his view that professed Muslims living in the so-called "lapsed abode of unbelief" (*dar al-kufr al-tari*)—that is, Islamic lands that had forsaken the Shari'a—were to be regarded *prima facie* as Muslims, not as unbelievers. Others assessed to be in the *irja'* camp included Abu Bakr al-Qahtani, a Saudi on the Delegated Committee who argued that *takfir* was "one of the requirements of the religion" not "a part of the foundation of the religion," and Abu al-Mundhir al-Harbi, a Saudi belonging to the Office of Research and Studies who believed that appealing to infidel courts was not in every case tantamount to unbelief.[28]

One outcome of the committee's work was an official statement condemning "those who hesitate to excommunicate polytheists" (*man tawaqqafa fi takfir al-mushrikin*).[29] This statement, dated May 29, 2016, was issued by an obscure body called the Central Office for Overseeing the Shari'a Departments (*al-Maktab al-Markazi li-Mutaba'at al-Dawawin*). Written primarily by al-Furqan, who solicited the input of the Islamic State's scholars and officials, it condemned the language of *takfir al-'adhir* as problematic while affirming that there is no excuse for hesitating to excommunicate polytheists. On the all-important question whether *takfir* is part of the foundation of the religion or one of its requirements, it was equivocal, stating that discussion of *takfir* in terms of foundational and required is prohibited.

Al-Furqan's statement should thus be seen as an attempt to forge a theological compromise between those of relatively more extremist and those of relatively more moderate orientation in the Islamic State. The men who saw themselves as occupying the middle ground as regards *takfir*—al-Furqan, Abu Sulayman al-Shami, Abu Khabbab al-Masri, *inter alios*—were trying to keep the two sides at bay.[30] Scholars such as al-Bin'ali do not seem to have agreed with al-Furqan's statement—weeks before the statement was issued, al-Bin'ali wrote to al-Furqan saying that *takfir* should be understood as "one of the requirements of the religion"[31]—but they did not erupt in protest.

The Takfir Memorandum and the Scholarly Backlash

Al-Furqan's theological compromise may have lasted longer had he not been killed in an airstrike on September 7, 2016.[32] Several months later, in January 2017, Abu Sulayman al-Shami was killed by the same means,[33] and around this time Abu Khabbab al-Masri was killed as well.[34] There was great turmoil in the upper ranks of the Islamic State's leadership, and as subsequent events were to show, some of the vacant positions were filled by men of more extremist persuasion than their predecessors. It was in this context that Turki al-Bin'ali, on January 20, 2017, sent al-Baghdadi a letter warning him against embracing a "theory of balance" whereby a certain number of extremists would be empowered in order to accommodate their constituency. Al-Bin'ali had it on good authority that this was the policy al-Baghdadi was pursuing, and he appears to have been correct. [35]

The work of settling and clarifying the group's ideology had been put on hiatus. When it was resumed in early 2017, it was under the leadership of a young Saudi newly appointed to the Delegated Committee named Abu Hafis al-Wad'ani. Al-Wad'ani, a former governor (*wali*) of Raqqa Province, was tasked with reestablishing al-Furqan's methodological committee and ensuring ideological conformity among the Islamic State's scholars.[36] But unlike before, al-Wad'ani's efforts had an explosive effect. Unlike al-Furqan, al-Wad'ani showed no interest in finding middle ground, instead siding entirely with those identified by al-Bin'ali as the "new extremists," that is, those who consider *takfir* to be "part of the foundation of the religion" (*min asl al-din*). Al-Wad'ani sought to enshrine this more extremist position as official doctrine and, in doing so, to put the perceived moderates in their place once and for all.

On May 17, 2017, the Delegated Committee released a seven-page memorandum under the title "That Those Who Perish Might Perish by a Clear Sign, and [That Those Who] Live Might Live by a Clear Sign," a quotation of Qur'an 8:42.[37] Addressed "to all the provinces, departments, and committees" of the Islamic State, it condemned the "extremists" who promote the idea of *takfir* in infinite regress (*al-takfir bi'l-tasalsul*), but its main concern was the moderates, or the "Murji'ites." The memorandum took an uncompromising position on those who waver in excommunicating "polytheists," including those who vote in elections, affirming that *takfir* of polytheists is "one of the manifest principles of the religion" (*min usul al-din al-zahira*). The latter phrase is effectively the same in meaning as "part of the foundation of the religion" (*min asl al-din*). In stating this, therefore, the Delegated Committee was adopting the position of the "new extremists." Significantly, the memorandum stood in contradiction to the earlier statement produced by the Central Office for Overseeing the Shari'a Departments, which had warned against classifying *takfir* as either foundational or required.

The response of the Islamic State's scholarly class, headed by al-Bin'ali, was swift and dramatic. Unlike in previous episodes of infighting, the scholars made their objections public, leaking their refutations online.

On May 19, 2017 al-Bin'ali addressed a long letter to the Delegated Committee with his critical "observations" on the memorandum.[38] He complained bitterly that the memorandum was issued in undue haste, not having been subjected to the scrutiny of "the scholars." Some of al-Bin'ali's criticisms were trivial or pedantic—the new statement contained typographical and grammatical errors, and it relied on a few weak *hadith*—but his main objections were substantial. He noted that the memorandum seemed intended to appease "the extremists" (*al-ghulat*), who were, he claimed, celebrating in mosques and on social media that "the Islamic State had repented and returned to the truth." By declaring *takfir* "one of the unambiguous foundations of the religion," he argued, the Delegated Committee had contravened al-Furqan's instruction to avoid classifying *takfir* one way or the other. For al-Bin'ali, the implication of the phrase "one of the unambiguous foundations of the religion" was without question *takfir* in infinite regress. Another concession to the extremists that he bemoaned was a line to the effect that professed Muslims beyond the Islamic State's territory—that is, in *Dar al-kufr al-tari'*—are not necessarily to be regarded as Muslims. What "most people" have taken away from this line, he noted regretfully, is that "the Islamic State excommunicates everyone outside its borders." He then quoted several earlier speeches by Islamic State leaders seemingly contradicting this position. The letter closes with an appeal to the Delegated Committee to revise and correct what it has written.

On May 31, al-Bin'ali died in Mayadin, Syria in an airstrike carried out by the U.S.-led coalition.[39] In June, another Islamic State scholar who refuted the memorandum, the Kuwaiti Abu 'Abd al-Barr al-Salihi, also died in an airstrike; at the time of his death, he was imprisoned by the group's senior leadership.[40] The supporters of these men regarded their deaths as suspiciously convenient for the more extremist elements of the Islamic State. They speculated that these scholars and others had been killed at the direction of their ideological opponents, who in this case would have leaked the men's locations to the coalition.

These accusations were made explicitly by another Islamic State scholar, Abu Muhammad al-Hashimi, in an open letter to al-Baghdadi dated July 5, 2017.[41] Al-Hashimi, who notes that he worked under al-Bin'ali at the Office of Research and Studies, is extremely critical of the caliphate in his letter, calling it an "entity in which innovations and extremism have spread." The extremists, he alleges, have assumed power in the Delegated Committee and waged a "war against the scholars." "The soldiers," he tells al-Baghdadi, "are saying among

themselves” that al-Bin‘ali’s death “was contrived by those who wrote or supported the memorandum of error.” Al-Hashimi also seems convinced that al-Salihi’s death was intentional. He describes how al-Salihi was arrested by the Islamic State’s security service in the last days of Ramadan 1438 (equivalent to the last days of June 2017) and brought to a “cramped, old prison” along with “more than 60” of his supporters, only for them to be killed soon afterwards in an airstrike.

The next month, in August 2017, another prominent ally of al-Bin‘ali’s, Abu Bakr al-Qahtani, was killed in an airstrike in Iraq.[42] One of his supporters wrote that his death recalled the “murky circumstances” of al-Bin‘ali’s demise.[43]

The *takfir* memorandum had thus created a situation of all-out ideological warfare in the Islamic State. Extremist figures such as Abu Hafs al-Wad‘ani were using their newfound power to isolate and perhaps even eliminate the scholars. Naturally, the latter were losing confidence in the Islamic State’s leadership, and some, such as al-Hashimi, were on the verge of leaving the caliphate altogether. At this point, al-Baghdadi realized that he needed to intervene before the scholars and their supporters completely abandoned ship.

The “Return to the Truth”

On September 15, 2017, the Delegated Committee released a new statement withdrawing the *takfir* memorandum issued back in May.[44] “Adherence to the content of the memorandum titled ‘That Those Who Perish Might Perish by a Clear Sign’ ... has been terminated,” it stated, “on account of its containing errors of knowledge and misleading and unreliable statements that have given rise to disagreement and division in the ranks of the *mujahidin* particularly and the Muslims in general.” The brief statement concluded by reminding readers of “the virtue of returning to the truth,” and in a postscript announced that an audio series dedicated to the ideological issues in dispute was forthcoming.

According to one account of the events leading up to this “return to the truth,” when al-Baghdadi learned of the uproar caused by the *takfir* memo he called a special meeting between himself, members of the Delegated Committee, and some of the Islamic State’s scholars.[45] After hearing both sides of the ideological divide, he decided to dissolve the Delegated Committee and withdraw the May 2017 memorandum. One of the scholars present, the Egyptian Abu Muhammad al-Masri, was appointed to a seat on the newly reconstituted Delegated Committee; another, the Jordanian Abu Ya‘qub al-Maqdisi, was named the successor to al-Bin‘ali as head of the Office of Research and Studies. Following the meeting, several of the members of the former Delegated Committee, including Abu Hafs al-Wad‘ani, were imprisoned, as were the members al-Wad‘ani’s methodological committee. Many of those incarcerated would flee the Islamic State as its territory shrank; others, including al-Wad‘ani, were eventually executed.

Al-Wad‘ani himself would write a fascinating retrospective on al-Baghdadi’s intervention and its aftermath. In December 2017, after being released from prison, he sent a long letter to al-Baghdadi questioning the wisdom of withdrawing the *takfir* memorandum and complaining about the rapidly deteriorating condition of the caliphate.[46] The Islamic State, he said, has become “two factions” (*fariqayn*), one having been empowered and the other having been subject to a campaign of suppression. He noted that “many of the brothers” are unsure whether al-Baghdadi is fully aware of what is going on. “We truly do not know,” he wrote, “whether this is happening with your knowledge or without your knowledge.” Al-Wad‘ani urged al-Baghdadi to return to the battlefield to reassure the soldiers, and to “try to repair what your recent decisions have ruined.” After writing his letter, al-Wad‘ani became a wanted man, though this time he managed to escape capture for two months. In June 2018, he was executed by the Islamic State on charges of being a “Kharijite.”[47]

In the second half of September 2017, the promised audio series appeared in six installments.[48] Titled *Silsila ‘ilmiyya fi bayan masa’il manhajiyya* (“Knowledge Series Clarifying Matters of Methodology”), it made a number of points regarding the right approach to *takfir*, one of which stands out about above all. This comes in the third episode, where *takfir* of polytheists is classified as “one of the requirements of the religion” (*min wajibat al-din*), not as “part of the foundation of the religion” (*min asl al-din*). It was a complete reversal of the

position set out in the memorandum issued four months prior.

The scholars thus seemed to have achieved a major victory with the *Silsila 'ilmiyya*, but it soon emerged that they were not satisfied. The recantation of the May 2017 memorandum was, in their view, half-hearted and incomplete. For one thing, al-Baghdadi had not released the entirety of the audio series prepared by the scholars; he had withheld three critical episodes discouraging excess in *takfir*. In July 2018, these three missing episodes were leaked by an online media organization with close ties to the scholars.[49] This outfit, Mu'assasat al-Turath al-'Ilmi ("The Scholarly Heritage Establishment"), was founded in October 2017 for the purpose of publishing the books, essays, and other works (i.e., the "heritage") of the Office of Research and Studies. In December 2017, Mu'assasat al-Turath began reporting the occasional arrest of the Islamic State's scholars, including Abu Muhammad al-Masri and Abu Ya'qub al-Maqdisi, as well as the return to power of some of the "extremists" of the previous Delegated Committee.[50] The scholars were once again being clamped down on.

Conclusion

Indeed, neither of the two sides—that is, neither the more moderate wing nor the more extremist wing of the Islamic State—was entirely victorious following the September 2017 "return to the truth." Presumably, al-Baghdadi's aim was to restore the balance between the two sides, not to have one of them devour the other. In granting the scholars a symbolic victory by formally adopting their position on *takfir*, he was wary of alienating the more extremist types represented strongly in the Islamic State's Central Media Department, among other places. But in trying to alienate neither side, al-Baghdadi seems to have disappointed both. The relative extremists became resentful of the official position on *takfir* outlined in the *Silsila 'ilmiyya*, while the relative moderates became upset with him for tolerating the extremists.

Unable to find an ideological middle ground, al-Baghdadi opted for papering over the ideological divisions in the Islamic State, yet his approach may not be viable in the long term. The scholars, representing the more moderate wing, appear increasingly sidelined. The Office of Research and Studies was shut down,[51] and in July 2018 its leader was imprisoned and accused of, among other things, collaborating with Mu'assasat al-Turath.[52] The latter has continued to publish the "heritage" of the scholars, portraying those who remain as powerless and persecuted. Should the scholars and their supporters decamp en masse, it could deprive the Islamic State of a critical base of support in the wider Jihadi Salafi community for years to come.

What is most striking about the ideological infighting described above is that much of it has coincided with a pivotal moment in the Islamic State's history—namely, its loss of the vast majority of its territorial holdings in Iraq and Syria between 2016 and 2017. These setbacks, rather than distracting from theological debates, have instead intensified and exacerbated them. This says something about the nature of the Islamic State and its constituents and supporters. When a militant group is on its heels and is being beat back, it is only natural that the strategy and policy of the group be called into question. In the case of the Islamic State, this has meant first and foremost the group's theological orientation. The level of ideological discord has correlated with the level of worldly decline and failure. Whether the Islamic State can manage to repair its ideological house, or at least keep the infighting at bay, may well depend on whether conditions on the ground improve.

For the moment, the ideological divisions continue to fester, leaving open the possibility of an organizational split, which would see the departure of the Islamic State's more moderate members and supporters. It is worth mentioning that some al-Qaida supporters online have welcomed the development of this ideological split in the Islamic State. For instance, in May 2018, pro-al-Qaida channels on Telegram shared a message by a certain "Son of al-Qaida" who expressed pleasant surprise by a "more open and more moderate" tendency forming in the Islamic State both online and on the ground. The author urged his readers not to "curse the darkness" but rather to "light a candle," suggesting that those in al-Qaida's orbit ought to reach out to these disaffected Islamic State members and supporters of less extremist persuasion.[53] Whether such efforts will succeed—that is, whether some kind of rapprochement between al-Qaida supporters and disaffected Islamic State supporters might be achieved—is yet to be seen. The "Murji'ites" of the Islamic State have not completely given up on the

caliphate yet. If they do, there may still be too much bad blood with al-Qaida for them simply to return to it.

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Notes

[1] See further Cole Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State*, Brookings Institution, 2015. Ideology was not the only factor separating al-Qaida and the Islamic State. Issues of personality and strategy were also key, but different approaches to ideology have been and remain critical.

[2] For an excellent study of these fault lines in the preceding period, see Brynjar Lia, “Jihadis Divided between Strategists and Doctrinarians,” in *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 69-87.

[3] See, for instance, “The Rāfidah: From Ibn Saba’ to the Dajjāl,” *Dabiq* 13 (January 2016): 32-45, available at <https://jihadology.net/2016/01/19/new-issue-of-the-islamic-states-magazine-dabiq-13/>. See further the widely shared essay in online Islamic State circles, “Juz’ fi bayan harakat Taliban wa-kufriyyatiha min bayanatiha ’l-rasmiyya wa-majallatiha wa-dasturiha ’l-taghuti,” available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/bayan-aqidat-harakat-taliban.pdf>.

[4] Letter from the Delegated Committee, December 12, 2015, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/hukm-al-fasail.pdf>.

[5] Letter from the Central Office for Overseeing the Shari’a Departments, June 1, 2016, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/hukm-tanzim-qaidat-suriya.pdf>.

[6] See, for instance, Abu Maysara al-Shami, “The Qā’ida of adh-Dhawāhiri, al-Harārī, and an-Nadhārī, and the Absent Yemenī Wisdom,” *Dabiq* 6 (December 2014): 16-24, available at <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/the-islamic-state-e2809cdc481biq-magazine-622.pdf>.

[7] Abu Muhammad al-‘Adnani, “Udhran amīr al-Qā’ida,” *Mu’assasat al-Furqān*, May 11, 2014, transcript available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/udhran-amir-al-qaida.pdf>.

[8] Ayman al-Zawahiri, “al-Sham amana fi a’naqikum,” *Mu’assasat al-Sahab*, January 14, 2016, transcript available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/al-sham-amana.pdf>.

[9] The most illuminating sources have come from two Telegram channels called *Wa-harrid al-mu’minin* (“And Rouse the Believers”) and *Ma’dhiratan ila ’llah* (“As an Excuse before God”), which are run by men convinced that the Islamic State has become too moderate. The latter channel, which has changed its name to *al-Nadhir al-’Uryan* (“The Bare Warner”), is operated by a former colleague of Abu Hafis al-Wad’ani (d. 2018), a high-ranking member of the Delegated Committee on the more extremist side of things (more on him above). Together, *Wa-harrid al-mu’minin* and *al-Nadhir al-’Uryan* have leaked many official Islamic State documents—memorandums, letters, internal assessments, etc. Filling out the picture are the many leaked documents—mainly books and essays but also statements on current events—distributed by *Mu’assasat al-Turath al-’Ilmi* (“The Scholarly Heritage Establishment”) and *Mu’assasat al-Wafa’ al-’I’lamiyya* (“The Fidelity Media Establishment”). These channels are aligned with the Islamic State’s scholarly establishment, which has grown distrustful of the caliphate’s leadership for reasons opposite those of *Wa-harrid al-mu’minin* and *al-Nadhir al-’Uryan*: the scholars believe the Islamic State has become too extremist in orientation.

[10] See Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, *Sahih al-targhib wa’l-tarhib*, 3 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma’arif, 2000), 3:55.

[11] ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Qasim, ed., *al-Durar al-saniyya fi ’l-ajwiba al-Najdiyya*, 16 vols., rev. ed. (Riyadh: Warathat al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Qasim, 2012), 10:91-93, at 91.

[12] See further on al-Hazimi Cole Bunzel, “Caliphate in Disarray: Theological Turmoil in the Islamic State,” October 3, 2017, *Jihadica*, <http://www.jihadica.com/caliphate-in-disarray/>.

[13] For an overview, see Shams al-Din al-Naqaz, “al-Qissa al-kamila lil-tayyar al-Hazimi al-akthar ghuluwwan fi ’l-takfir qabl Da’ish wa-ba’dahu,” *Noon Post*, July 31, 2016 (part 1), <http://www.noonpost.org/content/19129>, August 2, 2017 (part 2), <http://www.noonpost.org/content/19167>.

[14] Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate*, 26.

- [15] Telegram post by al-Nadhir al-'Uryan, October 1, 2018, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/nadhir-hattab.png>
- [16] Tweet by @turky_albinali, May 22, 2014, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/binalitweet.png>.
- [17] Abu Maysara al-Shami (aka Abu Sulayman al-Shami, Ahmad Abu Samra), "Al-Hazimi bayna kabirat al-qu'ud wa-dalal al-Jamiyya," available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/al-Hazimi-bayn-kabirat-al-quud-wa-dalal-al-Jamiyya.pdf>.
- [18] Tweet by @abitns, September 9, 2014, <https://twitter.com/abitns/status/509320893030731776>.
- [19] "Taqrir 'an zahirat al-ghuluww fi 'l-Dawla al-Islamiyya," Diwan al-Amn al-'Amm, November 14, 2015, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/zahirat-al-ghuluww.pdf>. For more on this document, see Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "An Internal Report on Extremism in the Islamic State," *aymennjawad.org*, November 1, 2018, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/21757/an-internal-report-on-extremism-in-the-islamic>.
- [20] Statement by the General Committee, 1435/2014, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/tamim6.jpg>.
- [21] "Al-Qabd 'ala khaliyya min al-ghulat khattatat lil-khuru'j 'ala dawlat al-khilafa," al-Maktab al-'I'lamī li-Wilayat al-Ra'qa, December 2014, https://archive.org/details/rqa_gwll.
- [22] "Dismantling a Khārijī Cell," *Dabiq* 6 (December 2014): 31.
- [23] On al-Bin'ali, see Cole Bunzel, "The Caliphate's Scholar-In-Arms," July 9, 2014, <http://www.jihadica.com/the-caliphate%E2%80%99s-scholar-in-arms/>; on his role in the Office of Research and Studies, see Bunzel, "A House Divided: Origins and Persistence of the Islamic State's Ideological Divide," June 5, 2018, <http://www.jihadica.com/a-house-divided/>.
- [24] Turki al-Bin'ali to the Delegated Committee, February 13, 2016, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/al-binali-ila-al-lajna.pdf>.
- [25] Abu Khabbab al-Masri, *Taqrir 'amm 'an amal al-lajna*, July 9, 2016, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/taqrir-amm-an-amal-al-lajna.pdf>.
- [26] See further on this term as used by the jihadis Joas Wagemakers, "'Seceders' and 'Postponers'? An Analysis of the 'Khawarij' and 'Murji'a' Labels in Polemical Debates between Quietist and Jihadi-Salafis," in Jeevon Deol and Zaheer Kazmi, eds., *Contextualising Jihadi Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 145-164.
- [27] Abu Khabbab al-Masri, *Taqrir ba'd al-jalsa ma'a al-shaykh Abi Hammam al-Athari*, April 10, 2016, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/taqrir-bad-al-jalsa-maa-al-shaykh-Abi-Hammam.pdf>.
- [28] al-Masri, *Taqrir 'amm 'an amal al-lajna*.
- [29] Statement from al-Maktab al-Markazi li-Mutaba'at al-Dawawin, May 29, 2016, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/155.pdf>.
- [30] For a lengthy treatment of the issues of extremism and Murji'ism in the Islamic State from the standpoint of this intermediate group, see *al-Tashjir li-masa'il al-irja' wa'l-ghuluww fi 'l-takfir*, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/tashjir.pdf>. According to al-Nadhir al-'Uryan, this was co-authored by Abu Sulayman al-Shami and Abu Khabbab al-Masri with the assistance of al-Furqan. See Telegram post by al-Nadhir al-'Uryan, September 3, 2018, <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/al-jadwal-alahu.png>.
- [31] Turki al-Bin'ali to Abu Muhammad al-Furqan, May 19, 2016, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/al-binali-to-al-furqan.pdf>.
- [32] "Statement from Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook on Airstrike Against ISIL Senior Leader," U.S. Department of Defense, September 16, 2016, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/946983/statement-from-pentagon-press-secretary-peter-cook-on-airstrike-against-isil-se/>.
- [33] "Among the Believers are Men: Shaykh Abu Sulayman ash-Shami" *Rumiyah* 8 (April 2017): 40-45, available at <https://jihadology.net/2017/04/05/new-release-of-the-islamic-states-magazine-rome-8/>.
- [34] Telegram post by al-Nadhir al-'Uryan, October 16, 2018, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/abu-khabbab-al-masri.png>.
- [35] Turki al-Bin'ali to the Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, January 20, 2017, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/hawl-mawdu-ihtiwa-al-ghulat.pdf>. For more on this document, see Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "Turki al-Binali's Critique of the 'Theory of Balance': Translation and Analysis," *aymennjawad.org*, January 8, 2019, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2019/01/turki>

binali-critique-of-the-theory-of-balance.

[36] Telegram post by al-Nadhir al-'Uryan, September 24, 2018, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/nadhir-09.24.2018.pdf>.

[37] "Li-yahluka man halaka 'an bayyinatn wa-yahya man hayya 'an bayyina," Delegated Committee, May 17, 2017, available at http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/tamim_h_8_t_31.pdf. For an English translation, see "That Those Who Perish Would Perish upon Proof and Those Who Live Would Live upon Proof," May 17, 2017 available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/That-Those-Who-Perish.pdf>.

[38] Turki al-Bin'ali to the Delegated Committee, May 19, 2018, available at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Binali-letter.pdf>.

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The Islamic State's Way of War in Iraq and Syria: From its Origins to the Post Caliphate Era

By Ahmed S. Hashim

Abstract

This article examines the Islamic State's way of warfare from its origins in the early 2000s to the present (2019), by analyzing and addressing the critical issues of how and why a state or non-state actor fights the way it does.

Keywords: way of warfare, Islamic State, guerrilla war, Iraq, Syria

Introduction

Despite its defeats, which effectively ended its 'caliphate' in 2018, Islamic State (IS) continues to pose a threat to international security. It is therefore critical to understand IS' way of warfare in order to defeat an "enemy that refuses to die"[1]. In 2016, IS 'officials' were already prepared for the possibility that they would lose territory and large numbers of personnel. Convoluted discussions about victory and defeat being part of a 'Divine plan' or of God's judgment on His 'flock,' were rationalized by claiming that sometimes God's favor smiles on them and sometimes it does not. However, they did not simply rely on the Divinity for explanations of their successes and setbacks; instead they took measures to lessen the impact of setbacks and to remain militarily effective much to the chagrin of their exhausted enemies.

Purpose of Study

Much has been written about IS' ideology, social media operations, organization, finances, and brutality toward its foes. However, almost absent from these discussions are detailed analyses about how it fights and why it fights the way it does. This article aims to fill that void in conceptual analysis of the IS way of warfare by building on and going beyond what has been written so far. Specifically, this article has two goals. The first is to discuss briefly the concept of 'a way of warfare' and the factors that shape ways of war. This will help us establish a conceptual framework for better understanding how Islamic State fights. The primary purpose is to trace Islamic State's way of warfare from 2003 to the end of 2018.

The Concept of a Way of Warfare

The concept of a way of warfare, which has been used extensively in military history and more recently Strategic Studies, addresses the twin issues of how and why a state or non-state actor fights the way it does. A military organization's way of war does not just emerge; its rise is shaped by many factors.

Factors shaping ways of warfare

Ideology and leadership ideas or preferences shape ways of war. The structural influences range from the impact of environment such as geography and terrain, nature of the demographic base, availability of resources including finances, characteristics of the available military technology, and, of course, the nature of the enemy and that enemy's strengths and weaknesses.

The role ideology plays in warfare is complicated. IS ideology, its system of beliefs, which we generally refer to as being part of the Salafi-jihadist worldview, is the primary source of why to fight and only secondarily of how to fight. Ideology is the source of the goals it seeks to implement, it tells IS members who the enemies are and

why they must be fought. Ideology influences their view of the world, and if they suffer ideological fracture then that affects overall cohesion of the movement.

How ideology affects ways of war has been extensively debated. To quote Leon Trotsky, “Marxism can be applied with great success even to the history of chess. But it is not possible to learn to play chess in a Marxist way.” [2] The jihadist strategic thinker, Abu Bakr Naji, noted in *Management of Savagery* that war-fighting consists of universal principles – sunan kawniyyah -- that are independent of ideology but are subject to the constraints imposed on them or opportunities provided by technology, human capabilities, resources, environment and the nature of the enemy.

While the previous discussion makes a great deal of sense, ideology cannot be easily dismissed as a factor in the formulation of ways of warfare of societies, especially for those that are ideological in thought and behavior. In the context of Islamist and specifically IS’ way of warfare, this is where the term jihad comes in. Jihad means to struggle, to strive, or to exert effort. It also means holy war and for some Islamists it is one of the most important obligations of the religion. Islam sanctions war ideologically like other religions. The Quran permits jihad to repel aggression, to defend the state and the religion, to establish Islam in areas where it does not exist, to fight injustice and the persecution of Muslims. This does not tell us how to fight but why you must fight. The Quran also calls upon Muslims to make certain military preparations for jihad, both mental and material, much of which pertains to how to fight.[3]

The impact of ideology on the IS way of warfare occurs at three distinct levels. At the first level, ideology identifies the enemy, rationalizes why he is the enemy, and provides the justifications for war against that enemy. That level is not about how and why IS fights the way it does, but also about justification and rationalization for war.

At another level, ideology influences the trajectory of what is permissible to do in war, i.e. how to fight, how to treat soldiers and civilians, how to deal with prisoners of war, what technology is permissible to use in war, and the disposition of property and assets seized. This primarily deals with notions of ‘Just War’ and the laws of war.

At the third level, ideology shapes training and preparation for war fighting. Is the ideologically prepared soldier a better soldier? Well-trained and fit soldiers who regularly and realistically train for the clash of arms are usually better prepared for war. But do spiritual and ideological preparations add to their fighting prowess in terms of resilience, higher morale, and cohesion?

Ideological systems like Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany, Communist Vietnam and Islamic Iran have provided strong doses of ideological preparation for their soldiers. Similarly, Islamist groups have valued ideological indoctrination and preparation from the time of Palestinian militant Abdullah Azzam’s exhortation that foreign fighters coming to help the Afghan mujahidin fight the Soviet invaders must be mentally and spiritually prepared before battle. Hence, Islamist training camps and war fighting curricula included a heavy dose of ideological preparation. In the early years of their confrontations with their enemies, many Islamist groups seemed to put greater stress on ideological preparation at the expense of instruction in preparation and readiness for war fighting. This often showed on the battlefields where poor military training resulted in significant casualties.

Many groups then began to put equal, if not greater stress on ‘professional’ training and preparation for war, which resulted in greater lethality. While one could argue that ideological and professional military training should go hand in hand to make an effective soldier, it is difficult to convincingly disaggregate the impact of ideology and spiritual training from other factors that promote resilience, cohesion and morale in a particular entity’s way of warfare.[4]

Leaders and elites also play a role in the formulation of a way of warfare, be it a state or non-state actor. Their respective views of the outside world, and particularly of the enemy shape their way of warfare. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the man responsible for the origins of IS, had a pathological hatred for the Shia and this hatred formed the very basis of his attacks against Shia civilians, Shia-dominated Iraqi security forces and government

officials. His successor, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, on the other hand, wanted to build a territorially based 'state' – the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) -- and he urged the formation of semi-regular fighting units to face the enemy.[5]

Geography is an immutable factor as it is the space in which organized mass violence between warring groups takes place. The physical and human environments profoundly shape ways of warfare. IS strategists complained that Iraq was not suitable for classic guerrilla warfare because of its lack of sanctuaries, the absence of truly inhospitable terrain such as in Afghanistan, Chechnya or Yemen. Zarqawi himself wrote of this. In an interview released in December 2006, he was asked, "What difficulties face jihad in Iraq?" He responded:

There can be no comparison between our capabilities and the enemy's resources. Hundreds of our brothers are fighting hundreds of thousands of the enemy.... The land of jihad in Iraq is different from Afghanistan and Chechnya. The brothers in those two countries are helped either by forests or high mountains where they can hide from the enemy and prevent him from reaching them. Iraq is flat without mountains, wadis or forests.[6]

To be sure, geography does confer advantages on certain types of terrain for irregular war. It is advantageous for the weaker side to use terrain inaccessible to the stronger side. Mountainous and jungle terrains are considered to be advantageous to the insurgent as control of terrain for a sustained period of time allows an armed non-state actor the 'luxury' to develop more sophisticated and more deadly war fighting techniques.[7] The situation was remedied to some extent by the jihadists' success in establishing a sanctuary in Diyala province northeast of Baghdad where the terrain enabled them to set up training grounds and build disciplined small units that could fight.

The major problem for the jihadist insurgents in Iraq was the human terrain rather than the physical terrain for many reasons. Firstly, the jihadists actively provoked and killed communities they considered their enemies but this in turn reduced the jihadists' ability to build a supportive environment to further their cause. Secondly, those who were their allies – Iraqi Sunni insurgents – were often short-term opportunistic allies with whom they competed for power and resourced and who would ultimately transform into enemies.

The role of military technology in influencing the way of warfare has been massively acknowledged in both military history and strategic studies. Non-state actors simply do not have the same military technology as states: they do not have established and secure facilities for production or modification of weapons. States that may be sympathetic to insurgents have to provide munitions and arms in a clandestine and covert manner through convoluted supply lines. Non-state actors can also acquire weapons and ammunition through capture (as has happened with the case of IS against dismal performance by Syrian and Iraqi forces in 2013 and 2014). If insurgents consolidate control over territory, they can begin their own production facilities, which provide their forces regularly with weapons, ammunition, and even produce innovative low-tech weapons or modifications of the advanced weapons captured from the enemy.

The nature and capabilities of the foe one is fighting also shapes your way of warfare. When the jihadist 'war machine' recovered between 2012 and 2015, it faced Syrian, Iraqi and Kurdish forces who were suffering from serious shortfalls in their morale, capabilities and in their respective ways of war against emerging insurgent forces. This facilitated IS' ability to fight almost conventionally. However, with the improvement in the capabilities of the Syrian, Iraqi and Kurdish forces, as well as the introduction of potent airpower by the United States and its allies, IS was forced to re-think its way of warfare to deal with the dynamics on the ground.

Is there an Islamic way of warfare?

Understanding ways of warfare has never been a 'scientific' objective analytical exercise. It has more to do with how peoples, cultures, and states view the way of warfare of others and often this turns out to be skewed by lack of accurate information and the existence of ingrained political and cultural prejudices. This particularly affects our understanding of the ways of war of non-state actors.

Since 9/11 there have been many writings arguing that there is an Islamic way of warfare based on Islamic theories and practice of war going back to the Prophet Mohammad and his successors. Most of the literature dealing with an alleged Islamic way of warfare lacks depth, is ahistorical, and highly political or 'orientalist' in that it posits certain unchanging structural attributes from the founding days of the religion to the present way of warfare of the myriad Islamist groups around the world.

In *American Thinker*, author Robert Engler writes that IS military strategy is a mirror image of that used by Mohammad in his wars. Engler begins dramatically: "The strategy is world domination under the rule of Islam." [8] However, Engler makes avoidable mistakes. Strategy is a means to an end or goal. He then tells us: "tactical advances and withdrawals, controlling large areas of territory, using the media to broadcast terror and fear, the use of oil as a source of revenue and soliciting ISIS recruits from Muslim communities in the West have so far made ISIS unstoppable." [9] Mohammad did not have access to any of these resources (oil, modern media, or 'Muslims living in the West'). Finally, Engler, like many others who believe in the existence of a specific 'oriental way of war,' adds that 'tactical advances and withdrawals' and 'controlling large areas of territory' are military factors that are specifically Islamic or Islamist; they are not as any military commander or military historian would point out. Engler's piece is just the tip of the iceberg here as there are other numerous faulty understandings of the so-called Islamic or Islamist ways of warfare. [10]

By way of contrast, rigorous military studies of jihadist warfare are emerging. Many researchers have done outstanding work seeking to understand how IS fights. The primary weakness of their analyses, however, is the lack of a conceptual framework for understanding IS' way of warfare. Much data is accumulated leading to very detailed descriptions of battles and technical specifications of IS weapons but little assessment of what that all means. [11] More recently, some observers have provided conceptual frameworks for analyzing the enormous amount of data on IS' military enterprise, looking at both IS military strategy and ways of warfare conceptually, as well as minutely describing battles and theater operations. [12] This article profits from what has already been done on IS way of war and builds upon all these preceding works to promote further accumulation of knowledge and to arrive at some tentative conclusions.

The IS Way of Warfare: Thought and Practice

The man responsible for the emergence of the original movement is Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, born Ahmad Fadel Nazzal al-Khalayleh in the gritty industrial city of Zarqa, Jordan. In 1989, at the age of 23 he made his way to Peshawar with other novices. Zarqawi was quite clear that during his first sojourn in Afghanistan the group did not gain much experience in organizational or military matters. Moreover, given the end of the war with the Soviet invaders and the falling out among various mujahidin groups, there was nobody able or willing to provide training, development or organizational structure:

During the second trip, which took place in 1999, things improved. Zarqawi's initial organizational structure was not based on a rational system of hierarchy and management but more on a circle of family and friends who came from the Fertile Crescent. When they arrived in Iraq in 2002 with their organization, Jamiat al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad (JTJ) to confront the coming American invasion, they realized they were not ready for war. By its own admission, JTJ initially lacked a base for operations, military credentials, and popular support. A report by one member, Abu Anas al-Shami, stated:

We have discovered that after one year of jihad we have not accomplished anything on the ground. None of us could find a piece of land [the size of the palm of the hand] to use as a shelter or a place to retire to safety among some members of [his] group.... We would hide at daylight and sneak like a cat at night... Homes were raided and the heroes were chased. It was a dark picture and everyone felt a sense of terrible failure. [14]

War in Iraq forced Zarqawi to develop a more formal structure. The group created an organization endowed

with specific tasks and missions. They sought to establish a leadership that would manage the organization as it set about the deadly business of sowing mayhem in Iraq. The organization was going to be involved in serious fighting for the first time and needed to create a functionally specialized military capability with distinct sets of expertise and skills. At the beginning, Zarqawi's chief operational weapons were suicide bombing and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Between April 2003 and September 2005, 400 suicide bombings took place in Iraq, including 90 in May 2005, nearly as many as the number conducted by Palestinians in Israel between 1993 and 2005.[15] As Zarqawi put it in an interview released after his death:

The brothers' most effective weapon, after relying on God and praying to him for success, has been martyrdom operations. It is the brothers' unanswerable weapon for which the enemy can find no remedy. The enemies cannot prevent such operations.... Hence these martyrdom operations have played a big role in weakening the enemy and making it reach this level of despair, confusion, defeatist spirit, and psychological collapse.[16]

The impact of suicide bombing campaign was strategic but not to the ultimate benefit of the organization. The campaign contributed to the outbreak of the vicious civil war between Sunnis and Shias and to the decision of many Sunni groups to turn against Zarqawi and his organization in late 2006. Zarqawi's organization was very weak in urban warfare, small-unit skills and fighting abilities. The level of functional specialization in other military arenas such as artillery, mortar units, snipers and logistics were considerably less developed, if at all, in those earlier years.[17]

Zarqawi's successors sought to further build up the organization and were deluded into thinking that the time was ripe for an Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) under Zarqawi's immediate successor as leader, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi. This was at the very moment the organization was being hollowed out by relentless U.S. operations and a major assault by the thoroughly disgruntled Sunni insurgents. ISI's ability to move freely came under severe pressure as Iraqi civilians and certain insurgent elements began to provide useful information to U.S. forces who used it effectively and quickly to take down ISI leaders and cells.

In early November 2007, U.S. forces raided an insurgent hideout in Balad and found a diary of an ISI 'emir' or commander named 'Abu Tariq'. Mostly written in October 2007, the diary catalogues the decline of ISI in that sector. 'Abu Tariq' once commanded 600 fighters, a substantially sized ISI brigade, as most were smaller. By October 2007 he was down to 20 men. He blamed the Sunni turn-around against ISI for the organization's demise.[18]

Abu Umar al-Baghdadi's recognition of the disastrous defeat of ISI is detailed in Issue 101 of the organization's magazine Al-Naba, which addresses military matters, and led him to lament "lam yabqa lana al 'an makan, nastati' al-sumud fi ha rub' saa" (there is no place left for us to make a stand even for a quarter of an hour). He had to take the bold decision ('qararan jar'in) to dismantle the semi-conventional structure and rely largely on clandestine means such as assassinations, sabotage, raids and use of 'stand-off' weapons such as IEDs.[19]

The loss of the human terrain – support of people and other insurgent organizations – negatively affected ISI's way of warfare and led to its rapid atrophy as a fighting force between 2007 and 2011. However, despite the massive losses by 2011, it is clear, in retrospect, that ISI had not been decisively defeated either by the Sunni revolt against it or by the ongoing U.S. military surge. When the Americans withdrew, ISI began reassessing its position, learning from its mistakes and rebuilding the organization.

Military Re-Emergence and Decline of Islamic State, 2012-Present

The December 2011 U.S. withdrawal signaled the end of Islamic State of Iraq's (ISI) decline. The Iraqi Security Forces simply did not have the training, flexibility, and will to plan and execute high-tempo operations against the jihadists.

In July 2012, the ISI began the first of two intensive insurgency campaigns that paved the way for its operations of 2014.[20] The first, “Breaking the Walls,” involved a wave of high-explosive truck bombings against prisons, security installations and ‘soft’ targets. It lasted for a year and was designed to free jihadist prisoners and provoke Shia retaliation. The second, “Soldiers Harvest,” which began in July 2013, was a targeted campaign of assassinations and bombings against the security forces. These campaigns were well resourced and executed with a high level of professionalism. ISI had moved from being a largely terrorist outfit, which used suicide-bombers, assassinations, and car bombs to one that could fight effectively along a spectrum ranging from terrorism to more complex operations involving the command and coordination of different types of units and weapons.

The Rise of ISIS Conventional Warfare Capabilities

In 2013, ISI changed its name to Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) because of its decision to become involved in the Syrian civil war against the regime of Bashar al-Assad. ISIS developed into a more functionally specialized military organization able to wage war using robust guerrilla warfare and semi-conventional mobile warfare. It put these capabilities to good use in mid-2014 and beyond in both offensive and defensive operations in both Iraq and Syria, particularly during the spectacular defeats of Syrian forces in Tabqa, Menagh, Deir-Ez-Zor, and Palmyra and of Iraqi forces in Mosul, Tikrit, and Ramadi.

The ferocity of ISIS offensives in both Syria and Iraq contributed considerably to the demoralization and degradation of Syrian and Iraqi military units. The defeat of Syrian and Iraqi military forces in 2014 allowed ISIS to acquire vast stocks of weapons, munitions and military vehicles. ISIS was able to seize significant territory enabling it to set up its “caliphate” – also known as the Islamic State - with about 8 million people under its control.

The capture of territory gave IS the ‘breathing space’ to start building a conventional capability and a relatively robust military production and modification capability that was impressive for its achievements in producing weapons, modifying captured weapons and churning out ammunition and shells for its forces. It seized a significant quantity of Russian and American artillery from the Iraqi armed forces and Russian artillery from the Syrian army. IS developed an armored corps based largely on the Soviet and Russian T-series of tanks.[21] IS also used tanks to breach enemy defensive positions and to provide firepower for advancing ‘motorized’ IS units, often riding in Toyota pick-up trucks.[22] IS, however, did not use its tanks in major or large-scale armored battles reminiscent of clashes between the armored forces of conventional armies. It seemed unable to handle more than one to two platoons of tanks (i.e. 4-5 or 8 to 10) at any one time. This may have been due to growing pains in command, communications, and control, which it may have been unable to resolve before its conventional military capabilities were eroded. Instead, IS small units used anti-tank missiles in both the offense and defense and were effective in taking out numerous enemy tanks and armored personnel vehicles. [23]

IS avoidance of massing armor could have been a way to avoid giving its enemy’s air power the opportunity to strike large formations. IS writings showed that it was very concerned by the impact of enemy airpower on its ability to function on the ground. This was clearly reflected in articles referring ‘to how to fight under the eyes of Crusader planes,’ which recommended the dispersal of IS ground forces and the use of extensive camouflage and deception on the battlefields.[24]

Unlike its predecessors, IS built a relatively large conventional infantry force structure of special units, known as *inghimasi*, and regulars, which included foreign fighter units and local fighters. The *inghimasi* are IS’ equivalent of the special forces of regular armies. They are not suicide bombers but well-trained commandos whose missions are to breach defensive positions at whatever cost necessary. They were also used in the frontlines as assault troops in offensives, to conduct reconnaissance operations, and to cover retreats of IS forces.[25]

IS ‘regular’ infantry forces were divided between foreign and local Syrian and Iraqi fighters. The foreign fighters were more ideologically motivated than the local units who were largely motivated by local grievances against their respective governments in Syria and Iraq. However, cohesion and discipline issues within both foreign

fighter units and among the local fighters became a concern after reverses and serious defeats followed the victories of 2014.[26]

IS' seizure of garrisons and bases in both Iraq and Syria (such as Menagh and Tabqa) showed it had built a relatively effective small-unit conventional capability. Operational methods improved dramatically in the 2013-2015 time frame. Its 'officers' were able to command, control and coordinate the fire and maneuver of fire teams on the ground in the assault against government positions in Syria and Iraq. Later, when IS was forced onto the defensive in cities, its units were able to defend effectively in the inner areas of cities until it ordered its forces to melt away into the desert or rural areas.[27]

Its traditional operational method such as suicide vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIEDs) became even more lethal and was used with deadly effect in urban warfare. IS transformed its suicide bombing enterprise from a small-scale effort producing suicide belts and vests for individual suicide bombers and fitting passenger cars with explosives for the deadly SVBIEDs in small workshops to more industrial scale production in the captured cities. IS would eventually also be able to rig large trucks and captured military vehicles with large quantities of high explosives. The scale of IS' industrial production of SVBIEDs, for use in the defense of Mosul against the Iraqi Army was staggering.[28]

IS shocked the allied ground forces when it introduced simple drones into the theater of operations. IS used drones for a variety of purposes: to provide reconnaissance and surveillance, to drop small quantities of munitions and grenades on enemy ground forces, to guide SVBIED drivers to their targets, and help IS units to plan offensives and defensive battles.[29]

Down the Spectrum of Violence: Terrorist and Insurgent Campaigns

From 2016 onward, IS was forced on the defensive and began to cede ground. The defeat of IS, loss of over 90% of its territory, death of a considerable number of its high quality personnel, and destruction of military equipment eliminated its capabilities to wage effective warfare at the higher end of the violence spectrum.

The loss of territorial strength – tamkin – was a double blow to IS conventional military capabilities and to its state-building enterprise. IS officials tried to downplay the significance and argued that it had happened once before in the 2008-2010 timeframe, that they were prepared for it again, and that they would eventually overcome this latest setback.[30]

However, following its catastrophic losses IS reverted to terrorism and guerrilla warfare. This was expected as extensive territorial losses force an armed non-state actor back down the spectrum of 'lesser' forms of warfare. Having experienced a similar scenario of defeat and loss of territory in the past, IS leaders again discussed available options in 2016. They realized that their position as a territorial entity was increasingly untenable and that they would have to revert to 'lower' and simpler operations in order to remain significant. In an August 2018 speech the IS leader, the 'caliph' Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, said: "for the mujahideen, the scale of victory or defeat is not dependent on a city or town being stolen or subject to those with aerial superiority, intercontinental ballistic missiles or smart bombs." [31]

After 2017, IS fighters regularly launched terrorist and guerrilla attacks on civilians, military forces, police and anti-IS militias in both Syria and Iraq. Clandestine IS cells tasked with covert missions such as assassinations and sabotage reappeared in provinces and cities from which they had been ejected at great cost.[32]

Conclusions

It is too early to reach concrete conclusions about IS' way of warfare. However, a number of key points can be highlighted from this brief overview of IS' way of warfare.

First, IS leaders have been faced with two problems common to many entities in an unequal fight: (i) how does

the weak fight the strong; (ii) and how does the weak defeat the strong. The weak can be any kind of organized entity fighting a stronger organized entity that has greater numbers of manpower, better technology, and more resources. A non-state actor cannot build a capability that is simply the mirror image of the state. Therefore, it has to find other ways to fight and defeat the stronger opponent. In recent conflicts involving non-state actors, many have discovered that developing a wide repertoire of ways and means – strategies and weapons systems – guarantees them greater military effectiveness and resilience against their enemies.[33]

Second, IS was and continues to be a learning organization. IS is eclectic in that it borrows from all sources – both ancient and modern and both Islamic and non-Islamic – in its way of warfare.[34] The commonly accepted cliché is that while IS' theology is that of the 7th century, it is a thoroughly modern entity in how it propagates its ideology, builds its organization, recruits personnel, conducts information operations, justifies brutal terror, and in how it fights.

Third, IS evolved into a hybrid non-state actor after 2012. The term 'hybrid capabilities' or 'hybrid warfare' are ambiguous and loosely applied terms.[35] However, for the purposes of this article, a hybrid non-state actor has two paramount characteristics: (i) Unlike traditional terrorist groups whose resources are limited, IS developed robust and lethal structure that included the traditional instruments of terrorism, the techniques of insurgents, and the capabilities to conduct semi-conventional warfare; (ii) depending on circumstances, the environment, and the characteristics of the enemy, IS can go back and forth along this spectrum of violence from terrorism to semi-conventional warfare. This was evident in 2016, when the extensive loss of territory and state infrastructure forced IS to revert back to its basic guerrilla or terrorist specialties: the small hasty ambushes, the solo suicide bomber and 'covert' Suicide Vehicle Borne IED using civilian vehicles. When it faced lackluster conventional military forces on the ground, IS was able to engage at the higher end of the spectrum of violence and used semi-conventional warfare.

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Notes

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Who Are the ISIS People?

By Vera Mironova

Abstract

By definition, an “armed group” is a group of individuals which threatens or uses violence to achieve its goals.[1] And while a significant body of academic and policy research is looking at the “violence” aspect of the definition, trying to understand why and how groups engage in violence, the “group” aspect of it (the people involved) often receives less attention. Yet without the people, there is no group and, as a result, no one to conduct those acts of violence. So to truly understand the prospects of an armed group like ISIS in the future, we need to understand what we can about their cadre, in particular: 1) who ISIS 1.0 members were, 2) who among them survived and what are their plans, and 3) who could potentially be inspired by the group’s proposed goals in the future. By understanding these issues, it becomes easier to develop better policies for discouraging current members from continuing operations (“de-radicalization”) and for preventing new people from joining.

Keywords: ISIS, Syria, Iraq, human resources

Introduction

Jacob Shapiro shows that one of the main difficulties armed groups struggle with is their human resources. [2] Jeremy Weinstein, in comparing leading insurgency groups in different countries, looks at why some rebellions are ideologically motivated while others are more oriented toward immediate profit and how it affects recruitment.[3] Research looks at the first step prospective fighters take, answering the question, “What makes individuals take up weapons?” For example, organizers of rebellions use three principal ways to recruit soldiers: forced recruitment,[4] offering immediate material incentives or promising such benefits in the future,[5] or appealing to the fighters’ sense of grievance.[6] It has also been shown that relative deprivation,[7] in-group ties and bonds,[8] out-group aversions,[9] the desire to improve one’s social status,[10] the relative danger of remaining a civilian,[11] social networks,[12] and even simple boredom[13] drive people to mobilize for violence.

While the majority of previous research looks at local fighters, it is impossible to ignore the growing role of foreign fighters in civil conflicts. Hegghammer,[14] Malet,[15] Bakke,[16] Dawson and Amarasingam[17] all shed light on recruitment of foreigners and their motivation for joining, but I will look beyond that to how these fighters choose a group and why some quit and leave.

My research is based on extensive interviews with members of different armed groups fighting in Syria. Active ISIS foreign members were conducted in Syria and Turkey in person by my research assistant and in Mosul and Hawija by phone. The majority of interviews with ex-foreign fighters were conducted in Turkey, Ukraine, Russia and Fergana Valley (Central Asia), where they were hiding or free after serving their sentence in prison. Due to the snowball methodology, foreign fighters from the former Soviet Union are overrepresented in the sample. On one side, it limits the generalizability of findings (although they were one of the biggest groups of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq), but on the other side, it allows for a case study from different angles; my Russian background and age afforded me a similar cultural background and allowed for more open discussion with these fighters. Also, although there were female group members, my research is limited to male fighters.

In interviews I was asking not only about a respondent’s motivation and behavior but also about their brothers in arms. On one side talking about abstract others (instead of themselves) makes them more honest in their answers, and on the other side it allows to mitigate the survivors’ bias.

ISIS 1.0 Manpower

The majority of ISIS human resources were local people who joined the armed group for different reasons like ideology, money, power, or because they simply did not have other options. And although the Islamic State had the same name across both Iraq and Syria, a variety of people, reasons, and regions in each of those countries came into play in these fighters' choices to join.

In northwestern Syria, there was an extensive list of armed groups a fighter could have joined, all of which had significantly different goals, proposed enemies, risk tolerance, financial backing, and political power. So in general, a person looked for a group he most aligned with. If someone wanted to fight against Assad, he would have chosen a non-ISIS group such as Al Nusra or Ahrar al-Sham because they were the strongest groups pursuing that goal. However, those groups were extremely active in combat and, as a result, had big casualties while providing only basic necessities to its members. So although the goal resonated with local fighters, the risks involved with these groups were significant while the benefits were small.

ISIS on the other side had a better offer. According to interviewed fighters, while Al Nusra offered around \$300 a month to its fighters, ISIS provided the same salary in addition to major benefits ranging from cell phones to cars. Also ISIS, in general, was less involved in fighting (there were even civilian jobs offered for group members away from the dangers of the frontline) and more involved in controlling a large territory, so group members not engaged in risky combat activities spent their time exercising power over civilians. As a result, fighters more interested in money and power and less interested in the potential risks associated with group membership were choosing ISIS over other groups. One interviewed local ISIS member from Raqqa explained, "When Al Nusra was in Raqqa, I was thinking about joining them. But then ISIS came, and since I did not see much difference and I wanted to stay home, I joined them instead. Because I was studying computer science before the war, I went to work for Amni [Internal Security]. It was a good place to work. It paid \$250 a month and I was far from the frontline."

At the same time in areas like Deir Ezzor, where there was a lot of anti-Kurdish sentiment even before the war, some people joined ISIS with the sole purpose of fighting against the Kurds. According to these recruits' logic, it was better a radical-but-Arab group controlled the region than any sort of Kurdish rule.

Later in the conflict, many locals were forced to join ISIS simply because they had run out of food and were not able to support themselves. According to one interviewed low-level ISIS member, he joined the group in 2017, during the last three months ISIS controlled his territory, in order to earn enough to buy just basic food he and his family needed to live.

In Iraq, the situation was different. Many people joined ISIS because of its anti-Shia government (in case of Northern Iraq) or anti-Kurd sentiment (in case of Diyala area) and because they were interested in building a separate Sunni Arab state. Also because there was no other Sunni Arab group fighting for that cause, ISIS enjoyed a monopoly on recruitment among the Sunni Arab population. As a result, ISIS group members in Iraq, from the very beginning of the war, were more dedicated to fighting and more willing to die in combat compared to local Syrian fighters, many of whom had joined for money and power.

Because many locals in Syria did not want to take part in risky operations, ISIS recruited foreign fighters who would. In general, the foreign fighters were more dedicated to the group. Not only did they risk life and limb to get to Syria, once in the group, they had very little hope of ever leaving and returning to civilian life because they absolutely depended on the group for survival. At the same time, foreign fighters' subjective goals for participating in the conflict were different not only from those of their local brothers in arms, but also from the goals of other foreign fighters.

Some foreign fighters, especially in the beginning of the conflict, went to Syria with an honest desire to help the local population fight against the dictator. For example, after the August 2013 chemical attack by Assad, the numbers of foreign fighters heading to Syria increased. Others went for ideological reasons ranging from fighting for an abstract jihad against disbelievers to dying and going to heaven to meet 72 virgins promised

to the martyr. For those who were professional mercenaries, experts in their military specialty, and people involved in weapons trade, the main reason for going was money. According to an interviewed foreign fighter who, in addition to fighting, was engaged in weapons trade, “We were actually thinking about going to Libya, but did not manage to get there on time. If not Syria, we would have gone somewhere else.” For others, the conflict was about power and fame; Chechen fighters going to ISIS were often accused of this by other Chechens for leaving instead of defending Chechnya against the Russians.

Some foreigners came because they were involved in criminal activities and, as a result, had problems with the law in their home country. They saw Syria as a place they could hide. According to a Chechen fighter who came to Syria after living in Turkey, “There were people who were wanted for rape and pedophilia in Turkey, so they left to Syria to hide from law enforcement and continue their behavior.”

Some foreigners went to Syria interested in personal monetary gains. For example, one interviewed ex-ISIS foreign fighter from Central Asia admitted that before going to Syria, he was involved in robbing malls in Russia and Turkey. Syria, he thought, provided an even better opportunity for self-enrichment. Other foreign fighters simply wanted to fight. According to a foreign fighter from Dagestan, one of his friends from Ingushetia (before coming to Syria) had planned to join the French Foreign Legion. “Fighting was his thing. He was strong and brave, loved sports, and was very good at shooting,” remembered his comrade.

After the summer of 2014 when ISIS declared Caliphate, a different wave of foreigners went. Instead of going to Syria to fight and die, foreigners were now going to live, especially from countries where there was dictatorship and discrimination. ISIS’s utopian propaganda played a major role in attracting both fighters and civilians, heralding the dawn of an Islamic state where oppressed Muslims were free to live and practice their religion safely.[18] Many even brought school books for their children from back home so as to not interrupt their children’s education. They believed they were going to an Islamic state where they would be pleased to hear the sound of an azan calling for prayer and with leadership they considered truly Muslim; ISIS propaganda had depicted Syria as a comfortable place to live.

When asked about who the most oppressed foreigners in their home countries were, many interviewed foreign fighters cited Uzbeks, who made up a sizable group of foreigners in Syria (relative to the size of their country). According to an ex-ISIS foreign fighter from Dagestan, “It’s not surprising there are so many Uzbeks here. The government in Uzbekistan is so anti-Muslim that people can’t even go to a mosque without raising suspicion. There, only old people can have a beard, and you can get arrested if police find a praying rag in your car.” [19] At the same time, Uzbeks had limited options for immigrating to peaceful places; a visa to any Western country was hard to get and it was very unlikely they would get a refugee status anywhere. In addition, if the government of Uzbekistan looked for them, countries like Russia and Turkey (main destinations for Uzbeki emigrants) would deport them back home where they would most likely face torture and prison.

Those are major reasons for joining ISIS in Syria and Iraq, but joining was just the first step in individual career in ISIS. What happened to people after they took a weapon under the ISIS black flag?

Who Is Left?

It would be a mistake to assume it was a random group of those who first enlisted with ISIS who were the first to die. Individual reasons for enlisting with ISIS highly correlated with an individual behaviour and, as a result, his survival or lack thereof.

Based on the interviews, ISIS members killed during the war fell into several categories:

1) *Jihadists*. People who joined with the abstract goal of dying in jihad and going to heaven. They not only fulfilled their goal of dying at least, but did it early in the conflict. According to fighters interviewed, those recruits volunteered for suicidal missions immediately after arrival. Some of such group members would intentionally chose a group to switch to where the line of fighters waiting to conduct suicide missions was the shortest.

2) *Fighting to fight*. Group members only interested in fighting for fighting's sake also fought until the last breath and rarely survived post 2017. According to interviewed fighters, these fighters would choose to participate in the hardest and most dangerous missions and, as a result, were also disproportionately killed.

3) *The barely trained*. As the war against ISIS intensified, more and more fighters were needed on the frontline, so training time was reduced to a bare minimum. Thus many of the fighters did not know how to fight or even behave in a combat zone. According to an interviewed foreign fighter, "once we left a young fresh fighter from Moldova to guard a tank on the battlefield. Assad forces started shooting with artillery and this stupid guy, instead of running away, climbed inside the tank. Of course the Assad forces were targeting the tank, and the fighter burned inside when they finally hit it." Often those scarcely trained recruits killed not only themselves but others around them, especially while working with explosive devices.

4) *Those seeking Utopia*. Low-level foreign group members who had come to take part in a utopian Islamic State also did not survive the war. Although they had initially gone to Syria with money (after selling their property back home), by the time the ISIS regime was falling and they wanted to leave, they had run out of money and were not able to afford the exorbitant costs smugglers were asking (between \$7,000 and \$10,000 per person). One ISIS member from the Caucasus who had lived in Al Mayadin, Syria, with his family started trying to leave in 2016.

5) *The ultra-radical*. Finally, a highly-ideological group of people who disagreed with ISIS leadership which happened when they realized the Islamic State was not the utopia they had dreamed of. Because they openly questioned ISIS ideology and posed a threat to their legitimacy, ISIS perceived them as a fifth column, and they were targeted by the group itself. As a result, many of them were killed. They were either executed in prisons or, when the demand for manpower increased, sent to the most dangerous frontlines in Kobane, Deir Ezzor, and Hama.

Just as the goals and ideologies of these five categories made them less likely to survive, the different goals and ideologies of the following categories afforded them the best chance of survival past the ISIS defeat:

1) *Draftees and survivors*. Low-level local fighters who had joined for money or were drafted. Not only did they not take risks in combat, but given the opportunity, they would choose to surrender. They knew that because they were only low-level group members, they would get lighter prison sentences (in Iraq) or avoid any punishment altogether (in Syria). According to interviews conducted in Iraq with members of the armed forces, court judges and lawyers, those in prison are mostly low-level local fighters who had surrendered or were taken alive. One example is a 30-year-old man from Mosul, whose trial I had attended in Tel Kaif in January 2018. He had only been a member of ISIS for the final few months of the group's occupation and had joined because he had run out of food for his family. ISIS was paying him 5000 dinars (about \$5) per day.

2) *Foreign group members who left early in the conflict*. Because ISIS eventually prohibited its fighters from leaving (and would kill anyone suspected of planning an escape), those who left before the main wave of desertion started had the best chances of doing so successfully. In addition, the prices for being smuggled out increased with time, and many foreigners were priced out of trying to escape.

This category included four groups who left before 2016:

First, the professional foreign fighters. In addition to mainly working in training camps, their chances of being killed on the frontline were significantly smaller. Also, many who had initially gone to Syria left when another conflict started elsewhere. One Chechen mercenary who had trained opposition groups in Syria at the beginning of the conflict left for the Ukraine when Russia invaded in 2014 and started his own battalion to train Ukrainian forces. Many other Chechens (from non-ISIS groups) who had come to fight Russia in Syria also relocated to the Ukraine. A good example is the Ajnad al-Kavkaz group who turned to fighting in the Sheikh Mansour Battalion in the Ukraine where there were more Russians to fight and it was closer to home. Fighters of other nationalities, particularly ones from Central Asia, also went to Afghanistan when it became clear that ISIS in Syria and Iraq would fall.

Second, some Western foreign fighters who had gone to gain glory in the so-called jihad very soon realized the situation in Syria is not quite what the group's propaganda had portrayed. For example, one ex-foreign fighter from Central Asia in the interview explained why he eventually decided to leave: "I got disappointed in jihad before I even entered Syria. When were we still in a safe house in Turkey preparing to cross into Syria, my future emir in a Uzbek jamaat in Syria asked me to bring two huge bags of carrots with me into Syria. I was carrying so many carrots that it was basically my entire luggage." He continued: "Apparently, there were no good carrots in Syria, and they are essential to prepare national Uzbek food, but already then I kind of felt that it [the jihad] is not this computer-game-type-jihad I thought it should have been. I thought I would be carrying in weapons and ammunition! But instead, it was only carrots." Several months later, this fighter left Syria on the first occasion that arose.

Third, fighters who had gone for self-enrichment. For example, according to interviews with fighters and families of dead ISIS fighters, many Chechen ISIS members from Georgia were sending money back home. Often those people were not satisfied with the fairness of the loot division, so they took revenge on the group by stealing its money. One interviewed ex-ISIS foreign fighter admitted that he not only stole several cars before leaving ISIS, he even tricked them into paying for his travel to Turkey, claiming he was going there to meet his family and bring them back to Syria. Some even stole bigger sums from ISIS on their way out of the group. Often, an ISIS fighter would receive funds to buy military equipment, but would instead abscond with the cash. ISIS tried to catch such people in Turkey, but they were not very successful and many were able to escape.

Fourth, during 2014 and 2015, when ISIS was at the apex of its power, highly ideological people who disagreed with ISIS's idea of an Islamic state and brand of Islam sought to leave the group by any means possible. Some of them succeeded.

3) *High-level group leadership*. Because most leadership did not participate in combat, they were only in danger of death in the case of a precise airstrike. They were also free to leave at any time because no one in ISIS could prevent them from doing so. According to local civilians, they noticed that group leaders (and in particular foreign leaders) started leaving Syria before a battle for Raqqa began. And with the liberation of Mosul in August 2017, some ISIS leaders, who understood the group would not recover from its territorial losses also left, taking large amounts of the group's money with them. The money enabled them to bribe their way out and, in the case of foreign ISIS leaders, buy themselves new documents so they could travel freely.

4) *Amni*. Similar to group leadership, members of Amni (Internal Security) had the means and freedom to leave at will despite the group's no-exit policy. They also had the added benefit of near anonymity. Because they were part of a secret organization within ISIS and had often wore masks in public, rarely did civilians or even fighters know who they were. This meant they did not even have to bribe their way out or be concerned about being recognized once they were free.

Potential for Recruitment of New Members

While it was only a small minority of qualified, high-level group members who disproportionately survived (and low-level fighters did not), it would not be hard for ISIS leadership to quickly regain new low-level fighters; oppressive governmental policies continue to contribute to the pool of young, disenfranchised men ready to take up arms. Instead of seizing the opportunity to correct the issues that drove their citizens to Syria in the first place—issues like unemployment and oppression—in many cases, the situations have become even worse. This is especially true in the Middle East, US, and Central Asia. And while collaborative military operations were successful in killing off the vast majority of fighting-age males who chose to fight with ISIS, new potential group members are quickly growing up and could soon take up weapons.

Reasons for joining:	Level in the organization	Killed	Survived
Money (Self Enrichment)	High		+
Money (To Survive)	Low		+
Anti-Kurdish Grievance	Low	+	
Anti-Shia Grievance	Low	+	
Power	High		+
Draft	Low		+
Grievance Against Foreign Government	Low	+	
Going to Heaven	Low	+	
Life Experience	Low	+	
Professional Military	High		+
Religious Ideology	Low		+
Fame	High	+	

The biggest number of low-level group members were people who joined for either money and because of grievances. And new recruits in those categories are the most needed to regain lost territories. People who joined for money are not loyal to the group and left as soon as the group was defeated but are needed to increase group numbers and fill administrative positions and people who joined because of the dedication were disproportionately killed but are needed to feel fighters positions. So what will be driving factors for new recruits?

1) *Money*. In the Middle East, problems with initial unemployment rate have not only persisted, they've gotten worse due to the war. Also, many ISIS families lost their husbands, who were the sole breadwinners, and the government is as unwilling as they are unable to support them. And already ISIS is stepping in. According to interviewed law enforcement members in Mosul, ISIS is already supporting the widows and orphans of ISIS dead fighters. In the event of a resurgence, these people are likely to join ISIS, with young sons becoming fighters, if ISIS would offer them even a basic salary.

2) *Grievances in the Middle East*. Many people who joined ISIS with anti-Kurdish sentiment were from areas that are still administered by Kurds, a situation that only increases anti-Kurdish sentiment. As a result, those locals are already looking for any group that will help them act on their grievance, including the Shia militias they fought against while part of ISIS. But now they are better than nothing because they are anti Kurdish.

On the other side, anti-Shia sentiment would also continue to supply fighters to ISIS. In Mosul, many locals welcomed ISIS in the first place because they disagreed with what they deemed Baghdad's radical Shia government and its abusive law enforcement. Even before ISIS, if Al Qaeda wanted to target a civilian for recruitment, it would start by reporting that person to Iraq's internal security as an Al Qaeda member knowing the civilian would be arrested, thrown in prison, beaten and tortured and released only after his family had bribed the corrupt law enforcement.[20] After such an experience, that civilian was often more than ready to volunteer for any anti-Shia government movement that approached him.

Now, after Mosul's liberation, official government forces left law enforcement responsibilities for the territory to radical Shia militias who also abuse their law enforcement powers. According to Human Rights Watch report in Mosul, the National Security Service runs illegal prisons where they detain Sunni locals.[21] Those prisons are overcrowded, unsanitary, and provide inadequate medical treatment. Inmate management includes regular beatings and even torture. Some inmates in those prisons are not even there because of a connection to ISIS but simply because of Iraqi bureaucracy. Not only is such treatment of inmates questionable from ethical

and legal standpoints, such handling only increases anti-government grievances and, as a result, radicalization. In an interview, one ex-inmate mentioned that everyone in his cell was excited at any news about successful ISIS operations, not because they were pro-ISIS, but because they were anti-government: “While many of them [inmates] did not sympathize with, and had even suffered under, ISIS,” he explained, “they were also against the Iraqi government that was holding them in those terrible conditions, and ISIS was the only force fighting them.” Such situations increased grievance and negated any appreciation locals might have had for the central government liberating the territory from ISIS.

3) *Native Country Grievances*. For many people in non-democratic countries (that were major suppliers of foreign fighters to ISIS), there were two main reasons they initially joined the war—the abuse and corruption of local law enforcement and the inability to peacefully demonstrate against it. Now, new and harsh anti-terrorism laws serve not only as a gold mine for corruption, but also a great excuse for law enforcement to crack down on opposition, real or imagined.

According to the logic of corrupt law enforcement, since the punishments for terrorism crimes are harsher, they can demand even bigger bribes from families of individuals even remotely affiliated with ISIS. Even for a charge as small as receiving a phone message with a radical religious video attached, a family might be expected to pay huge sums of money to liberate the offending relative. In several known cases in one Central Asian republic, raising the required money for bribes meant families had to sell their own houses, often leaving them homeless.

For people accused of supporting terrorism there is an added financial burden. Often law enforcement will not allow them to travel freely, even after they have served their sentence, and because they have a hard time finding local work, they are much more likely to pursue criminal activities to obtain money.

Such behavior from law enforcement does nothing to increase the citizens’ trust in their government. Instead, it fuels anti-government sentiment and moves people closer to any rebel cause. According to one interviewee in a Uzbek-majority town in Kyrgyzstan, the sister of a person imprisoned on terrorism support charges, “He [her brother] was just a quiet religious guy before he was imprisoned. But I am sure now he will become a radical anti-government ISIS sympathizer.”

We have now looked at the human resources of ISIS 1.0, who among them survived and how they could replace those who were killed. What are the implications?

Conclusion

Since high-level group members like leadership and Amni were able to flee and thus survive, their experience and connections could allow them to re-establish ISIS in their new location. And while high-level group members have to hide, for example, in the insurgency, members of Amni who are less known to both the public and governmental intelligence could more freely prepare ground for new major operations. And because of domestic grievances and general poverty, a whole new pool of recruits would be willing to join them once the call is given. Experienced professional group members and weapons traders who remain, although on other battlefields, would potentially be able to return and train new recruits.

Although current counter-propaganda efforts could stop new recruits who might join for “life experience,” “fame,” or “going to heaven,” it will do little to stop those recruits with grievances, which comprise the much bigger category. Since not much has improved in the domestic policies of certain countries, and abuses have even gotten worse, some would undoubtedly act on their grievances.

And because of its perceived effectiveness, the ISIS brand may still attract new members who may have grievances in their home country. If those people can travel to a battlefield to join an armed group; they will do so. If not, they will conduct small-scale attacks and solo terrorism attacks against domestic targets.

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From Directorate of Intelligence to Directorate of Everything: The Islamic State's Emergent Amni-Media Nexus

By Asaad Almohammad and Charlie Winter

Abstract

This article, which is based on original interview data gathered from eastern Syria between January and October 2018, examines the emergent dominance of the Islamic State's Directorate of General Security (DGS). We track how this institution, which is currently operating through a network of diwan-specific security offices grouped under the Unified Security Center (USC), has come to oversee and manage an increasingly wide array of the group's insurgent activities—including intelligence and military operations and religious and managerial affairs. Focusing in particular on its role in the context of media production—which comprises anything from facilitation and security to monitoring, distribution and evaluation—we illustrate the critical importance of this most elusive directorate, positing that, in its current form, it could stand to facilitate the survival of the Islamic State for months—if not years—to come.

Keywords: Islamic State; organization; intelligence; media; information security; middle management

Introduction

As the territories of the Islamic State (IS) have crumbled in recent years, analysts the world over have been ruminating as to what its ultimate defeat would look like. In so doing, they have speculated as to the various refuges it may take to in order to compensate for the seemingly existential setbacks it now faces.[1] Most seem to be under the impression that, whatever happens, it will one day make some sort of comeback.[2] Some have contended that this will be achieved virtually;[3] others have asserted that it will occur materially as well.[4] In any case, it is generally believed that IS's senior leaders have long been anticipating these dire straits and have thus been making strategic arrangements to mitigate the impact that they could stand to have.

In seeking to understand how and to what end their long-term planning could materialize, it serves to reflect on IS's pre-caliphate history. During its first resurgence between 2011 and 2013, IS (which was then calling itself the Islamic State in Iraq) focused on using covert operations to consolidate its position locally and steadily, secretively grow. It was only from 2013 onwards that it really began to visibly assert itself, eradicating the border between Syria and Iraq and incorporating jihadi groups far beyond its immediate theater of operations into the global "Islamic State" brand.

Now that the proto-state has collapsed in both Syria and Iraq, the conventional wisdom is that IS will return to its earlier priorities—that is, like ISI, it will wait, active but concealed, for a new opportunity to mobilize.[5] To this end, it is thought that it will now focus on covert insurgency rather than proto-statehood. This will likely involve inciting sectarian tension and amplifying polarization; coercing, intimidating, and co-opting marginalized Sunni communities and tribes; and exacting "revenge" attacks and assassinating rivals and collaborators.[6] There is already much to evidence that this tactical devolution is taking place.[7] However, notwithstanding that, the parallels with ISI should not be overstated: IS today is a very different group to what it was back then: it has footholds across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia and, in its current state, it is likely able to continue operating as a clandestine insurgency in-theater and a global terrorist network out-of-theater, thereby keeping up with its *baqiyyah wa tatamaddad* maxim for months, if not years, to come.[8]

This bifurcated approach might make sense in theory, but, in reality, it is a logistical nightmare, one that requires far-reaching executive authority, constant monitoring and evaluation, and a hefty dose of middle management. It is in this complex context that IS's Directorate of General Security (DGS) has stepped in, entering a period of

unprecedented ascendancy that sees it dominating almost all aspects of the group's bureaucratic management operations. Through the lens of the DGS's media-focused activities, this article tracks that ascendancy, illustrating that its remit now extends far beyond the limited sphere of 'security' to instead incorporate a transdisciplinary bureaucratic function as well, one that appears to have been crafted with a view to facilitating a future comeback for the caliphate. The article proceeds as follows. After briefly presenting our data collection methodology, we examine the activities of the DGS in general, before exploring its recently expanded role in the context of propaganda production.[9] We conclude with a brief discussion of what this could mean for IS's future as a hierarchically organized insurgent movement.

Data Collection

Our analysis is based on interviews, texts and audio-visual materials (i.e., covertly taken pictures of internal IS memos, audio recordings of IS cadre, and notes) gathered from eastern Syria during the first nine months of 2018. These materials were gathered by six data collectors—known to the first author, having collaborated on other research projects, but not known to each other—operating in what were then IS-held areas in eastern Syria. Prior to the initiation of the research phase, each participant was briefed in detail on the research objectives, procedures, scope, and informed as to the voluntary nature of their participation. Any risks involved in participating were discussed at length with the first author. During this briefing, each of the data collectors was asked if they would be prepared to share materials that would substantiate their answers to interview questions. They were also told that, based on their answers, the questions they were asked would become more specific, eventually focusing on particular organizational and/or operational issues. All six interviewees gave their consent to participate on the condition of anonymity and rigorous internal and external confidentiality measures.

After the initial scoping stage had been completed, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted between January 3 and September 29, 2018. Each data collector was interviewed sixteen times by the first author during this period. As well as this, the data collectors provided internal documents, audio recordings, and accounts of their own unstructured interviews with active IS media and security cadres.[10] All raw information was stored in doubly-anonymized entries; each entry includes headings, texts of interview data and/or translations of any documents or recordings that were received alongside it. The headings contain the data collectors' alphanumeric codes and the dates on which the data were received.

Once collected and compiled, all accounts were triangulated with one another to assess their credibility. When accounts conflicted, individual data collectors were asked for more information. Anything that could not be reconciled was excluded and, if a data collector repeatedly provided information that did not reconcile with that of the others, the entirety of their input was excluded from the project.

Having stated that, two caveats are in order. First, our data relate only to IS's operations in eastern Syria during the period between January 3 and September 29, 2018. Therefore, they should be treated as a snapshot, not a global blueprint. Second, the directorate and dates are missing for most of the internal documents we received. While we tried to ascertain their date and source of publication by triangulating the accounts of different data collectors with other documentary evidence gathered in-theater and online, it was not possible to unequivocally determine what these were—that said, through the same means, their contents could be corroborated.[11] With that in mind, all conclusions made on the basis of this article can only be tentative in nature.[12]

The Directorate of General Security

The DGS's initial inception and design are attributed to Samir Abd Muhammad al-Khelifawi (aka Haji Bakr), a Saddam-era intelligence colonel turned jihadist strategist and military commander.[13] Through it, IS works both to preserve *amn al-dawlah* ('domestic' state security) and engage in '*amaliyyat amniyyah*

kharijiyyah (external intelligence operations). Taha Subhi Falaha (aka Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani), IS's former spokesperson, is believed to have been the first commander of the DGS.[14] However, even before his death in 2016, a Syrian national by the name of Ali Musa al-Shawakh (aka Ali Juma al-Shawakh, Abu Luqman or Abu Ayoub al-Ansari) is reported to have replaced him as *amir* of the DGS.[15] There is evidence to suggest that al-Shawakh built on and improved the hierarchal design of the original *amni* organizational structure.[16]

Previous work on the DGS describes a shadowy entity feared even by IS's own cadre, not to mention locals living in liberated territories.[17] Its activities are wide-ranging: it is said to preside over a network of detention centers wherein suspected individuals (whether local, foreign, civilian, or IS members, etc.) are systematically imprisoned, interrogated, and tortured;[18] it is known to be directly involved in the recruitment, training, and deployment of child soldiers;[19] its operatives are embedded throughout and beyond IS-held territories, collecting information for intelligence and counterintelligence operations;[20] and, topping all this off, according to multiple European intelligence services, it is believed to be instrumental in planning external terrorist attacks.[21]

Based on our data, though, the DGS engages in even more activities than those listed above.[22] Indeed, it truly is, to borrow the words of Bahney and Johnston, "the glue of the ISIS organization from top to bottom." [23] It has three principal operational spheres, namely: (i) military and local security operations; (ii) intelligence and foreign operations; and (iii) managerial and religious affairs.[24] Its military and local security operations include anything from recruiting and selecting, training, and overseeing the activities of elite forces; assassinating rivals and collaborators; kidnapping and detaining locals and foreigners for ransom; engaging in specialized defensive and offensive operations; monitoring and reporting on the performance and leadership of combat units; and devising infiltration and retreat plans.[25] Its local and foreign intelligence operations encompass the general management of intelligence and counterintelligence activities; handling local informants and foreign supporters; planning, commissioning, directing and/or guiding terrorist attacks on behalf of IS; monitoring cadres to root out spies and informants; interrogating detainees; and vetting new recruits and IS personnel.[26] Lastly, its managerial and religious affairs comprise the setting up of front businesses; overseeing the training of *shari'ah* judges; providing mosque clerks with speeches; monitoring and reporting on the performance of *shari'ah* judges and mosque clerks; handling logistical support and management operations (including armament and basic supplies); safeguarding assets (e.g., personnel, information, bases, etc.); monitoring and reporting on the performance of the management and personnel of individual directorates; communicating leadership decisions to the organization's direct management personnel; and enforcing said decisions.[27] Below, we focus on the last four of these activities.

Sometime between January 2017 and February 2018, the DGS's already robust management operations were centralized to a greater degree than they had ever been before through the establishment of *al-markaz al-muwahhid al-amni* (Unified Security Center, henceforth USC), which serves as a coupling link between IS's senior leaders and its administrative directorates.[28] According to our data collectors, the USC is charged with communicating leadership directives to the *amirs* of different directorates, overseeing their implementation, and monitoring and reporting on performance. All this is done through a network of directorate-specific *amni* (security) offices (see Figure 1).[29] As an aside, it is worth noting that the DGS's increasing centrality has been tracked elsewhere, for example in the work of al-Tamimi.[30]

As of late September 2018, eight directorates were active in the area to which our data pertains, namely: the towns of al-Sussah, al-Shafah, parts of Hajin, Al-Baghuz Fawqani, and the outskirts of the city of al-Bukamal in eastern Syria.[31] Besides the DGS, they are, in no particular order, the Directorates for Health, Mosques and Proselytization, *Zakat*, War, Soldiery, Media, and Courts; there is also the Committee for Education, which was recently folded into the Directorate for Mosques and Proselytization.[32] According to our data collectors, each of these receives strategic instruction from IS's leadership via a specially assigned office within the USC: there is, for example, a *maktab al-masajid wa-l-da'wah al-amni* (Mosques and Proselytization Security Office), a *maktab al-harb al-amni* (War Security Office), and a *maktab al-zakah al-amni* (*Zakat* Security Office).[33]

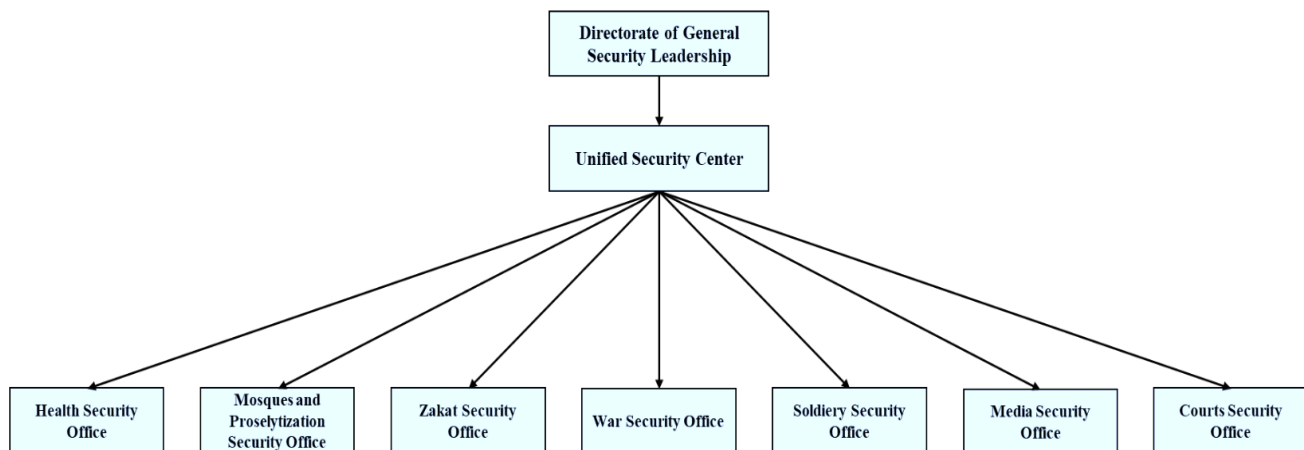


Figure 1. The unified security center's subordinate offices

The Structure of the Central Media Directorate

Before examining the role of one of these offices in particular—that which looks after the media production cycle—it is worth providing an overview of the Central Media Directorate, with and through which it operates.

Our data collectors reported that IS's Central Media Directorate in eastern Syria comprises of a Media Council, a Media Judiciary Committee, an Information Bank, and various Media Offices.[34] The Media Council is the most powerful of these authorities.[35] It has oversight over the Media Judiciary Committee, the Information Bank, and all Media Offices.[36] The Media Judiciary Committee, which reports only to the Media Council, has direct oversight over all media-related activities at the operational level, ranging from media production to data storage.[37] Among other things, it dictates tactical direction and issues guidelines on technical matters.[38] For its part, the Information Bank seems to serve as a central database for all information related to IS's insurgency.[39] It is believed to store data on all facets of the organization, including, but not limited to, media materials (this includes those that are raw, those undergoing editing, and those that have been finalized and distributed).[40] In its capacity as an institution for media archiving and validation, the Information Bank reports to the Media Judiciary Committee.[41] In the context of everything else, it answers only to the USC.[42]

Operating alongside these institutions is the *maktab al-i'lam al-amni* (Security Media Office), which is subordinate to the USC but coordinates closely with the Media Judiciary Committee and Media Council.[43] Based on our data, it interacts at virtually all managerial and operational levels of the media production cycle, binding the Central Media Directorate from top to bottom.[44] The Media Security Office (MSO) has an *amir*, a team of administrative personnel and a security staff—who are, it should be noted, embedded at both the Information Bank and in individual Media Offices—as well as dozens of field operatives.[45]

The Amni-Media Nexus

The principal role of the MSO is to allow the DGS to directly facilitate and secure IS's media production cycle. In the following pages, we document how it does this according to a narrowly defined set of bureaucratic lines that privilege secrecy, consistency, and centralization. As becomes clear, the MSO's various protocols—which revolve around prevention, deterrence, surveillance, deception, perimeter defense and compartmentalization—speak to a systematic and strategic level of thinking that is geared towards fostering both temporal and spatial security.[46] In the below pages, each of these protocols is examined in turn.[47]

Prevention

The information security literature states that prevention measures are usually employed to safeguard a given organization's data *before* an attack takes place. Usually, this is achieved through the prohibiting of unauthorized access to, and modification or destruction of, sensitive data.[48]

Such measures are central to the MSO's information security-related operations.[49] An array of technical (e.g., software and application-based) and non-technical (e.g., restriction-based) methods are used to prevent or mitigate the impact of cyber-attacks, as well as cut down on data misuse, leakage, and mis-exploitation. For instance, when it comes to the production and handling of raw media material, strict guidelines are enforced. [50] MSO operatives reportedly collect, secure, and transport all materials deemed to be sensitive from the site of production, regardless of who produces it.[51] They oversee its safe transmission to specially designated individuals housed in the Information Bank, who check through and validate it.[52] Only after that process has been completed are raw materials made available for post-production, and even then, only select operatives are ever permitted access.[53]

In addition to this, MSO operatives are also charged with making sure that regular media operatives do not use internet-enabled devices for media-related activities while at the same time enforcing a series of specially mandated security-maximizing practices.[54] To this end, they restrict all but a few media-related communications to local intranet connections and ensure that stored materials are encrypted and devices frequently wiped.[55]

Deterrence

In the information security literature, deterrence is understood to be a disciplinary mechanism used to guide and restrain attitudinal and behavioral exchanges that could undermine organizational cohesion.[56] It holds that human and group behavior can be shaped by the prospect of sanctions, which range from uncertain and lenient to certain and severe.[57] The literature also states that deterrence is especially effective when it comes to: influencing personnel's attitude towards unauthorized access and use of information; guiding and restraining access to and use of an organization's information; demotivating internal users from taking actions to access or corrupt the organization's information assets; and discouraging insiders' misuse and abuse of information assets.[58]

The MSO is structurally unable to deploy deterrence measures in anything other than an internal context—that is, it can dissuade media operatives from mishandling sensitive information but it cannot dissuade cyber-attackers. Deterrence in this context hence manifests in a spectrum of disciplinary actions implemented against those who fail to abide by MSO security instructions. In most cases, anything that could conceivably be construed as an act of espionage results in death.[59] For the most part, it falls to the MSO to investigate and prosecute suspected cases of spying.[60] The execution of those it roots out is widely documented by IS itself and, based on the account of one data collector, media workers are detained and executed by MSO enforcers especially frequently.[61]

To that effect, the MSO has diffused an atmosphere of paranoia into the IS media apparatus. Its rigid culture of fear, which is founded on disciplinary sanctions that are both certain and severe, is seemingly geared towards deterring insiders from doing anything remotely out of the ordinary so that, if and when someone is caught in flagrante, it is all the more obvious.

Surveillance

Surveillance is a fundamental part of all good information security strategies. It facilitates a high degree of situational awareness and thus enables the organization in question to respond to tactical threats rapidly and appropriately.[62] Successful surveillance requires systematic monitoring of fluid and evolving security environments.[63] Fundamentally, it revolves around garnering a detailed understanding of any and all information security-related incidents.[64] Among other things, this might be achieved through physical and virtual monitoring of the people and places charged with the collection, transportation, and production of

sensitive data.[65]

While our data collectors could not speak to the presence of surveillance hardware (e.g., electronic sensors) or software (e.g., intrusion detection systems), they did report that MSO operatives were present throughout the media production cycle, which they could be seen to monitor overtly and thoroughly. Their monitoring of production teams and data handlers appears to be especially sophisticated, as does their presence in the Information Bank.[66] Moreover, any internet-related media activities—like, for example, distribution—are always done under their watchful eye.[67]

It hence seems that the MSO developed and deployed a comprehensive surveillance operation in eastern Syria, one that allowed it to maintain a highly granular awareness of all media-related activities, from the time of production right through to the point of distribution.

Deception

In the context of information security, deception measures are usually deployed with a view to distracting and waylaying attackers by shifting their attention away from valuable information assets.[68] There are two broad sets of deception strategies, namely those that are passive and occur through concealment and camouflage, and those that are active and occur through the planting of dis- and misinformation.[69] While our data collectors did not speak of any active deception measures (which is not to say that they are not being implemented), they spoke at length about passive ones such as concealment.[70]

Most of IS's media operations and information assets still seem to be located in territories that it controls and, while an external media infrastructure certainly exists, its physical location and the nature of its activities is kept secret. Cohering local and international media operations is the A'maq News Agency, which appears to operate under the joint oversight of the Media Council and DGS.[71] Beyond its better-known reporting and production activities, the Agency was reported to be tightly connected to the Information Bank and Media Judiciary Committee.[72] Among other things, its unit in eastern Syria is said to be charged with processing propaganda materials from other IS-held territories in places like Iraq, Egypt, Afghanistan and so on.[73] These it receives via operatives at the Information Bank, who work with other media offices and centers as well as other directorates.

Based on multiple reports, it would appear that the Agency does not just have an editorial role in the Information Bank, but that it controls and administers the scope of its day-to-day activities.[74] Whether or not that is the case, its operatives are usually the first to gain access to new information and data, which is then validated and forwarded onto other offices for production purposes.[75] It is worth further noting that our data collectors reported that the MSO operates through and with the A'maq News Agency, something that suggests either that it is either subordinate to the A'maq News Agency or that the A'maq News Agency is subordinate to it.[76]

In any case, it seems clear that passive deception measures—all of which are continually being monitored and assessed by the MSO—are instrumental to IS's information security strategy. Among other things, this includes its concealment of both the roles of critical information assets like the A'maq News Agency and of communications between its operatives on media-related issues.[77]

Perimeter Defense

The last two sets of MSO administered information security measures are spatial in nature. Perimeter defense refers to logical or physical boundaries created by an organization to regulate incoming and outgoing traffic around critical information assets in order to restrict access.[78] Perimeter defenses are almost always ineffective when they are the only measure for protecting information assets.[79] Moreover, they are entirely inadequate in the context of attacks against networked information architectures because they do not protect against the aggressive use of wireless devices.[80] Nonetheless, they are a very effective way to monitor and regulate physical access to sensitive data.[81]

Our data collectors identified a convoluted set of perimeter defense-based measures being implemented at the hands of the MSO. They include: close monitoring of the production of raw media material; raw media material delivery procedures; efforts to determine who receives materials from outside of IS's immediate sphere of operations; restrictions over who is allowed to communicate with remote members and branches; and access limitations at the Information Bank and in Media Offices.[82]

Together, our data collectors' accounts speak to a spectrum of physical perimeter defenses employed by the MSO. They suggest that IS's most sensitive data is secured physically and its consumption regulated at every opportunity. At a minimum, then, IS's media assets are secured through established and secured physical boundaries; it is unclear as to whether or not the MSO also uses technology or software-based defenses, but it seems likely that this would be the case.

Compartmentalization

Information compartmentalization refers to the protection of sensitive data by establishing ring-fenced categories that are individually regulated, monitored, and controlled.[83] This allows organizations to divvy up sensitive data such that, if some of it is breached, other aspects remain protected.[84] To this end, where possible, personal access to information assets is regulated based strictly on need. In short, it protects against data breaches by limiting operational access to subsets of departmental information.

Our data collectors' descriptions of media operative interactions with the Information Bank speak to this exact set of measures.[85] For instance, one specifically reported that the use of and access to data at the Information Bank is highly securitized, even among operatives of the Bank itself.[86] Unless otherwise specified, operatives are only allowed to access information from the directorate to which they are assigned.[87] This, they related, has been achieved through its careful division into different zones for different bodies of information.[88] Moreover, regarding media-related data in particular, media office liaisons are not allowed access to anything through the Bank's own computers.[89]

Our data collectors reported that it is the MSO that oversees these compartmentalization measures, constantly regulating and monitoring access to any and all data at the Information Bank.[90] In so doing, it safeguards data related to all facets of IS's operations, not just its media activities.

Conclusion

In August 2018, the United Nations Security Council reported that there were some twenty to thirty thousand living members of IS in Syria and Iraq.[91] While this figure should be treated with a hefty pinch of salt given it is based on the assessments of a single member state, it should still be taken seriously. There can be little doubt that IS's war is not over, even if its proto-state is: its covert depth in the region is extensive, even in areas from which it had formally been expelled. Indeed, according to a Kurdistan Region Security Council official, "former [IS] strongholds have [already] re-emerged as strongholds." [92]

It thus seems that IS has gone into survival mode in Syria and Iraq and that, while in this state, it will not be inactive—it will just be less overt about its insurgency. Indeed, in months and years to come, it is likely to continue to operate as a clandestine insurgency in-theater and a global terrorist network out-of-theater, using the DGS as the lynchpin for its global activities. In this article, we illustrated how the institution had already become an instrumental part of IS's propaganda production and distribution cycle and, based on our data collectors' observations, it would appear that the directorate has similar levels of oversight over the group's other operational spheres.[93]

Hence, it could well be the case that the organization's medium- and long-term prospects will come to rely on the DGS, both its covert operatives and secretive institutional bureaucracy. With that in mind, practitioners with an eye on the future would do well to better understand this elusive entity.

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Notes

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Making Sense of Jihadi Stratcom: The Case of the Islamic State

By Charlie Winter

Abstract

This article explores why jihadis make propaganda. Through the analytical lens of Bockstette's 2008 framework for jihadi communication strategies, it assesses two of the Islamic State's most important doctrinal texts on media jihad—the first, a little-known speech by Abu Hamzah al-Muhajir that was published posthumously in 2010, and the second, a field-guide prepared by the Islamic State's official publishing house, the Himmah Library, in 2015. After drawing out the core insights, similarities and presuppositions of each text, it discusses the enduring salience of Bockstette's model on the one hand and these two texts on the other, noting that, while it is imprudent to make policy predictions based on them alone, so too would it be remiss to ignore the strategic insights they contain.

Keywords: Strategic communication; propaganda; insurgency; Islamic State; Islamic State of Iraq; jihadism.

Introduction

In 2017, the Islamic State's utopian project failed—at least, it did in material terms. As the year progressed, the borders of what had once been its proto-state disintegrated; its ranks haemorrhaged, and financial reserves collapsed.[1] On top of all that, once-key urban strongholds like Mosul, Raqqa and Mayadin, to which many had tied the fate of the caliphate project, were recaptured and purged.[2] For these reasons among others, policymakers are already rushing to declare that the Islamic State is defeated, and that, like a flare burning bright one minute and extinguished the next, it is now bound to fade into obscurity.[3] Such optimistic predictions have been made before about this group, and that we are hearing them again now should be cause for concern, not reprieve.[4] Military defeat and ideological failure are not one and the same thing for this organisation and, if 2018 is anything to go by, it is down but certainly not out.[5]

Central to the Islamic State's ability to navigate through its current tribulations is strategic communication, something for which it is already renowned. In the last few years alone, its official propaganda outlets have become household names, and they have already demonstrated that they have no intention of quietening down now that the caliphate is no longer contiguous—indeed, in many cases, their wares have actually increased in technical sophistication.[6] Hence, although the Islamic State's kinetic threat may have diminished, its ideational menace remains a clear and present danger. The present article explores the extent of this danger, assessing it through the lens of internet-mediated communication. Using Bockstette's 2008 work on jihadi strategic messaging as an interpretative framework, it evaluates the Islamic State's past rhetoric on propaganda with a view to identifying prevailing trends in how and why it engages in media warfare—as well as when those trends evolve.[7]

The article proceeds as follows. After a brief review of the existing literature on the Islamic State's digital outreach strategy, I set out Bockstette's understanding of what motivates jihadi communication. In the section that follows, I use it to inform a critical analysis of two seminal texts on Islamic State propaganda activism—the first, a little-known speech by Abu Hamzah al-Muhajir, and the second, a field-guide prepared by the Islamic State's official publishing house, the Himmah Library.[8] In the conclusion, I discuss the enduring salience of both these texts, noting that, while it is imprudent to make policy predictions based solely on them, so too would it be remiss to ignore the strategic insights they contain.

Literature Review

Much ink has been spilled on the Islamic State, especially in the context of its approach to outreach, which is perhaps the single most researched aspect of the organisation. Scholars have tended to explore it from three angles: thematic analyses of its aggregate output; content analyses of individual texts or groups of texts; and quantitative analyses of its social media support-base.

The first body of work is characterised by studies from the likes of Zelin, Milton, and Winter, whose respective efforts revolve, like Kimmage's earlier examination of al-Qa'ida in Iraq's communication strategic, around archives—built both in the short- and long-term—of official media output.[9] Generally speaking, their findings are consistent with one another: they each identify a net decline in the amount of propaganda being produced by the group, one that has roughly correlated with (but not necessarily been caused by) its territorial contraction since 2015. While a series of intuitive conclusions may be reached about this, there is no agreement as to what exactly caused this deceleration, and the Islamic State has remained entirely silent on the matter. It is worth noting that the consensus is not quite complete, with an account by Fisher contending that there has been no such productivity decline.[10]

The next stream of research comprises mixed methods analyses of individual genres of Islamic State propaganda. There have been myriad explorations into its magazines, *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*, with some also turning their attention to the Arabic-language equivalent, *Naba*. [11] Others, like Winkler et al. and Adelman, have focused on decrypting the hundreds of infographics it has published since 2015, while scholars such as Nanninga and Dauber and Robinson have instead concentrated on its production of videos.[12] El Damanhoury and Milton are among the very few to have examined its mass production of still images, about which much more can and should be said.[13] Notwithstanding the diversity of their subject matter, these genre studies often reach similar conclusions regarding the presence of mainstream visual rhetoric in the Islamic State's propaganda—that is, motifs and tropes that are very much at home in contemporary Western media culture.

The last of these three research trends focuses on the other side of the communication equation: it consists of explorations into Islamic State support-base dynamics on social networking and file-sharing platforms. Since 2014 in particular, jihadi activism on websites like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube has attracted a lot of attention from scholars and policy analysts alike. Carter, Maher and Neumann's investigation was one of the first such mapping efforts, and it was followed by similarly orientated explorations from the likes of Klausen and Berger and Morgan.[14] Later research on the same issue by Conway et al. and Alexander illustrates that the presence of jihadis on these mainstream platforms has declined since 2015, with new, privacy-maximising services like Telegram, Wickr, and Pidgin coming to take their place as preferred communication hubs for jihadi extremists.[15]

The present study builds on the above, albeit from a slightly different perspective. Drawing on the Islamic State's own rhetoric about media warfare, it contributes to a less prominent cluster of outreach research that evaluates the group's communication imperatives by examining documents that it itself has published. Relatively few have approached the issue from this angle. Among them are Rogan, whose 2007 monograph on al-Qa'ida's approach to propaganda provides one of the first comprehensive analyses of jihadi outreach; [16] Whiteside, whose historical exploration of Islamic State media operations is informed by documentary evidence dating as far back as 2003; [17] Winter, whose analysis is based on the same Himmah Library text on media strategy that is explored below; [18] and Milton, whose work is based on internal documents captured, translated and declassified by the United States Department of Defense. [19] Considered together, these accounts demystify some of the more intricate details of the group's media production, distribution and evaluation activities—and, crucially in the present context, they also inform us as to what strategic considerations drive them. By testing the validity of Bockstette's analytical framework in the specific context of the Islamic State—which, lest we forget, was embryonic when it was first proposed—this article contributes to and builds upon this last body of work.

Jihadi Insurgency and Strategic Communication

Writing in 2008 in the context of al-Qa'ida's media strategy, Carsten Bockstette, then a lieutenant colonel in the German Air Force, proposed that the way in which jihadis conceptualise the communication battlespace means that they are in a highly advantageous position vis-à-vis their more numerous, better-resourced, and better-equipped adversaries. Indeed, by taking advantage of the “favorable communication asymmetry” that is proffered by the nimbleness with which they can navigate the global information environment, jihadis, he holds, have been able to “compensate for a significant part” of what they are lacking in terms of “military might.”[20] Relatively unchallenged, they are able to deploy meticulously planned, high-risk outreach strategies using both social and mainstream media, influencing friend and foe in almost equal measure.

Typically, jihadi communication campaigns revolve around one of three strategic objectives: propagation, legitimisation, and intimidation.[21] The first essentially refers to efforts to attract new recruits, draw in new donors, and expand the reach of their ideology. The second speaks to a more defensive form of communication, one that focuses on justifying violence and situating the actions of the movement in question within a broader Islamic context. The last focuses on the adversary audience; it manifests most prominently in terrorist operations deployed because of their communicative, not kinetic, potential.

In pursuit of these three sets of objectives, jihadi groups are said to work to a five-step model, one that is common to much effective strategic communication planning and could thus be applied in the context of many political marketing campaigns—including those that are non-jihadi:

- i. Strategic end-state assessment and development.
- ii. Communication infrastructure evaluation.
- iii. Target audience analysis and channel selection.
- iv. Plan development and execution.
- v. Monitoring and evaluation.[22]

By adopting this approach, Bockstette contends that jihadi communicators have been able to exploit a fundamental asymmetry that their enemies—as risk-averse states often (but not always) bound by the ethical and moral conventions that have come to be associated with modern-day warfighting—are simply not party to.

While there was much evidence for the validity of this framework back in 2008, the advanced state of jihadi media production today bears little resemblance to the rough-cut tapes that characterised it in the 2000s. Nevertheless, these same three strategic objectives have withstood the tests of time, something that I endeavour to demonstrate below.

Framework, Applied

In this section, I interpret two doctrinal documents relating to the Islamic State's media war, drawing on Bockstette's framework throughout. The first text is a speech attributed to Abu Hamzah al-Muhajir—a successor to Abu Mu'sab al-Zarqawi and former prime minister and war minister of the Islamic State of Iraq, the direct predecessor to what is now known as the Islamic State. Entitled, ‘To those entrusted with the message,’ it surfaced posthumously in 2010, when the group was at its lowest ebb. The second text is a field-guide for media operatives that was published by the Islamic State's printing press, the Himmah Library. Entitled, ‘Media operative, you are a mujahid too,’ it first appeared in mid-2015, when the group was at the zenith of its influence. Both documents are similarly orientated: each addresses core supporters of the group, setting out the strategic value of media activism with a view to justifying why the Islamic State invests so much time and energy in it. Below, each is considered in turn.

Text I: “To those entrusted with the message”

Stripped of ideological window-dressing, the Abu Hamzah speech consists of fourteen guidelines falling into one of four thematic clusters. Three of these clusters correlate almost exactly to Bockstette’s core communication objectives—propagation, legitimisation, and intimidation. The fourth relates to educational and administrative matters, pursuits that, while interesting, are not considered to be motivating factors for propaganda activism. The discussion below is thus limited to the first three of these clusters.[23]

Throughout the text, Abu Hamzah comes back to the perceived importance of proactive and positive outreach, holding that it is the chief means with which to propagate the Islamic State’s ideology and creed. He variously advises that media workers should “establish communication and dialogue with those who sympathize with and support the issue of Islamic media”;^[24] “prepare a daily video news bulletin that focuses on updates and analyses events, especially those relating to the mujahidin”;^[25] and compile “a memorandum of proposals and guidance on a monthly basis for the mujahidin and the commanders of jihad.”^[26] If each of these instructions is correctly implemented, he holds, Islamic State media operatives will be able to enlarge their global support base with unparalleled efficiency. Indeed, through them, they could variously “raise [the mujahidin’s] spirits, frighten [the mujahidin’s] enemies,” and—perhaps most importantly in this context—make the group and its supporters “appear as one ummah fighting for one objective on many frontlines.”^[27]

Abu Hamzah also makes much of the media workers’ potentially pivotal role in legitimising the Islamic State in the face of its adversaries, noting that they are on the very frontline of defensive communications. He states that media workers are beholden to constantly “defam[e] the image of the infidels, expos[e] their immorality, and describ[e] every defect they have.”^[28] Simultaneously, they must work to understand the stuff of which the adversaries’ arguments is made—the implication being that counter-messaging campaigns should be developed based on this awareness.^[29] If this is done successfully, he contends, the regular media operative will be equipped with everything that they need to “expose their [enemies’] contradictions, violations, and grave sins.”^[30] Essentially, then, this second stream of operations revolves around the targeted derision of any ideas that run contrary to the Islamic State and its belief system—and that includes those which emerge in the mainstream news. Thus, it appears to be geared towards entrenching the group’s exclusivist in-group identity, something intended to leave it legitimised and its adversaries discredited.

On the topic of intimidation, Abu Hamzah speaks at length; indeed, it is the very first thing he mentions. In particular, he proposes two key lines of aggressive communication operations: “sow[ing] terror in the hearts of our enemy using everything permitted by shari’ah for this purpose”—including, that is, terrorism and violent propaganda—and “provid[ing] hackers with instructions” to deploy electronic warfare against enemy institutions such as banks and political foundations in order to “terrify those who have shares in these establishments and destroy their trust.”^[31] Here, he hints at the potentially war-changing impact of propaganda of the deed and propaganda of the virtual deed. As well as fostering a sense of the Islamic State’s apparent ubiquity, intimidation-focused influence campaigns conceived along these lines are said to be a way to compound, in the eyes of both friend and foe, the perception of organisational “strength” in terms of “determination and number.”^[32]

Notwithstanding the fact that this speech was made nearly a decade ago by a man who is now long-dead, the ideas it contains continue to run strong within the Islamic State’s media ministry. They have been writ large across its outreach activities for years—seen in anything from its utopian promotions of life inside the caliphate and counter-messaging campaigns to its deployment of terrorism and distribution of ultraviolent propaganda—and, as is demonstrated below, continued to undergird them when the group was at the height of its power in 2015.

Text II: “Media operative, you are a mujahid too”

The Himmah Library booklet was composed primarily for in-theatre consumption, its core goal being to motivate Islamic State media operatives in their day-to-day efforts. Setting out the strategic importance of propaganda production and distribution, it describes the imperative for media jihad and, just as is the case with

the above, speaks to motivational ideals strikingly similar to those identified by Bockstette.

The authors are unambiguous when it comes to the role of media production in propagating their ideology and expanding the movement. In the introduction, they state that the first goals of the media operative are:

“To buoy the morale of soldiers, spread news of their victories and good deeds, encourage the people to support them by clarifying their creed, methodology and intentions and bridge the intellectual gap between the mujahidin and ordinary Muslims.”[33]

In other words, propaganda is considered to be the central vehicle for popularising the Islamic State brand—anything from its news and current affairs to more esoteric, ideological matters that relate to its creed. This idea closely echoes what Abu Hamzah stated on the matter: he too held that media outreach is the chief means with which to incite ‘regular Muslims,’ en masse, to jihad. In any case, the authors frequently return to this notion, variously noting that there are few more important things than “bring[ing] glad tidings to the believers’ hearts,” “transmit[ting] to the simple people a true picture of the battle,” and “steering others towards [the ideology] and opening their eyes to it.”[34]

The authors are equally explicit about the need to defend the Islamic State through legitimisation-focused media operations. They write at length about “the intellectual invasion” being conducted by Western nations against Muslims the world over, contending that media workers must “declar[e] the truth” in the face of their “daily lies and professionalised falsification,” responding aggressively to the “frenzied media campaign” they are waging.[35] Moreover, given the recent “intensification of this propaganda war”—something that jihadis have long complained about—they hold that defensive communication operations have never been more important: after all, this battle is being fought not just for the reputation of the Islamic State as an organisation, but for the very existence and future of the religion of Islam.[36]

Just as it does in the Abu Hamzah speech, a discussion of the intimidation logic behind media jihad takes centre-stage in the Himmah Library text. The authors write extensively about how aggressive communication operations are a central part of both “verbal jihad” and “jihad of the sword,” and they devote an entire section to its value in “infuriating the enemy.”[37] Because “everything that angers the enemies of Allah” is a legitimate “form of jihad,” they hold that offensive psychological operations should be viewed as a logical extension, or even a substitution, to kinetic campaigns.[38] It is worth noting that, because the Islamic State’s war is total, it matters not which aspect of the adversary is targeted—whether it is the government and its military or its softer, more vulnerable underbelly, the general public.

Considered together, the field-guide’s eight chapters repackaged and reiterate much of what Abu Hamzah stated five years earlier. This is significant, because the Islamic State at the time of its release in 2015 was almost unrecognisable from the Islamic State in 2010: the group was ascendant, not floundering, having just declared its caliphate, attracted tens of thousands of volunteer supporters to Iraq and Syria, and provoked a global war. Given that, at the time of writing, we are on the cusp of another new phase in the group’s history, one in which it is structurally much closer to the Islamic State of 2010, it is critical that this evolution—or lack thereof—is kept in mind.

Concluding Remarks

By examining the above texts through the lens of Bockstette’s framework, this article has illustrated its ongoing relevance in the context of jihadi strategic communication. Judging by its own rhetoric on the matter, the Islamic State does indeed appear to consider media warfare to be an effective way to propagate and legitimise itself and intimidate its adversaries. That these objectives have continually been at the heart of its information strategy across some of its most difficult years is interesting, especially given that they did not seem to change even after it had transformed itself from an ailing insurgency into a booming proto-state. This points towards the versatility of Bockstette’s model as a general framework for communication at times of war, one that places

information at the heart of the asymmetric arsenal come rain or shine.

A recent audio statement by Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi suggests its salience will continue to be the case in the aftermath of the group's most recent material collapse. Fifty-five minutes in length, the speech made for a predictable retelling of the last few years—the central proposition was that the current tribulations were all part of God's plan and that all would soon be well. In the course of making this point, though, Abu Bakr also spoke specifically about the state of the media war. Among other things, he closely echoed both Abu Hamzah and the Himmah Library field-guide, stating that his caliphate was under more ideological pressure than ever before from its foes, who had intensified their “campaign of intentional disinformation and defamation” through the establishment of specially devoted “centres, committees, and significant numbers of trolls.” In view of this, he warned “of taking news from any other source than the Central Media of the Islamic State” and called upon his media activist listeners to double down in their efforts, “renew the[ir] covenants, make further sacrifices, and divert [the disbelievers] away from fighting”—a statement that was reiterated in the October 2018 video, ‘Inside the caliphate VIII.’[39]

As per the above directive—which was enthusiastically circulated in multiple languages by Islamic State supporters on Telegram—the media jihad rages on, even as its kinetic counterpart slows down. Hence, in spite of continuing efforts to limit the dissemination of jihadi propaganda online, which are having an undeniable impact on the group, the strategic communication space could still stand to become even more important to it than it already is.[40]

With this in mind, it is probably fair to say that Bockstette's framework is as salient today as it was ten years ago. However, it is not quite complete: at least one more core communication objective—that of instruction—exists alongside his tripartite structure. While scarce in quantity, the Islamic State's instructional materials have been central to its aggressive communication campaigns in recent years. Indeed, in the last two years alone, its central media offices have issued detailed advice on how to commit terrorist attacks using anything from knives and cars to more complex tactics like hostage-taking and bomb-making.[41] To be sure, the group is not the first to produce such materials—they have a rich pedigree both in and out of the jihadi paradigm, what with the likes of AQAP's Inspire magazine and 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Muqrin's 2004 publication, ‘A practical course for guerrilla warfare’[42]—and nor will it be the last. However, their global impact is, at least at the time of writing, unprecedented.[43] While, to an extent, they have merely been geared towards intimidating adversaries, when one considers that releases like the video ‘You must fight them, o muwahhid’ have had a direct role in executed terrorist attacks, there can be no denying their pedagogical value.[44] For that reason, in months and years to come, we should think instead of there being a quadripartite, not tripartite, motivational structure for jihadi internet-mediated outreach, one consisting of propagation, legitimisation, intimidation, and instruction.

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Notes

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Not Gonna Be Able To Do It: al-Qaeda in Tunisia's Inability to Take Advantage of the Islamic State's Setbacks

By Aaron Y. Zelin

Abstract

This article examines Katibat Uqba Bin Nafi, al-Qaeda/al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib's official branch in Tunisia. It sheds light on an unexplored case study on jihadi groups in recent times by investigating its history and forthcoming prospects. Moreover, it plans to use this article as an avenue to weigh in on the debate within jihadi studies on the future of al-Qaeda and if it can take advantage of the Islamic State's misfortunes in Iraq and Syria as well as Libya. The latter of which has more direct impact on IS's network in Tunisia. The article interrogates a number of Arabic primary sources that have yet to be surveyed from KUBN and AQIM that will help clarify these inquiries. It will identify shortcomings in KUBN's capacities and highlight reasons why IS will likely remain a more attractive avenue for jihadi mobilization in Tunisia going forward. This is relevant since much of the debate on AQ's status analyzes the topic from more of a macro level than looking at specific groups within its broader global network. This research will illustrate that while the consensus might be that AQ is primed to benefit from IS's setbacks, in the case of Tunisia, unless conditions change locally, KUBN is unlikely to follow the same trend as other AQ branches or when evaluating AQ as a whole.

Keywords: Tunisia, Katibat 'Uqbah Bin Nafi, al-Qaeda, The Islamic State, Networks, Messaging, Local Population, Terrorism

As the Islamic State (IS) began to lose territory in Iraq and Syria in the spring of 2015, two of the larger concerns for those that analyze the broader global jihadi movement was the potential for foreign fighter returnee violence and for al-Qaeda (AQ) to take advantage of IS's misfortunes. This article seeks to address the latter concern, in the context of Tunisia.[1] This is because there is a puzzle worth unpacking: if the majority consensus in the jihadi studies field views AQ as ascendant, why is AQ in Tunisia's branch Katibat 'Uqbah Bin Nafi (KUBN) not able to overcome IS's network in Tunisia and become the standard-bearer of the movement in Tunisia? Relatedly, it will also explain why KUBN was unable to take advantage of AQ's prior branch in Tunisia, Ansar al-Sharia's successes (AST). Beyond answering this puzzle, there has been very little written about KUBN, beyond small mentions in articles on AQ or as a side note when discussing IS in Tunisia.[2] Therefore, this article will help fill an important qualitative gap in the literature on jihadi groups. It seeks to interrogate KUBN in a more holistic manner by exploring its creation and evolution over time based on a number of under or unexplored primary sources from KUBN and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib (AQIM).

The article plans to first explore literature that relates to debates on the state of al-Qaeda and how this research hopes to complement these ideas. Then it will provide background history on and the evolution of KUBN. The article will conclude by providing a deep analysis and reasons for why KUBN is unlikely to take greater advantage of IS's loss of territory in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, and not become more of the standard bearer of jihadism in Tunisia.

The State of al-Qaeda

Over the years, there have been a number of debates within the jihadi studies field on the health of al-Qaeda as an organization and its ability to remain relevant and operate. In the early years following the September 11th attacks, much of this was in the context of whether AQ was a centralized organization that had command-and-control over external operations in the West.[3] It morphed after the Arab uprisings into a discussion on if the uprisings hurt or helped AQ's broader agenda in the region.[4] More recently, with the tide going against IS militarily, there has been a vigorous exploration by specialists in the field on if AQ is primed to take advantage

of IS's losses and reclaim the mantle as the preeminent global jihadi network.

It is important to note, which Daniel Byman and Anne Stenersen have articulated, that sometimes this debate can get confusing or individuals are talking past one another since there have been different metrics used to identify strength.[5] And depending on which one is utilized one may gain a different view. For instance, as Stenersen highlights, "Should al-Qaida's strength be measured by the number and size of affiliates or the popularity and reach of its message? Or should the ability to stage international terrorist attacks be taken as yardstick? And when it comes to the threat – are we talking about the immediate threat from al-Qaida's 'external operations' capability, or the long-term threat from the development of al-Qaida-friendly sanctuaries abroad?"[6] Therefore, Stenersen suggests that "al-Qaida's support to Islamist insurgencies, and al-Qaida's international terrorist planning, should be seen as two different problem sets which require different countermeasures." [7] This particular article will focus on the former since there has been no evidence that KUBN has attempted or has the capacity to conduct external operations.

In terms of thoughts on the current overall health of AQ as an organization, some of the leading researchers in the field believe AQ is in a positive position and trajectory going forward. According to Bruce Hoffman, "While the self-proclaimed Islamic State has dominated the headlines and preoccupied national security officials for the past four years, al-Qaeda has been quietly rebuilding." [8] Relatedly, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross notes that "al-Qaeda remains a coherent and centralized organization, albeit one that is not perfectly centralized. Second, al-Qaeda's leadership continues to be essential in determining both the trajectory of the organization as well as its strategic direction." [9] Julia McQuaid, et al., have taken a less sharp view highlighting the changes over time, but still believes that: "Al-Qaeda is a very different organization in a very different world. It has suffered setbacks and periods of weakening, but it has also made gains and expanded in the face of international efforts against it." [10] I have also argued that "the [AQ] network is not on the run and is very active in numerous locales, most specifically Syria, Yemen, Mali, Somalia, Libya, as well as AfPak." That said, I did caution that "Al-Qaeda's emphasis on localized jihad missions, however, is not free of possible downsides." Noting complications and troubles in places like Syria and Libya with more locally focused actors. [11]

In contrast to the above conventional wisdom, Daniel Byman argues that "AQ's operational activity, strength, and the resulting threat that it posed all appeared in decline." [12] Likewise, Barak Mendelsohn has asserted that jihadi groups, including AQ, have a fundamental "aggregation problem," [13] which leads to failure. This suggests from Mendelsohn's perspective that AQ is not on the upward trajectory.

However, there is a thought-provoking dilemma. When reading the above take by the field, most view AQ as having a positive future outlook. Yet, this goes against my original contention that KUBN is not in position to take advantage of IS's recent failures. Therefore, it is important to make an addendum to this author's analysis on the state of AQ by noting that it is important to not only explore AQ as a broader system, but to also look on a case-by-case basis at specific branches and affiliates since the picture might differ from the overall diagnosis, which is the case here.

Background History on KUBN

Going back to mid-1995, AQIM and its predecessor groups (GIA and GSPC) have attempted to establish a larger network in Tunisia. [14] After the GSPC pledged bay'a to Usama Bin Ladin in September 2006 and later changed its name to AQIM in January 2007, [15] it restructured its allocation of resources, which had previously been divided across nine zones only in Algeria. The group decided to break its operations into four areas: Central (Algeria), East (Tunisia), South (Sahel), and West (Mauritania). The new division illustrated the importance that Tunisia and Tunisian members would play. [16] These changes could explain why a multi-week low-level insurgency broke out from December 2006 to mid-January 2007 in the mountains of eastern Tunisia with the AQIM front group Jund Asad Bin al-Furat (JABF). [17] In some ways, this was a test run for AQIM's post-Tunisian uprising creation of KUBN.

KUBN: A Fig Leaf of AQIM

KUBN came to be as a consequence of France's Operation Serval in Mali. Although the operation did not begin until mid-January 2013, the Malian government requested assistance to combat the AQIM-led jihadi insurgency in the northern part of the country in September 2012. This gap between Mali's request and the French intervention allowed AQIM time to plan its resources and personnel relocation. This spurred the movement of AQIM assets, Tunisian foreign fighters in Mali and AQIM fighters in Algeria to Western Tunisia in Jabal Chambi, along the border with Algeria. This was later corroborated by Tunisia's Interior Minister at the time Lotfi Ben Jeddou.[18] It is at this juncture that Tunisia fell victim to more sophisticated insurgent-type attacks against its military and security forces. Prior to the first KUBN attack, which targeted a National Guardsmen in Bou Chebka, along the Algerian-Tunisian border, on December 10, 2012,[19] most AQIM-related incidents following the Tunisian revolution had to do with weapons smuggling enterprises being broken up. The six incidents before the Bou Chebka attack occurred in remote and rural areas of Tunisia, such as Tataouine, Nekrif, Bir Znigra, Rouhia, Bir Ali Ben Khalifa, and El-Stah Hsan.[20]

Following the Bou Chebka attack, the al-Nahdah-led government at the time announced a series of arrests ten days later in Jabal Chambi and Ain Drahem, in northwest Tunisia, and provided more details on KUBN. [21] Ali Larayedh, Minister of Interior at the time, noted that some Tunisians arrested in the sweep had also previously been involved with AST dawa activities, though he was "unable to confirm the existence of formal links" between the KUBN cells and AST. The Tunisian government would formally designate AST as a terrorist organization in late August 2013.[22] The designation was a consequence of some of AST's members joining up with KUBN, but more importantly is due to AST's secret military wing, which helped prepare the two assassinations of secular leftist politicians Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi in February and July 2013, respectively as well as the failed October 2013 terrorist plot against Sousse and Monastir.[23] It should be noted, however, that this network was more connected to the AST-ASL nexus in Libya, with training camps used in Sabratha, Libya to help train individuals involved in these assassinations and plots than the KUBN network on the Algerian-Tunisian border in Jabal Chambi. The latter network is more connected to historical AQIM networks than the former newer ones that were established from scratch following the 2011 revolution.

In the beginning, KUBN, unlike many other jihadi groups, did not have a presence online to push its propaganda or announce operations it conducted. Therefore, there was a gap in information on the organization in the first year-and-a-half of its existence. It is likely that this was the case because AQIM did not want to publicize this project. It should be recalled that it was the Tunisian government that uncovered this front group. Therefore, it is plausible that reports that KUBN, beyond conducting low-level insurgent attacks, was also being used to attract more Tunisians to AQIM, and therefore providing initial training before sending these fighters to more advanced AQIM camps in Algeria or Libya.[24]

It only began to establish a presence online on July 11, 2014 when it created a Facebook page and Twitter account called Fajr al-Qayrawan.[25] This was ahead of an attack on the Tunisian military five days later, which killed 14 Tunisian soldiers and left 20 wounded.[26] The attack has been considered the most deadly attack against the Tunisian military since the country's independence in 1956. Moreover, KUBN only admitted officially that it was an AQIM front group in January 2015 when a martyrdom notice it released wrote AQIM under KUBN to note, which group the individual died fighting with. Both the creation of the presence online as well as the announcement of overt affiliation as an AQIM cut out was due to the Islamic State's advances in Iraq and Syria, but also within Tunisia.

The Islamic State Infiltration of KUBN

In the lead up to and following the announcement of IS's Caliphate in late June 2014, the proto-state promoted various pledges of allegiance and support to IS's leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as well as the broader project of resurrecting the historical form of Islamic government. For instance, in late March 2014, AQIM's central region came out in support of IS.[27] This grouping formed the basis of what eventually would become a 'province'

of IS called Wilayat al-Jaza'ir following Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's mid-November 2014 speech expanding IS's provincial system outside its core in Iraq and Syria.[28] This same dynamic occurred in mid-September 2014, when an alleged KUBN statement was released by Ifriqiya Media and stated "the mujahidin brothers in KUBN from the land of al-Qayrawan show support, help, and aid for the Islamic Caliphate State...give victory to the Islamic State, raise its banner and unite the ranks of the mujahideen in every place." [29]

This statement, however, did not represent KUBN as an organization. With hindsight, it is clear that it was a group of KUBN members that were pro-IS attempting to agitate for the organization to defect as well as buttress IS's claims over the homegrown Tunisian jihadi movement. Another important angle to point out is that the majority of insurgent attacks from IS in Tunisia once they officially began conducting them in 2015 have been carried out in Jabal al-Maghilah and Jabal Salloum.[30] This is where KUBN cell's that defected to IS had previously been located. It also helps explain the pattern of operations in Kasserine governorate, where IS maintains a base in those two locales, while those that remained loyal to KUBN continue to operate cells and conduct attacks in Jabal Chambi and Jabal Samamma.

The dynamics in Tunisia between KUBN and IS cells in Kasserine governorate, where both groups mainly operated was different and less hostile militarily than how the situation played out in Syria and elsewhere. Ifriqiya Media explained the nuanced nature of the local relationship between KUBN and IS: "we work in silence without any disagreements between us, we cooperate together, and the goals in different stages differ between every one of them." [31] Therefore, the groups had their own agendas and each focused on them, but sometimes they would cooperate since both were operating in the same non-conducive environment due to the Tunisian government's efforts.

That said, Ifriqiya Media, a Tunisian jihadi online media outlet that was founded in mid-June 2014 and was posting content that supported both IS and AQ-affiliated groups, had a clear agenda and information operation campaign. Ifriqiya Media was pro-IS and was only posting KUBN content since it was holding out hope that members of KUBN would pledge bay'a to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Therefore, by posting both IS and KUBN content, Ifriqiya Media was hoping to expose and convince their fellow pro-AQ jihadis to IS content and for them to commit to the correct side in the competition between IS and AQ.[32] Therefore, Ifriqiya Media was hoping to undermine AQIM's project in Tunisia: "We were the first to support and spread the news about jihadi operations in Tunisia during a time when the official jihadi media platforms were being passive due to some orders given." [33] This appears to be a slight against AQIM, since as discussed above, KUBN did not have an overt presence online in the first year-and-a-half of its existence. It is only a month after the creation of Ifriqiya Media that KUBN's official outlet at the time, Fajr al-Qayrawan, was established. That said, Fajr al-Qayrawan went dormant in mid-October 2014 following the arrest of its administrator.[34]

This arrest though provided greater space to the pro-IS elements in KUBN, since for whatever reason, possibly a lack of qualified individuals with the necessary skill set to run a media outlet, KUBN did not create a new media apparatus or replace someone to run the Fajr al-Qayrawan online accounts. As a result, over time, more and more of the Ifriqiya Media content was pro-IS and less and less highlighted pro-AQ/KUBN-related content. It is only after the death of KUBN's leader, Khalid Sha'ib,[35] and the organizations reaffirmation that it was still a part of AQIM,[36] both in late March 2015, did Ifriqiya Media begin fully posting 100% pro-IS and IS in Tunisia propaganda. It is no wonder then, that within two weeks of these developments, KUBN established its own Facebook page under the group's name for the first time to reclaim its autonomy and legitimacy.[37]

As a consequence of Ifriqiya Media's information operations, it is also likely the main reason why the Tunisian government originally claimed that KUBN was responsible for the Bardo Museum attack in March 2015.[38] The Tunisian government may not have yet fully comprehended at that point the split within KUBN itself. Therefore, IS's infiltration of KUBN hurt KUBN's capacity as well as membership base due to the defections between late summer 2014 and early 2015 when IS began to overtly promote through its official propaganda organs that it was indeed them as an organization involved in attacks, with the most notable being the March 2015 and June 2015 Bardo Museum and Sousse Beach attacks. As part of Tunisia's military response to those two IS attacks, it also picked up its military operations against KUBN, due to the original confusion, but also

to show that it was doing something against the militant threat. By July 2015, according to Tunisia's Interior Minister at the time, Najem Gharselli, 90% of KUBN's membership had been killed.[39]

Rebuilding KUBN, But Losing Momentum

As a consequence of the degradation of KUBN, the organization put out a statement in late August 2015, with a new official logo to help rebrand and boost its efforts. In many ways, it was also a reintroduction of the group to the Tunisian public. In the statement it had a message for a few audiences:

- The Tunisian government (which it called taghut [tyrants]) and its soldiers: "their repressive measures against the Katibah and against all Muslims will only strengthen their resolve to continue their jihad.
- Their 'mujahidin' brothers and especially those in the prisons of the tyrants: "offering them support and encouragement".
- The people of Tunisia: "the freedom promised by their revolution is being stolen. The Katibah will not shed innocent Muslim blood, and they are only targeting the tyrants." [40]

This last line is the most consequential aspect of the message. It would come back to hurt the organization since it has been unable to fully live up to its claim that it does not shed 'innocent Muslim blood'. Before getting to this in greater detail below, which helps explain why KUBN has been unable to take advantage of IS's misfortunes since 970 Tunisians have returned home from Iraq and Syria, it is worthwhile to explore the pace of operations that KUBN has conducted since 2015. This will illustrate its weaknesses and hardship in re-recruiting back IS in Tunisia members and foreign fighter returnees.

Based on official claims of responsibility from KUBN, in 2015 it conducted seven attacks; in 2016 it went down to three, with that total being reached subsequently in 2017 and 2018.[41] What is noteworthy beyond the fact that their attack pace has gone down, is that the level of sophistication in attack has been degraded greatly as well. In 2015, four of the attacks were ambushes and included clashes with Tunisian forces. This went down to one in 2016, none occurred in 2017, and only one occurred in 2018. The rest of KUBN's attacks have been against civilians as well as random mine explosions that it planted. Neither of which needs a lot of planning to execute. With the mines going off randomly once it is placed, it makes it far less risky on its members. This highlights risk aversion from KUBN due to low membership and broader organizational incapacity.

Part of this breakdown over the past few years is also due to American military aid, intelligence assistance, and forces on the ground has increasingly helped Tunisia deteriorate KUBN's (as well as IS's) ability to operate as openly and as forcefully.[42] Therefore, it is no surprise that the Tunisian military eventually killed Khalid Sha'ib's successor, his brother, Murad Sha'ib in August 2017.[43] Moreover, within quick succession, when AQIM began to send reinforcements from outside Tunisia to assist in re-organizing KUBN's capabilities, the Tunisian military was quickly able to kill KUBN's new leader Bilal Kobi in January 2018.[44] Further to this weakening, this could also explain why within the propaganda realm, KUBN's statements were now being released under the name of AQIM officially instead of released only under its group's name. Instead of the statement being signed as from KUBN solely and using its letterhead, even if it is known that KUBN is a part of AQIM, KUBN's statements are now signed off at the bottom with KUBN and AQIM, while also now using AQIM letterhead.

Within that framework and change, KUBN/AQIM released two statements in April and May 2018, likely to spur support and recruitment by focusing on classic jihadi ideological points. The first takes aim at France and Western governments for alleged continued imperialism in Tunisia and noting that "replacing persons and names, while keeping the essence of the regime and its structure, will only produce the same results. Previously, there were Bourguiba and Ben Ali. Today, there is Essebsi. Tomorrow, there will be Ghannouchi, and so on and so forth. It will be all the same!"[45] The statement ends with contradictory declarations by first claiming its continued relevance: "the mujahidin are still keeping their word. They have not replaced or changed, despite the successive trials and tribulations," while also then calling on individuals to act on its behalf: "We incite

every honest Muslim who is able to inflict harm on the Crusader wrong-doers and their interests by any means possible to spare no effort to do so, and to offer their persons and property in support of their faith and in defense of the oppressed children of their Muslim nation.”[46] This shows, that in fact, KUBN is not too strong and therefore needs others to conduct some type of low-scale operation.

The second statement was geared toward the forthcoming Tunisian municipal elections, which took place on May 6, 2018.[47] Jihadi-salafis, including KUBN/AQIM, consider democracy a religion, one in which humans contravene the sovereignty of God by attempting to make their own laws. In placing themselves on God’s level, politicians—including Islamists—violate the fundamental monotheistic principle of tawhid, which makes them polytheists. This ideology informs KUBN/AQIM’s statement, which attacks the legitimacy of democracy in Tunisia: “elections are drugs to sedate the Muslim people of Tunisia every two to three years and divert the attention from their key issues.”[48] That said, two months prior to the statement being put out by KUBN/AQIM, IS released an article in mid-March 2018,[49] in issue 123 of its weekly newsletter al-Naba, that takes aim at Tunisia’s electoral democracy and forthcoming election.[50] Therefore, KUBN/AQIM’s statement might not have had the same impact within the audience that might have been most receptive to it due to IS’s earlier article.

While the fate of KUBN recently has been of deterioration in overall capabilities, that does not mean the organization should be taken lightly since it still has lethal capacity, just far less often. For instance, their July 8, 2018 attack on Tunisian National Guardsmen in Ayn Sultan in Jendouba Governorate killed nine National Guardsmen.[51] That said, a larger question is if KUBN has the ability to take advantage of IS’s losses in Libya (December 2016), Iraq (July 2017), and Syria (October 2017) over the past couple of years. Based on the data above there are no signs that KUBN has been able to exploit this changed environment within the global jihadosphere. It is worthwhile mentioning that the capacity of IS in Tunisia has also gone down over the past few years having claimed responsibility for eleven attacks in 2015, four attacks in 2016, four attacks in 2017, and four attacks in 2018. No doubt, the role of American aid, assistance, and guidance has been helpful. The next section will help explain why beyond the purely counterterrorism measures KUBN is not poised to become the preeminent jihadi group in Tunisia.

Drawbacks on KUBN’s Ability to Overtake IS in Tunisia

The discussion about KUBN’s election statement following IS’s leads to a crucial point when exploring KUBN as an organization today and its ability to position itself vis-a-vis IS’s network in Tunisia: the group is not connected to the pulse of the Tunisian jihadi movement, is not innovative in the way it operates, and alienates the local population it is attempting to curry favor with. Some might argue that is the case for IS in Tunisia as well, but IS, unlike AQ, has never claimed that it is attempting to cultivate hearts and minds. Furthermore, when looking at the prisoner population of Tunisian jihadis most are pro-IS, which highlights the lack of broader support in country, even if both groups appear to have relatively similar operational pace the past few years. This is due to KUBN’s network disconnection, the changed experiences of Tunisian jihadis since the Arab uprisings, KUBN’s inability to align propaganda with action, and therefore losing hearts and minds of the local populace.

Network Disconnection

KUBN has had the disadvantage of positioning itself in areas that did not have much historic connection to jihadi activism. It is true that AQIM’s predecessor groups, the GSPC and the GIA, conducted attacks along the Algerian-Tunisia border three times between 1995-2001,[52] but most historical Tunisian jihadi networks were closer to the coastal region (Ariana, Bizerte, and Tunis) and Libyan border (Ben Gardane). This is in contrast to KUBN’s, which hugs the Algerian border in Kasserine and to a lesser extent in El Kef and Jendouba. Moreover, following the Tunisian revolution when AST was active and building local branches of its organization in various governorates, cities, and villages throughout Tunisia, the governorates where KUBN has operated were some of the least active within AST’s network. Based on research for this author’s forthcoming book, on a per

capita basis as it relates to events that AST organized by governorate (24 total governorates in Tunisia); El Kef, 19/24; Jendouba, 22/24; and Kasserine, 24/24, were at the bottom.[53] The main takeaway from this is that those locales were not deeply penetrated by jihadi networks and influence. Therefore, those three governorates, with Kasserine being the most relevant, since that is where KUBN has been the strongest since 2012, there was no fertile ground to easily recruit and penetrate the local milieus. Instead, KUBN has mostly been holed up in different mountainous areas in these regions, with Jabal Chambi and Jabal Samamma as the most relevant -- both of which are in Kasserine government. This is also relevant when discussing issues with the local population below.

Beyond the limited nature of AST's activism within those three governorates, the areas that were more richly organized and mobilized were later co-opted for recruitment to fight in Libya and Syria with IS. The main conduit for this was through a group and online media outlet called Shabab al-Tawhid (ST), a network of pro-IS Tunisians that had previously been with AST before it was designated as a terrorist organization. At the time, this author surmised that ST was a successor network to AST and was attempting to remobilize locally after the designation.[54] But with hindsight, it appears more as a mobilizing structure for foreign fighter recruitment and to turn AST members away from AQ to IS. ST was also where the first former senior AST leader, Shaykh Kamal Zuruq, pledged baya (allegiance) to the leader of IS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[55] As a consequence, much of the Tunisian foreign fighter contingent abroad was pro-IS and drifted away from AQ's branches in Syria (Jabhat al-Nusra) and Libya (ASL). These networks, especially those connected to the Tunisian jihadi training camps in Sabratha, Libya, which were associated with IS, helped populate IS's branch in Tunisia as well as train the individuals responsible for the Bardo Museum, Sousse Beach, and Tunis National Guard Bus attacks as well as the attempted takeover of Ben Gardane in 2015-2016. As a result, this network co-optation by IS of many facets of AST's infrastructure, made it far more difficult for KUBN to also connect with and recruit Tunisians to join it in its mountain bases in other parts of the country.

As noted above, many of the key figures in the leadership of KUBN had previously come from AQIM's network in Algeria and Mali. The latter of which were mainly Tunisians that had been foreign fighters in Mali. The former, including the group's leaders (Khalid Sha'ib, Murad Sha'ib, and Bilal Kobi), were Algerian. Therefore, they were not necessarily as plugged into the new scene that emerged in Tunisia with AST after the revolution and were more used to the methodology of AQIM's network in Algeria. Therefore, if one compares the modus operandi of KUBN with AQIM's activities in Algeria over the past decade, they appear to be very similar: small groups of cells that primarily lay ambushes and are deeply clandestine in rural and mountainous areas. While this might bode well for survival, it does not necessarily help with winning hearts and minds of the local population. Nor does this approach augur well for KUBN's propaganda products garnering an audience, especially if the frame alignment is off due to differences between what is said and what its actions show.

From Terrorism and Insurgency to Social Movement and Service Provision

It is necessary to first highlight some key structural changes that happened to the jihadi movement, which is relevant to Tunisian jihadism, and helps explain some of these failures that KUBN has encountered.

Historically, within the Arab world, most jihadi groups either were involved in terrorist incidents or some level of insurgent military activity. Much of this is due to the conditions on the ground in these countries, whether within the framework of an authoritarian system or within the context of civil war. As a consequence, there was a limit to the tools that jihadis could use to attempt to advance its message and try over time to implement its vision for society. It in many ways was self-defeating since these groups mainly operated clandestinely and covertly. Therefore, they were not close with the local population, which made it difficult to advance beyond a purely violent stage of action. This dynamic changed dramatically with the onset of the Arab uprisings, which allowed for jihadi groups to expand their repertoire of actions due to the opening of public squares or safe havens that jihadi organizations controlled. This led to the growth in dawa (proselytization/outreach) activities as well as the provision of social services and in some cases governance. This was a paradigm shift and moved the jihadi movement forward due to the greater opportunities to appeal directly to the local populace in a face-

to-face manner versus only through online videos. These new conditions brought in a larger pool of individuals to a number of jihadi organizations that may have not joined had it been a purely violent and underground movement. Therefore, the expectations within the broader movement altered to presume a certain type of organizational operation. It also shows that jihadi groups could not only talk about implementing some type of theocratic vision some time in the future, but actually carrying it out in the real world to varying degrees.

In the context of Tunisia, AST built up a vast network of outreach and service from 2011-2013. My forthcoming book on the history of Tunisian jihadism gets into this in great detail, but is beyond the scope of this particular article. What is important to note in this piece though is that the building of an Islamic state was a key motivating frame used by AST to encourage people to join its group. It was so important to the group that when it published its first advertisement for its second annual conference in May 2012, it framed the event as “a building block in the project to establish the Caliphate State.”[56] Furthermore, the title of the third annual conference a year later was “Supporters of Islamic Law ... The Islamic State We Are Building,” suggesting that it was no longer an objective for the future, but rather a process that AST had already begun. After the third conference, AST began using the slogan, “We Are Building the Islamic State” to further signify the ongoing process and push individuals to join the historic project.[57]

This messaging frame is a tool in fostering an individual’s sense of significance. It asserted that one could be part of a project larger than oneself: the re-establishment of an Islamic state in Tunisia. Therefore, those same youth who have education, skills, and desire to give back to their community can now feel empowered. AST sought to contrast that feeling of empowerment with the feelings sparked by a corrupt central government that does not want to empower youth. Recognizing these grievances, AST always repeated the slogan “Your Sons Are At Your Service.” This highlighted the importance of not only giving back to one’s neighborhood, but also honoring those involved in such work. It also helped that AST provided evidence (by posting all of its activities on its official Facebook page) that it was indeed building this shadow structure of works and services in various communities throughout Tunisia. Consequently, the more charitable and outreach activities AST orchestrated, the more individuals joined up, which in turn allowed AST to organize and conduct more activities, more often, in more locales.

This helps provide one explanation for why recruitment to IS was so seamless. Many Tunisian jihadis viewed it as a continuation of what they had already been doing in Tunisia, as told to this author by a member of AST: “The dawa is going on and then after it, it is global work, not just in Tunisia.”[58] Moreover, instead of only doing these types of functions as a movement, now they were doing it, from their perspectives, as part of a historical project through the reintroduction of the Caliphate. As a consequence, Tunisian jihadis became accustomed to a certain type of jihadism, one that included population outreach and service, beyond just violence. This historical process, especially with the experience of the Tunisian jihadi movement since the Tunisian revolution in particular, is key to also understanding why KUBN has not been able to succeed as much with the local population as one might think. It does not help either that their ideological messaging to the population does not completely align with what has happened on the ground.

Losing Hearts and Minds

With this in mind, this section will highlight a number of points. First it will show that the type of messages that KUBN and AQIM have been pushing to the Tunisian population seems distant and from an era prior to the Arab uprisings. Second, it will illustrate the inability of KUBN to ingratiate itself with the local population. Rather, and finally, it will demonstrate how any possible goodwill has been hurt due to KUBN’s penchant for stealing provisions from locals homes, raiding local businesses for supplies, and setting up mines that although are likely supposed to target Tunisian security forces have in many cases killed local civilians in the areas they operate. In the end, KUBN/AQIM are proffering a message against the current Tunisian government and those that believe in the process of democratization, but not offering anything in return beyond terrorizing and alienating the local community, one that they are not even close to because they are hiding in the mountains.

Returning to KUBN/AQIM's statement ahead of the Tunisian municipal elections in May 2018, it notes that "in every election to date all political parties market the next elections as a turning point as if it's a 'magic cane,' which will change the circumstances of the country, and allow the country to escape its economic and political crises." [59] It is true that many Tunisians still are waiting for economic benefits from the revolution, but this particular election is part of providing such gains in the longer-term. By decentralizing power to the local level, instead of a centralized apparatus that is distant to the population, this election provides more local agency over budgets and other types of services and advantages that only someone from that particular area might be able to render since they do care about the area they came from. This is in contrast to some outsider from the capital that has no connection to the rural and interior parts of Tunisia. Therefore, KUBN/AQIM are criticizing a measure that in the medium-to-long-term will be beneficial to the local populations. This is especially the case in areas KUBN operates like Kasserine, since those locally will have more control over and say in their own lives and future, which the hope is to alleviate more of the economic burden. As a result, the same playbook AQ-aligned groups might use to delegitimize faux elections in authoritarian systems in the Arab world prior to the uprisings, falls short, as well as impedes the wishes of the locals the group is attempting to sway.

More importantly, KUBN/AQIM do not provide much alternative to what it is criticizing beyond rhetorical flourishes about the need for Islamic law and for individuals to fight jihad. These positions are attached to another key element of its messaging related to the fact that it claims it does not attack civilians. In at least four statements, KUBN/AQIM tries to convince Tunisians that it does not spill the blood of innocent individuals (which is part of a broader campaign that AQ has promoted since Ayman al-Zawahiri's September 2013 "General Guidelines for the Work of a Jihadi" [60]).

- "We tell our people in Tunisia that we do not target the Tunisian people... We only target those who attack us... we are not responsible for attacks on our Muslim Tunisian Families... We ask our mujahidin to do their best and be up to the task and warn them about infallible blood." [61]
- "[KUBN] will not shed innocent Muslim blood, and they are only targeting the tyrants." [62]
- "It reiterates to the people of Tunisia that KUBN's fight is with the tyrants and their soldiers, not with ordinary Muslims. And it warns the local population to be cautious about moving around KUBN areas with weapons in case the group mistakes them for enemy soldiers. It also informs local inhabitants that they can expect to be searched and to undergo identity checks so that KUBN can determine that they are not members of the army or on their list of supporters of the tyrants. KUBN also assert their right to defend themselves if they are attacked, even if the attacker is Muslim." [63]
- "We promise our people in Tunisia that we do not target any innocent Muslim who is not fighting us. And we confirm that our war is against those who oppressed and assaulted us like the army and other security bodies." [64]

Also, AQIM's 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jaza'iri in December 2016, released an advice booklet to leaders and fighters in KUBN on how to operate in the mountainous areas they are based in. It notes the following key directions:

Getting to know many people as much as you can and gain their affection, if you gain their affection they will aid you in many things... They will not snitch on you and will hide you, and mislead your enemies. You will gain influence in the area and will be able to mobilize as you wish. Gain information about the enemy anytime. And best you will gain and benefit from is the issue of recruiting. You will guarantee logistical support in all kinds (such as: provisions, clothes, and everything you need from military supplies)... And reminding everyone of the bombs, because it might be danger to them, this is part of maintaining the safety of Muslims. [65]

This counsel about being close to the local population, along with KUBN/AQIM's own propaganda about not targeting innocent civilians has not been heeded. Instead, KUBN is not, as noted above, close to the local residents, but rather hiding in the mountains. More importantly, it has killed a number of residents either

on purpose or by accident and has also ransacked individuals homes and businesses to survive, which runs counter to the second point above in al-Jaza'iri's guidance manual.

As a consequence of KUBN's direct murder of local residents, including Salih al-Firjani, Haddah Rihimi, and Lamjed Gribi, it has released statements attempting to justify the group's actions and whitewash what occurred as part of a public relations gambit since these deaths were seen locally as inexcusable.[66] Based on a database created by this author, since May 2016, there have been 14 cases where landmines laid by KUBN have been set off by civilians, which has led to at least four deaths, two amputations, and other various injuries. Less lethal, but no less worrisome to local residents, since October 2015, based on a database created by this author, KUBN has been involved in 20 cases of breaking into people's homes and local businesses to steal provisions, supplies, and forcefully eaten home-cooked meals as well as attacking or assaulting locals for information on the Tunisian military (see Table 1).

Table 1. Incidents and Assaults Related to Break-Ins and Gaining Intelligence

Date	Incident	Location
10/18/2015	Terrorists refuel food and force two young men to transport them	Ain Zayen
1/2/2016	Four armed individuals burst into family home and seize food	Mazreg Chames
3/25/2016	Three terrorists assault and rob a citizen	Sidi Harath
5/29/2016	Terrorist group penetrates a shop and a house	El Aayoun/Jebel Twaysha
6/28/2016	Nine terrorists including a woman broke into a home, stealing food and medicine	Mazreg Chames
8/4/2016	Terrorist group attacks a house and seizes supplies	Douar Msabhia
8/11/2016	Assaulting a resident of Kasserine who refused to give them the addresses of security forces	Agroub Mimoun
8/16/2016	Terrorists entered a house	Sarkouna
11/19/2016	Terrorist group attacks a house and seizes foodstuffs	Ghar Dimaou
1/17/2017	Group of terrorists storm a house and seizes provisions of its inhabitants	Douar Jfaffleya/Ain Zayen
3/5/2017	Terrorists attack a grocery store	Hammam Mallag
3/22/2017	Aggression by terrorists against a shepherd	Jebel Samamma
6/5/2017	Three terrorists assault a 22-year-old	Ain Zayen
8/9/2017	Terrorist group raided a house	Jebel Ouergha
10/21/2017	Terrorist elements rob a house	Ain Zayen
12/25/2017	Terrorists open fire on shepherds	Ain Jenan
6/1/2018	Terrorist group shoots a shepherd	Jebel Chambi
6/23/2018	Terrorist group tortures a shepherd	Krayriya
8/22/2018	Terrorists attack a house	Fej Ettine
10/1/2018	Two terrorists break into a house	Mejmaja

It is no surprise then that many local residents do not look too fondly upon KUBN and its fight against the Tunisian government and security forces. Not only is KUBN not close to the local residents nor attempting to gain favor with them via service provision, instead many civilians have been killed, injured, or harassed by KUBN. Therefore, KUBN has undermined its own potential base. This helps provide a greater explanation for why KUBN is unlikely to overtake IS as the most popular jihadi group in Tunisia. Plus, the broader Tunisian jihadi network is pro-IS, whether breaking it down by those that are based abroad (Syria, Libya, Europe) or internal (prison system). The reality is, IS's message still has greater appeal, due to the fact that it can rely on a nostalgia narrative of what it did in Iraq, Libya, and Syria, unlike KUBN, which just discusses what could be. All IS has to do is point to the exploits it was able to accomplish in Libya, Iraq, and Syria in terms of

administration, governance, and services to show that it could be a possibility in Tunisia if given the proper conditions in contrast to a negative lived experience with KUBN.

Conclusion

For all these reasons mentioned in the previous few sections—network disconnection, the changed experiences of Tunisian jihadis since the Arab uprisings, and KUBN’s inability to align propaganda about not shedding innocent Muslim blood with its actions—the group is losing hearts and minds of the local populace. Even if there may be some type of appeal with some themes in KUBN’s message, whether it relates to economic inequality or imperialism that could attract those on the secular left or messages that have social conservative talking points related to issues including equal inheritance amongst the sexes that might entice Islamists, all of this becomes irrelevant when one alienates the same population that one is attempting to gain support from.

This is especially the case for AQ-aligned groups, which have been attempting, through al-Zawahiri’s guidelines mentioned above, to distinguish itself from past jihadi excesses by showing a more welcoming jihadi enterprise. In the case of KUBN, however, it is not living up to such ideals and when one adds to it the structural factors, counterterrorism campaign, and IS’s remaining appeal within the Tunisian jihadosphere, it is unlikely that KUBN will be to take advantage of IS’s recent downturn. Therefore, contra to overall arguments about AQ’s viability in the aftermath of IS losses in Iraq, Libya, and Syria over the past two years, this particular case study has shown that KUBN’s status falls more in line with Byman and Mendelsohn’s diagnosis for AQ’s current state.

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Notes

[1] This author has already discussed this in two other papers on the Tunisian foreign fighter and returnee phenomenon: Aaron Y. Zelin, “Tunisian Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Notes* Number 55, November 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/tunisian-foreign-fighters-in-iraq-and-syria>; Aaron Y. Zelin, “The Others: Foreign Fighters in Libya,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Notes* Number 45, January 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-others-foreign-fighters-in-libya-and-the-islamic-state>.

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The Failing Islamic State Within The Failed State of Yemen

By Elisabeth Kendall

Abstract

This article explores why Islamic State has failed to gain significant traction in Yemen despite conditions on the ground that appeared, superficially at least, to be conducive to its expansion. Four main reasons are posited: its overt brutality and indiscriminate attacks; its inability to rival al-Qa'ida's deep roots and territorial hold; its failure to find culturally nuanced ways of appealing to locals as well as the difficulties faced by foreign fighters in both reaching and integrating in Yemen; and its arrogant and alienating leadership style. The article next looks at Islamic State's challenges and weaknesses in Yemen by analysing both the revelations of defectors and its own propaganda. Despite some early support from inside Saudi Arabia, Islamic State lacked charismatic leaders who inspired broad loyalty and respect and was well into decline by 2016. Nevertheless, Islamic State media continued to project a magnified image of its presence in Yemen, possibly assisted by several false flagged attacks. Finally the article unravels the conflict that erupted between Islamic State and al-Qa'ida in mid-2018. The evidence suggests that the conflict is linked to local territorial and power rivalries and may have been provoked by external actors intent on sowing rifts inside Yemen's jihad. Looking ahead, Islamic State and al-Qa'ida are unlikely to merge formally, and both groups will weaken in the short-term. Al-Qa'ida retains the upper hand but there are some signs that Islamic State may be trying to develop a more 'authentic' image in Yemen. For jihadist foot soldiers, however, both labels may be becoming less relevant. In the long-term, the prospects for jihad look more promising. Either the current war persists, providing favourable conditions for jihad groups to thrive, or a peace deal is reached, which will inevitably result in disillusioned sectors of the population with whom jihad groups might make common cause.

Keywords: Islamic State in Yemen, al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, recruitment, terrorist group rivalries

Introduction

Yemen's rugged topography, rampant corruption[1] and persistent conflicts[2] have long made it an attractive hub for militant jihadists, who have been operating successfully there ever since the 1980s.[3] The Islamic State's attempt to gain ground in Yemen might therefore have been expected to succeed, particularly given the ongoing instability following Yemen's popular uprising in 2011,[4] a National Dialogue which ended in 2014 without solving Yemen's most divisive issues,[5] growing sectarianism generated by the advance of Houthi rebels vocally supported by Shi'ite Iran in 2014, and the chaos of all-out war from 2015. Yet despite early successes in attracting both new recruits and al-Qa'ida defectors, Islamic State in Yemen (ISY) quickly lost momentum, and it never held territory. This article begins by identifying the reasons behind ISY's failure to gain traction. Next it examines ISY's recent challenges and weaknesses, such as defections, the need to retreat, and the increasing irrelevance of the global Islamic State label as the group's character, aims and focus in Yemen become more parochial. It then analyzes the eruption of violent conflict between ISY and al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in 2018 and questions the extent to which this may be harnessed to local rivalries and/or stirred by external actors. Finally, it concludes by looking ahead to how ISY may be evolving and the possible circumstances that may enable it to resurge.

Why Did Islamic State Fail to Take Root in Yemen?

The Islamic State officially announced its expansion into Yemen on 13 November 2014, following Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's acceptance of an oath of allegiance sworn to him by "Yemen's mujahidin" in an audio recording. For a brief period, ISY expanded. Its key youth recruiter and coordinator for Hadramawt, Abu Karam al-Hadrami, opened hostels and managed the accommodation, everyday needs, and movements of new recruits.[6] ISY benefitted from the outbreak of war in Yemen in 2015 as it was able to situate the conflict with the Houthis, who are aligned to a limited extent with Iran, as part of a jihad against Shi'ite "apostates".

In this, ISY was inadvertently helped along by the rampantly sectarian narrative emanating from Gulf states. In March 2015, a Saudi-led coalition of Sunni Arab countries intervened militarily in Yemen to contain the perceived influence of Shi'ite Iran and restore the internationally recognized government toppled by the Houthis, who are largely adherents to the Zaydi branch of Shi'ite Islam. This sectarian framing of Yemen's war fitted perfectly into Islamic State's own highly polarizing narrative of true believers versus deviants, pitting Muslims against Muslims. Given these favorable early signs, why did the Islamic State fail to take root in Yemen?

There are four main reasons why nascent support for ISY ebbed away. First, its overt brutality and indiscriminate attacks alienated Yemenis. One of its earliest operations was a coordinated attack in Sana'a in March 2015 using four suicide bombers. They targeted two public mosques, killing or injuring a total of nearly 500 Yemenis. Although the mosques were tenuously linked to the Houthis, blowing up praying Muslims in public places of worship was too much even for al-Qa'ida. AQAP vehemently denied any link to the attacks and reaffirmed its own policy of avoiding targeting public places where innocent civilians might be harmed.[7]

Second, AQAP had deeper roots than ISY and was able to take quick advantage of the war to exploit the security vacuum left by the absentee government that had fled to Riyadh. As war raged in Yemen's west, AQAP set to work in Yemen's east. It coordinated recruitment stations, playing on southern fears of a northern takeover, staged a jailbreak to release imprisoned mujahidin including Khalid Batarfi, one of its most charismatic ideologues,[8] robbed the central bank and seized state military hardware. Within a month, by April 2015, AQAP was operating its own de facto state out of the eastern coastal capital of Mukalla. For young men seeking higher purpose and keen to help along a nascent caliphate, al-Qa'ida was the obvious choice in Yemen, not Islamic State.

Third, ISY did not integrate well with local communities or tribes. It failed to address local grievances through development programs, something at which AQAP had been adept during 2015 and 2016.[9] Nor did it communicate in locally attuned ways. When this author showed tribesmen in eastern Yemen ISY's first video announcing its arrival in Yemen,[10] the locals looked on bemused, unimpressed by the matching uniforms, coordinated combat moves, odd accents and unwieldy way in which the men had tied their headscarves. Even after ISY retreated to settle in an area of al-Bayda' close to the front lines with the Houthis from around October 2016, it apparently struggled to attract strong support among tribes. Judging by the names of the 49 martyrs announced by ISY for Wilayat al-Bayda' during 2018, no more than a handful were local to al-Bayda'. The greatest single source of martyrs (19%) was Ta'izz, a hotbed of radical Salafi jihadi activity and an active battle front with the Houthis.

ISY's progress in Yemen has also been hampered by the difficulties foreign terrorist fighters faced in trying to reach and integrate in Yemen. Yet its die-hard aspiration to attract foreign fighters for Yemen's jihad was still in evidence in a May 2018 video. This included a call to young men to "come forth to your pinnacle, come forth to your majesty, come forth to what will bring you new life" and cut to footage of UK police manhandling Muslims and of refugees walking along a European motorway.[11] Nevertheless, only two of the 49 ISY martyrs referred to above were from outside the Arabian Peninsula and both of these were from Africa not the west.[12] AQAP's own policy towards foreigners speaks to the challenges of integrating foreigners into Yemen's jihad. It explained that it preferred to exclude foreigners owing to their more extreme outlook and the attention that they draw both domestically and internationally. AQAP claimed in 2017 to have had only five foreigners in its ranks during the entire previous five years.[13]

It is possible that this wariness was informed by experience, for Yemen's jihad had received many foreigners over the years. In the mid-1990s, jihadists from Ayman al-Zawahiri's Islamic Jihad attempted to regroup in Yemen following a harsh crackdown in Egypt. In this, they were tacitly supported by the regime of former President Ali Abdallah Saleh, at least as long as he found them a useful foil in his fight against

southern socialists in Yemen's 1994 civil war.[14] More recently, from the mid-2000s, the arrival in Yemen of American-Yemeni preacher Anwar al-Awlaqi (d. 2011) prompted at least some other western would-be jihadists to follow.[15] Several foreigners who trained with AQAP have become notorious, including the British-educated Nigerian who tried to bring down an airliner over Detroit in 2009, the French brothers of Algerian descent who carried out the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* magazine in Paris in 2015 and the Danish radical Morten Storm, who reportedly went on to become an undercover intelligence agent 2006-11.[16] In general, however, Yemen's jihad has been a largely local movement. Although President Hadi in 2014 claimed that 70 per cent of AQAP were foreigners, he may simply have been trying to deflect the blame for Yemen's jihad problem; most of the hundreds killed in a major military crackdown in 2014 were in fact Yemenis.[17]

Fourth, ISY's leadership style was considered arrogant, bossy and disrespectful. By the end of 2015, evidence began to emerge of serious rifts within ISY. A letter purporting to be from 70 ISY members declared their refusal to operate under the command of their appointed leader, owing to his violations of Sharia and oppressive treatment of the rank and file, although they reaffirmed their allegiance to the caliph himself. [18] Their complaints were thrown out by ISIS central office, but two weeks later a further 31 ISY members backed up their denunciation of the ISY leader. It is significant that over 90 per cent of the signatories bear names that clearly identify them as Yemeni.[19] Details of 15 legal cases brought against the ISY leader by its Yemeni rank and file appeared on Telegram channels in July 2016. These specifically named the ISY leader as Abu Bilal al-Harbi, a Saudi national whom they accused of corruption and abuse of power. Al-Harbi must eventually have been killed because laments vowing to avenge his death were circulated by ISIS loyalists in 2017.[20]

ISY's Challenges and Weaknesses

Many of those who initially joined ISY ended up defecting to AQAP as leadership issues persisted. In November 2017, pro-AQAP channels celebrated "breaking news" of "many" ISY fighters defecting to AQAP after suffering mistreatment for having questioned their leaders' irreligious behavior.[21] The fact that US air strikes had obliterated two ISY training camps in al-Bayda' just two weeks earlier,[22] following ill-judged ISY media posts revealing clearly locatable features of the camps,[23] may also have made AQAP look like a more attractive option. More defectors allegedly followed in 2018. Allegations by four ISY defectors published on pro-AQAP channels reveal insights into the continuing challenges faced by ISY in maintaining the loyalty of its fighters. They tell of ISY lock ups in which those who requested to visit family or transfer to other fronts were imprisoned and tortured. This had the effect of horrifying other recruits such that "dozens" were seeking to escape.[24] A further defector criticized ISY leaders for irreligious acts, such as declaring whole local populations apostates, aligning with drug lords in the world of organized crime, and arguing amongst themselves over girls. He also complained of deception, recounting how ISY would film videos in Hadramawt pretending it was Shabwa.[25] Naturally, relying on AQAP sources for such accounts must be treated with caution as they may be selective and exaggerated, but it seems fair to conclude that ISY is making little headway in Yemen.

Several important clues about the operations of and challenges faced by ISY can be derived from the biographical eulogy that ISIS released in May 2018 for Abu Karam al-Hadrami, ISY's key youth recruiter and coordinator.[26] First, ISY was not as well funded as provinces in the ISIS heartlands of Syria and Iraq. Abu Karam had asked to leave Yemen to join ISIS in Syria since this would be more "prosperous" for him. Second, ISY had support from inside Saudi Arabia. Abu Karam was radicalized inside a Saudi prison, then supported financially and guided to Yemen from Saudi. Third, ISY lacks capable and charismatic people. Abu Karam was persuaded to stay in Yemen, and to delay the martyrdom operation he allegedly longed for, owing to an urgent need for men like him. ISIS clearly saw his value, writing "What made Abu Karam distinct was his cheerful face, big heart and fine reputation, together with being blessed by abundant patience. He gained the confidence of everyone who sat with or spent time with him." Fourth, Hadramawt was an early ISY hub since it was receiving recruits in large enough numbers to require Abu Karam to open hostels and manage the

accommodation, everyday needs and movements of ISY fighters before he rose to become responsible for logistics between ISY's provinces. Fifth, after a brief period of expansion, ISY began to decline (probably in 2016). Abu Karam "and his brothers" withdrew to the Qayfa area of al-Bayda'. His role changed from being ISY's cross-Yemen coordinator to serving as a water-carrier for ISY fighters on the al-Bayda' front.

Thus ISY's foothold in Yemen shrank as it all but retreated to a rugged corner of north-west al-Bayda', where it allegedly used intermarriage as an integration strategy.[27] This shift likely began circa October 2016 when ISY's operational claims indicate that it was becoming more active there. The Hadramawt branch of ISY must have decamped to al-Bayda' by Summer 2017 at the latest.[28] ISY tried to consolidate and expand in al-Bayda', setting up two training camps. The first, the Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani camp, was announced in December 2016 and was specifically designed to graduate *inghimasiyyun*, or suicide fighters.[29] This was soon followed by the Abu Muhammad al-Furqan camp, which, as well as training suicide fighters, provided more sophisticated weapons training including for heavy weapons and night operations.[30] Sniper classes also followed, [31] while suicide fighters were indoctrinated during 50-day courses in Sharia law, manners and morals. ISIS central media reported a gushing recruit enthusing that "We find in the courses the meaning of true brotherhood, which represents a living reality and not just passing talk. You find one brother advising his brother, another washing his clothes, the third treating him, the fourth making his bed for him." [32]

ISIS media thus made ISY look like a growing concern in al-Bayda'. AQAP, which was also operating in the Qayfa region, provides an alternative perspective. After ISY released an article crediting its fighters with "repelling the greatest Houthi attack" in the Qayfa region,[33] AQAP formally challenged ISY's claims to be seriously engaged in battling Houthis.[34] A prominent ISY defector also accused ISY of exaggerating its presence and effect and of being more interested in photo shoots than fighting. He criticized ISY for wasting suicide bombers on pointless operations, picking soft targets and perpetrating acts "devoid of religion, morals and benefit".[35] According to his estimate, approximately 120 ISY fighters had congregated in Qayfa, but by April 2017 their number had dwindled to around 70.[36] Successful US air strikes on ISY's two training camps in October 2017 further decimated its ranks.[37]

ISIS media is adept at magnifying its presence and disguising its decline. A fine example is the spin deployed in the martyrology for ISY coordinator, Abu al-Karam, who was killed in April 2018. He had aspired to become a suicide bomber driving an explosives-laden car but was persuaded to defer this ambition. Allah rewarded him with "the best death given to a mujahid: carrying water whilst reciting Allah's book".[38] This placed a heavy spin on the reality, which was dying accidentally after being hit by a Houthi rocket whilst carrying water to the rag-tag remnants of a failing group relegated to a Yemeni backwater and struggling to endure.

To the outside world, Islamic State has often looked stronger than it is in Yemen. Its operations were usually headline-grabbing and its propaganda was slick and professionally produced relative to that of AQAP, especially in its early days. But in reality, AQAP undertook roughly ten times as many operations in Yemen as ISY during 2016 and 2017. ISY may also have been promoted, or at least used as a false flag for disruptive and/or politically motivated attacks, by former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. It may not be a coincidence that activities attributed to ISY's Wilayat Aden-Abyan in the southern capital of Aden suffered a noticeable downturn in the period immediately following Saleh's death on 4 December 2017 at the hands of his erstwhile allies, the Houthis. The occasional videos produced in the name of ISY's Wilayat Aden-Abyan differ markedly from those of Wilayat al-Bayda'. They tend to be more professionally produced, display greater military prowess, feature larger scale operations, and naturally focus on targeting southern military and administrative personnel rather than Houthis.[39] Internal ISY communications were also dismissive of activities flagged to ISY in Wilayat Ta'izz. ISY supporters insisted "everyone knows there is no official presence of the Islamic State there . . . just a small band of deviators and rebels." [40]

Internecline Jihadist Conflict: AQAP versus ISY

A bloody conflict erupted between ISY and AQAP in July 2018. The conflict was limited to north-west al-Bayda' and may be linked to local disputes and rivalries, although it is important to understand that alignment with certain individuals or pockets within tribes does not implicate entire tribes.[41] The fighting was sparked by ISY capturing a group of 13 AQAP mujahidin on their way from Yakla to the Houthis battlefront in Upper Qayfa. In a video that ISY released of the captives, only half wore beards, which suggests that they were a mix of AQAP and tribal fighters.[42] AQAP considered this "a declaration of war", the final straw in a long list of ISY provocations. AQAP complained that ISY had pitched camp right behind their own camp, ripped open their tents screaming "takfir", thus declaring them apostates, and prevented them from passing through ISY checkpoints more than one at a time. AQAP vowed that its "mujahidin, together with the proud tribes, will continue to exterminate them" until they start to behave reasonably.[43] The nature of these provocations are more redolent of local territorial and power rivalries within al-Bayda' than of an ideological showdown between two heavyweight jihadist groups battling for supremacy.

This conflict between AQAP and ISY shows no signs of abating. Slanging matches abounded on encrypted social media channels, with slurs such as ISY sentencing a recruit to 80 lashes for gobbling four cans of tuna and threats such as "Don't moor your little [ISY] fishing boat between [AQAP] ships and steamers, O Kharijite!".[44] ISY released a puerile video calling AQAP liars and accusing them of starting the conflict in collaboration with the Yemeni army. The video paraded images of the AQAP captives, insisting they were still alive, then listed 13 of ISY's own fighters whom it claimed AQAP had killed.[45] ISY also released an unconvincing video of an alleged AQAP defector criticizing AQAP for working with the army and for preaching in its mosques that ISY is the real enemy rather than the Houthis.[46] Shortly afterwards, AQAP released a video featuring four ISY recruits whom it had captured. One explains on camera how they had been specifically tasked with oppressing certain tribes in the Qayfa area.[47] More armed clashes have followed. Since ISY consolidated into a single Yemen province in late September 2018 until the end of that year, 69 per cent of ISY's claimed attacks were against AQAP and only 31 per cent against Houthis. Thus ISY's trajectory is now more focused on battling AQAP than targeting Houthis.

AQAP is no longer holding back in its response. It claimed to have killed 12 ISY fighters in a six-hour overnight battle in early November as revenge for ISY launching rocket propelled grenades at a house in Lower Dhi Kalib. A few days later, ISY claimed to have killed 10 AQAP in a 10-hour battle. In a sign that the battle is escalating, pro-AQAP channels responded by circulating a warmongering poem, chanted in a chillingly discordant style, which included vengeful lines such as: "A harsh and painful response is coming / From men of religion and folk who defend / Our swords are drawn, blood for blood".[48] These ongoing clashes, including the targeting of a residential village, at a time when both groups share the pressing overarching mutual jihadist goal of battling Houthi 'infidels' suggests that local rivalries may be attaching themselves to militant jihad (and vice versa).

There is also a possibility that the internecline jihadist fighting has been stirred by *agents provocateurs*. The nature of the irritations listed above and others, such as ISY disrespectfully driving through AQAP checkpoints at high speed or deliberately stirring up problems in AQAP areas,[49] seem designed to provoke conflict at precisely the time when there was a real risk that the two jihad groups might start to blend. Just a month before the conflict erupted, AQAP's Khalid Batarfi revealed that AQAP's relationship with other Islamist groups was at its best yet.[50] This seems credible. After all, by 2017, both ISY and AQAP were under severe pressure from counter-terrorism operations, so could find solidarity in adversity; both were managing to co-exist in the same region of al-Bayda'; both were focused on the same Houthi enemy and ISY had largely ceased perpetrating the kind of headline-grabbing attacks with high civilian death tolls which AQAP hated; many AQAP commanders, some vociferously critical of ISY, had been killed in US drone strikes; and ISY could no longer criticize AQAP's failure to implement Sharia law since AQAP no longer governed territory. It would thus have made good sense for them to combine forces.

There is some evidence that creating rifts inside Yemen's jihad was a conscious aspiration of regional

intelligence agencies. One of the seven major spies outed by AQAP in August 2018 revealed that he had been recruited by Saudi intelligence specifically to start a fake jihad group in Yemen to degrade AQAP. He confessed that he had found this remit too difficult so joined AQAP to disrupt from the inside instead.[51] This at least raises the possibility that there may have been others who succeeded under the guise of ISY. AQAP pointed out in a video that they had been successfully focused on their mission “until the Islamic State organisation appeared and tried to steer [them] off course, behaving in ways that serve enemy interests.” The video featured ISY recruits captured by AQAP explaining how they had been compelled to attend a course that focused specifically on declaring AQAP apostates.[52] A further video in October 2018 featured sobbing operatives confessing that they had been sent to infiltrate AQAP to exploit rifts, stoke conflict, sow suspicion and divert the mujahidin from their mission, and that they were told this was higher priority than merely gathering information for targeted assassinations.[53] Of the eight spy tasks AQAP media identified based on interviews with unmasked spies, the top four all related to stirring discord inside Yemen’s jihad movement.[54]

Naturally, spy confessions must be treated with caution. However, these confessions accord with the reality of AQAP being severely degraded by accurate drone strikes which must have been based on inside information. In some of the early confessions, the spies appear remarkably at ease, wholly unremorseful and even proud of their prowess as they describe specific examples of drone strikes they initiated.[55] This gives the impression that some at least thought they were speaking to a trusted contact, and we do know that AQAP commissioned the documentary style videos, which are considerably better produced than the AQAP norm, from an external professional who was likely unknown to them from within the jihad movement. [56] Other confessions were clearly filmed under duress, with distressed spies demonstrably remorseful for their acts of betrayal and the deaths they had caused.[57] In all cases, the spies provide convincing details of how they were recruited and the methods they used to elicit their jihadist colleagues’ locations, place trackers, photograph targets, record conversations and communicate information at speed to their handlers. On balance therefore, the testimonies may be considered largely credible.

Conclusion: Where Next for ISY?

The uptick in ISY’s martyr claims since March 2018 would indicate that it has managed to replenish its ranks to a limited extent since US air strikes on its training camps in October 2017. Although its main centre of operations in Yemen is now Wilayat al-Bayda’, since September 2018 it has referred to itself under the consolidated name “Wilayat al-Yemen”. This change was designed to fall in line with the name consolidation adopted by ISIS for its other provinces worldwide and does not indicate a broader presence inside Yemen.

AQAP continues to be the strongest jihad group with the deepest roots in Yemen, but it now seems unlikely that ISY will blend into it given the current blood feud between them. There is, however, a certain amount of fluidity between the groups. There are indications that at least some jihadist foot soldiers in Yemen consider the al-Qa’ida and Islamic State labels less relevant, now that neither group governs territory.[58] This is either because they simply aspire to be mujahidin serving God’s higher purpose and will join whichever group reaches out to them, or because their practical interests lie in joining forces with whichever group best serves the needs and ambitions of their community or tribe. In May 2017, Abu Majid al-Khabubi, an al-Qa’ida activist and occasional columnist for its *al-Masra* newspaper, complained that “some people are ready to be a soldier for any Muslim emir” and chastised “those who sympathise with Da’ish and think that differences with them could be resolved if Da’ish changed a little”. He insisted that “this [attitude] fails to recognize the depth of the disagreement with such a group, or more accurately mafia”.[59] His comments were enthusiastically circulated on pro-AQAP wires.

It seems from the two groups’ communications that since late 2015, more foot soldiers have been heading from ISY to AQAP than in the other direction, but there are some signs that ISY may now be trying to develop a more “authentic” image within the Yemeni context. Its standard menu of combat, weaponry and executions

continues. Its latest video (at the time of writing) features a four-man execution squad, a crucifixion and two beheadings as well as a ritual burning of the Yemeni flag against a backdrop of captured coalition vehicles. [60] However, alongside this, it has been making more of an attempt to evoke a sense of belonging, male bonding and shared identity in pursuit of a higher purpose through the dissemination of idealized lifestyle images from the frontlines. This is presumably born of the need to attract new recruits. Since ISY's 'retreat' to al-Bayda', it has issued more photosets and videos of stylized shared moments in frontline jihadi life, such as breaking fast during Ramadan, reciting Qur'an, watching ISIS films and cleaning weapons together. [61] This would attract disillusioned or displaced young men from around war-torn Yemen. Images of food preparation and group meals are particularly dominant in 2018, [62] something which doubtless holds strong appeal in a country where over 20 million people, two thirds of the population, are reported to be severely food insecure. [63] One recent video even included footage of apparent ISY members performing traditional tribal dancing and sung poetry in a style that is normally more reminiscent of AQAP. [64] This supports the notion outlined above that ISY may have succeeded in aligning with some, albeit limited, tribal interests in al-Bayda'.

These findings highlight several important points about the dynamics of jihadi groups that are often overlooked. They are learning organisations that react, morph and interpret their aims according to conditions on the ground, apparently without compromising the supra-historical and non-negotiable nature of their global mission. Hence they latch onto local concerns and make them their own. This results in a constant tug of war between the local and the global. Amongst other factors, the absence of strong, inspirational and effective leadership (whether owing to drone strikes, battlefield deaths, external intervention or the simple impossibility of communicating safely) can mean the local starts to eclipse the global, leading to splintering and fragmentation. Global al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri is acutely aware of this and has been at pains in recent addresses to call for brotherly solidarity and to stress that local fighters on myriad battlefronts must view themselves first and foremost as part of a single unifying jihad. [65] In his 9/11 anniversary speech in 2018, Zawahiri even enjoins al-Qa'ida groups not to fight Islamic State, despite the latter declaring them apostates. [66] Nevertheless, in Yemen as elsewhere, [67] ISY and AQAP are becoming increasingly decentralized, both from their respective international cores and as coherent domestic groups.

This does not mean the threat is disappearing. Indeed, the prominent jihadist strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri has long advocated a more decentralized approach. [68] Nor does it mean that the global can't win out again when conditions change. In the short term, internecine fighting inside Yemen's jihad and relentless counter-terrorism operations will likely weaken both groups. In the long-term, however, the prospects for jihad in Yemen look more promising as the civil war drags on and the state continues to unravel. While Yemen has not proven a receptive host to foreign terrorist fighters, as outlined above, all the key ingredients for jihadi militancy to resurge lie inside the Yemeni tinder box itself. These include a fragmenting state, the proliferation of armed militias attached to old north-south fault-lines, external proxies building resentment through human rights violations, an entire generation of dispossessed youth that has known only war for the past four years, over two million children out of school, growing sectarianism, a looming water crisis, millions displaced and millions more on the brink of starvation.

Perversely, it may be that ISY will become more of a risk if and when a peace deal is finally brokered in the Yemen war. This is because any peace deal will inevitably result in disillusioned pockets of the population, especially in the south where historical conflicts, which are unlikely to be addressed in any peace deal, continue to simmer. This presents an opportunity for both ISY and AQAP to co-opt local grievances and re-frame them within their broader narratives of global jihad.

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Notes

- [1] The endemic nature of corruption in Yemen is explained in detail in Sarah Phillips, *Yemen and the politics of permanent crisis* (London: Routledge, 2011). See in particular chapter 3, “The informal rules of the game”. See also April Longley-Alley, “The rules of the game: Unpacking patronage politics in Yemen”, *Middle East Journal* 64:3 (2010): 385-409.
- [2] See Isa Blumi, *Chaos in Yemen: Societal collapse and the new authoritarianism* (London: Routledge, 2010) and Stephen W. Day, *Regionalism and rebellion in Yemen: A troubled national union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- [3] For a brief summary of the roots and evolution of militant jihad in Yemen, see Elisabeth Kendall, “Contemporary jihadi militancy in Yemen: How is the threat evolving?”, Middle East Institute Policy Paper 2018-7 (July 2018), pp. 2-4. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/how-jihadi-militancy-yemen-evolving>. More in-depth accounts of the history of jihad in Yemen can be found in Gregory Johnsen, *Yemen, the last refuge: Yemen, al-Qaeda, and America's war in Arabia* (New York: Norton, 2012); Christian Hellmich, *Al-Qaeda: From global network to local franchise* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2011), particularly chapters 5 and 6; Laurent Bonnefoy, “Jihadi violence in Yemen: Dealing with local, regional and international contingencies”, pp. 243-58 in Jeevan Deol and Zaheer Azmi (eds.), *Contextualising jihadi thought* (London: Hurst, 2012). On dangers of oversimplifying the identification of jihadists, the rampant difficulties of quantifying the movement(s), and the tendency to exaggerate the threat, see chapter 3 of Laurent Bonnefoy, *Yemen and the world: Beyond insecurity* (London: Hurst, 2018).
- [4] A plethora of problems continued to face Yemen in the fragile aftermath of its 2011 uprising. Many of these are brought out in Helen Lackner (ed.), *Why Yemen matters: A society in transition* (London: Saqi, 2014). See in particular chapters 1 and 5 by Sheila Carapico and Laurent Bonnefoy respectively.
- [5] The road from Yemen's uprising and transition period to war is explained in chapter one of Helen Lackner, *Yemen in crisis: Autocracy, neo-liberalism and the disintegration of a state* (London: Saqi, 2017). See also Stacey Philbrick Yadav, “The ‘Yemen Model’ as a failure of political imagination”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47 (2015): 144-7.
- [6] *Al-Naba'* 133 (24 May 2018): 9.
- [7] Note that AQAP has shown no such qualms regarding Houthi civilians. For example, in 2011 it sent three suicide bombers to blow themselves up among crowds of Houthi civilians, including a market place. *Madad* 7 (December 2011): 1.
- [8] Dramatic footage of the Mukalla jailbreak, featuring Batarfi running through the forecourt and Ibrahim al-Abyani sliding down a drainpipe, surfaced in the AQAP video, “Hadm al-Jasusiyya 1”, October 2018.
- [9] See Elisabeth Kendall, “Al-Qaeda and Islamic State in Yemen: A battle for local audiences”, in Simon Staffell and Akil Awan (eds.), *Jihadism transformed* (London: Hurst, 2016), 89-110.
- [10] ISY video, “Junud al-khilafa fi ard al-Yemen”, April 2015.
- [11] ISY video, “al-Khayrat”, May 2018.
- [12] In a list of 13 further martyrs released by ISY on 1 August 2018, one was Omani and one Kuwaiti but there were still no westerners listed.
- [13] Erlend Ofte Arntsen, “Yemen's al-Qaida: Entered agreement with tribal leaders not to attack the west”, *VG*, 16 April 2017.
- [14] Gregory Johnsen, *Yemen, the last refuge: Yemen, al-Qaeda, and America's war in Arabia* (New York: Norton, 2012), Kindle loc. 840.
- [15] A young Muslim man from San Diego has written about Anwar al-Awlaqi as “a role model for all students of knowledge”. He recounts how, inspired by al-Awlaqi, he too moved from the United States to Yemen in the mid-2000s “to seek knowledge by the will of Allah”, eventually moving on to Somalia to fulfil his dream of jihad. “Sheikh Anwar al-Awlaki [sic.] and Me”, *Gaidi Mtaani* 8 (January 2017): 12-18. Awlaqi's online sermons and English language *Inspire* magazine (launched 2010) doubtless raised the profile of Yemen among would-be jihadists in the West.
- [16] Morten Storm, with Tim Lister and Paul Cruickshank, *Agent Storm: My life inside Al Qaeda* (London: Penguin, 2014). In this autobiography, Storm writes that there were “plenty of foreign students” studying alongside him in the Salafi seminary he attended in Dammaj in the late 1990s on his road to radicalization (p. 43).
- [17] MENAS, “Major offensive against AQAP kills ‘hundreds’ of terrorists”, *Yemen Focus* 5:5 (May 2014): 2.
- [18] Bill Roggio and Thomas Joscelyn, “Divisions emerge within the Islamic State's Yemen ‘province’”, *The Long War Journal*, 15 December 2015.
- [19] A comprehensive list of the signatories and an English translation of the letters is provided in Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, “Dissent in the Islamic State's Yemen affiliates: Documents, translation & analysis”, 29 February 2016. <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/02/dissent-in-the-islamic-state-yemen-affiliates>

- [20] Laments appeared, for example, on Uways al-Khilafa and Sabil al-Muwahhidin Telegram channels, 20 October 2017.
- [21] Khunduq al-Haqq Telegram channel, 1 November 2017.
- [22] US Central Command, “US forces conduct strike against ISIS training camps in Yemen”, 16 October 2017. <http://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/1344652/us-forces-conduct-strike-against-isis-training-camps-in-yemen/>
- [23] ISY photoset (distributed as video), “Mu'askar al-Shaykh Abi Muhammad al-'Adnani: Takhrij daf'at al-Shaykh Abi Bilal al-Harbi”, 9 October 2017.
- [24] “Inhiyar Jama'at al-Baghdadi, khawarij al-'asr, fi Qayfa”, Min Sama' Shabwa Telegram channel, 7 October 2018.
- [25] Al-Sarim al-Battar, “Shahada li-ahad al-munshaqqin 'an far' Tanzim al-Dawla fi al-Yemen”, al-Badr Media, 24 July 2018.
- [26] *Al-Naba'* 133 (24 May 2018): 9.
- [27] “Khilafat al-awham wa-sirk al-li'am”, Shakhuf Telegram channel, 31 December 2018.
- [28] Abu Karam's eulogy mentions that he participated in a battle in Hammat Liqah. ISY battled in Hamat Liqah several times from February 2017 onwards, but the last battle prior to Abu Karam's death was on 21 August 2017. Additionally, an ISY photoset from Hadramawt “Tanzif al-silah wa-idamatu-hu” dated 25 April 2017 would indicate that ISY had not yet fully decamped from Hadramawt by late April. Therefore the shift of ISY's Hadramawt branch can reasonably be held to have occurred at some point between late April and late August 2018.
- [29] ISY photoset “Mu'askar al-Shaykh Abi Muhammad al-'Adnani”, 4 December 2016.
- [30] ISY photoset “Mu'askar al-Shaykh Muhammad al-Firqan”, 30 March 2017; “Mu'askar al-Shaykh Abi Muhammad al-Firqan”, *al-Naba'* 76 (13 April 2017): 15.
- [31] ISY photoset “Dawrat al-qannasa li-Junud al-Khilafa fi Qayfa”, 5 June 2017.
- [32] *Al-Naba'* 77 (20 April 2017): 14.
- [33] “Junud al-Khilafa yasudduna akbar hujum li-l-Hutha 'ala mawaqi'i-him fi mintaqat Qayfa”, *al-Naba'* 51 (20 October 2016): 3.
- [34] “Ansar al-Shari'a yafdahun iddi'a' Jama'at al-Baghdadi fi ma'arik Qayfa”, *al-Masra* 28 (2 November 2016): 7.
- [35] Husam al-Umawi Telegram channel, 21 May 2016.
- [36] Husam al-Umawi Telegram channel, 14 April 2017. The main AQAP supporters channel on Telegram similarly estimated that ISY fighters in Qayfa did not exceed 80 by April 2017.
- [37] The US claimed that the strike had “killed dozens of ISIS members . . . , disrupting the organization's attempt to train new fighters”. US Central Command, “US forces conduct strike against ISIS training camps in Yemen”, 16 October 2017. <http://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/1344652/us-forces-conduct-strike-against-isis-training-camps-in-yemen/>
- [38] *Al-Naba'* 133 (24 May 2018): 9.
- [39] A good example is “Haqq al-'ada 2”, 12 September 2018.
- [40] Sabil al-Muwahhadin and Abu al-Yaman al-Yamani Telegram channels, 2 November 2018.
- [41] This complex relationship is explained well by Nadwa al-Dawsari in “Foe not friend: Yemeni tribes and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula”, POMED Paper, 2018. <http://pomed.org/pomed-publications/foe-not-friend-yemens-tribes-and-aqap>. See also Marieke Brandt, “The global and the local: Al-Qaeda and Yemen's tribes”, pp. 105-30 in Virginie Collombier and Olivier Roy (eds.), *Tribes and global jihadism* (London: Hurst, 2017).
- [42] ISY video “Anasir min Tanzim “Qa'idat al-Yaman” asara-hum muqatili al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi Qayfa shimal gharbi al-Bayda”, 15 July 2018.
- [43] Muslih al-Muhajir, “Haqiqat ma hasala fi ard Qayfa bayna Khawarij al-Baghdadi wa-Ansar al-Shari'a”, al-Badr Media, 27 July 2018.
- [44] Murabit min Hadramawt Telegram channel, 16 July 2018.
- [45] ISY video “Wa-al-badi' azlam”, 1 August 2018.
- [46] ISY video “Unsur min Qa'idat al-Yemen yandammu li-muqatili al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi Qayfa shimal gharbi al-Bayda”, 6 August 2018.

- [47] AQAP video, “Shahadat wa-i'tirafat li-asra min Tanzim al-Dawla”, 9 August 2018.
- [48] 'Ashiq al-Rusud Telegram channel appears to have been the original source of distribution, 13 November 2018.
- [49] Al-Sarim al-Battar, “Shahada li-ahad al-munshaqqin 'an far' Tanzim al-Dawla fi al-Yaman”, al-Badr Media, 24 July 2018.
- [50] “Liqa' suhufi ma' al-Shaykh Khalid bin 'Umar Batarfi”, al-Malahim Media, 20 June 2018.
- [51] Testimony of Abu 'Amir al-Makki, AQAP introductory video for series “Hadm al-jasusiyya”, August 2018.
- [52] AQAP video, “Shahadat wa-i'tirafat li-asra min Tanzim al-Dawla”, 9 August 2018.
- [53] AQAP video “Hadm al-jasusiyya 1”, October 2018.
- [54] AQAP infographic “Mahamm al-jawasis wa-anwa'u-hum wa-sifatu-hum wa-amakin tajnidi-him”, al-Badr Media, 7 November 2018.
- [55] AQAP video “Asrar wa-akhtar wa-rahil akhyar”, December 2017 (released 17 January 2018)
- [56] AQAP introductory video for series “Hadm al-jasusiyya”, August 2018. In the final three minutes, the documentary maker explains how he was approached by AQAP. Also of interest is his claim (at 31 minutes into the video) to have had access to some of the spy investigation files as well as the files of former spies within the Saudi intelligence service.
- [57] AQAP video “Hadm al-jasusiyya 1”, October 2018.
- [58] For a discussion of recent fragmentation and decentralization in Yemen's jihad, see Elisabeth Kendall, “Contemporary jihadi militancy in Yemen: How is the threat evolving?”, Middle East Institute Policy Paper 2018-7 (July 2018), pp. 15-18.
- [59] Abu Majid al-Khabubi Telegram channel, 31 May 2017.
- [60] ISY video “Unqudhu anfusa-kum”, 31 December 2018.
- [61] Particularly strong depictions of group belonging can be found in ISY photosets from 11 June 2017, 2 Sept 2017, 1 Oct 2017, 14 May 2018 and ISY video “Id al-Kumah”, 5 Sept 2017.
- [62] For example, photosets from 9 May 2018, 13 June 2018, 20 August 2018 and ISY video “al-Khayrat”, 17 May 2018.
- [63] World Food Programme, Yemen Emergency Dashboard, December 2018. https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/fa4a7ff5c1c64e0ca1b5a2f89dba7de2/download/?_ga=2.226061082.1427846426.1547303472-334034299.1547303472
- [64] ISY video “Ayyam shukr wa-dhikr”, 3 September 2018.
- [65] Zawahiri's strongest exhortation for unity comes in his video address “Umma wahida fi harb wahida 'ala jabahat muta'addida”, 9 June 2017. Other examples can be found in his video addresses “al-Sham lan tarka' illa li-(Al)llah”, 23 April 2017; “Ya akhwanu-na fi al-Sham, aslahu dhat bayna-kum”, 20 February 2018; “Sharq Ifriqiyya Thughar al-Islam al-Janubi”, 18 March 2018; “Tul Abib ayd-an ard al-Muslimin”, 13 May 2018;
- [66] Al-Qa'ida video “Kayfa nuwajih Amrika”, 11 September 2018.
- [67] This splintering has perhaps been most public in Syria. See Charles Lister, “How al-Qa'ida lost control of its Syrian affiliate: The inside story”, *CTC Sentinel* 11: 2 (February 2018).
- [68] See Brynjar Lia, *Architect of global jihad: The life of al-Qa'ida strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri* (London: Hurst, 2007). Chapter ten provides translated excerpts from al-Suri's *The military theory of the global Islamic resistance call* (December 2004/January 2005).

The Islamic State's Provinces on the Peripheries: Juxtaposing the Pledges from Boko Haram in Nigeria and Abu Sayyaf and Maute Group in the Philippines

By Jacob Zenn

Abstract

Despite the loss of territories in Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State's "provinces" have all remained loyal to the organization's "core" and its Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Boko Haram's successor, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), and the jihadists in the Philippines in the Maute Group and Abu Sayyaf, which were labeled "East Asia", have both continued coordinating with the Islamic State. ISWAP now not only fields Caucasian foreign fighter commanders but also receives directives from the Islamic State on matters ranging from negotiations to attack plans while the jihadists in the Philippines would not have engaged in the short-lived conquest of Marawi if not for them taking into account the demands of the Islamic State "core". Prior to merging with the Islamic State the jihadists in Nigeria and the Philippines restructured their internal organization and proved they could hold territory, which indicated they could meet the conditions the "core" required of them to be designated as provinces. By juxtaposing the relationship of the Islamic State "core" to the jihadists on the peripheries in Nigeria and the Philippines this article demonstrates the importance of the provinces for the Islamic State project and the different ways jihadists in the provinces have interacted with the "core".

Keywords: Boko Haram, Islamic State, Mergers, Philippines, Abu Sayyaf, Maute, ISWAP

Introduction

Since Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's declaration of a Caliphate in 2014, the Islamic State has become a terrorism phenomenon for three main reasons. First, the group administered large swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq in the heartland of the Middle East. Second, the group directed massive terrorist attacks in Europe and at least inspired other attacks in countries ranging from the United States to Russia to Indonesia, while also attracting tens of thousands of foreign fighters from around the world to the battlefields of Syria and Iraq. And, third, the group won pledges of allegiance from jihadist groups around the world and incorporated them into its organization as "provinces".

These provinces have been vital to the Islamic State project, and the Islamic State will no sooner abandon the provinces than the provinces will abandon the Islamic State "core" despite the struggles it faces in holding its territory in Syria and Iraq. The provinces are also integral to understanding why the Islamic State became a terrorism phenomenon: the perception that the Islamic State was a global Caliphate with provinces around the world contributed to the surge of thousands of foreign fighters joining the group in Syria and Iraq after 2014. These foreign fighters, in turn, contributed to the group's conquests of territory in Syria and Iraq and the execution of external operations in Europe and elsewhere around the world. The provinces' continued loyalty to the Islamic State has also helped the Islamic State maintain credibility even after the loss of territory in Syria and Iraq. As a counterfactual, had the provinces abandoned the Islamic State in 2018, it may have dealt a knockout blow to the organization's legitimacy and proven it was truly a "paper state".[1]

On its peripheries, the Islamic State's westernmost province is in Nigeria and its easternmost province is in the Philippines. The jihadist groups in those two countries and in Libya, Egypt ("Sinai") and Afghanistan ("Khorasan") are the most active of the Islamic State's provinces outside of Syria and Iraq. In Nigeria, most "Boko Haram"[2] members and some Ansaru[3] members merged to become the Islamic State in West Africa Province, or "ISWAP", in 2015. And in the Philippines, Abu Sayyaf[4] and several other jihadist factions, including the Maute Group, merged and were labeled by the Islamic State as "East Asia" in a list of its provinces in its media in 2017, including the al-Bayan daily bulletin. However, whether this was a designation as a

“province” according to the leadership of the Islamic State is unsubstantiated. In contrast, for example, al-Baghdadi’s spokesman himself, Abu Muhammed al-Adnani, explicitly stated ISWAP was a province in March 2015.[5]

ISWAP and the jihadists in the Philippines, moreover, were unique compared to the provinces in Libya, Sinai, and Khorasan because they had less physical interaction with the Islamic State fighters in Syria and Iraq. Nevertheless, even in the case of ISWAP despite that the communication with the “core” was conducted mostly virtually, there was a still an impact on the province. This article will therefore demonstrate how the Islamic State has functioned and presumably will continue to function even if it loses all of its territory in Syria and Iraq and needs to rely on virtual communication with its provinces and an increasingly dispersed “core”.

The merging and uniting of jihadist groups and factions within one country, such as Nigeria, or one region, such as Southeast Asia, and tamkin (territorial authority) have been the Islamic State’s two main requirements for groups to gain recognition as a province. This, in turn, has meant the jihadists in Nigeria and the Philippines have altered their internal organizational structure and strategic decision-making to meet the demands of the Islamic State. For example, as this article will demonstrate, the jihadists in Nigeria united in 2015 for the sake of becoming a province, although they had already obtained tamkin before then. Similarly, the jihadists in the Philippines both united and obtained short-lived tamkin in Marawi to prove themselves worthy of becoming a province in 2017.

This article proceeds with an examination of the literature on the Islamic State in Nigeria and the Philippines and an explanation of how this article provides distinct analytical and methodological contributions to the field. The article then follows with an analysis and comparison of the pledges to al-Baghdadi from the jihadists in both countries. An assessment of whether the relationship benefitted more the Islamic State “core” in Syria and Iraq or the groups on the peripheries in Nigeria and the Philippines is also conducted. Lastly, counter-terrorism implications are considered in the conclusion.

Literature and Methodologies Related to the Islamic State in Nigeria and the Philippines

Just as there is debate over whether local or international forces were more influential in creating “the Boko Haram phenomenon” in Nigeria, there is also debate over the significance of Boko Haram’s merger with the Islamic State to become ISWAP in March 2015.[6] The main proponents of the school that views Boko Haram as a local phenomenon, who tend to be writing at Western-based institutions, have considered Boko Haram’s relationship to the Islamic State to be superficial. The distinguished professor at Oxford, Abdul Raufu Mustapha, for example, expressed agreement with Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos and argued it was a “correct reading of the evidence” to “caution against the tendency to view Boko Haram as part of a wider global network of Islamist terrorism.”[7] While Mustapha’s claim was in 2014, that perception still holds today. A 274-page book published by the French Agency for Development in 2018 and edited by Pérouse de Montclos titled “Crisis and Development: Boko Haram and the Lake Chad Region”, for example, describes Boko Haram’s “links” with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State as “alleged” and conducts no further strategic, military, media or funding assessments on those relationships.[8] Similarly, Kyari Muhammed argued in a 2018 book chapter on Boko Haram’s origins for “The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian Politics”, which was edited by Carl LeVan and Patrick Ukata, that Boko Haram’s “links to international jihadist networks” are “alleged” and that Zenn was “obsessed” with “mining the Internet for snippets of information to link Boko Haram to international jihadist networks”, as if physical documents or field interviews with ISWAP leaders or mediators who communicate with them would reveal that Boko Haram was, in fact, not “linked” to the Islamic State currently or al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) previously.[9] Kyari Muhammed managed to discuss Boko Haram’s entire history from its origins until April 2015 without mentioning AQIM (or its predecessors) one time, including when explaining the emergence of Ansaru; this is remarkable even for those who believe local factors have played a more significant role than international factors in Boko Haram’s evolution. In general, therefore, those who adopt the local perspective tend not to place much stock in the idea that Boko Haram is “linked” to

the Islamic State, let alone having restructured its internal organization, increased its military capabilities or receive influenced in other ways as a result of the pledge.

In contrast, there are other scholars, such as Andrea Brigaglia and Alessio Iocchi, who argued in a 2018 report for the Capetown, South Africa-based Centre for Contemporary Islam that “international connections ... should be central to any attempt to understand the evolution of the [Boko Haram] phenomenon.” Moreover, according to Brigaglia, the “failure to appreciate the depth of the participation of Nigerian actors into quintessentially global Jihadi networks reinforces the idea of an ‘African Islam’ essentially isolated from or impermeable to global influences.”[10] The extent of Nigerian Muslims’ international interactions, including Sufi leaders who received funding from Libya and Iran to counter Saudi and Kuwaiti support to Salafis in the 1980s, are well documented in the academic literature.[11] However, it was through “religious elites” in the Salafi community that in the 1990s the “Jihadist tumour” entered Nigeria. Brigaglia acknowledges those clerics have for more than a decade “genuinely, but ineffectively tried to ‘slice off’ the Jihadist tumour” they contributed to create in Nigeria. While debate on the local and international dimensions of the “Boko Haram phenomenon” should be encouraged and occur in an ethical and constructive way, the “minimizing attitude” of certain other members of the academic community towards “documenting the global dimension of the Boko Haram phenomenon” has “exonerated” those religious elites who have “muddled the waters” about the group’s origins.[12] This, in turn, “does not serve the interests of an oppressed community”—namely marginalized groups that have been targeted and victimized by jihadist groups such as ISWAP that hold takfiri theologies and have persisted in “undermining the body of the Global South.”[13]

In interpreting a key primary source document written by ISWAP leader Abu Mus’ab al-Barnawi in context of prior analyses of jihadism in Nigeria, Brigaglia further argued that Nigeria has both “been a front of Global Jihad and of the Global War on Terror for quite some time, probably since the early 2000s.”[14] Although this author initially argued in a 2012 Occasional Paper on Boko Haram that “a partnership between al-Qaeda and Nigerian militants was never forged in the 2000s”, in view of other recent work by scholars in Sokoto State, Nigeria, such as Tijjani Talba Kafa and Abdulwahab Habib, it is now this author’s contention that Nigeria became “a front of Global Jihad” not in the early 2000s, let alone the mid-2000s when Alexander Thurston argues Muhammed Yusuf “tried to smuggle in jihadist thought” into Nigeria, but rather the mid-1990s.[15] That period is when the Boko Haram founder, Muhammed Ali, was sent by a group of Salafi clerics to meet with Usama bin Laden’s inner circle in Khartoum, Sudan and the first Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) operatives began operating in Nigeria with the consent of certain “religious elites”.[16] While this author argued in a 2018 article that the support from al-Qaeda and AQIM’s predecessors, such as the GIA, did have a “significant impact” on the early Boko Haram, this author would still caution that Carl LeVan’s interpretation of the early al-Qaeda and GIA relationship with the Nigerian jihadists as indicative of Boko Haram being “born of a global jihadist conspiracy” unnecessarily exaggerates their interactions; the relationship was instead predicated mostly on “start-up” funding and training to the Nigerian jihadists of up to \$3 million from Bin Laden or his inner circle and up to several dozen Nigerians trained by the GIA in the Sahel.[17]

Since the 1990s, there have been two “accelerations” in al-Qaeda support to Boko Haram: after the destruction in late 2003 of the “Kanama camp” that Muhammed Ali founded in 2002; and after the extrajudicial killing of Muhammed Ali’s successor, Muhammed Yusuf, and up to 800 of his followers in 2009.[18] In both those instances, Boko Haram members retreated to the Sahel and received harbor and training from AQIM’s predecessor, the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), and AQIM, respectively (the GIA was the predecessor of the GSPC). This article, however, focuses only on the ways Nigeria has continued as a “front of Global Jihad” since Boko Haram’s pledge of loyalty to the Islamic State in 2015. In this regard, the article relies on the author’s field interviews in Borno State, Nigeria in 2018 and observations of attack trends and internal primary sources from ISWAP.

The article finds the Islamic State has had an impact on ISWAP’s internal organization, military tactics, media outputs, and negotiation positions, which advances the position that “international connections”—specifically with the Islamic State—have mattered to ISWAP. The article therefore contributes a different perspective than an emerging conventional wisdom among some scholars who do recognize at least some “links” exist; whereas

they suggest ISWAP's relationship with the Islamic State is "primarily rhetorical", this article contends that although messaging is important there are also other forms of collaboration and influence that warrant analysis and that may be more important than messaging.[19] Nevertheless, this article will also adopt the approach of Virginia Comolli, who argues "there is a connection" between Boko Haram and the Islamic State but that "one should... acknowledge differences remain." [20] This article will therefore also highlight examples of ISWAP seeming to defy Islamic State directives and influence in the conclusion.

Much of the disagreement over the Islamic State and ISWAP relates to sources and methods. Although neither the "local" nor "internationalist" school is uniform, the former tends to not use any of the key primary sources about Boko Haram or ISWAP, including eulogies, memoirs, or histories written by ISWAP or AQIM leaders about the jihad in Nigeria, letters by or about Nigerian jihadists that were found in Usama bin Laden's compound, or leaked audio recordings from the ISWAP shura. For example, none of the key primary sources that deal with Boko Haram's origins in the years before 9/11 or its founding in 2002 or from the mission in 2003 of the first al-Qaeda operative who was sent from Pakistan to Nigeria to meet Boko Haram and GSPC leaders in Nigeria were mentioned or cited in Kyari Muhammed's 2018 book chapter specifically on Boko Haram's origins.[21] He was also among the five academics who questioned the legitimacy of "jihadist primary sources" in 2018 by equating them with "Nazi sources" without distinguishing between internal documents (whether captured or released by the group), which are generally more reliable, and speeches or articles for the public, which are generally more biased when assessing a group's strategy, organizational structure, military capabilities, alliances, and history but not necessarily false. One of the problems with avoiding altogether or stigmatizing primary sources is that it makes it more difficult for academics to "update" their analysis once new information from the past or especially the present emerges, which is why Kyari Muhammed's 2014 book chapter on Boko Haram in a Pérouse de Montclos-edited volume was virtually the same as his 2018 book chapter.[22]

Alexander Thurston suggested more recently in 2019 that a "certain kind of approach" to primary sources could be a form of "terrorology" that "often implicitly de-prioritizes other sources", such as "what ordinary people say, what journalists say, what the counter-sources say, etc." [23] However, the risk of Thurston's recommended sources when assessing the relationship of the Islamic State to its provinces, which is the focus of this article and the conference for which it was written, is that "ordinary people", including victims of terrorism, and "journalists" also have biases and the tendency to exaggerate. Moreover, ordinary people and most journalists are unlikely to be familiar with the leadership-level discussions and agreements between the Islamic State and ISWAP. In fact, all sources should be recognized for having advantages and drawbacks and the need to be scrutinized in terms of "source criticism" and "counter-sources."

There is no need to single out primary sources for scrutiny or assign them subjective and academically imprecise labels, such as "terrorology", that can be applied with a broad-brush to discredit or create doubt about legitimate sources, protect orthodoxy, including shielding vulnerabilities in one's own analysis from critique, and undermine the truth-seeking objective of the academic enterprise.[24] One might, however, acknowledge Thurston's proper call for more "source criticism" of primary sources—but still without employing academically imprecise terms such as "terrorology"—and argue there should also be more "source criticism" of interviews of jihadists and other secondary literature as well.[25] An Oxford University Press book on Boko Haram in 2018, for example, perpetuated the still unsubstantiated, indefensible and harmful claim that first entered the academic discourse in 2012 that "Christians masquerade as Boko Haram while attacking other Christian congregations." [26] Unless primary sources are proven to be a specific problem in academic discourse, which is difficult to claim especially in light of the aforementioned calumny about Christians and Boko Haram that has existed now for five years in secondary literature, then it would be worth scholars evaluating all sources with a critical eye and not having a "minimizing attitude" towards any of them in particular.

Certain primary sources, such as audios obtained from the shura of ISWAP, which this author received during fieldwork in Borno State, reveal the types of orders that the Islamic State has provided to ISWAP. These orders, in turn, have affected who ISWAP has killed—and intends to kill—both in internal purges within the group and among the civilian population. These sources are therefore highly relevant from a humanitarian perspective. However, they may not be ideal for understanding certain humanitarian issues, such as the needs of displaced

civilians seeking access to healthcare, shelter, or schooling for which accounts of “ordinary people” would be more reliable. Scholars must determine the appropriateness and reliability of sources depending on context, circumstance and the focus of study. For the purposes of the theme of this article interviews with mediators who have personally dealt with ISWAP’s leadership and internal audios from ISWAP’s leadership are privileged over interviews with “ordinary people” who do not have access to knowledge about ISWAP’s dealings with the Islamic State “core”. The data from these sources are naturally considered and triangulated alongside attack data sets, secondary literature and other related sources.

In contrast to the debate on ISWAP and the Islamic State, analyses of jihadism in the Philippines, including by Maria Ressa of the Manila-based Rappler and Rohan Gunaratna of Nanyang Technology University in Singapore, tend to be in agreement that the Islamic State communicated with the jihadists in the Philippines and provided some financing and strategic advising to them before Islamic State media mentioned “East Asia” among its provinces.[27] In that regard, this article seeks to take advantage of the distance in time since the major battle in Marawi in 2017 to offer a more comprehensive and detailed analysis of the public statements and communications of the jihadist factions in the Philippines and the Islamic State both before and after that battle than has previously existed. It is hoped this will generate a clearer picture of how the factions united and why they decided to attempt to acquire *tamkin* in Marawi to meet the conditions that the Islamic State demands of prospective provinces. Unlike the case of ISWAP where there are several internal primary source documents that have emerged from the group’s leadership, there have been fewer, if any, internal discourses from the jihadist leaders in the Philippines that have become publicly available. Therefore, this article assesses the activities of the jihadists in the Philippines vis-à-vis the Islamic State primarily by interpreting attack patterns and public messaging.

More broadly, it is hoped this article provides valuable insights for scholars of the Islamic State “core”, who may have a tendency to focus on the organization in its “heartland” in the Middle East but overlook the organization’s activities in the provinces and how the “core” interacts continuously with the provinces and vice-versa. This, in turn, will contribute to scholars of the “core” acquiring a greater understanding of not only the “core” itself, but also the Islamic State as a complex organization with global reach.

The Case of the Islamic State and Nigeria

Behind-the-Scenes of ISWAP’s Pledge to the Islamic State

ISWAP formed in March 2015 when Boko Haram leader Abu Bakar Shekau pledged allegiance (*baya’*) to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and al-Baghdadi’s spokesman, Abu Muhammed al-Adnani, accepted it in a speech five days later. Although Shekau acknowledged that al-Baghdadi was a legitimate Caliph, he originally did not want to make the pledge. Shekau suspected (rightly, as it turned out) that his commanders would exploit the pledge and use the Islamic State’s authority to depose him from leadership. Considering Abu Mus’ab al-Barnawi’s description of group’s commanders as welcoming the emergence of the Islamic State because they hoped it would lead Shekau to moderate his violence, Shekau must have also known that if he did not make the pledge he could face an internal rebellion or risk sub-commanders making the pledge without him, which they threatened to do.[28]

One of the reasons why Shekau was beholden to other commanders of the group when it came to the issue of the pledge was that these commanders were in communication with Boko Haram’s North Africa-based Islamic State intermediaries by both written correspondences and text messages (including from prisons in Nigeria).[29] These intermediaries, in turn, managed the relationship with the Islamic State “core” in Syria and Iraq. There is no evidence Shekau or his top commanders, such as Man Chari, or spokesman, Abu Zinnira, communicated with the Islamic State directly; rather Man Chari and Shekau both indicated after the August 2016 demotion of Shekau from ISWAP leadership that Abu Mus’ab al-Barnawi had been controlling the group’s communications with the Islamic State.[30]

These Islamic State intermediaries, however, were so enamored of Shekau that it is possible—even probable—

that the Islamic State would not have accepted the pledge to al-Baghdadi from anyone in Boko Haram but Shekau. Adding to the irony, the Boko Haram commanders who were communicating with those North African Islamic State intermediaries, such as Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi, were repulsed by Shekau's brutality in territories the group conquered in northeastern Nigeria starting in 2013.[31] These commanders nevertheless seem to have hidden the extent of their repulsion of Shekau from the North African Islamic State intermediaries because the semblance of opposition to Shekau could have jeopardized their ability to become a province.[32] They did, however, imply to the Islamic State that there were internal matters that could delay Shekau's pledge and that the Islamic State should be patient about determining when to announce the new province. In a best case scenario, which later occurred in August 2016, these commanders hoped the Islamic State could remove Shekau from the group's leadership.[33] In this sense the Boko Haram pledge to the Islamic State was done out of genuine belief in al-Baghdadi as Caliph but it also was opportunistic and the result of intra-group politicking.

Islamic State Impact on ISWAP Tactics

After holding a shura in February 2015, Boko Haram finally united and Shekau made the pledge to al-Baghdadi on March 7, 2015.[34] The most visible immediate impact of the Islamic State on the new ISWAP was the Islamic State's incorporation of ISWAP into its global media apparatus. The Islamic State provided ISWAP with media equipment for that purpose.[35] However, there are only reports of small financial transfers through Western Union from the Islamic State to Ansaru militants who traveled to Libya and were presumably among the Ansaru members who Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi later reported in his book joined ISWAP.[36]

The pledge also seemed to have an impact on ISWAP targeting. ISWAP, for example, struck N'djamena, Chad with suicide attacks claimed by the Islamic State with martyrdom photos for the attackers for the first time and increased its attacks in Niger and Cameroon in the weeks after the pledge.[37] This coincided with an ISWAP media effort to focus on its holding of territory in Nigeria and present its broader pan-West African credentials, especially highlighting attacks in Niger, Cameroon and Chad.[38] At the time in 2015 several Islamic State supporters from Senegal, who were part of the same social networks as Senegalese Islamic State members in Libya, also joined the group in Nigeria and met with Shekau, received money from him, and then returned to Senegal where they were arrested.[39]

It is probable that the Islamic State also provided some tactical advice to Boko Haram. This was exemplified in ISWAP rocket-making photos in 2015, which closely resembled the rockets the Islamic State made in one of its own videos from "al-Fallujah Province" in Iraq.[40] That "al-Fallujah Province" video was also found on the cell phone of an ISWAP member who was captured in Cameroon in 2015, suggesting ISWAP may have learned rocket-making in part from the video itself.[41] Nevertheless, such rocket-making advising was not decisive for ISWAP; the group had already conquered territory with the weapons, funding and training it had received before the pledge, including from AQIM in the 2009 to 2011 period.[42] Therefore, it did not need, but still may have benefitted from, these rockets to succeed on the battlefield.

Another form of tactical support that the Islamic State provided to Boko Haram was up-armored suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosives devices (SVBIEDs). These SVBIEDs were reported by ISWAP insiders as early as 2017 but they only appeared in an ISWAP video in 2018 and subsequent pictures released by the Nigerian army in 2019.[43] In theory ISWAP could have learned to make up-armored SVBIEDs without direct contact to the Islamic State, but if that is the case, one questions why neither Shekau's faction after he was removed from ISWAP in August 2016 nor AQIM and its Mali-based affiliate have used them and why ISWAP used them only after pledging loyalty to the Islamic State in 2015. (AQIM and its Mali-based affiliated conducted SVBIED attacks but not with the signature "up-armour" of the Islamic State).

The reported Islamic State tactical advice to ISWAP on attacking military barracks in northeastern Nigeria has also contributed to ISWAP controlling more territory than it ever has since the collapse of the Nigerian military back in 2014. Indeed, if ISWAP can communicate with the Islamic State as frequently as it does to claim attacks—21 times in December 2018 and 17 times in January 2019, for example—then it is easy to see how the Islamic State could advise ISWAP on attack plans on an almost daily basis and take advantage of its decade-plus of insurgency experience in Iraq and later Syria.[44] The biggest issue in ISWAP's communications with the

Islamic State, in fact, according to an ISWAP shura audio in Kanuri language in 2018, has simply been finding a strong enough Internet connection around Lake Chad, while the presence of a Caucasian commander with a long beard and a unique military uniform in a January 2019 ISWAP video indicates the group has been able to steer a foreign fighter all the way to Borno State for the group's major attack in Baga on December 28, 2018. [45] Therefore, Islamic State tactical influence should also be considered an important military contribution to its province.

Islamic State Impact on ISWAP's Internal Organization

What had the most decisive effect on ISWAP has been the Islamic State's decision to announce Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi as ISWAP leader in August 2016 and to order foot soldiers to join him. The foot soldiers then took part in major battles led by former Ansaru-leaning commander Abu Fatima on the side of al-Barnawi and defeated Shekau's loyalists.[46] During the course of these battles, the Islamic State dropped Shekau from the ISWAP leadership position, as Shekau had originally feared.[47] As a result of this leadership change, ISWAP has administered its territories in northern Nigeria under the leadership of al-Barnawi in a way al-Barnawi's representatives have described as a "hearts and minds" approach.[48] Interviews, evidence from attack data sets, and anecdotal reports from the ISWAP territories under al-Barnawi's leadership indicate that the group generally does not target civilians, such as farmers, herders, and villagers but only "collaborators" with the government (such as NGOs) and the military.[49] This is much different than the group under Shekau's leadership, which targeted virtually anyone who was not a member.[50]

If not for the leadership change in ISWAP ordered by the Islamic State's more "moderate" theological faction,[51] then it is plausible al-Barnawi would not have come to power in ISWAP.[52] Now that al-Barnawi is in power in ISWAP, it is more likely than when Shekau was the group leader that the group can sustainably administer the territories under its control and win the support or at least acquiescence of the population. This will make it more difficult for Nigeria to reclaim some of the territories in the country's northeast that have remained under insurgent control since 2013.

At the same, the Islamic State may not be finished intervening in ISWAP's internal affairs. In September 2018, the Islamic State ordered ISWAP commanders to purge Mamman Nur, a longtime ally of Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi and Abu Fatima, the latter who died in 2017.[53] The Islamic State also ordered ISWAP hardliners to execute two female Muslim NGO workers in September and October 2018, respectively, in a "Jihadi John"-style video with an ISWAP militant next to an Islamic State-style black flag declaring he was carrying out the orders of al-Baghdadi before shooting.[54] According to the Islamic State's previous guidance to the group on the Chibok kidnappings, Muslim women could be executed for being apostates, such as working for "Christian" NGOs, but not "enslaved" like Christian women could be.[55] The mediator between ISWAP—and formerly Boko Haram—and the government subsequently noted in 2018 that all decisions now go up the level of the Islamic State.[56]

As a result of the deaths of pro-Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi members of the Islamic State, such as Nur and his loyalists and Abu Fatima, other more hardline Islamic State members may now be attempting to negotiate not only a ceasefire, which currently exists, but also a reconciliation or some level of broader coordination between ISWAP and Shekau; either way the ideologies of both ISWAP and Boko Haram are apparently converging.[57] Such a broader agreement with Shekau would likely require Shekau to make certain concessions, such as not engaging in female 'suicide' bombing and abiding by certain Islamic State guidelines that were sent to ISWAP in March 2015 about limiting targeting of Muslims, but Shekau is known for his recalcitrance and may refrain from any further deal-making unless he is named as ISWAP leader again.[58]

In this regard, it is notable that the relationship between ISWAP and Islamic State has remained strong and consistent notwithstanding the deaths of several interlocutors between them, including the North Africans who segued the relationship before the March 2015 pledge, the Islamic State theologians who advised ISWAP after the March 2015 pledge, such as Abu Malek al-Tamimi; and others in Sudan who have reportedly been involved in liaising between ISWAP and the Islamic State. The relationship has shown the ability to endure the test of time and circumstances thus far.

The Case of the Islamic State and Jihadists in the Philippines

The pledge and post-pledge process for ISWAP with the internal battles between Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi and Shekau loyalists involved greater intra-group friction than what occurred in the Philippines. In the Philippines—or Southeast Asia more broadly (to include Indonesia and Malaysia)—the dilemma with the pledge to al-Baghdadi was not so much tension between jihadists but rather coordinating between diverse factions across a wide geographic space and convincing the Islamic State of their unity and ability to demonstrate tamkin.

Southeast Asian Allegiances to Al-Baghdadi

In June 2014, when al-Baghdadi declared the Caliphate in Mosul, the leader of Mujahidin of East Timor (MIT) in Indonesia, Santoso, which has been the main jihadist group in Indonesia since the demise of Jemaah Islamiya (JI) in 2010, immediately pledged allegiance to him.[59] Another Indonesian group, Jemaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT), also stated it was “ready” to make the pledge and was “monitoring” the situation. Like MIT, JAT was also a remnant of JI, which was founded by the Indonesian cleric, Abu Bakar Baasyir. Despite serving a sentence in Jakarta for sponsoring a terrorist camp in Sumatra, Indonesia where, among others, Santoso trained in 2010, Baasyir was able to call on his supporters to pledge allegiance to al-Baghdadi from his prison cell.[60] At the time of those pledges, MIT and JAT were the foremost jihadist groups in an otherwise weakened environment for jihadists in Indonesia as a result of the security forces dismantling most of JI in previous years. Nevertheless, it was notable that these JI remnants had given such positive signals to the Islamic State despite having originally been close to al-Qaeda networks in Southeast Asia since the 1990s. Moreover, there was little sign of residual pro-al-Qaeda sentiment or resistance from other factions within those groups.

In the neighboring Philippines, dozens of inmates in a prison also immediately pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi in a July 2, 2014 video distributed by the pro-Islamic State al-Battar media group.[61] Days after that video from the prison, jihadists in Abu Sayyaf also posted a video on Facebook declaring their allegiance to al-Baghdadi. Still several more days later, on July 23, 2014, longtime Abu Sayyaf commander Isnong Hapilon and around a dozen other militants followed with their own video pledging allegiance to al-Baghdadi in Yakan dialect and Arabic.[62] Also in that video was a well-known Malaysian militant from what Hapilon called the Ansar al-Shari'a Brigade and another Philippine jihadist from a group called al-Ansar Battle Brigade (Mu'arakat al-Ansar). Hapilon noted in the video that these groups had made pledges separately but were now coming together. This suggested he knew the Islamic State required a unity of factions for a pledge to be accepted and was attempting to fulfill that obligation. Nevertheless, there did not appear to be coordination with MIT, JAT, or any other Indonesians at that time.

The Islamic State acknowledged that various pledges were in process from jihadist groups around the world in its November 2014 edition of Dabiq, including mentioning the Philippines and Nigeria specifically (but not Indonesia).[63] However, the Islamic State noted a “direct line of communication” had yet to be set up with some groups and that others, presumably including the jihadists in Nigeria and the Philippines, had yet to unify under a single leader appointed by the Islamic State to make the pledge: in reality Shekau was yet to commit (or be convinced to make the pledge) and Isnong Hapilon was among several contenders to represent the Philippines. The Islamic State noted three months later in the February 2015 edition of Dabiq that certain “conditions and requirements” had to be fulfilled before a group could gain the approval of the Islamic State leadership to become “officially recognized as a [province] of the Islamic State.”[64] Such conditions included:

- documenting their bay'at [allegiance],
- unifying the jama'at who have given bay'at,
- holding consultations to nominate a wali [governor] and members for the regional shura assembly,
- planning a strategy to achieve consolidation [tamkin] in their region for the Khilafah so as to implement the Shari'ah, and
- presenting all this to the Islamic State leadership for approval.

Less than one year after that Dabiq edition was released, in January 2016 the jihadists in the Philippines reiterated their allegiance to al-Baghdadi under a single leader, Hapilon, when they released a video representing Abu Sayyaf, Ansar al-Shari'a Brigade, and the al-Ansar Battle Brigade making the pledge to al-Baghdadi together. [65] However, four notable groups that had separately pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi were missing from that video:

- Ansar Khilafah Philippines, which was an Islamic State-inspired group comprised of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) defectors that had networks to jihadists in Indonesia and Malaysia, including by marriage;
- The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), which included MILF defectors who disagreed with MILF's 2012 peace deal with the government;
- The Maute Group, which was led by an al-Azhar university graduate, Abdullahi Maute, and his brother, Umar Maute, who both pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi in 2015 and were based in their native Lanao del Sur and had close ties to former JI and Abu Sayyaf members, including Hapilon; [66] and
- Indonesian jihadists, such as Santoso, who would be killed in July 2016.

This did not mean those four groups were not loyal to al-Baghdadi or there were internal tensions in Southeast Asia like the case in Nigeria, but suggested there was a lack of communication between those groups. [67] In December 2015, for example, a video of a training camp of 10 Islamic State fighters in the Philippines was released that called on jihadists to “kill infidels whether you are in Luzon, the Visayas, or Mindanao.” [68] Although it was not ascribed to any group, the background music was the same as a previous Ansar al-Khilafah Philippines video, implying the fighters were from that group and were still loyal al-Baghdadi even though they were “missing” from the previous video.

The January 2016 video with Hapilon seemed to have an effect on the Islamic State. In its al-Naba magazine that same month, the Islamic State acknowledged Hapilon's pledge and indicated that the Islamic State learned of his 20 years of operations in Basilan, southern Philippines and that the jihadists in the Philippines had united their ranks under him. [69] The Islamic State could have simply “googled” that information about Hapilon, but it is equally, if not more likely, that it consulted with Southeast Asians in Syria and Iraq who knew him to vet him. In addition, the Islamic State employed the same methodology that it did when it issued videos on a twitter account it created for Boko Haram before Shekau's pledge in March 2015 to introduce Nigeria to its global jihadi followership. In the al-Naba article about Hapilon, for example, it also provided some basic background information on the Philippines to introduce the Philippines to followers unfamiliar with the country. The Islamic State also claimed in the article that appointing of a local Islamic State leadership under Hapilon would present a threat to the Philippines and would lead to the capture of territory. This occurred in Marawi more than one year later in 2017.

Conquest of Marawi

As the courtship between the Islamic State and the jihadists in the Philippines was underway, the Islamic State began claiming attacks in Southeast Asia. The first one was in Jakarta, Indonesia in January 2016 when a suicide bomber detonated near a Starbucks, killing several people. [70] Although Indonesian authorities first suspected a Syria-based Indonesian was responsible for the attack, it later accused—but without providing detailed evidence—JAT leader, Aman Abdurrahman, of masterminding the attack. The attack, therefore, was classified by the Indonesian government as “Islamic State-inspired” but not “directed”. Aman Abdurrahman was in the same prison in Jakarta as Abu Bakar Baasyir and had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in June 2014 at the time of the attack. Days before the attack, he had issued a fatwa stating, “If you cannot emigrate then wage jihad with spirit wherever you are,” which suggests he may in fact have inspired the attack. [71] In 2017, he was sentenced to death for ordering the attack and other attacks from his prison cell. Baasyir, for his part, subsequently renounced his support to al-Baghdadi, alleging he was misinformed about the Islamic State

while in prison.

Another Islamic State-influenced operation in the Philippines seemed to occur two months later in March 2016, when the Saudi scholar A'id al-Qarni was nearly assassinated in the southern Philippines. The Islamic State had named him as “wanted” its January 2016 edition of Dabiq.[72] The assassin, who was killed during the operation, was seemingly responding to that Islamic State call even though the Islamic State did not claim his operation nor did he seem to have communicated with the Islamic State. The first Islamic State-claimed operation in the Philippines was, however, also in March 2016, when its affiliated news agency, Amaq, stated its members captured 20 Philippine soldiers in Marawi, which was the base of the Maute Group. This was a precursor to the Maute Group’s operation to actually conquer and occupy Marawi in 2017.

In December 2016, the Islamic State again began hinting at future operations in Marawi when it claimed its fighters captured towns south of Marawi in an operation that left “dozens” of Philippine soldiers dead. This claim was corroborated by media reports in the Philippines about Maute Group militants fighting Philippine soldiers and raising the Islamic State flag over an abandoned town hall in Lanao del Sur.[73] It also foreshadowed the subsequent May 2017 Islamic State-claimed “conquest” in Marawi, which became international news after the Maute Group and other jihadists alongside Hapilon, some regional foreign fighters, and Abu Sayyaf and BIFF members burned down buildings and attempted to take over a hospital and a prison in Marawi, which ultimately led to the conquest of most of the city.

الدولة الإسلامية
24 Ramadan 1438



TODAY'S NEWS

Meanwhile, two children were killed and 7 others were wounded as a result of American Crusader airstrikes near Masjid an-Nawawi in the city of Raqqah.

❖ **Karkuk Wilayah:**

Two inghimasi soldiers of the Khilafah carried out an attack on a Peshmerga military base where American soldiers were present, located at the Tuz Khurmato airbase.

Meanwhile, two 4-wheel drive vehicles carrying Peshmerga fighters were destroyed after being targeted with two explosive devices in the village of Kaysumah, and in the area of Dibs west of Karkuk, leading to two Peshmerga fighters being killed.

❖ **East Asia:**

An armored vehicle belonging to the Filipino Crusader army was destroyed using a rocket projectile, and 5 Filipino soldiers were killed and 9 others were wounded in clashes in the neighborhood of Laylud Madaya in the city of Marawi.

❖ **Barakah Wilayah:**

A number of Islamic State soldiers carried out an assault on a Rafidi army barracks near the Tall Sufuk border crossing. Clashes took place that led to three murtaddin being killed, a number of others being wounded, and one of their barracks being burned, with the mujahidin returning safely back to their positions.

Likewise, a number of Islamic State soldiers carried out an inghimasi attack targeting a PKK position in the city of Shaddadi.

Meanwhile, support detachments targeted PKK positions in Shaddadi, and in the area of Kashkash Jubur, and in the villages of 'Azzawi and Zu'ayli with 68 mortar rounds and 6 Grad rockets.

In the north of the wilayah near Dawwar as-Siyahi in the city of Qamishli, a vehicle carrying PKK fighters was targeted with an explosive device, leading to the vehicle being destroyed and those inside being killed and wounded.

Meanwhile, 12 members of a single family were killed, most of them women and children, as a result of an American Crusader airstrike on a home in the area of Tall al-Bashair near the artificial border.

❖ **Salahuddin Wilayah:**

Four Rafidi Mobilization barracks were targeted near the village of Shuwayratan and at the Makhazin Bridge and on the Hadithah – Bayji road with four SPG-9 rockets and 26 mortar rounds.

Al-Bayan Radio Bulletin in English Language on June 19, 2017, including “East Asia”[75]

The Islamic State played up the “conquest” of Marawi with a video on June 1, 2017 that showed grainy footage of jihadists shooting at Philippine soldiers and claiming to have killed 75 of them. Several days later, on June 7, 2017, the Islamic State also released an interview of Hapilon in its magazine Rumiya that referred to the

“soldiers of the khilafah in East Asia” and discussed the battles in Marawi.[74] Two weeks later, the battle in Marawi proved to be sufficient to warrant the creation of a province for the jihadists in the Philippines. On June 19, 2017, for example, the Islamic State’s al-Bayan daily bulletin mentioned attack claims in Marawi from “East Asia” along with its list of attacks in other official provinces, although notably the words “East Asia” and “Province” were never all together. On June 22, 2017, the Islamic State also released a video showing a beheaded Philippine soldier as well as the beheadings of “agents of the Crusader coalition” at the hands of Philippine, Malaysian and Indonesia Islamic State militants in Raqqah, Syria, in an effort to show a connection between the Southeast Asian jihadists in the Philippines and Syria and to urge jihadists in Southeast Asia to fight at home if they could not make it to Syria. The video also showed four previously unknown brigades in the Philippines pledging allegiance to al-Baghdadi. This was presumably to emphasize that the Philippine jihadists had united under Hapilon.

Loss of Marawi

The Islamic State occupation of Marawi lasted from June 2017 until August 2017 when key members of the Maute Group, including both Maute brothers, and Hapilon were killed and the Philippine army finally retook the city building-by-building. While the Islamic State infographic specialists in al-Yaqin media claimed the jihadists inflicted 489 casualties, official statistics from the Philippine government suggested that 160 soldiers and 47 civilians were killed and more than 350,000 people were displaced from the city. According to some uncorroborated reports, the Islamic State—even al-Baghdadi himself—ordered the attacks on Marawi.[76] That would be consistent with al-Baghdadi apparently “ordering” ISWAP’s killing of the female NGO workers, but it would seem more probable al-Baghdadi’s representatives would communicate with the jihadists abroad given his intense security cordon.

Although there were credible reports of hundreds of thousands of dollars of financing that the Islamic State provided to Isnon Hapilon through a Malaysian intermediary by cash delivery and other funds through Western Union, the main tactical influence of the Islamic State on the jihadists was seemingly in the Maute Group’s urban combat techniques.[77] Just like the Islamic State did in Syria and Iraq, for example, the Maute Group successfully stationed guns deep within houses so they could shoot through holes in walls and windows in a way that the Philippine army could not detect the origin of the fire.[78] This helped the jihadists, who were historically accustomed to jungle warfare, last longer they otherwise would have in occupying Marawi.

It seems the Islamic State wanted the jihadists to conquer Marawi because the Maute Group already had a base of support there and attacking a city as big as Marawi was certain to attract significant international attention. Had the Philippine jihadists instead attacked a town in the more remote islands of Mindanao like Sulu and Basilan, where Hapilon was formerly based, then it would have been more difficult for the Islamic State to portray its fighters in the Philippines as having “conquered” a city analogous to the conquest of Mosul in 2014 itself. This would have been a lesser propaganda victory for the Islamic State.

The question arises as to who benefitted from the “conquest” of Marawi. The Islamic State in Syria and Iraq was able to leverage it in a major media campaign that distracted from its struggles in Syria and Iraq but more importantly portrayed the Islamic State as still expanding to new far-reaching territories. Yet, even despite the “success” of occupying the city for several months there was virtually no chance the jihadists would be able to hold Marawi for the long-term in the face of the Philippine army’s counter-attack with military support from the U.S., Australia, and China, among other countries. As a result, the jihadists in the Philippines were exposed and their leaders, including both Maute brothers and Hapilon, were killed. It is unlikely the jihadists in the Philippines are any better off in the long-term as a result of the occupation of Marawi even if the Islamic State is able to send some additional foreign fighter reinforcements to the group’s hideouts in Mindanao, who are attempting to introduce yet other new tactics to the jihadists there, such as suicide bombings.

Moreover, as part of the reconstruction of Marawi, the Philippine government plans to turn the city into a new “tourist attraction”.[79] It is unclear if the displaced people, some of whom may have sympathized with the Maute Group, will ever return to their original homes and, even if they do, large parts of the city may be gentrified such that the previous inhabitants of Marawi will never have their former way of life back. The

Philippines is also working with China in the post-conflict reconstruction efforts.[80] If China's policies in its own Xinjiang Region are any indication, the reconstruction of Marawi may be accompanied by a resettlement of Christian or other non-Marawi Filipinos to the new "modern" Marawi. While this may exacerbate tensions with the previous inhabitants of Marawi, it will also make it harder for jihadists to establish networks with their ethnic kin there again.

Conclusions

While the Islamic State "core" seems to have benefited more in the short-term from the publicity and narrative of the Marawi "conquest", the jihadists in the Philippines may still benefit in the long term if Islamic State fighters are able to travel to the Philippines and provide them with new skills, if not also funds. Such has already occurred in the Philippines with a Moroccan having carried out one of the only suicide bombings in that country's history in August 2018 and the Islamic State having claimed a massive bombing at a church in Jolo in Mindanao on January 29, 2019, which killed more than 20 people and was apparently carried out by a woman in what would therefore be an innovation for the jihadists in the Philippines.[81] Yet, they will be far from being able occupy territory again, as they have lost that element of surprise.

In the case of Nigeria, however, the Islamic State has benefitted from ISWAP being among its most active provinces and frequent contributors to its media releases about winning battles. At the same time, ISWAP has actually moderated as a result of the Islamic State's influence on its internal organization, and the Islamic State has provided some beneficial strategic advice to the group. Thus far, therefore, the relationship has been "win-win". While the relationship shows no signs of weakness, it is relevant to note that there have been no random killings claimed by ISWAP outside of the main battle zone in northeastern Nigeria, such as a video-recorded stabbing of a foreigner or a police officer in Lagos or other major city. In addition, there have been no anti-al-Qaeda polemics from ISWAP in its videos and, in fact, ISWAP has only reflected about its former "strong ties" to AQIM.[82] Moreover, ISWAP has issued some of its own videos with no Islamic State branding, such as during the hostage-taking of professors of University of Maiduguri in 2017, which it seems to have negotiated without Islamic State intervention. Therefore, should ISWAP ever need to survive and function on its own or assert its independence from the Islamic State it has the infrastructure and capability to do so.[83]

More broadly, by tracing the pledge processes of the jihadists in Nigeria and the Philippines, one finds that the jihadists in both countries did, in fact, undergo internal organizational restructuring before making the pledge to al-Baghdadi. Both groups of jihadists also had at least an initial line of communication to the Islamic State's media network and were able to make the pledge to the Islamic State and have the Islamic State recognize them once they demonstrated to the Islamic State they had united under a single leader and had—or could obtain—tamkin.

Analysts can benefit from considering not only the Islamic State's training, funding, arming, and advising of provinces on the peripheries, but also assessing how the restructuring of these groups' internal organization and their need to demonstrate tamkin to the Islamic State has affected their leadership, strategy, and operations. In terms of counter-terrorism, had Nigeria done this it may have been more prepared to play one faction (al-Barnawi's) against the other (Shekau's), and in the Philippines the army may not have been caught off-guard by the "sudden" conquest of the Marawi. Similarly, now that the Islamic State has lost control of much of its territory in Syria and Iraq it is necessary to estimate how that development will affect the Islamic State's relationship with these provinces. Will it lead to Islamic State "core" jihadists traveling to the peripheries to join these groups and the swifter diffusion of tactical transfer from Syria and Iraq to the peripheries? Will the deaths of Islamic State members in Syria and Iraq lead to other members taking over the communications with the provinces and possibly favoring one faction (such as Shekau) over another (such as al-Barnawi) or encouraging a shift in attack targets? These are among the key analytical questions that will be important to answer for counter-terrorism forces in Nigeria and the Philippines and their international partners as well as humanitarian organizations in preparing for the next phases of the war in both countries.

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Notes:

- [1] Cole Bunzel, "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State," The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, No. 19, March 2015; URL: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-ideology-of-the-Islamic-State.pdf>.
- [2] "Boko Haram's" self-given name is "Jama'at Ahl al-Sunna lil-Da'wa wa al-Jihad", meaning "Sunni Muslim Group for Preaching and Jihad."
- [3] "Ansaru" is an abbreviated version of the name "Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad as-Sudan" or "Group of Supporters of Muslims in Black Africa". For a discussion on the emergence of Ansaru, see Andrea Brigaglia and Alessio Iocci, "Some Advice and Guidelines: The History of Jihad in Nigeria, as Narrated by AQIM and the Islamic State," *Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, 14, 2017, 27-35; URL: https://www.academia.edu/37964841/Some_Advice_and_Guidelines_The_History_of_Global_Jihad_in_Nigeria_as_Narrated_by_AQIM_al-Qaeda_in_the_Islamic_Maghreb. For a discussion of individual Ansaru members' reintegration into Boko Haram and joining ISWAP (but noting that Ansaru as an organization opted out of ISWAP after a shura held on February 9, 2015), see Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's Conquest for the Caliphate: How Al Qaeda Helped Islamic State Acquire Territory," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 35:5, 13 March 2018; URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1442141>.
- [4] Though written one decade ago, the following provides a useful backgrounder on Abu Sayyaf: Rommel C. Banlaoi, "Abu Sayyaf: Al-Harakat Al-Islamiyyah, Essays on the Abu Sayyaf Group", Philippine Institute for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (PIPVTR), 2008; URL: https://www.academia.edu/1921767/Al_Harakatul_Al_Islamiyyah_Essays_on_the_Abu_Sayyaf_Group_by_Rommel_Banlaoi.
- [5] Abu Muhammed al-Adnani, "So They Kill and Are Killed," *Jihadology*, March 12, 2015; URL: <https://jihadology.net/2015/03/12/al-furqan-media-presents-a-new-audio-message-from-the-islamic-states-shaykh-abu-mu%E1%B8%A5ammad-al-adnani-al-shami-so-they-kill-and-are-killed/>.
- [6] See, for example, Jacob Zenn, "A Primer on Boko Haram Sources and Three Heuristics on al-Qaida and Boko Haram in Response to Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 12, Issue 3, June 2018; URL: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2018/issue-3/06---special-correspondence-a-primer-on-boko-haram-sources-and-three-heuristics-on-al-qaida-and-boko-haram-in-response-to-.pdf>. Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston, "A Response to Jacob Zenn on Boko Haram and al-Qa'ida," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 12, Issue 2, April 2018; URL: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2018/2018-02/higazi-revised.pdf>.
- [7] Abdul Raufu Mustapha, "Understanding Boko Haram," in A. R. Mustapha, ed., *Sects & Social Disorder: Muslim Identities & Conflict in Northern Nigeria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 147-198
- [8] Géraud Magrin, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, Emmanuel Chauvin, Charline Rangé, and Christine Raimond, "Key variables," in Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, ed., *Crisis and Development: The Lake Chad Region and Boko Haram* (Paris: French Agency for Development (AFD), 2018), pp. 211; URL: <https://www.afd.fr/sites/afd/files/2018-08-04-37-14/Crisis%20and%20Development.%20The%20Lake%20Chad%20Region%20and%20Boko%20Haram.pdf>.
- [9] See Kyari Muhammed, "The Origins of Boko Haram," in A. Carl LeVan, Patrick Ukata, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian Politics* (Oxford University Press (December 18, 2018), pg. 584.
- [10] Andrea Brigaglia, "Slicing off the Tumour": The History of Global Jihad in Nigeria, as Narrated by the Islamic State," *Politics and Religion*, No. Vol. XII, 2018; URL: <https://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/index.php/prj/article/view/320/332>. Andrea Brigaglia and Alessio Iocci, "Some Advice and Guidelines: The History of Jihad in Nigeria, as Narrated by AQIM and the Islamic State," *Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, Issue No. 14, 2017, 27-35; URL: https://www.academia.edu/37964841/Some_Advice_and_Guidelines_The_History_of_Global_Jihad_in_Nigeria_as_Narrated_by_AQIM_al-Qaeda_in_the_Islamic_Maghreb.
- [11] Roman Loimeier, "Islamic Reform in Twentieth-Century Africa," (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).
- [12] An example of this is where Alexander Thurston claimed in an article for Oxford Islamic Studies Online, whose editor-in-chief is Dr. John L. Esposito, that, "After graduating from IUM [Islamic University of Medina] in 1993... [Shaykh Ja'far Mahmud Adam] was also one of the most outspoken critics of Muhammad Yusuf, the founder of the violent movement Boko Haram." However,

Thurston blatantly overlooks that from 1993 until at least 2002 Shaykh Ja'far Mahmud Adam was actually one of Muhammed Yusuf's mentors and in the mid-1990s Shaykh Ja'far preached a doctrine of violent jihad and called takfir on Sufis in Borno. He also cultivated a relationship around 1994 with Muhammed Ali, who was the actual Boko Haram founder in 2002 and co-leader of Boko Haram with Muhammed Yusuf until 2003. Thurston's claim, therefore, "exonerates" Shaykh Ja'far Mahmud Adam from involvement in Boko Haram's origins because it provides cover for the jihadist ideology and takfiri theology that existed in Saudi Arabia and that Shaykh Ja'far propagated and introduced to his followers in Nigeria after he returned from Medina to Nigeria in 1993, including to Muhammed Yusuf. Shaykh Ja'far became "outspoken" against Muhammed Yusuf (and Muhammed Ali) only around 2002, which is nearly ten years after he returned from Medina to Nigeria. To be fair, Shaykh Ja'far was also a "tragic hero" because, according to Brigaglia, like other Salafi clerics in Nigeria, he "genuinely, but ineffectively" sought to combat the doctrine of violent jihad and takfir, but by the 2000s it was already too late; this is also why Muhammed Ali's loyalists in Boko Haram assassinated Shaykh Ja'far in 2007. Similarly, Pérouse de Montclos wrote in a 2016 article that, "In spite of his total opposition to the ideas professed by Mohammed Yusuf, for example, an Izala sheikh from Sokoto, Abubakar Gero Argungu, said publicly that the members of Boko Haram [who were] killed in 2009 could be considered Muslim martyrs." Pérouse de Montclos therefore "exonerates" Abubakar Gero Argungu from any role in the origins of Boko Haram or jihadism in Nigeria by failing to consider that in 2002 when Yusuf was still in Izala Argungu delivered a sermon with one of the most explicit endorsements ever in Nigerian history of al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Bin Laden and Mullah Umar, which is discussed in Brigaglia's "Slicing the Tumour" article. Assuming these two academics and other members of their academic group have acted in good faith and have not been influenced by, for example, the Gulf-based "research patrons" of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies or Gulf-based research patrons of their other institutional affiliations, then their "exoneration" of these clerics should, according to Brigaglia, be attributed to their reliance "entirely on sources that date only to after the mid-2000s, i.e. when the split between [Shaykh Ja'far Mahmud] Adam and Yusuf had already clearly emerged." They should therefore consider using sources from before 2004. See Alexander Thurston, "Islamic Universities and Their Global Outreach," Oxford Islamic Studies Online, September 28, 2016; URL: http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/Public/focus/essay1009_Islamic_Universities.html. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos (2016) A Sectarian Jihad in Nigeria: The Case of Boko Haram, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 27:5, 878-895. Andrea Brigaglia, "Slicing off the Tumour": The History of Global Jihad in Nigeria, as Narrated by the Islamic State," *Politics and Religion Journal*, Vol. XII, No. 2, 2018; URL: <https://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/index.php/prj/article/view/320/332>. Andrea Brigaglia, "The Volatility of Salafi Political Theology, the War on Terror and the Genesis of Boko Haram," *Diritto e Questioni Pubbliche*, 15(2), pp. 174- 201, 2015; URL: https://www.academia.edu/24045774/The_Volatility_of_Salafi_Political_Theology_the_War_on_Terror_and_the_Genesis_of_Boko_Haram. Duncan Robinson, "The Shame of Britain's Universities," *The New Statesman*, March 9, 2011; URL: <https://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/03/university-saudi-british>. See also Rebuttal #7 in Jacob Zenn, "The Folly of Crowds: Jacob Zenn Rebutts Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston," *aymennjawad.org*, June 22, 2018; URL: <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2018/06/jacob-zenn-replies-to-his-critics>. See also the section "Events of the 1990s" in Khalifa Aliyu Ahmed Abulfathi, "The Metamorphosis of Boko Haram: A Local's Perspective," *sheikhahmadabulfathi.org*, 2011; URL: <http://www.sheikhahmadabulfathi.org/content/metamorphosis-boko-haram-0>

[13] Andrea Brigaglia, "Slicing off the Tumour": The History of Global Jihad in Nigeria, as Narrated by the Islamic State."

[14] Ibid.

[15] Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 119; Jacob Zenn, "Northern Nigeria's Boko Haram: The Prize in al-Qaida's Africa Strategy," The Jamestown Foundation Occasional Paper, December 6, 2012."

[16] "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency", International Crisis Group Africa Report # 216, 3 April 2014; URL: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/curbing-violence-nigeria-ii-boko-haram-insurgency>. Cherif Ouzani, "Sale temps por les djihadistes," *Jeune Afrique*, May 10, 2004. Tijjani Talba Kafa and Abdulwahab Habib, "Clash of Civilizations: An Assessment of the Early Origin of Boko Haram," *International Journal of Science and Research*, Volume 7 Issue 10, October 2018.

[17] Carl LeVan, "Review," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 56, 4 (2018), pp. 697 – 716. See also Douglas Walton, "The strawman fallacy," in Johan von Benthram, ed., *Logic and Argumentation* (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of the Arts, 1996); URL: <https://www.dougwalton.ca/papers%20in%20pdf/96straw.pdf>. Jacob Zenn, "A Primer on Boko Haram Sources and Three Heuristics on al-Qaida and Boko Haram in Response to Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston." Abdulbasit Kassim, "Boko Haram's Internal Civil War: Stealth Takfir and Jihad as Recipes for Schism." ed. by Jacob Zenn, in "Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency," West Point CTC, New York, May 2018; URL: <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines.pdf>.

[18] See, for example, Andrea Brigaglia and Alessio Iocci, "Some Advice and Guidelines: The History of Jihad in Nigeria, as Narrated by AQIM and the Islamic State." See also Jacob Zenn, "A Primer on Boko Haram Sources and Three Heuristics on al-Qaida and Boko Haram in Response to Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston."

[19] Even without background analysis or any citation some established scholars have made the claim that the relationship is "primarily rhetorical", which indicates that this claim has become so accepted among certain members of the scholarly community that sourcing is no longer deemed necessary to substantiate the claim. See Scott MacEachern, *Searching for Boko Haram: A History*

of *Violence in Central Africa*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pg. 187.

[20] Virginia Comolli, “Boko Haram: Indigeneity, Internationalism, Insurgency,” in A. Carl LeVan, Patrick Ukata, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian Politics* (Oxford University Press (December 18, 2018)), pp. 611.

[21] See Kyari Muhammed, “The Origins of Boko Haram,” in A. Carl LeVan, Patrick Ukata, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian Politics* (Oxford University Press (December 18, 2018)), pp. 611. Curiously, Kyari Muhammed neither discussed in his book chapter a document released by AQIM in 2017 that mentions Boko Haram members with the GIA in 1994 nor an article by the Ansaru leader that discusses Boko Haram’s origins before 9/11. Both of these documents were mentioned in Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston, “A Response to Jacob Zenn on Boko Haram and al-Qa’ida” and Jacob Zenn, “A Primer on Boko Haram Sources and Three Heuristics on al-Qa’ida and Boko Haram in Response to Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston.”

[22] Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston, “A Response to Jacob Zenn on Boko Haram and al-Qa’ida.” Kyari Mohammed, “The message and methods of Boko Haram,” in: Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos (Ed.) *Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA)–Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014; URL: <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/23853/ASC-075287668-3441-01.pdf>). For a keen description of the value of jihadist primary sources, see the “Methodology” section of Nelly Lahoud, “Al-Qa’ida’s Contested Relationship with Iran,” *New America Foundation*, September 7, 2018; URL: <https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/al-qaidas-contested-relationship-iran/methodology>.

[23] Thurston’s definition of “terrorology” includes that it is when “jihadist primary sources” are “imbue[d] with an aura of mystery and power...” or when “terrorologists... follow obscure and highly ideological ‘treasure maps’ to arrive at the true, inner understanding of jihadism and the ten-foot-tall warrior-masterminds who direct it.” The term is therefore too subjective and imprecise to be academically credible; the term “source criticism” is, however, more academically useful. In addition, it does not appear anyone “present[ed] a single biography as the key to understanding the Islamic State” as Thurston claimed someone did in his assessment of several potential “terrorologists”, nor does Aymenn al-Tamimi indicate he himself is “disappointed” about a two-year gap in the biography of Abu Ali al-Anbari, as Thurston claims he “seems” to be, but rather al-Tamini notes that “readers hoping for detailed stories of what Anbari was up to in Syria in 2012-2014 will be disappointed (italics added for emphasis).” This impreciseness itself is why “terrorology” can become a problematic term. It is also important for scholars to accurately represent the claims of other scholars and not invent claims that no scholar ever made because although countering “strawmen” arguments may make it easier to “win” a debate, they do not advance the field because they do not engage any actual arguments put forth by other scholars. Alexander Thurston, “On the Zarqawi/Anbari Issue: Source Criticism and Subtext in the Analysis of Jihadism,” *Sahelblog*, January 4, 2019; URL: <https://sahelblog.wordpress.com/2019/01/04/on-the-zarqawi-anbari-issue-source-criticism-and-subtext-in-the-analysis-of-jihadism/>. For an example of the risk of imprecise and “broad-brush terms” in the context of human rights, see Jon Henley, “A glossary of US military torture euphemisms,” *The Guardian*, December 13, 2007; URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/dec/13/usa.humanrights>.

[24] The possibility of misuse or abuse of the term “terrorology” is further evidenced in Rebuttal #6 of Jacob Zenn, “The Folly of Crowds: Jacob Zenn Rebuts Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston,” *aymennjawad.org*, June 22, 2018; URL: <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2018/06/jacob-zenn-replies-to-his-critics>. See also Jacob Zenn, “Boko Haram’s al-Qaeda Affiliation: A Response to ‘Five Myths about Boko Haram,’” *Lawfare*, February 1, 2018; URL: <https://www.lawfareblog.com/boko-harams-al-qaeda-affiliation-response-five-myths-about-boko-haram>.

[25] See, for example, the critique of Pérouse de Montclos’ interview methods in Rebuttal #11 in Jacob Zenn, “The Folly of Crowds: Jacob Zenn Rebuts Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston,” *aymennjawad.org*, June 22, 2018; URL: <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2018/06/jacob-zenn-replies-to-his-critics>. See also Khalil’s critique of interview methods of Boko Haram members in James Khalil, “A Guide to Interviewing Terrorists and Violent Extremists Khalil,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, October 20, 2017, p.1-15.

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Research Note

Understanding Muslims' Support for Suicide Bombing in West Africa: A Replication Study

By C. Christine Fair and Samta Savla

Abstract

Support for Islamist violence among Muslims—howsoever varied—is theoretically and practically important because scholars have demonstrated that popular support for terrorism may explain where terrorist events occur even though the mechanistic details of this predictive utility are disputed. For this and other empirical and theoretical reasons, scholars from various disciplines and scholarly commitments have sought to exposit respondent-level determinants of support for Islamist political violence. One of the common variables that is used in these studies is support for Shari'ah (often referred to as “Islamic law”); however, scholars using this variable arrive at divergent conclusions. Recent studies of Pakistan and Bangladesh suggest one reason for this is the way in which scholars conceptualize and instrumentalize Shari'ah. This scholarship argues that Shari'ah should be decomposed into at least three components, support for: scriptural literalism, good governance and restrictions on women. Using 2009 data from Pew's Tolerance and Tension, we replicate the empirical estimation strategies of those scholars to extend this analytical framework to four West African countries (Ghana, Cameroon, Guinea Bissau and Liberia), which have been neglected by scholars of Islamist political violence. We find considerable support for this framework. Notably, in Ghana and Liberia, support for scriptural literalism coincides with support for religious violence. We find no correlation between religiosity and support for violence in any of the four countries. In Guinea Bissau, we find a puzzling positive relationship between secularism and support for violence.

Keywords: Public Opinion, Islamist political violence, public support for Islamist violence, West Africa, Replication Study

Introduction

The September 11 attacks, the spread of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, and other acts of Islamist political violence have pushed Muslims and their faith into the center of political debates across the world. Global publics have come to view Muslims in their own countries and abroad with fear and alarm, fueling Islamophobia and even deadly attacks on Muslims.[1] In many ways the presumption that Muslims support violence committed in the name of their faith is unfounded: data from Pew Research Center demonstrates that a majority of Muslims aver that “suicide bombings and other forms of violence against civilians in the name of Islam are rarely or never justified.” However, in some countries, nearly one in four Muslims indicates that these acts of violence are at least sometimes justified, including 40% in the Palestinian territories, 39% in Afghanistan, 29% in Egypt and 26% in Bangladesh.[2]

This support for Islamist violence among Muslims—howsoever varied—is theoretically and practically important for several reasons. First, recently scholars have demonstrated that this popular support for terrorism may explain where terrorist events occur even though the mechanistic details of this predictive utility are disputed.[3] Second, several studies have found that favorable public opinion explains the success of terrorist movements. For example, they rely upon public support to legitimize their goals if not their means[4] and they can more easily extract financial and human resources from sympathetic populations.[5] Terrorist groups may take public opinion into consideration when making tactical or even strategic decisions.[6] For these and other empirical and theoretical reasons, scholars from various disciplines and scholarly commitments have endeavored to exposit respondent-level determinants of support for suicide bombings and other forms of Islamist political violence perpetrated by Islamist militant groups using both multi-national surveys and

country-specific samples as well as innovative survey techniques[7] to field these surveys.

Political scientists have studied the posited correlation between support for political violence and an array of respondent-level factors, including: knowledge of Islam;[8] perceived and actual socio-economic status; dimensions of education and human capital;[9] ethnicity;[10] facets of belief and practice such as religiosity;[11] exposure to violence;[12] among other individual-level factors such as attitudes towards American culture and U.S. foreign policy[13] and political dissatisfaction.[14] These various empirical inquiries have often reached indeterminate and/or discordant findings.

In this article, we dilate upon recent studies in which the authors sought to explain why various studies that link support for political violence and preferences for Shari'ah (often referred to as "Islamic law") arrive at divergent conclusions.[15] Fair, Littman, and Nugent[16] suspected that part of problem derives from the sub-optimal ways in which scholars *per force* conceive of and instrumentalize Shari'ah in these empirical studies. Using a unique dataset they collected from a national survey fielded in Pakistan, they argued that Shari'ah should be conceptualized into (at least) three components and instrumentalized accordingly: scriptural literalism such as support for Quranic physical punishments often referred to as Hudood Punishments (e.g. whipping, stoning, amputation, etc.); a demand for good governance (access to fair courts, diminished corruption, provision of public services); and restrictions on women. They found that while respondents who understood Shari'ah in terms of scriptural literalism (e.g. Hudood punishments) were more likely to support Islamist political violence, those who understood it as good governance or restricting women in public life were less likely to do so.[17]

Using data from Pew Research Center's 2011/12 World's Muslims Data Set, Fair, Hamza and Heller[18] next explored whether this framework explains support for suicide bombing in Bangladesh, which is another large Muslim-majority country in South Asia, that recognized Islam as the basis of law and had been part of Pakistan until 1971.[19] However, they also explicitly controlled for respondent attitudes towards secularism. In general, they replicated the major findings of Fair, Littman, and Nugent for Pakistan in that scriptural literalism positively correlated with support for suicide attacks while other dimensions of Shari'ah were not statistically significant. They also found that support for secularism is negatively correlated. These results may not be so surprising given the ostensible commonalties between Pakistan and Bangladesh. The question remains whether the instrumentalization of Shari'ah, proffered by Fair, Littman and Nugent, explains support for Islamist violence among Muslim polities that differ from Bangladesh or Pakistan geographically, demographically, politically, historically or in dominant sectarian commitments embraced by their polities.

In this replication study, we examine whether this framework proffered by Fair, Littman and Nugent explains support for Islamist violence in countries that differ from Pakistan or Bangladesh historically, geographically, politically, socially, demographically and with respect to the Islamic interpretative traditions embraced by the populations. Here, we apply their concept to several Muslim-minority countries in West Africa, including: Ghana (population 28 Million, 18% of which is Muslim),[20] Cameroon (population 26 million, 21% Muslim),[21] Guinea Bissau (1.8 Million, 45.1% Muslim),[22] and Liberia (5 million, 12% Muslim).[23] Examining these countries is important both theoretically and practically. Most scholarly inquiries into support for Islamist violence dilates upon Muslims in Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East, North Africa as well as South and Southeast Asia. While scholars have also looked at support for Islamist violence in Africa, most works primarily focus on countries with Muslim majority or near majority populations. These four countries are all Muslim minority states, although Guinea Bissau has a large minority (45 percent). Also, studies tend to focus upon support in countries in which Islamist violence has taken place with some frequency. It is important to test Muslims' support for Islamist violence not only in countries where they have been influenced by exposure, but in those where such an occurrence is limited. Given the myriad differences between these countries on the one hand and Pakistan on the other, this is a hard test of the Fair, Littman and Nugent framework.

All four are Muslim-minority countries and with exception of Cameroon, these four countries have exhibited limited encounters with Islamist terrorism. Even then, the operation of such groups in Cameroon is a recent

development. With the data limitations from countries included in the Pew Research Center's surveys,[24] Cameroon, Liberia, Ghana, and Guinea Bissau were four countries that fit our research criteria and have not been investigated in this light thus far.

To do so, we leverage data from the Pew Research Center's 2009 *Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* survey, which includes data from 25,000 Muslims and non-Muslims across nineteen countries.[25] As we discuss below, because these countries have small Muslim minorities, our analytical samples are small ranging between 245 and 373. Despite these small samples, our findings support the key elements of the Fair, Littman and Nugent framework. Consistent with that study, we find that in Ghana and Liberia, support for scriptural literalism coincides with support for religious violence while finding no correlation between religiosity and support for violence in any of the four countries. While Fair, Littman and Nugent did not examine secularism, Fair, Hamza and Heller did and found an inverse relationship between support for secularism and support for terrorism. We found no statistical relationship in three of the countries, but, in Guinea Bissau, we find a positive relationship. In all four countries, socio-economic status is insignificant.

We organize the remainder of this article as follows. First, provide brief background sketches of the four countries, focusing upon religion, ethnic and political challenges. Next, we provide an overview of the limited extent of Islamist militancy in the four countries in our sample to demonstrate that this is rare and recent phenomenon. Third, we review the extant scholarly literature that is germane to explaining individual support for Islamist violence. Fourth, we describe the data and analytical methods we employ in this study. Penultimately, we discuss the results and conclude with a discussion of the policy implications of our findings.

Background on the Countries in our Sample

In this section, we provide a brief description of the countries in our sample focusing upon the ethnic and religious composition of the countries and major features of domestic politics, which may aid us in interpreting the results of our analysis. All four countries, while differing in many ways, have several features in common. They all evidence diversity with respect to ethnicity and creed. Christian and Muslim communities have evolved considerably in the last sixty years as Pentecostalism is supplanting older traditional denominations and Wahhabi versions of Islam displace traditional Sufi identifications. Thus in both traditions, the most zealous and stringent are becoming ever more prominent producing sectarian and communal conflicts in countries that are already vulnerable to conflict in nearby countries. All are young countries with about 60% of their populations under 25.

Cameroon

Cameroon, with a population of 25.6 million, is a young country with 60% of the population under the age of 25. It also diverse with respect ethnicity and religious identifications. While no ethnic group is in the majority, "Cameroon Highlanders" are the plurality with 31%, followed by the Equatorial Bantu (19%), Kiridi (11%), Fulani (10%), as well as smaller groups (Northwestern Bantu, Eastern Nigritic among other African and non-African ethnic groups). The country is overwhelmingly Christian although Christians are divided among Roman Catholics who are 38.4% of the country, Protestants (26.3%) and other Christians (4.5%) while Muslims comprise 20.9% of the populations. The remainder are animist (5.6%), non-believers or others (4.2%). [26] According to a 2012 Pew study, among Muslims, 27% identify as Sunni, 3% as Shia, 40% as "just a Muslim," and 17 percent as "something else." Additionally, 12% identify as Ahmadiyya. Some 45 percent belong to a Sufi order, the most common of which is the 19th-Century Tijaniyyah Sufi order;[27] however as noted below this changing. In 2010, Pew found evidence of considerable communal distrust: more than half (57%) of Christians thought Muslims were violent and one in four (24%) of Muslims thought that Christians were violent.[28]

Johnson (2017) notes that in recent decades the religious landscapes of both Muslim and Christian communities have experienced profound changes which have the potential to profoundly disrupt social relations with potential for violence. On the Christian side, Pentecostal movements emerged in in French-speaking Cameroon in the 1960s. (Previously they were only in English-speaking Cameroon.) Established churches reviled the

Pentecostal churches. At the same time, Catholicism also underwent a “Charismatic renewal movement,” in part in response to the spread of Protestant Pentecostalism. Christian churches began moving into new geographies in part due to the expanding mobility of their adherents who increasingly found themselves in places where no church existed from their denomination and who organized to establish them. Whereas established churches centered around denomination (i.e. Baptists, Reformed, Lutherans, Catholics, etc.), newer churches, which called themselves Evangelical or Pentecostal, were “individual enterprises under the leadership of a guide who called himself pastor, apostle, or prophet,” many of whom had little pastoral training. In recent decades, Cameroon has been beset with religious television programming, which allows them to affiliate with a pastor perhaps thousands of miles away.[29]

Islam in Cameroon has also undergone considerable change over roughly the same time frame. In the early nineteenth century, Islam tended to be centered in the north which was dominated by ethnic Kirdi who were governed by the Fulanis who, while only one third of the population, were in political control. The first development in modern history took place in the 1970s when Ahmadou Ahidjo, a Fulani Muslim, became the head of state. This ushered in a period of “Fulanization,” which has sometimes been associated inaccurately as “Islamization.” During his tenure, traditional chiefs came under pressure to bring their Kirdi populations into the fold of Islam. This was more of a political move than a religious one. Many Kirdis abandoned Islam as soon as Ahidjo was out of power. As with Christianity, Islam began moving from the north to the south following the migration of Cameroonians for schooling or employment. In large cities, mosques became a visible focal point. The imams, who were doctrinally unified and recognized both by the worshipers and by the state, played what Johnson calls a “federating role for all Muslims, from the north as well as the south of Cameroon.”[30] Wahhabism came to Cameroon in the 1980s due to the efforts of Arab Gulf State monarchies, which—enriched by their oil reserves—began to propound Wahhabism aggressively in Africa. Africans received scholarships in Islamic studies, which bequeathed to Cameroon a generation of new religious intellectuals, who differed from former faith leaders. Whereas mosques were previously founded with denominational unity, new Wahhabi institutions (mosques, papers, NGOs and proselytization organization) functioned autonomously. Finally, as happened with Christianity, Wahhabi Islam became increasingly available on television and the internet.[31]

Taken together, this democratization of both faiths has allowed very intolerant and zealous variants of Christianity and Islam to compete with and overtake more traditional denominations. Moreover, Cameroon is a conflict-prone regional environment, due to the attacks by Boko Haram and the political instability in neighboring Central African Republic. In light of these issues, Johnson worries that “Cameroon is exposed to risks of internal and external conflicts: religious intolerance finds a fertile terrain there because of ethnic cleavages and the latent resentments arising from social inequalities.”[32]

Ghana

Ghana, with a population of 28.1 million, is also a young country with 57% of its citizens under 25. The largest ethnic group is the Akan, with 47.5% of the population. The next largest group is the Mole-Dagbon (16.6%), followed by the Ewe (13.9%), and several other smaller groups (Ga-Dangme, Gurma, Guan, Grusi, Mande.) The country is overwhelmingly Christian (71%), although there is considerable diversity (Pentecostal/Charismatic (28.3%), Protestant (18.4%), Catholic (13.1%), other (11.4%)). Muslims comprise 17.6% of the population while the remainder identify as traditional (5.2%), none (5.2%) or other (0.8%).[33] Among Muslims in Ghana, 51% identify as “Sunni,” in the afore-noted Pew poll, 8% as Shia, 16% as “something else” and 13% as “just a Muslim.” Slightly more than one in three (37%) identify as Sufi Muslims and the Tijaniyyah order is the most common.[34] Pew found high levels of inter-communal distrust with 61% of Christians believing Muslims are violent while only 11% of Muslims hold this view of Christians.[35]

As with Cameroon, Wahhabism became more common in Ghana in the 1980s through similar means, where it began to conflict with traditional Sufi adherents whose practices are reviled by Wahhabis. However, it first came to the country sometime around the 1940s. It spread through Quranic schools. The aim of these early

Wahhabism was the reform of Muslims who espouse un-Islamic practices, notably adherents of Sufi orders such as Tijaniyyah. This resulted in religious tensions that predate the oil-fueled expansion of Wahhabism in the 1980s: by the 1970s the Tijaniyyah was no longer the majority tradition.[36] As with Cameroon, while Wahhabism has undercut support for traditional Muslim practices, Pentecostalism and other forms of charismatic Christianity is also competing for influence among the country's Christian population. Given the effective use of religious media by both groups over several decades, both Wahhabi Islam and charismatic Christian movements are part of global religious flows.[37]

Guinea Bissau

Guinea Bissau is the smallest country in our sample with a meagre 1.8 million. It too is a young country without about 60% of its population under 25. It is ethnically diverse with the Fulani being the largest (28.5%), followed by the Balanta (22.5%), Mandinga (14.7%), Papel (9.1%) and Manjaco (8.3%). Smaller groups such as the Beafada, Mancanha, Bijago, Felupe, Mansoanca, Balanta comprise the remainder. Of the four, Guinea Bissau has the largest percentage of Muslims (45.1%) while Christians make up 22.1%, animist 14.9%, while rest either identify as animist or with no religion.[38] Among Muslims, according to Pew, 40% identify as Sunni, 6% as Shia, 2% as Something Else or 36% as Just a Muslim. Forty percent identify with a Sufi order, of which the Tijaniyyah order is most popular.[39] Despite the fact that a majority of citizens identify with Islam or Christianity, politics in Guinea Bissau rely upon animism as the "traditional" faith.[40] There is little scholarly literature on the evolution of either Islam or Christianity in this country. Curiously, among the four countries studied here, there seems to be greater religious tolerance. Pew found in 2010 that only one in five Christians believed Muslims were violent while only 13 percent of Muslims believed Christians were violent.[41] The country also has a history of political instability (inclusive of civil war and multiple coups, the most recent of which occurred in 2012) as well as a shambolic economy, inadequate education infrastructure, pervasive corruption, endemic poverty, and various forms of criminality. Many families send their male children to study in Quranic schools in Senegal and Gambia where they are forced to beg.[42]

Liberia

Liberia has a population of 4.8 million, which is extremely diverse ethnically with no singular ethnic group dominating. The Kpelle is the largest (20.3%) followed by the Bassa (13.4%); Grebo (10%); Gio (8%); Mano (7.9%) Kru (6%) in addition to several others that comprise fewer than 5% (i.e. Lorma, Kissi, Gola Krahn, Vai, Mandingo; Gbandi). With respect to religion, a majority (86%) are Christian while 12% are Muslim. The remainder are comprised of other faiths each of which are embraced by fewer than 1% of the population.[43] Of the Muslim population, 38% identify as Sunni, 9% as Shia, 10% as "something else," and 22% as "just a Muslim." Nearly one in 10 identifies as Ahmadiyya. Forty-five percent identify with a Sufi tradition, the most common of which is the Tijaniyyah order.[44] As with other countries in this study, Pew found considerable communal distrust with 43% of Christians believing Muslims to be violent in comparison to 20% of Muslims who viewed Christians as violent.[45]

As elsewhere Pentecostalism has grown rapidly in Liberia, driven by many of the same dynamics noted above. The Pentecostal churches have sought assert to themselves as the most salient and efficacious church for Liberians.[46] Less is known about the changes within the Muslim community apart from the fact that Muslims suffered various forms of exclusion and discrimination and that, during the 1980s, Muslims benefitted from scholarships to study in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. During this time, Liberian Muslims began forging closer ties to Muslims elsewhere in West Africa, such as Guinea and Sierra Leone. In post-conflict Liberia, Muslims remain politically marginalized and the object of mistrust. While Liberia's civil war (1989-2003) which rendered some 250,000 persons refugees and while internally displacing another half million is generally viewed as non-religious in nature, there were religious overtones. For example, Christians sought to use the war to attack and wipe out Muslims largely because of the belief that Liberia is a Christian country and Muslims should go elsewhere, such as Guinea.[47]

Overview of Islamist Terrorism in West Africa

Prior to 9/11, West Africa was mostly free of terrorist threats and Islamist militancy. The rise and spread of such groups in the region have occurred more recently compared to the rest of the continent.[48] According to the U.S. Department of State, the primary Islamist militant group operating in the region is Nigeria-based Boko Haram and its offshoot, Islamic State-West Africa (IS-WA). While its stronghold is Nigeria, it is also active in Chad, Niger and Northern Cameroon where it conducts terrorist attacks, targeted killings, and kidnappings. In Cameroon, most Islamist militancy and terrorism is concentrated in the Lake Chad Basin, which involves Northern Cameroon, and along the Cameroon-Nigeria border.[49]

Both Boko Haram and IS-WA reject modern geographical boundaries and seek to restore the caliphate. For Boko Haram, this means restoring the boundaries of the Sokoto Caliphate encompassing Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Burkina Faso. Abubakar Shekau’s 2010 reorganization of Boko Haram has led to religious and sectarian cleansing of Christian areas and establishing Islamic rule extending to Cameroon’s bordering villages. [50] Weak border security, instability, and existing conflict in the Lake Chad basin has only continued to fuel the insurgency.

In addition to Boko Haram and its offshoot IS-WA, influence from other regional terrorist groups is continuing to spread and only increasing the likelihood of spillover conflict in neighboring states. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine, and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) are three active Islamist groups in the region who pose such a threat. AQIM originated in Algeria and is active in Mali, Niger, Libya, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. Ansar Dine is primarily active in Mali, and MUJAO, operates in Mali, Niger, Algeria and Burkina Faso.[51] Terrorist threats from within these countries as well as those across the continent have severe and diverse ramifications. Particularly, Islamism in Nigeria and Mali increases the risk of Islamist terrorism spreading across the region. Additionally, the region’s permeable borders, potential affiliation among terrorist groups, creation of illicit financial networks to support these groups, and political and economic instability raises concerns for the entire West African region.[52] (See Tables 1 and 2, which depict the number of terrorist attacks and resulting casualties in Cameroon, Liberia, Ghana, and Guinea Bissau from 2009 to 2016.)

Table 1. Total Events

Country	Year							
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Cameroon	1	3	3	0	3	67	82	54
Ghana	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Guinea-Bissau	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Liberia	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0

Source: In-house manipulation of data from the Global Terrorism Database. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). (2017). Global Terrorism Database [Data file]. Retrieved from <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

Table 2. Casualties (Fatalities and Wounded)

Country	Year							
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Cameroon	0	7	4	0	7	806	1411	569
Ghana	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
Guinea-Bissau	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Liberia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: In-house manipulation of data from the Global Terrorism Database. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). (2017). Global Terrorism Database [Data file]. Retrieved from <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

Why Some Muslims Support Islamist Violence: What the Literature Says

Here, we review the extant literature on support for Islamist violence to generate testable hypotheses about the lineaments of respondent support for terrorism. Generally speaking, the literature explores the following explanations for support for violence: the Clash of Civilizations and the derived notions of scriptural literalism, religiosity and piety; commitments to secularism; and socio-economic status. We review these concepts in turn below.

Clash of Civilizations

To explain support for Islamist violence, scholars frequently mobilize Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis which posits a fundamental conflict between the Christian West and the so-called Islamic World and asserts that support for terrorism derives from embracing Islam.[53] Empirical studies are discordant. Tessler and Robbins,[54] Esposito,[55] Tessler and Nachtwey[56] find little association between simply believing in Islam and supporting violent politics; however, Weinberg, Pedazhur, and Canetti Nisim[57] as well as Ginges, Hansen, and Norenzayan[58] do find support for the asserted causal relationship between Islamic piety and political violence. When analysts have found correlation between embracing Islam and violence, the relationship seems to be driven by a particular understanding of Islam (e.g., for example, beliefs about the efficacy or compulsory nature of individual militarized jihad).[59] Other studies have found that adherence to specific sectarian traditions predict support for Islamist militant groups.[60] At least two scholars have presented limited evidence that individuals with greater knowledge of Islam, obtained through Quranic study groups and other pious practices, are better able to resist the arguments of militant thought leaders and thus less likely to support Islamist militant politics.[61]

Two studies have argued that it is not embrace of Islam that explains support for Islamist violence; rather it is the embrace of scriptural literalism.[62] Ciftci, O'Donnell, and Tanner[63] assess multiple variables on support for al-Qaeda and determine that strong correlation exists between literalist interpretations of Islam and support for al-Qaeda. They conclude that a belief in literalist interpretations of Islam rather than religiosity accounts for respondent support for al-Qaeda's violence. This accords a similar finding of Fair, Littman and Nugent who, based upon their review of extant literature, argue that it is not support for Shari'ah per se that best accounts for individual support of Islamist violence in Pakistan; rather the way in which support for Shari'ah is instrumentalized. They argue that support for Shari'ah should be decomposed into three concepts: support for Islamic scripturalism which includes support for physical punishments often called Hudood (whipping, stoning, amputation); support for good governance and restrictions upon women. They test their supposition formally using unique data collected from a large, nationally representative survey of Pakistan and find that only support for Hudood punishments explains support for violence. Fair, Ali, and Heller extend the Fair, Littman and Nugent findings to Bangladesh and conclude that there is no statistically significant relationship between piety and support for violence, but scriptural literalism does lead to significant correlations to support for violence. These studies give rise to two testable hypotheses:

H1: Respondents who embrace literalist interpretations of Shari'ah will be more supportive of Islamist violence.

H2: Religiosity is not correlated with tolerance of terrorist activities like suicide bombing.

Commitments to Secularism

Fox,[64] in his study of whether secularist policies in state constitutions are consistent with observed relations between the state and religion, finds that constitutional clauses on the separation of state and religion influence state sponsorship of the religion. However, most states do not fully meet the standards of separation of religion and state. While many scholars have studied the relationship between religiosity and support for violence,

there remains limited scholarship on the relationship between secularism and support for Islamist violence. In an expansion of his previous work, Fox[65] investigates the discrimination of religious minorities in Muslim-majority states. While a majority of the states in the Middle East contain some form of religious freedom legislation, religious minorities still face high levels of discrimination. He concludes that discrimination is most present in states with autocratic regimes or which present a single state religion. Fair, Hamza, and Heller directly examine the relationship between support for secularism for Islamist violence. Using data from the *Pew Research Center's World's Muslims Survey*[66] to measure support for Islamist violence in Bangladesh, they find a negative relationship between support for secularism and support for Islamist violence. This gives rise to our third hypothesis, namely:

H3: Secularism is negatively correlated with support for Islamist terrorist attacks like suicide bombing.

Socioeconomic Status

The notion that poverty and support for terrorism share a causal and positively correlated relationship has long been debated and disputed by many scholars. Previous studies have found little evidence linking poverty or education to support for terrorism.[67] Ethan Bueno de Mesquita[68] in his study of the relationship between economic conditions and terrorist mobilization finds that while poorer economic conditions correlate with increased terrorist mobilization, terrorists themselves are not likely to be poorer or less educated than the populations from which organizations recruit. This is because during periods of economic depression, the opportunity costs of participating in militancy for persons with higher “human capital” endowments is lower relative to periods of economic growth. This means that there are more higher-quality persons who want to be a terrorist than groups have need for personnel. Thus, militant organizations have the luxury of “hiring” better qualified persons who are available in the pool of potential recruits during economic retrenchment.[69] Under these demand-constrained conditions, terrorist groups can select the best persons available. When economies perform poorly, more educated or skilled persons become available relative to better times and the opportunity costs for higher quality persons to join a terrorist group decline. This may explain why terrorists tend to be better educated relative to the populations from which they come even while the overall economic well-being of the country or community may be relatively underperforming.[70]

Empirical tests of the relationship between socioeconomics and support for Islamist militancy produce either mixed or countervailing evidence for the claim, depending on the country studied or the specifics of the model employed. For example, Shafiq and Sinno found that in Indonesia and Jordan, the wealthiest respondents are most supportive of suicide bombing that target civilians while in Pakistan the wealthiest respondents were least supportive. However, in Jordan, Morocco, and Turkey, support for bombings against civilians were comparable across income quartiles. When they examined support for suicide attacks against Westerners in Iraq, a different set of patterns emerged. In Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, the wealthiest were less supportive of the tactic while the richest in Pakistan were most supportive. They found no obvious pattern between per capita income quartile and support for such attacks in Morocco.[71]

In contrast, Sirgy, Joshanloo, and Estes[72] posited that support for political militancy is influenced by one's sense of economic ill-being and a strong sense of Muslim religiosity. The authors test a quality of life model and conclude that Muslims that are economically deprived and live in politically unfree states tend to support Jihadist terrorism as a solution to problems such as corruption, crime, social conflict, poverty, and unemployment.[73]

These studies are typical of the literature in which various authors find that the relationship between income and support for suicide bombings varies across the countries studied and the targets of the attacks. Inputs into socio-economic status such as education produce similarly divergent results, as one would expect.[74]

Given these varied divergent empirical findings, we posit the below Null hypothesis.

H4: Socio-economic status will not be related to support for Islamist violence.

Analytical Methods and Data

This is principally a replication study of Fair, Littman and Nugent, who used a unique dataset derived from a survey they fielded in Pakistan, and extended by Fair, Hamza, and Heller using publicly available data from Pew. For this reason, it would have been optimal to use Pew's "World's Muslims Data Set," which was used by Fair, Hamza and Heller. Unfortunately, that dataset did not include the countries of interest investigated in this effort. For this reason, both to test the above-positing four main hypotheses and in-turn conduct our replication study, we employ data from the Pew Research Center's *Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*[75] for which Pew fielded surveys between December 2008 and April 2009 using face-to-face interviews of individuals between the ages of eighteen and ninety-seven across nineteen countries in the respective national languages. We use survey samples for four Muslim-minority countries, namely: Liberia, Cameroon, Ghana, and Guinea Bissau.[76] While the sample sizes range from 1,000 respondents (in Guinea Bissau) 1,503 respondents (in Cameroon), these samples include both Muslims and non-Muslims. In this study, we only employ responses from Muslim survey participants. This resulted in survey samples that range from 245 respondents (for Cameroon) to 373 (for Guinea Bissau). We provide information about the samples used in this study from each country in Table 3, below.

Table 3: Information about Country-Specific Survey Samples

Country Name	Total Sample Size	# of Non-Muslims in Sample	# of Muslims in Sample	Margin of Error Among Muslims
Cameroon	1,503	1,209	245	±9 points
Ghana	1,500	1,148	339	±7 points
Guinea Bissau	1,000	619	373	±7 points
Liberia	1,500	1,040	279	±8 points

Enumerators asked respondents numerous survey items that pertained to respondent religious beliefs and practices in effort to gauge respondents' knowledge of and attitudes toward other faiths. The survey effort also sought to assess respondents' levels of political and economic satisfaction; concerns about crime, corruption and extremism; positions on issues such as abortion and polygamy; as well as views of democracy, religious law and the place of women in society.

Instrumentalization

Because this is principally a replication study, we used the same survey questions as employed by Fair, Hamza, and Heller. Fortunately, Pew tends to use the same questions in their multi-country survey efforts over many years, enabling us to follow their instrumentalization procedures unless otherwise noted. We acknowledge that while the questions are identical or nearly identical in the English versions of the respective questionnaires, respondents may interpret the questions differently in these varied political and/or temporal contexts. Equally important to note is that these survey items may take on different connotations or denotations once translated into the relevant languages in each country depending upon the translation choices of Pew's implementing partners. Taken together, while we may believe we are asking the same question of respondents in different countries in different years, the questions may differ in subtle ways or be understood by respondents to be different. Unfortunately, because Pew does not provide the translations of their questionnaires, we are unable to verify the translations Pew uses, even if we could muster the requisite linguistic expertise to do so.

In order to test H1, we created a Hudood index similar to that in Fair, Hamza, and Heller. This index includes seven survey questions which reflect an individual's support for literalist interpretation of Islamic or Shari'ah

law as the official legal code in their country and the approval of punishments in accordance to Shari'ah law. The index ranges from 0 to 1, where "0" indicates little support of Hudood laws and "1" indicates the most support. To construct the Hudood index, we use survey questions 54, 55, 95a, 95b, 95c, 95d, and 95e, which we provide in Appendix 1.

In order to test H2, we create a Religiosity index. This index includes six questions that measure the respondent's self-reported commitment to religious practices. The index has values between 0 and 1, with "0" indicating the least amount of commitment to religious practices and "1" indicating the maximum possible. To construct the Religiosity index, we employ survey items 42, 64, 65, 66a, 68j, and 68k from the survey, which we detail in Appendix 1.

To test H3, we create a Secularism index that measures the respondents' support for secularism. The index ranges from 0 to 1, with "0" corresponding with the least amount of support for secularism and "1" corresponding with the most support. We derive the Secularism index from questions 12a and 14 from the survey, which we detail in Appendix 1.

In order to test H4, we would prefer a direct measure of respondent income. Unfortunately, Pew's *Tolerance and Tension* Survey[77] does not include any question about actual income. Thus, per force, we use a survey item (Question 101) that proxies income in that it measures the respondent's self-perceived economic status. This question asks respondents to rank their self-perceived economic status as being "very bad", "somewhat bad", "somewhat good", and "very good". We recoded this variable to have a range of 0 to 1, with "0" corresponding to low ("very bad") and "1" corresponding to high ("very good"). It turns out that Fair, Hamza, and Heller had empirical concerns about the way in which Pew collected income data in the survey the employed and thus used the same question to study the linkages between economic status on the one hand and support for Islamist violence on the other.

Finally, we derived our dependent variable from Question 88 which asks: "Some people think that the tactic of using arms and violence against civilians in defense of their religion is justified. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence is never justified. How about you? Do you personally feel that the tactic of using arms and violence against civilians in defense of your religion can be often justified, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?" As noted by Fair, Hamza, and Heller, this question is sub-optimal in several respects. First, it conflates the goal of defending one's faith with the tactic of "using arms and violence against civilians." Second, the goal is highly emotive: defending Islam.

Methodology

We use the below basic model specification:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta X_i + \varepsilon$$

Here, i refers to the respondent, α is a constant, ε is an error term and X refers to a vector of respondent-level characteristics, including the study variables as well as the control variables employed by Fair, Hamza and Heller namely: education level, access to internet, and gender. We estimate the models for the four countries separately using ordered logistic regressions. Doing so permits the coefficients on study variables to change for each country. Survey responses listed as "don't know" or "refused" were treated as missing, which further reduces national sample sizes in the regressions. We have placed the descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variables for Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea Bissau and Liberia in Tables 4 through 7 respectively. We provide the regression results in Table 8.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Cameroon

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Range	Percentiles				
					10%	25%	50%	75%	90%
Dep. Var.	237	0.2518	0.3590	0-1	0	0	0	0.6667	1
Hudood	235	0.5951	0.2400	0-1	0.2857	0.4286	0.5714	0.8571	0.8571
Religiosity	232	0.9122	0.1023	0-1	0.75	0.8333	0.9583	1	1
Secularism	236	0.3298	0.2999	0-1	0	0	0.1667	0.5	0.6667
Income	233	0.3577	0.3374	0-1	0	0	0.3333	0.6667	1
Gender	245	0.6735	0.4699	0-1	0	0	1	1	1
Education	244	0.2541	0.3026	0-1	0	0	0	0.5	0.5
Internet	245	0.1429	0.3506	0-1	0	0	0	0	1

Source: In-house calculations of Pew Data

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Ghana

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Range	Percentiles				
					10%	25%	50%	75%	90%
Dep. Var.	320	0.3667	0.3909	0-1	0	0	0.3333	0.6667	1
Hudood	315	0.6340	0.2801	0-1	0.2857	0.4286	0.5714	1	1
Religiosity	317	0.8996	0.1141	0-1	0.7083	0.8333	0.9167	1	1
Secularism	333	0.3293	0.2707	0-1	0	0	0.5	0.5	0.6667
Income	216	0.4475	0.3407	0-1	0	0.3333	0.3333	0.6667	1
Gender	339	0.5811	0.4941	0-1	0	0	1	1	1
Education	338	0.3018	0.3723	0-1	0	0	0	0.5	1
Internet	338	0.1893	0.3924	0-1	0	0	0	0	1

Source: In-house calculations of Pew Data

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for Guinea Bissau

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Range	Percentiles				
					10%	25%	50%	75%	90%
Dep. Var.	353	0.4750	0.3828	0-1	0	0	0.6667	0.6667	1
Hudood	304	0.5832	0.2509	0-1	0.2857	0.4286	0.5714	0.7143	0.8571
Religiosity	311	0.9061	0.1249	0-1	0.6667	0.8333	1	1	1
Secularism	348	0.2356	0.2550	0-1	0	0	0.1667	0.5	0.5
Income	318	0.4109	0.3576	0-1	0	0	0.3333	0.6667	1
Gender	373	0.5147	0.5005	0-1	0	0	1	1	1
Education	362	0.3688	0.3350	0-1	0	0	0.5	0.5	1
Internet	362	0.1685	0.3748	0-1	0	0	0	0	1

Source: In-house calculations of Pew Data

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics for Liberia

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Range	Percentiles				
					10%	25%	50%	75%	90%
Dep. Var.	254	0.3110	0.4084	0-1	0	0	0	0.6667	1
Hudood	234	0.6020	0.2366	0-1	0.2857	0.4286	0.5714	0.8571	1
Religiosity	232	0.9249	0.1071	0-1	0.7917	0.8333	1	1	1
Secularism	258	0.2138	0.2577	0-1	0	0	0.1667	0.5	0.5
Income	258	0.5129	0.3590	0-1	0	0.3333	0.6667	0.6667	1
Gender	279	0.6237	0.4853	0-1	0	0	1	1	1
Education	277	0.2924	0.3395	0-1	0	0	0	0.5	1
Internet	276	0.1812	0.3858	0-1	0	0	0	0	1

Source: In-house calculations of Pew Data

Table 8: Regression results: Support for Suicide Attacks

	Cameroon	Ghana	Guinea Bissau	Liberia
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Hudood	0.143 (0.636)	2.228** (0.704)	1.040 (0.692)	2.382** (0.772)
Religiosity	0.0573 (1.536)	-0.147 (1.612)	-2.515 (1.485)	-0.543 (2.007)
Secularism	-0.0309 (0.498)	1.203 (0.652)	2.332** (0.816)	-1.239 (0.690)
Income	0.803 (0.472)	-1.025 (0.564)	0.673 (0.504)	-0.540 (0.508)
Gender	0.0369 (0.335)	0.494 (0.362)	0.390 (0.348)	-0.501 (0.361)
Education	1.039 (0.570)	0.172 (0.533)	0.535 (0.541)	1.580** (0.567)
Internet	-0.159 (0.476)	-1.545* (0.623)	0.177 (0.487)	-0.544 (0.513)
Constant	-1.256 (1.421)	-1.515 (1.509)	1.547 (1.372)	-0.962 (1.826)
N	203	175	192	176
Pseudo R-Squared	0.033	0.194	0.089	0.093
DEPVAR Mean	0.245	0.352	0.505	0.318
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001				

Results and Discussion

As the coefficients in Table 6 evidence, we generally find support for H1, which hypothesized that respondents who embrace more literalist interpretations of Shari’ah will be more supportive of Islamist violence. For Ghana and Liberia, the Hudood index is statistically significant and positive at the 0.01 confidence level. Cameroon and Guinea Bissau do not exhibit a statistically significant relationship even though the coefficients for both are zero. Because of our small sample size, we cannot rule out the possibility of a false negative (rejecting the

hypothesis when it is true) for Cameroon and Guinea Bissau.

Turning to H2, which hypothesized no correlation between religiosity and support for Islamist violence, we similarly find no relationship consistent with the findings of the study we replicate here. (Again, we cannot rule out the possibility of a false negative.)

With respect to H3, which hypothesized a negative relationship between secularism and support for Islamist violence, we find no statistically significant relationship in Cameroon, Ghana, and Liberia. However, Guinea Bissau exhibits a positive and statistically significant relationship at the 0.01 confidence level. This result for Guinea Bissau diverges from the findings of Fair, Hamza and Heller which found a significant and negative relationship for Bangladesh. (Fair, Littman and Nugent did not include a secularism variable in their model for Pakistan.) With the data limitations on hand, it is impossible in this effort to fully understand this finding. As the afore-noted description of Guinea Bissau details, this country differs from the other three in several key ways. First, it has the largest percentage of Muslims over all. Second, this also means that our sample is somewhat larger than the others. Third, despite the importance of Islam and Christianity, animism still retains considerable salience.

Finally, H4 hypothesized that socio-economic status is not related to support for Islamist violence. Consistent with H4, we found no evidence for such a correlation, with the above-given caveat.

We controlled for education, internet access, and gender. Education was only a significant variable in Liberia, which exhibited a positive relationship between higher levels of education and support for violence. Access to internet and gender were both statistically insignificant in all four countries.

Conclusion and Implications

Public support for Islamist violence in Sub-Saharan and West African countries remains largely neglected by scholarship. Scholars seem to take interest in countries only after terrorism has become a notable challenge and they tend to focus upon Muslim-majority countries. This is unfortunate because there is likely utility in understanding the lineaments of support for violence in countries where such violence is relatively low or new. Equally important, there is an urgent requirement to better understand whether the lineaments of public support among Muslims in Muslim-minority countries differs substantially from those who live in Muslim-majority countries. With the exception of Guinea Bissau, which is 45.1% Muslim, all other countries have a Muslim population of 20% or less.

Unfortunately, there are no other extant datasets that permit the kind of evaluation that we have done here. However, these data are sub-optimal. While Pew's national samples were somewhat large, given the percentage of Muslims in each of these countries, we require analytical samples that are much larger or samples that are drawn exclusively from Muslims. (Note that it made no sense to include non-Muslims in our regressions, because non-Muslims did not answer the questions that form our various indices.) We hope that this research note will galvanize scholars to focus more attention on Muslim-minority countries and those which have not yet experienced Islamist violence. This latter point is important because once violence commences, respondents' views of violence may change. Respondents' views may harden as a result of exposure to violence and become more supportive. Alternatively, support may decline as they themselves experience the costs of violence.

Despite these empirical challenges, our findings provide considerable support for the framework offered by Fair, Littman and Nugent to understand the relationship between support for Islamic law on the one hand and Islamist violence on the other.

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Appendix 1: Creating the Indices for Hudood, Religiosity, and Secularism

Index Name	Description	Survey Questions Used
Hudood Index	This index is based on seven questions and measures individuals' support for Hudood laws. Coded values range from 1 to 0 with the higher values corresponding to support for Hudood laws. Missing values, "Don't know", and "Refused" answers were coded as 0.	<p>Q54: Which comes closest to your view? The Koran is the word of God, OR the Koran is a book written by men and is not the word of God?</p> <p>Q55: Would you say that the Koran is to be taken literally, word for word, OR not everything in the Koran should be taken literally, word for word?</p> <p>Q95a: Do you favor or oppose making shar'ia, or Islamic law, the official law of the land in our country?</p> <p>Q95b: Do you favor or oppose giving Muslim leaders and religious judges the power to decide family and property disputes?</p> <p>Q95c: Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for people who leave the Muslim religion?</p> <p>Q95d: Do you favor or oppose punishments like whippings and cutting off of hands for crimes like theft and robbery?</p> <p>Q95e: Do you favor or oppose stoning people who commit adultery?</p>
Religiosity Index	This index is based on six questions and measured religiosity of individuals. Coded values range from 1 to 0 with the higher values meaning that the individual is more religious. Missing values, "Don't know", and "Refused" answers were coded as 0.	<p>Q42: How important is religion in your life – very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?</p> <p>Q64: People practice their religion in different ways. Outside of attending religious services, do you pray several times a day, once a day, a few times a week, once a week, a few times a month, seldom, or never?</p> <p>Q65: (For those who answered "several times a day" to Q64) Do you pray all five salah every day, or not?</p> <p>Q66a: Please tell me how often you read scripture outside of religious services? Would you say at least once a week, once or twice a month, several times a year, seldom, or never?</p> <p>Q68j: Do you give zakat, that is give a set percentage of your wealth to charity or the mosque?</p> <p>Q68k: Do you fast, that is avoid eating during the daytime, during the holy month of Ramadan?</p>
Secularism Index	This index is based on two questions and measures secularism. Coded values range from 1 to 0 with the higher values corresponding to support for secularism. Missing values, "Don't know", and "Refused" answers were coded as 0.	<p>Q12a: In your opinion, should religious leaders keep out of political matters - or should they express their views on political questions?</p> <p>Q14: How do you feel about this statement: It's important to me that political leaders of our country have strong religious beliefs. Do you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with it?</p>

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Counterterrorism Bookshelf: 14 Books on Terrorism & Counter-Terrorism-Related Subjects

Reviewed by Joshua Sinai

The books reviewed in this column cover various topics, and are listed in alphabetical order, according to the authors' last name.

Shaul Arieli, *All Israel's Borders: One Hundred Years of Struggle Over Independence, Identity, Settlement and Territory* [In Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, Israel: Rooftop Books/ Yediot Aharonot/ Hamad Books, 2018), 442 pp., ILS 128.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-9-6556-4448-7.

Terrorism does not occur in a vacuum, but is the product of numerous underlying causes and factors within conflicts that produce aggrieved communities and individuals that feel a need to redress their grievances through violent means against their adversaries. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one of the underlying causes (with other factors involved, as well) that drives Palestinian terrorist groups and their supporters to engage in violence is the stalemate over the resolution of the West Bank's territorial boundaries, with these territories in control by Israel since the June 1967 War, with terrorism by far-right militant Jewish groups also related to their objective to prevent any compromise over these territories. To understand the role that these territories' boundaries and the conflicting aspirations of their Palestinian and Jewish inhabitants, we are fortunate to have Shaul Arieli's *All Israel's Borders: One Hundred Years of Struggle Over Independence, Identity, Settlement and Territory*, which provides an authoritative, comprehensive and detailed geographical, historical, and political account of the history of the territories that have shaped the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the past century. Following an introductory overview, the book is divided into seven parts: the role of territories and their boundaries in shaping countries and the nature of the dispute over Israel's boundaries; plans to divide the territory of historical Palestine from 1922 to 1947; the nature of the borders between Israel and the Arab states from 1947 to 1967; negotiated settlements and unilateral measures to resolve the conflict from 1967 to 2008; the nature of the security wall/fence established by Israel to cordon off Palestinian areas from 2002 to 2007; proposals to establish a permanent boundary at the Annapolis, Maryland summit in 2008; and a summary of unfinished processes to resolve the territorial dispute between the Israelis and the Palestinians and how they relate to other conflicts around the world. The epilogue presents the author's insightful and balanced proposal for resolving the stalemate over the West Bank's future. This is based on an examination of three approaches: demographic and security, political, and socio-economic, with each used as a metric to measure the effectiveness of various contending plans, ranging from the extremist option of an Israeli annexation of the West Bank or its parts, to a territorial compromise that would create two states that are capable of living side-by-side in a peaceful and secure manner. The epilogue also presents the author's compilation of statistical information about the demographic and socio-economic composition of the West Bank's inhabitants (e.g., as of 2016, 623,000 Jews versus 2,900,000 Palestinians, with the number of Jews decreasing to some 400,000 if the East Jerusalem region is excluded) (p. 324). The author concludes that for long-term peace, the Israelis and Palestinians need to agree on the boundaries of a new border that would be sufficiently flexible to provide a majority status for both sides in their respective territories. Otherwise, he cautions, the cycle of perpetual violence and instability will continue to characterize the lives of the neighboring Israelis and Palestinians. The book includes numerous black and white and color maps that display the evolving nature of historical Palestine, the Israeli State, and the West Bank, illustrating the text. Hopefully this important book will be translated into English so that a larger audience will benefit from its insights on the role of the territories in shaping the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the measures required to resolve this protracted conflict. The author, a retired Colonel in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), was extensively involved as a military advisor to various Israeli government peace initiatives, and is considered one of the country's leading experts on the West Bank.

Dave Dilegge, Robert J. Bunker, John P. Sullivan, and Alma Keshavarz (Eds.), *Blood and Concrete: 21st Century Conflict in Urban Centers and Megacities* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2019), 768 pp., US \$ 38.99 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-9845-7375-9.

The more than 50 chapters written by some 80 authors in this comprehensive *Small Wars Journal* anthology examine a significant threat: the increasing prevalence of urban centers as primary areas of military operations, surpassing rural areas in conflict regions around the world. As pointed out by David Kilcullen in his excellent preface, since it is impossible to mention all the volume's contributors, some of the issues raised by their chapters include the challenges for militaries in engaging in urban centers' physical and "cyber" terrains, and the employment of new technologies, such as drones, to conduct warfare against insurgent adversaries in such environments. Another challenge is presented by General Charles Krulak, a former Marine Corps Commandant, who is cited in John Spencer's foreword as stating that the future of urban warfare will consist of a "three-block war" where military forces "are simultaneously required to conduct humanitarian assistance on one block, peace-keeping on the other, and traditional warfighting the next over" (p. xli). In their introduction, the editors insightfully point out that "Differentiating between the tactical, operational, and strategic concerns accompanying each of these distinct (and sometimes converging) conurbations is essential to understanding and preparing for urban operations" (p. xlix). In the postscript, Margarita Konaev makes the important point that one of the reasons for the prevalence of urban warfare is that it is increasingly difficult for insurgents to operate in rural environments because "emerging technologies, and advances in surveillance techniques and aerial detection capabilities have also made the classic rural guerilla warfare settings of dense jungles and remote mountain hideouts far less safe for violent non-state groups. In cities, however, these militants can more easily blend into the local civilian population and use the city's complex and dense terrain for cover and concealment" (p. 648). Ms. Konaev's conclusion well sums up the volume's important contribution to the literature on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency: "as the world's urban population continues to grow, the future of global security will be determined by what happens in cities" (p. 651).

Nicholas Fotion, Boris Kashnikov, and Joanne K. Lekea, *Terrorism: The New World Disorder* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2007), 208 pp., US \$ 72.00 [Hardcover], US \$ 13.77 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-8264-9258-6.

This book is written by three philosophers who specialize in the ethics of conflict. They examine topics such as how terrorism is defined; the nature of suicide terrorism; significant past terrorist campaigns (such as anarchism in Russia, the Provisional Irish Republican Army, and terrorism in Greece); current terrorist conflicts (such as the LTTE in Sri Lanka, terrorism in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, terrorism in Chechnya, and al Qaida-type terrorism); the political and military causes of terrorism, including state terrorism; and the profiles of various types of terrorists, including what the authors refer to as "state terrorists" and "martyr terrorists." To examine future trends in terrorism, the authors apply yardstick factors to measure the capability of terrorist groups, such as persistence, motivation, human and financial resources, organization and training, planning, and execution of operations. These yardstick factors from the terrorists' capabilities are then applied against the capabilities of their "victims," namely the counterterrorist forces arrayed against them, leading the authors to conclude that while "terrorists have the motivation and the means to continue," their state adversaries "have the means, at best, to slow terrorism down or stop it in the long-run. For a variety of reasons, then, we, the victims of terrorism, will have to get used to living with the new world disorder" (p. 119). The next two chapters examine the arguments over the legitimacy of terrorism, in terms of for (e.g., as a just cause or last resort) and against (e.g., that terrorists lack the right to initiate aggression against innocent victims). In the concluding chapter on "Dealing With Terrorism," the authors present a series of recommendations, some of them military in nature (e.g., identifying the enemy and setting goals, good intelligence, alienating the terrorists from their constituency, and protecting the civilian population), others non-military in nature (e.g., cooperation with allies and provision of employment). The authors conclude that the spread of media of communications and military technology are ensuring that terrorism will persist "for the foreseeable future...in a new world disorder" (p. 166). The three authors are professors of philosophy at universities in the United States, Russia, and Greece.

Michael Fredholm, *Transnational Organized Crime and Jihadist Terrorism: Russian-Speaking Networks in Western Europe* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 238 pp., US \$ 136.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-1387-4994-8.

This is an extensively researched examination of the threats presented by the convergence of transnational organized crime and jihadist terrorism as embodied by the illicit activities by Caucasus- and Central Asian-based Russian-speaking social networks that operate within their Western European diasporas. As a Swedish academic, the author also focuses on their illicit activities in Sweden, using court cases as empirical evidence to illuminate the magnitude of the threat they pose to the country. To examine these issues, the book's chapters cover topics such as the convergence of the activities of criminal and terrorist groups; the origins of Central Asian and Caucasian organized crime within post-Soviet territories; the origins and evolution of Russian-speaking jihadist terrorism, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Islamic Jihad Union, and their proselytizing and recruitment activities in Western Europe; the role played by organized crime in the Chechen secessionist movement which transformed into the Caucasus Emirate jihadist group; the online activities of these groups, with a focus on the Kavkaz center, a grouping that has their websites based on servers in several Western countries; and their illicit activities in Sweden. A key finding of this study is that there are more criminal than terrorist members in these networks in Western Europe. With regard to counterterrorism and policing strategies, the author recommends a focus "on the need for intelligence sharing and the use of all available legislative tools" and the importance of "prosecuting non-terrorist crime [as – JS] a means to take action that will reduce the capability of a terrorist group, by denying it resources" (p. 220). A final finding is that "the case studies of Russian-speaking transnational organized crime and jihadist terrorism networks bring implications for other diaspora-based social networks in this period of large-scale migration" (p. 220). The author is Professor and Head of Research and Development at IRI, the Swedish Law and Informatics Research Institute in Stockholm.

Phil Gurski, *An End to the War on Terrorism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 192 pp., US \$ 120.00 [Hardcover], US \$ 41.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-7866-0954-0.

Written by a retired veteran counterterrorism analyst in the Canadian intelligence service, this well-informed and comprehensive book's seven chapters discuss significant issues in countering terrorism. These include assessing whether waging "war" as the primary focus of counterterrorism is an appropriate response to the threats posed by terrorism, especially in the form of Special Forces, airstrikes, drones, and targeted killings; the role of intelligence in counterterrorism, particularly in terms of human sources and intercepts, the role of law enforcement in counterterrorism, including the issue of treating terrorism as a type of crime. The volume also discusses the effectiveness of government anti-terrorism laws, such as the United States' Patriot Act and Canada's Anti-Terrorism Act. Other chapters assess the effectiveness of government programs such as the United Kingdom's CONTEST and Prevent programs, as well as similar programs in other countries, such as France. Also discussed are outreach programs, including community engagement by academics, religious leaders, and technology companies in addressing the challenges of domestic terrorism and countering violent extremism. Furthermore Phil Gurski assesses the effectiveness of de-radicalization programs around the world and offers suggestions on how to formulate effective counter-extremist narrative messaging. Wider questions are also addressed, including whether the religion of Islam is responsible for Islamist extremism and, finally, what are the components for effectively countering and terminating terrorism. This book is recommended as a concise general textbook.

John Horgan, *Divided We Stand: The Strategy and Psychology of Ireland's Dissident Terrorists* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 224 pp., US \$ 38.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-1997-7285-8.

This is an empirically-based and conceptually innovative account of the emergence and persistence (at least in the near-term) of a "new breed" of dissident Irish Republican terrorists, whom the author refers to as the

“terrorists’ *terrorists*,” and “for whom there will never be a peace process, never a negotiated settlement, and who will never be satisfied by politics or appeased by mainstream opinion” (p. xi). As described by the author, these dissident terrorists span groups such as the *Continuity IRA*, the *Real IRA*, *Oglaigh na hEireann*, RIRA, and *the IRA*, as well as other “microgroups” that range in size and ambition. As explained by the author, the book examines questions, such as “Who are the dissidents? What do they want? What are their strategic, psychological, and ideological driving forces? How do they organize and execute their activity? Where are they recruiting? What factors affect the growth and maintenance of dissident activity? And how can we help in preventing violent dissident Republicanism?” (p. xi). To examine these issues, the author draws on his research team’s open source-based database on their activities and personnel over an historical period that is divided into three waves of dissident activity: wave 1 (1994-1998), wave 2 (1998-2007), and wave 3 (2007 to the present – in this case, the period prior to the book’s publication in 2013). These issues are discussed in the book’s fourth, fifth and sixth chapters. The seventh chapter presents the author’s short-term strategy for responding to the threat posed by these dissident groups. He recommends undermining their legitimacy and credibility through counter-narratives, reducing the attractiveness of involvement in their activities, employing police and intelligence operations against them, and developing “a meaningful political strategy to engage” them (p. 159). The author concludes by observing that these dissident groups’ lack of effective strategies and continued divisions among themselves mark them “doomed to failure” in the long term (p. 178). This book is a significant contribution to the literature on the dissident terrorist factions that split from their more “mainstream” terrorist organizations whom they regard as insufficiently committed to their extremist causes. The author is Professor of Global Studies and Psychology at Georgia State University, Atlanta.

Richard Jackson (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Critical Terrorism Studies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 312 pp., US \$ 221.00 [Hardcover], US \$ 46.71 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-1386-0114-7.

This is the paperback edition of the hardcover edition that was originally published in 2016, making its lower price more accessible to the reader. For this reviewer’s assessment of the 2016 volume, see <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/519/html>.

Richard Jackson and Daniela Pisoiu (Eds.), *Contemporary Debates on Terrorism* [Second Edition], (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 292 pp., US \$ 136.00 [Hardcover], US \$ 40.76 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-1389-3136-7.

In this edited volume’s second edition, a set of 16 significant questions in terrorism and counterterrorism are examined by contrasting viewpoints. Following the editors’ introductory overview, the volume is divided into five parts. In Part I, “The Definition and Study of Terrorism,” two chapters examine whether terrorism is “still a useful analytic term, or should it be abandoned,” and “Is Critical Terrorism Studies a useful approach to the study of terrorism?” In Part II, “Categories of Terrorism,” two chapters debate the thesis of whether a ‘new terrorism’ has emerged and whether states can “be terrorists”. In Part III, “The Terrorism Threat,” five chapters debate questions such as whether terrorism poses a serious threat to international and national security, whether serious threats are posed by WMD terrorism, cyberterrorism, and al Qaida, and whether returning foreign fighters in conflicts such as the one in Syria are likely to become “future terrorists” in their former countries. In Part IV, “The Causes of Terrorism,” two chapters debate whether terrorism results from poverty and exclusion and whether religious extremism is a cause of terrorism. In Part V, “Dealing With Terrorism,” five chapters debate questions such as: are the resorts to state “suppression,” military force and mass surveillance effective in counterterrorism?, are drones a useful instrument, are counter-radicalization approaches effective in counterterrorism, and have global efforts to counter terrorism since 9/11 been effective? As a textbook, each chapter begins with an introduction and ends with a conclusion, discussion questions, and suggestions for further readings. This volume is recommended as a supplementary textbook for courses on terrorism and counterterrorism. Richard Jackson is Professor of Peace Studies and Director of the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Otago, New Zealand. Daniela Pisoiu is a Senior Re-

searcher at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (OIIP), Vienna, Austria.

Elli Lieberman (Ed.) *Detering Terrorism: A Model for Strategic Deterrence* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 332 pp., US \$ 131.75 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-1382-4060-5.

The contributors to this conceptually innovative volume examine the issue of how governments can effectively deter their non-state terrorist adversaries. One of their theses is that effective deterrence is dependent on governments focusing on the longitudinal dynamics of the deterrence process over time, a process that also addresses the “grand strategies” of the non-state adversary actors against them. Another thesis is that the strategy of terrorist groups seeks to achieve a ‘war of attrition’ against their more powerful state adversaries. To counter it, governments need to employ offensive campaigns to undermine them in order to achieve deterrence success. This conceptual framework is applied by the volume’s contributors to analyze the effectiveness of governmental deterrence campaigns over time against the terrorist threats posed by groups such as Hizballah, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Hamas, the Irish Republican Army, Chechen terrorists, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), and al Qaida, the Taliban, and ISIS. In the concluding chapter, the volume editor’s last two sentences are confusing, as he writes that “Finally, learning and the development of awareness by leaders about how deterrence works, developing a deterrence model in mind, could lead to quicker resolution of ongoing antiterrorism campaign. Deterrence, thus, could be a useful and less costly tool of statecraft” (p. 319). First, whereas ‘counterterrorism,’ which connotes an offensive response, is used (correctly) throughout the volume, it is jarring for ‘antiterrorism,’ which implies a defensive posture, to be so precipitously injected into the argument when the focus remains on employing counterterrorism in deterrence to undermine the terrorist adversary’s warfare. Also, the author should better explain why ‘effective’ deterrence “could be a useful and less costly tool of statecraft” than other deterrence measures. There are, after all, degrees of effectiveness in deterrence, ranging from less to more effective implementations. Aside from such definitional problems, the volume is an important contribution to the literature on deterrence in counterterrorism.

Ajit Maan and Paul Cobaugh, *Introduction to Narrative Warfare: A Primer and Study Guide* (Washington, DC: Narrative Strategies, LLC, 2018), 62 pp., US \$ 25.99 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-7212-2141-7.

This short, yet highly useful book’s objective is to provide a baseline understanding of the nature of insurgent or state adversary narratives and the counter-narratives that are required to achieve desirable changes in influencing the opponent’s behavior in response. To win “Narrative Warfare,” the authors define the nature of narratives (and their distinction from other types of stories), including their offensive and defensive forms, and the four components of strategic narratives: meaning, identity, content, and structure (MICS). In Information Warfare (IW), it is essential to know how to “weaponize” narratives against one’s adversaries, which the authors explain involves attacking “the identities of the target audience and cause a disorientation in the way people and cultures understand and give meaning to events” (p. 23). To dominate the narrative space, the authors recommend operationalizing it through “a complete package of both offensive and defensive narratives coordinated to both degrade adversarial audiences and to build resilience within friendly audiences” (p. 34). In an important insight to the literature on narratives and counter-narratives, which is highly relevant to the components of effective counterterrorism, the authors conclude that “Like kinetic maneuver strategy, you must control the battlefield and force your adversary to respond, not the other way around. There is a place for counter-narrative, but its place is as a supporting effort to an overall narrative strategy that places a compelling offensive narrative at the core of efforts” (p. 49). As a useful resource for courses and workshops on these issues, the book includes a series of study questions to accompany the six chapters. Ajit Maan is the Founder and CEO of Narrative Strategies, LLC, and Paul Cobaugh, a retired U.S. Army officer in Special Operations, is the firm’s Vice President.

Wendy Pearlman and Boaz Atzili, *Triadic Coercion: Israel's Targeting of States That Host Nonstate Actors* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2018), 384 pp., US \$ 65.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-2311-7184-7.

With states being challenged by non-state (or sub-state) terrorist groups that protect themselves from retaliation by finding geographical sanctuary in other states that either support or tolerate their presence, or are failed states that are unable to exercise control over their own territories, the question is how can threatened states fight them directly, including coercing their host states to put a stop to such groups? In this conceptually interesting book, the authors propose the concept of a strategy of “triadic coercion” to analyze, as they write, “wherein one state uses military threats and/or punishments against another state to deter it from aiding or abetting attacks by nonstate actors from within its territory or to compel it to stop such violence” (p. 1). To examine the components of deterrence that can succeed in overcoming such complications in countering terrorist groups that exploit their sanctuary in host countries, the authors’ investigate two main questions: “the conditions under which triadic coercion is likely to succeed” and “If triadic coercion is only effective against strong regime, why do states frequently employ it against weak ones?” (pp. 2-3). This conceptual framework is applied to examining the case of Israel’s responses to the threats presented by Palestinian terrorist groups operating from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, territory controlled by the Palestinian Authority (since 1993), and Hizballah operating in and from Lebanon. Other cases that are briefly discussed, include Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani networks, as well as its hosting of Lashka e-Taiba (LeT) and Kashmiri groups that target India; Iraq, Syria, and Iran that tolerate the presence of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party that threatens Turkey, and others. Among the authors’ conclusions are the findings that “triadic coercion is likely to succeed when targeted against a host state that possesses a regime that is strong” (p. 243), and that “Effective triadic coercion is not a substitute for political solutions that safeguard individual and collective rights” (p. 254) because “strictly military solutions are seldom sufficient against complex problems involving national conflicts over sovereignty and territory” (p. 254). This book is an important contribution to the literature on counterterrorism. Wendy Pearlman is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, and Boaz Atzili is Associate Professor and Director of the Doctoral Studies Program at the School of International Service at American University, Washington, DC.

Eli Saslow, *Rising Out of Hatred: The Awakening of a Former White Nationalist* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2018), 304 pp., US \$ 26.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-3855-4285-9.

This is a fascinating account by a Washington Post journalist of the de-radicalization from extremism process underwent by Derek Black who grew up in the epicenter of a leading white-supremacist family in West Palm Beach, Florida. His father founded Stormfront, a notorious racist community on the Internet, with his godfather, David Duke, being a KKK Grand Wizard. At age 19, he had his own extremist radio show, and was expected to follow in his father’s path as a white supremacist leader. However, following his homeschooling, he enrolled at New College of Florida, where he underwent a de-radicalization process and disavowed his previously extremist beliefs. With the author’s unique access to Derek Black, his extremist family, and their associates, this account is especially noteworthy for explaining how such ‘Alt Right’ movements have become prominent in a number of countries around the world and the possibility that some of its members might eventually decide to reject their extremist messages. In a revealing anecdote, the author quotes a conversation between Derek and his father: “‘Everything you advocated for is finally beginning to catch on,’ Don said. ‘Don’t you see that?’ ‘Of course,’ Derek said, because it was the one point on which they still agreed. ‘We’re coming up to the critical moment. That’s why I’m trying to warn people’” (p. 283).

Andrew Silke (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 668 pp., US \$ 208.25 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-1388-1908-5.

This is a comprehensive overview of findings by leading scholars of latest trends in research on terrorism

and counterterrorism around the world. Following the editor's introductory overview on the study of terrorism and counterterrorism, the volume's next 54 chapters are divided into two parts, with each part further divided into case studies. Part I: "Terrorism," covers general topics such as defining terrorism; the history of terrorism; terrorism's root causes; terrorism by states; terrorism by nationalist, separatist, left-wing and right wing groups; terrorism by lone actors; how terrorists are radicalized and their psychological make-up; terrorism in social media; how terrorist groups are organized; the effectiveness of terrorist warfare; the economic impact of terrorism; terrorism and criminality, including their financing; the phenomenon of foreign fighters who join terrorist conflicts in foreign lands; suicide terrorism; the tactic of hostage-taking; the potential use of weapons of mass destruction; and cyber terrorism. The second part presents case studies on significant terrorist groups, such as al Qaida, Boko Haram, Hamas, Hizballah, Islamic State (IS), the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and the German Red Army Faction (RAF). Part II: "Counterterrorism," covers general topics in conceptualizing counterterrorism; the roles of policing, military, and intelligence services in counterterrorism, including deterrence, imprisonment, and practice of targeted killings in counterterrorism; countering terrorist fundraising and finances; promoting the de-radicalization and disengagement of individuals from terrorism; the role of public support in counterterrorism; and the place of ethics and human rights in counterterrorism. These general topics are covered in case studies on counterterrorism in Argentina, Canada, China, France, Great Britain, India, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Spain, Russia, and two chapters on United States counterterrorism pre-9/11 and, by this reviewer, one on post-9/11. The volume's editor, Andrew Silke, is Professor of Terrorism Risk and Resilience at Cranfield University, England.

Leroy Thompson, *The Counterterrorist Manual: A Practical Guide to Elite International Units* (London, England, UK: Frontline Books/An Imprint of Pen & Sword Books Limited, 2009), 256 pp., US \$ 39.99 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-8483-2514-2.

In this highly informative practical handbook, Leroy Thompson, a renowned military expert, discusses how counter-terrorist units have evolved globally, how their members are selected, their training (such as in survival, evasion, resistance, and escape – SERE), how such units are organized, their specialized weapons and equipment, their tactics (including surveillance techniques and intelligence gathering), and how they prepare for high-risk missions, including countering the potential use of weapons of mass destruction. Also discussed is how they differ from regular military and police units. Prominent counterterrorist units around the world are also highlighted. Famous incidents involving responses by Special Forces are also discussed, including the 1976 Entebbe Airport rescue, the 1980 Iranian Embassy siege in London, the 2004 Beslan school hostage taking attack, and the 2009 response to simultaneous attacks by the LeT in Mumbai, India. The text is illustrated by numerous color photos.

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N.B. The views expressed in the Counterterrorism Bookshelf are the personal views of the Book Reviews Editor and do not necessarily reflect those of other members of the Editorial Team of Perspectives on Terrorism.

Book Reviews

Henry Prunckun and Troy Whitford, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: A Comprehensive Introduction to Actors and Actions* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2019), 269 pp., US \$ 85.00 [Hardcover], US \$ 35.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-6263-7760-8.

Reviewed by Joshua Sinai

The threat of terrorism is a paramount national security concern to governments and their citizens worldwide. Innumerable books are published on the nature of terrorism and the components of counterterrorism to defeat the terrorist threat. Henry Prunckun's and Troy Whitford's "Terrorism and Counterterrorism: A Comprehensive Introduction to Actors and Actions" stands out as is an exemplary resource for understanding these issues. Mr. Prunckun is a former senior level counterterrorism analyst in the Australian government. He is a widely published author, and a research criminologist in policing and security studies at Charles Stuart University, where Mr. Whitford is a lecturer.

This easy-to-follow textbook covers many relevant topics involved in analyzing the nature of the terrorist threat. This includes defining terrorism from the perspective of democratic governments: a violent political act by a group or by lone actors in furtherance of extremist objectives. Such political violence is criminal because it violates a democracy's penal laws, and is directed "against a government (via innocent victims) as opposed to aggression that emanates from a [foreign] state's military" (p. 5).

The authors explain how the resort to terrorism can be traced to Sun Tzu's doctrine of asymmetric warfare, in which the weaker side exploits vulnerabilities of its more powerful adversary government — that if you "kill one, [you] frighten ten thousand" through the publicity anxiety that accompanies such incidents when widely published. Terrorists' strategic objectives aim to disrupt the targeted government's activities to such an extent that it appears incapable of defending its citizenry, and thereby provoking it to overreact by implementing stern coercive response measures that might end up eroding a society's democratic nature and personal freedoms. This can inadvertently legitimize the insurgent groups' portrayal of an "unreasonable" government response.

Regarding terrorism's root causes, the authors observe that political violence is often a response to features of the larger context in which terrorists operate as they wrongly believe that only violence can redress their grievances. Such conflicts are difficult to resolve through negotiations because "The philosophy of terrorism does not entertain the possibility of coexistence between the group and society. Rather it seeks to destroy society" (p. 16). Nevertheless, the authors point out, there are a few instances in which "this absolutist perspective can change over time" (p. 16). One of these rare instances was the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) moderation, through Sinn Fein, its political wing, which enabled it to reach a peace agreement with the British government, thereby ending Northern Ireland's decades' old conflict.

Also covered in this volume are issues such as how radicalization into violent extremism takes place, and the reasons terrorists use to justify their resort to politically-motivated violence. The authors also explain how terrorists finance their operations (including by cooperating with criminal groups to raise funds). They point to the increasing lethality of terrorist warfare in terms of weaponry used (including the worst case scenario of weapons of mass destruction) and terrorists' rationale for targeting high-value human and physical targets, such as 9/11's simultaneous aircrafts' destruction of the World Trade Towers, which caused a catastrophic loss of life and major physical damage. Finally, the important topic of media coverage of terrorism is discussed. Here the authors are proposing guidelines for objectively covering terrorist incidents during the initial "fog of war." Regarding the components of effective counterterrorism, the authors discuss the role of intelligence agencies in tracking down terrorists, using both open source information and covert means — one of the book's major contributions — and the roles of law enforcement and the military in countering terrorists, whether domestically or overseas.

Another crucial component of counterterrorism in preventing future terrorist attacks are various de-radicalization programs established around the world to promote the disengagement of local terrorists from violence. Here the, the authors' develop an innovative formula for what is required to win the "war on terror." As part of this formula, the authors recommend applying a risk management methodology — which is usually absent from the academic study of counterterrorism. This consists of five steps: identifying the threat, gauging its likelihood, exploring one's own vulnerabilities, assessing the consequences of an attack, and constructing a prevention, preparation, response, and recovery (PPRR) emergency plan to prepare a response . With these steps providing an overriding framework for counterterrorism, the authors conclude that while the underlying causes that give rise to terrorism's grievances need to be understood and addressed, "Simultaneously, we must also take a tougher stance" (pp. 192-209).

Regarding future trends, the authors highlight the continuously evolving nature of terrorist warfare. When it comes to cyber-terrorism (which is still in a nascent form) terrorists might employ cyber weapons to gain remote access to their adversaries' SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) systems to bring down critical parts of a nation's infrastructure, such as a major electricity-generating power plants or transportation networks. Fortunately, such attacks have not yet materialized globally.

It is such practice-based insights that make this book a valuable guide for understanding the components involved in analyzing terrorist threats and the measures required for effective responses.

N.B.:This is a revised and expanded version of a review that initially appeared in The Washington Times. It is reprinted here by permission.

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Robin Maria Valeri and Kevin Borgeson (Eds.), *Terrorism in America* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 244 pp., US \$ 164.00 [Hardcover], US \$ 43.96 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-1382-0209-2.

Reviewed by Joshua Sinai

Several mass casualty attacks have occurred in the United States in recent years, perpetrated by ideologically motivated extremist domestic terrorists - incidents like the shooting rampages by ISIS adherent Omar Mateen at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida, on June 12, 2016 (49 killed, 53 wounded), or the massacre by the virulent white nationalist and anti-Semitic Robert Bowers of congregants at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on Oct. 27, 2018 (11 killed and 6 wounded). In another type of domestic terrorist attack, Cesar Sayoc was arrested in Plantation, Florida, on Oct. 26, 2018, for allegedly having mailed more than a dozen homemade improvised explosive parcel bombs to his liberal adversaries, including the CNN television network (no casualties).

What are the factors that motivate such diverse ideologically extremist US-based terrorists to carry out their violent attacks? Are they part of organized terrorist groups or lone actors that identify with, but are not members of, such groups? What future trends can we expect when it comes to domestic terrorist threats in terms of their perpetrators and the type of warfare they seek to wage and what are effective response measures to defeat them?

These are some of the questions addressed in "*Terrorism in America*." Although the volume under review is an academic book with plenty of theories by its eight contributors, its coverage of this subject from a criminological perspective is so insightful and detailed that it will also appeal to a broader audience that seeks to understand the magnitude of domestic terrorist threats facing America.

What is domestic terrorism? In the introductory chapter, the editors cite the FBI's definition as "Americans attacking Americans based on U.S.-based extremist ideologies" (p. 38) and "not directed by a foreign agent" (p. 38). This definition can be challenged as overly restrictive because many domestic lone actor terrorists are, in fact, influenced by extremist *foreign* ideologies, such as jihadism, and follow foreign-based groups' calls to act as more or less "independent franchisees" in order to carry out terrorist attacks.

The domestic terrorist groups discussed in this volume are primarily far-right-wing, far-left-wing and Islamist. The far-right-wing groups include white nationalists, neo-Nazis, Christian Identity groups, the Sovereign Citizens Movement and others. What is especially interesting about the psychological characteristics of the perpetrators, is, according to Kevin Borgeson's chapter on "Right-Wing Domestic Terrorism," that many of the perpetrators are lone actors who are frustrated with their personal and professional lives, are not married, and lack social valves to let off steam and constrain them from turning to extremist groups for guidance in an effort to understand why the world and their lives are "a mess." Joining such extremist groups, "increases their self-worth, allowing them to finally feel accepted and successful at something" (p. 31).

Paradoxically, however, many of the perpetrators of such attacks end up even failing in getting along with other extremists, due to their "social ineptitude" and other psychological factors, and become lone actor attackers on their own initiative. This was the case with Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, the perpetrators of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, on April 19, 1995 (168 persons killed, more than 680 others wounded), who, according to Joel A. Capellan's chapter on "Killing Alone: Can the Work Performance Literature Help Us Solve the Enigma of Lone Wolf Terrorism?," "were ostracized by the Michigan Militia because they advocated for violence" (p. 179).

The same psychological characteristics by susceptible individuals of the need to belong to such social groups also characterize many of those who become far-left-wing domestic terrorists; they join anarchist groups or become Animal/Earth Liberationists, Black Liberationists members or find similar groups.

In terms of their target selection, Michael Loadenthal, the author of the chapter on "Leftist Political Violence," asserts that, unlike far-right-wing terrorists who "frequently deployed lethal violence more indiscriminately and with less regard for civilian casualties," leftist violence "tends to be both symbolic and targeting inanimate

property, not humans” (p. 41) – a view with which this reviewer happens to disagree. Contrary to Loadenthal’s thesis, there are numerous examples of leftist violence causing fatalities, such as Ted Kaczynski (known as the “Unabomber”) whose mail parcel bombing campaign between 1978 and 1995 deliberately killed or wounded more than two dozen people. The same is true for the contemporary Black Lives movement, since some of the lone actors that associate themselves with it deliberately target law enforcement officers for assassination.

Islamist domestic terrorists, Christopher J. Wright explains in his chapter on “Islamist Terror in America,” are motivated by several factors, such as their belief that sharia (Islamic law) ought to be the law of the land for everybody and that the Muslim *ummah* (global Islamic nation) is being threatened by American military interventions in Muslim-majority countries for which, in their view, the United States deserves to be punished. This chapter also provides excellent case studies on domestic Islamist terrorists, including on the phenomenon of American foreign fighters who have joined local counterparts in conflict zones such as Syria.

Interestingly, like the far-left-wing terrorists who had targeted U.S. military facilities in the 1960s, Islamist terrorists (many of whom are characterized by personal psychological “issues” that turn them into lone actors) also target the U.S. military, such as in Maj. Nidal Hassan’s shooting rampage at Ft. Hood, Texas, on Nov. 5, 2009, killing 13 military personnel and wounding 32 others.

As to future trends in domestic terrorism, in the concluding chapter Robin Maria Valeri correctly observes that the availability of cyberspace’s telecommunications networks and computer systems make it possible for terrorists to “easily and inexpensively promote, recruit, and take credit for terrorist activities at a global level,” as well as to “commit acts of terrorism remotely” (p. 231).

To counter domestic terrorism, Ms. Valeri recommends a community-level based approach that could provide would-be terrorists with a sense of ‘belonging, meaning, and purpose in their lives - “because the best way to stop terrorism is by preventing its causes” (p. 235).

N.B. This is a revised version of a review that initially appeared in The Washington Times. It is reprinted here by permission.

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Bibliography: Humanitarian Intervention, Responsibility to Protect, Peacekeeping

Compiled and Selected by Judith Tinnes

[Bibliographic Series of Perspectives on Terrorism – BSPT-JT-2019-1]

Abstract

This bibliography contains journal articles, book chapters, books, edited volumes, theses, grey literature, bibliographies and other resources on the thematic complex of humanitarian intervention, Responsibility to Protect (R2P), and peacekeeping. While focusing on recent literature, the bibliography is not restricted to a particular time period and covers publications up to December 2018. The literature has been retrieved by manually browsing through more than 200 sources in relevant fields of social science studies. Additionally, full-text and reference retrieval systems have been employed to broaden the search.

Keywords: bibliography, resources, literature, humanitarian intervention, Responsibility to Protect, R2P, peacekeeping

NB: All websites were last visited on 05.01.2019. - See also Note for the Reader at the end of this literature list.

Introductory Note from the Editor

A bibliography on humanitarian intervention, responsibility to protect and peacekeeping might, at first sight, look out of place in a terrorism journal. However, forty years ago, before (counter-)terrorism studies and (low-intensity) conflict studies went separate ways, this would not have looked strange. In both cases, the protection of innocent civilians, either at home or abroad, is a matter of concern. With terrorist campaigns often preceding, accompanying and following insurgencies, popular resistance and their repression in and outside zones of open armed conflicts, responses to a broader spectrum of militancy, violence and oppression are clearly also relevant for the research community engaged in terrorism studies. In this sense, it is fruitful to look also at the literature on international peacekeeping operations and humanitarian interventions to discover common grounds regarding the responsibility to protect unarmed civilians.

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Note

Whenever retrievable, URLs for freely available versions of subscription-based publications have been provided. Thanks to the Open Access movement, self-archiving of publications in institutional repositories or on author homepages for free public use (so-called Green Open Access) has become more common. Please note, that the content of Green Open Access documents is not necessarily identical to the officially published versions (e.g., in case of pre-prints); it might therefore not have passed through all editorial stages publishers employ to ensure quality control (peer review, copy and layout editing etc.). In some cases, articles may only be cited after getting consent by the author(s).

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Bibliography: Genocide (since 1980) Part 2

Compiled and selected by Judith Tinnes

[Bibliographic Series of Perspectives on Terrorism – BSPT-JT-2019-2]

Abstract

This bibliography contains journal articles, book chapters, books, edited volumes, theses, grey literature, bibliographies and other resources on genocide that has taken place between 1980 and the present. While focusing on recent literature, the bibliography is not restricted to a particular time period and covers publications up to December 2018. The literature has been retrieved by manually browsing through more than 200 sources in relevant fields of social science studies. Additionally, full-text and reference retrieval systems have been employed to broaden the search.

Keywords: bibliography, resources, literature, genocide, one-sided violence, mass killing, state killing, ethnic cleansing, Rwanda, Burundi, Yugoslavia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Guatemala, Iraq, Yazidis, ISIS, Central African Republic, Sudan

NB: All websites were last visited on 05.01.2019. This subject bibliography is the second part of a two-part bibliography ([Part 1](#) was published in Issue 9[2]) of *Perspectives on Terrorism*). To avoid duplication, this compilation only includes literature not contained in Part 1. However, meta-resources, such as bibliographies, were included in both parts. - See also Note for the Reader at the end of this literature list.

Introductory Note by the Editor

A bibliography on genocide in a terrorism journal might, at first sight, look out of place. However, both terrorism and genocide are extreme forms of political violence and both involve the one-sided killing of unarmed civilians. In fact, it is amazing that scholars who study terrorism have generally neglected to see this parallel with genocide. Recently, the terrorist group ISIS (Daesh) has attempted genocide against the Yazidis, an ethno-religious minority in Iraq. It is therefore useful at this time to provide a snapshot of the literature on genocide for the community of terrorism scholars.

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Note

Whenever retrievable, URLs for freely available versions of subscription-based publications have been provided. Thanks to the Open Access movement, self-archiving of publications in institutional repositories or on author homepages for free public use (so-called Green Open Access) has become more common. Please note, that the content of Green Open Access documents is not necessarily identical to the officially published versions (e.g., in case of pre-prints); it might therefore not have passed through all editorial stages publishers employ to ensure quality control (peer review, copy and layout editing etc.). In some cases, articles may only be cited after getting consent by the author(s).

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475 Academic Theses (Ph.D. and MA) on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and Terrorism Prevention

(written in Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Norwegian, and Spanish)

Compiled and selected by Ryan Scrivens

Abstract

This bibliography contains doctoral dissertations (Ph.D.) and Master (MA) Theses on issues relating to countering violent extremism, preventing violent extremism, and terrorism prevention. Titles were retrieved manually by browsing the Open Access Theses and Dissertations (OATD) database, using the broad search term 'terrorism', 'terrorisme', 'terrorismo', and 'Terrorismus', as well as the narrow search term 'countering violent extremism', 'preventing violent extremism', and 'counterterrorism'. More than 8,900 entries were evaluated, of which 475 were ultimately selected for this list. All theses are open source. However, readers should observe possible copyright restrictions. The title entries are 'clickable', allowing access to full texts.

Keywords: bibliography, theses, terrorism, extremism, prevention, countering violent extremism

Bibliographic entries are divided into two thematic sections:

1. Programs, Strategies, Tactics, and Operations
2. Policy, Legislation, Law, and Prosecution

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Recent Online Resources for the Analysis of Terrorism and Related Subjects

Compiled and selected by Berto Jongman

Most of the items included below became available online between December 2018 and February 2019. They are categorised under twelve headings:

1. Non-Religious Terrorism: Actors, Groups, Incidents and Campaigns
2. Religious (mainly Jihadi) Terrorism: Actors, Groups, Incidents and Campaigns
3. Terrorist Strategies and Tactics
4. Conflict, Crime and Political Violence other than Terrorism
5. Counter-Terrorism – General
6. Counter-Terrorist Strategies, Tactics and Operations
7. State Repression and Civil War at Home and Clandestine & Open Warfare Abroad
8. Prevention and Preparedness Studies (including Countering Violent Extremism, De-Radicalization, Counter-Narratives)
9. Intelligence
10. Cyber Operations
11. Risk & Threat Assessments, Forecasts, Analytical Studies
12. Also Worth Reading

N.B.: 'Recent Online Resources for the Analysis of Terrorism and Related Subjects' is a regular feature of this journal. For past listings, see 'Archive' at <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/perspectives-on-terrorism/>

1. Non-Religious Terrorism: Actors, Groups, Incidents and Campaigns

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2. Religious (mainly Jihadi) Terrorism: Actors, Groups, Incidents and Campaigns

2a. Al-Qaeda and Affiliates

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About the Compiler: **Berto Jongman** is Assistant Editor of 'Perspectives on Terrorism'. He is a former senior Military Intelligence Analyst and currently serves as International Consultant on CBRN issues. A sociologist by training, he also worked for civilian Swedish and Dutch research institutes. Dr. Jongman was the recipient of the Golden Candle Award for his *World Conflict & Human Rights Maps*, published by PIOOM. He is editor of the volume 'Contemporary Genocides' (1996) and has also contributed to various editions of 'Political Terrorism', the award-winning handbook of terrorism research, edited by Alex P. Schmid.

Conference Monitor/Calendar of Events

(February – May 2019)

Compiled by Reinier Bergema

The Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI), in its mission to provide a platform for academics and practitioners in the field of terrorism and counter-terrorism, compiles an online calendar, listing recent and upcoming academic and professional conferences, symposia and similar events that are directly or indirectly relevant to the readers of *Perspectives on Terrorism*. The calendar includes academic and (inter-) governmental conferences, professional expert meetings, civil society events and educational programs. The listed events are organised by a wide variety of governmental and non-governmental institutions, including several key (counter) terrorism research centres and institutes.

We encourage readers to contact the journal's Assistant Editor for Conference Monitoring, Reinier Bergema, and provide him with relevant information, preferably in the same format as the items listed below. Reinier Bergema can be reached at <r.bergema@icct.nl> or via Twitter: [@reinierbergema](https://twitter.com/reinierbergema).

February 2019

ARTIS Seminar Series on Political Violence: Tamar Mitts, “Countering Violent Extremism and Support for ISIS on Social Media”

John Jay College of Criminal Justice Center on Terrorism

1 February, New York, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@JohnJayCNow](https://twitter.com/JohnJayCNow)

Fighting the Next War: Defense Against Biological Weapons

Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense

5 February, Washington DC, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@BiodefenseStudy](https://twitter.com/BiodefenseStudy)

Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad on the Prospects for Peace in Afghanistan

United States Institute of Peace (USIP)

8 February, Washington DC, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@USIP](https://twitter.com/USIP)

Speaker Series: Strategic Stability and the Future of International Politics

Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich

11 February, Zurich, Switzerland

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@CSS_Zurich](https://twitter.com/CSS_Zurich)

Book Talk: Women in the Crossfire: Understanding and Ending Honor Killing

National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)

11 February, College Park, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@START_umd](https://twitter.com/START_umd)

2019 Roundtable on Artificial Intelligence

Aspen Institute

11 February, Santa Barbara, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@aspeninstitute](https://twitter.com/aspeninstitute)

NATO COEDAT Course: Defence Against Terrorism*NATO Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism*

11-15 February, Ankara, Turkey

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: *n/a***India's Inter-State Water Wars: Causes, Consequences, and Cures***Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS)*

11 February, Washington DC, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@csis](#)**Influence Operations in Cyberspace: Linking Prevention, Response and Resilience***Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich*

12 February, Pisa, Italy

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@CSS_Zurich](#)**Panel "PKK Presence in Iraq and Turkey's Struggle Against Terror"**

Center for Middle Eastern Studies

12 February, Ankara, Turkey

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@orsamtr](#)**Afrin: The First Anniversary of the Olive Branch Operation**

Center for Middle Eastern Studies

12 February, Ankara, Turkey

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@orsamtr](#)**Turmoil in the Middle East***Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI)*

13 February, Philadelphia, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@fpri](#)**ASPI Women, Peace and Security Masterclass: In Policy and on Operations***Australian Strategic Policy Institute*

13 February, Canberra, Australia

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@ASPI_org](#)**No Afghanistan in the Sahel: An Alternative Perspective on Stabilisation****- Commandant Adrian Jacobs***Centre for Conflict, Security and Terrorism (CST)*

13 February, Nottingham, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@UniofNottingham](#)**Marvel Comics' Civil War: September 11 Attack, Cultural Trauma, and Fiction as Therapy***National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)*

13 February, College Park, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@START_umd](#)

Report Launch: Risk and Resilience: Advancing Food and Nutrition Security in Nigeria*Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS)*

13 February, Washington DC, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@csis](#)**Breakfast Briefing – Hezbollah and Terrorist Financing***Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)*

13 February, London, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RUSI_org](#)**Dissident Resilience to Repression: The Case of Pinochet's Chile***Stanford Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies*

14 February, Stanford, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@FSIStanford](#)**Building an Effective Approach to Terrorism Prevention***The Heritage Foundation*

14 February, Washington DC, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@heritage](#)**Preventing Radicalisation through Education***European Foundation for Democracy*

19 February, Brussels, Belgium

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@efdbussels](#)**Israel's National Security Challenges 2019***Stanford Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies*

19 February, Stanford, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@FSIStanford](#)**Iran's Revolution at 40***Chatham House*

19 February, London, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@ChathamHouse](#)**Planetary Security Conference 2019***Planetary Security Initiative*

19-20 February, The Hague, The Netherlands

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@PlanSecu](#)**NATO COEDAT Workshop: Training Needs Analysis (TNA)***NATO Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism*

19-20 February, Ankara, Turkey

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: *n/a***Situation in West Asia with Special Focus on Syria, Yemen and Iran***Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS)*

20 February, New Delhi, India

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@claws_india](#)

The Role of the Arab States in Israeli-Palestinian Peacemaking*Chatham House*

20 February, London, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@ChathamHouse](#)**Russian Political War: Moving Beyond The Hybrid***Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)*

20 February, London, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RUSI_org](#)**Not Always Stand Divided: Islamists and Secular Rivals in Tunisia***Stanford Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies*

21 February, Stanford, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@FSIStanford](#)**Russian Hybrid War, Ukraine, and US policy***Stanford Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies*

21 February, Stanford, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@FSIStanford](#)**Military Commissions Today***Center on National Security*

21 February, New York, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@CNSFordhamLaw](#)**Weak States: Rebel Governance and War Economies***Chatham House*

21 February, London, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@ChathamHouse](#)**RAN Meeting: Effective Alternative and Counter-Narrative Campaigns***Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) C&N*

21-22 February, Berlin, Germany

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)**RAN Meeting: Make a Change***Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) EDU*

21-22 February, Dublin, Ireland

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)**Book Talk: Turning to Political Violence: The Emergence of Terrorism***National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)*

26 February, College Park, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@START_umd](#)**Professor Stathis Kalyvas (Oxford) - Highlight Speaker Series***Centre for Conflict, Security and Terrorism (CST)*

27 February, Nottingham, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@UniofNottingham](#)

Afghanistan 2019: The Human Dimension*Chatham House*

27 February, London, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@ChathamHouse](#)**March 2019****Building Resilience and Preventing Radicalisation to Violent Extremism****- An Awareness Raising Workshop***AASW National Office*

1 March, Toowoomba Qld, Australia

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@AASW](#)**ARTIS Seminar Series on Political Violence: Mary Beth Altier, “Returning to the Fight: An Empirical Analysis of Terrorist Re-engagement and Recidivism”***John Jay College of Criminal Justice Center on Terrorism*

1 March, New York, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@JohnJayCNow](#)**2019 Chemical and Biological Terrorism Defense Conference***Gordon Research Conference*

3-8 March, Ventura, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@GordonConf](#)**RAN Steering Committee***Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)*

5 March, Brussels, Belgium

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)**Middle East Policy Series: Today’s Challenges***Center on National Security*

5 March, New York, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@CNSFordhamLaw](#)**Launch: Counterterrorism Yearbook 2019***Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI)*

5 March, Canberra, Australia

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@ASPI_org](#)**Security & Counter Terror Expo***Clarion Events*

5-6 March, London, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@SCTX19](#)**Security and Policing Home Office Event 2019***UK Home Office*

5-7 March, Farnborough, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: *n/a*

From Counterterrorism to Conventional Threats: The Future of War*Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI)*

6 March, Haverford, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@fpri](#)**Resilience Training: How to Involve the Population in Resilience and National Security?***Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)*

6 March, London, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RUSI_org](#)**Security and Defence 2019: Patterns, Disruptions, and Responses***Chatham House*

7 March, London, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@ChathamHouse](#)**TSAS Workshop***Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security and Society (TSAS)*

7 March, Ottawa, Canada

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@TSASNetwork](#)**Global Conference on Yemen: Dimensions of the Humanitarian Crisis and Prospects of Peace***Center on National Security*

7 March, New York, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@CNSFordhamLaw](#)**A Tale of Two Caliphates***National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)*

7 March, College Park, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@START_umd](#)**RAN Meeting: Role of Sports, Cultural and Other Leisure Activities in P/CVE***Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) YF&C*

7-8 March, Lisbon, Portugal

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)**Cybersecurity in the Commonwealth: Building the Foundations of an Effective National Cybersecurity Response***Chatham House*

8 March, London, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@ChathamHouse](#)**Extremism***Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI)*

12 March, Philadelphia, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@fpri](#)

International Conference, “Radicalization of Youth: Causes and Prevention”*SALTO Youth*

12-14 March, Bratislava, Slovakia

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: *n/a***Punishing Atrocities through a Fair Trial:****International Criminal Law from Nuremberg to the Age of Global Terrorism***Center on National Security*

13 March, New York, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@CNSFordhamLaw](#)**RAN: How Are We Doing?***Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) LOCAL*

13-14 March, Vienna, Austria

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)**RAN: Neuropsychiatric Disorders***Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) H&SC*

13-14 March, Turin, Italy

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)**The Future of Syria: Towards Inclusive Peacebuilding***Chatham House*

15 March, London, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@ChathamHouse](#)**NATO COEDAT Course: Terrorist Use of Cyberspace***NATO Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism*

18-22 March, Ankara, Turkey

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: *n/a***2019 Threat Conference***The Cipher Brief*

24-26 March, Sea Island (GA), United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@thecipherbrief](#)**RAN YOUNG Academy Kick-off session***Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) YF&C*

25-27 March, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)**20th Asian Security Conference***Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis*

26-28 March, New Delhi, India

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@IDSAIndia](#)

ISA 2019 Annual Convention*International Studies Association*

27 March, Toronto, Canada

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@isanet](#)**ARTIS Seminar Series on Political Violence:****Edmund Fitton-Brown, “The Evolving Threat from ISIL and Al-Qaida”***John Jay College of Criminal Justice Center on Terrorism*

29 March, New York, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@JohnJayCNow](#)**April 2019****Terrorism Conference: Active Shooter and Terrorism Readiness***Public Agency Training Council*

3-5 April, Las Vegas, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@PATCupdates](#)**Paul Wilkinson Memorial Lecture: Tore Bjørgo***The Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence*

4 April, St. Andrews, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@CSTPV](#)**UMD Executive Cyber Summit***National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)*

4 April, College Park, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@START_umd](#)**RAN Meeting: Current and Future Most Used and Most Watched Narratives and Strategies of Far Right Extremists and Islamist Extremists***Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) POL & C&N*

4-5 April, Stockholm, Sweden

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)**VIII. International Conference on Conflict, Terrorism and Society***Kadir Has University*

8-10 April, Istanbul, Turkey

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@icctsmidia](#)**Breakfast Briefing - Whatever Happened to Al Qaida?***Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)*

10 April, London, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RUSI_org](#)**RAN Meeting: Evaluation of the Impact of Victims of Terrorism Testimonials***Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) RVT*

10-11 April, Turin, Italy

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)

IAFIE Europe 2019

“Mihai Viteazul” National Intelligence Academy (MVNIA)

14-17 April, Bucharest, Romania

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@sri_official](#)

NATO COEDAT Course: Defence Against Suicide Attack

NATO Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism

15-19 April, Ankara, Turkey

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: *n/a*

RAN Meeting: Children Growing Up in an Extremist Family

Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) YF&C

24-25 April, Rome, Italy

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)

RAN Meeting: Grooming for Terror – Manipulation and Control

Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) H&SC

24-25 April, Bucharest, Romania

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)

RAN Kick-off Meeting Prosecutors

Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)

25-26 April, Paris, France

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)

Conferences on the Law of Armed Conflict

Israeli Defense Forces

25-27 April, Tel Aviv, Israel

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@IDF](#)

Future of Islamic World in the Horizon of 2035

The Institute for Islamic World Futures Studies

28-29 April, Tehran, Iran

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: *n/a*

Future of War Conference 2019

Arizona State University Center on the Future of War

29 April, Washington DC, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@Future_of_War](#)

May 2019**III. International Conference on Terrorism and Political Violence**

Eastern Mediterranean Academic Research Center (DAKAM)

3 May, Istanbul, Turkey

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@dakamtr](#)

ARTIS Seminar Series on Political Violence: Michele Gelfand

John Jay College of Criminal Justice Center on Terrorism

3 May, New York, United States

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@JohnJayCNow](#)

RAN Young Academy session 2 – Challenges & progress

Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) YOUNG

7-8 May, Bordeaux, France

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)

RAN Meeting: Police Role in the Reintegration and Risk Management of Released Violent Extremist Offenders and Returnee Fighters Coming Home

Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) POL

8-9 May, *to be confirmed*

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)

Century of the Radical Right: CARR Inaugural Conference CFP

Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right

15-17 May, London, United Kingdom

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@C4ARR](#)

NATO COEDAT Course: Critical Infrastructure Protection from Terrorist Attacks

NATO Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism

20-24 May, Ankara, Turkey

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: *n/a*

24th German Congress on Crime Prevention

Deutscher Praeventionstag

20-21 May, Berlin, Germany

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@praeventionstag](#)

RAN Multi-Agency Meeting: Taking Mental Health Issues Into Account in CVE and PVE

Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) LOCAL-H&SC

28 May, Paris, France

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)

RAN Policy & Practice Event Correlation Between Violent Extremism and Mental Health Disorders

Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)

29 May, Paris, France

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: [@RANEurope](#)

NATO COEDAT Conference: Annual Counterterrorism Discipline

NATO Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism

29-30 May, Ankara, Turkey

Website: [visit](#) | Twitter: *n/a*

Acknowledgment

Special thanks to Berto Jongman, Alex Schmid, Lorand Bodo, Agnes Venema, and Amarnath Amarasingam for their contributions to this Conference Calendar.

About The Compiler: **Reinier Bergema** is a Research Fellow and Project Manager at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT) and an Assistant Editor of *Perspectives on Terrorism*. His research interests include, *inter alia*, radicalisation and Dutch (jihadist) foreign fighters.

Award for Best Ph.D. Thesis Submitted and Defended in 2018 - 31 March 2019 Deadline for Submissions Approaching Fast

The Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI) seeks to enhance the quality of research in the field of Terrorism Studies. For this purpose, TRI established in 2014 an Annual Award for the Best Doctoral Dissertation on Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism. Among the incoming submissions of Ph.D. theses, the TRI Award jury identifies three finalists and from these the winner.

With the present announcement, a call is being made for sending to the jury Ph.D. theses submitted or defended at an academic institution in the calendar year 2018. Doctoral theses in the field of terrorism- and counterterrorism studies can be submitted either by the author or by the academic supervisor. Theses should be sent in electronic form as a Word document to the chairman of the jury at < apschmid@terrorismanalysts.com >, together with a cover letter (1-3 pp.), highlighting the merits of the submitted Ph.D. thesis. Submissions must be in English (or translated into English).

The deadline for entries is **31 March, 2019**. The TRI Award jury - consisting of Prof. Edwin Bakker, Prof. Clark McCauley, Prof. James Forest and Prof. em. Alex P. Schmid - will evaluate and compare the submissions, based on criteria such as originality in terms of introducing new data, theory or methodology, novelty and uniqueness of findings as well as degree of in-depth research.

The chairman of the jury will inform the three finalists identified by the jury's evaluation process before the end of July 2019. The winner among them will be announced during the summer of 2019 and can expect an Award of US \$1,000.-, plus a certificate of achievement, signed by the President of the Terrorism Research Initiative, Robert Wesley, acknowledging the granting of the TRI Thesis Award. The other two finalists will receive a certificate of achievement. For all three finalist theses, TRI will assist the authors in finding a publisher for their theses. The winner of the 2018 TRI ThesisAward will also be invited to submit an article for publication in *Perspectives on Terrorism*, summarising the winning thesis' main findings.

Words of Appreciation from the Editors

Perspectives on Terrorism is entirely the product of volunteers – academics, professionals and practitioners who for twelve consecutive years have been giving their time and providing their expertise to keep this free and independent scholarly online journal alive and increasing in circulation to over 8,200 subscriptions today. While the main burden of producing six issues per year rests on the shoulders of the Editorial Team and those of the Editorial Board members who do most of the reviewing, there are many others who assist us in producing timely Articles and Research Notes six times a year. The more than a dozen members of the Editorial Team and the twenty Editorial Board members alone would not be able to handle and review the growing number of submissions that reach us now on an almost daily basis. We could not function without the selfless help of our esteemed external reviewers who read and critique the articles submitted to us.

Once a year we wish to thank these anonymous reviewers publicly by listing their names. For reviewing article submitted to *Perspectives on Terrorism* in 2018, we sincerely thank the individuals listed here:

Max Abrahms, Amarnath Amarasingam, J.M. Berger, Noemie Bouhana, Frank Bovenkerk, Neil Bowie, Kurt Braddock, Clairissa Breen, Sarah Carthy, Christina Cliff, Maura Conway, Luis de la Corte, Cori Dauber, Danny W. Davis, Sarah De Silva Dissanayake, Bert-Jan Doosje, Benjamin Ducol, Deen Freelon, Boaz Ganor, Rohan Gunaratna, Phil Gurski, William Hansen, Malkanthi Hettiarachchim, Aaron M. Hoffman, Lee Jarvis, Danielle Jefferis, Daniel Koehler, Tommi Kotonen, Genevieve Lennon, Russell Lundberg, Stuart MacDonald, Leena Malkki, David Mallet, Barak Mendelson, Erin Miller, Cerwyn Moore, Feyyaz Muhammad, Brigitte Nacos, Petter Nesser, Brian Nussbaum, Christophe Paulussen, Arie Perliger, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, Muhammad Rahim, Fernando Reinares, Mir Sadat, Ekaterina Stepanova, Peter Talas, Ian David Turner, Teun van Dongen, Carlos Vazquez, Roger Warren, Doug Weeks, Daan Weggemans, Gabriel Weimann, James Wirtz, and Graeme Wood.

THANK YOU, Peer Reviewers for *Perspectives on Terrorism* (2018)!

We also wish to thank our not so anonymous regular members of the Editorial Board: Shazad Ali, Joost Augusteijn, Jeff Bale, Michael Boyle, Jarret Brachman, Richard Chasdi, James ‘Chip’ Ellis, Leah Farall, Paul Gill, Jennifer Giroux, M.J. Gohel, Beatrice de Graaf, Thomas Hegghammer, Bradley McAllister, John Morrison, Assaf Moghadam, Sam Mullins, Brian Phillips, Thomas Riegler, Simon Shen, and Anne Speckhard. These members of the Editorial Board were approached most often and asked again and again to give us their professional assessment on the quality of submissions reaching our journal. And of course, our team of Associate Editors also served as peer reviewers many times throughout the year: Tore Bjørgo, Gregory Miller, John Morrison, Bart Schuurman, Rashmi Singh, and Aaron Y. Zelin.

Altogether, many authors submitting manuscripts have benefitted from the reviews and constructive criticism provided by everyone listed above. Again, many thanks to all!

Alex Schmid and James Forest

About *Perspectives on Terrorism*

Perspectives on Terrorism (PoT) is a joint publication of the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI), headquartered in Vienna, Austria, and the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) of Leiden University, Campus The Hague. PoT is published six times per year as a free, independent, scholarly peer-reviewed online journal available at <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/perspectives-on-terrorism>.

PoT seeks to provide a platform for established scholars as well as academics and professionals entering the interdisciplinary fields of Terrorism-, Political Violence- and Conflict Studies.

The editors invite researchers and readers to:

- present their perspectives on the prevention of, and response to, terrorism and related forms of violent conflict;
- submit to the journal accounts of evidence-based, empirical scientific research and analyses;
- use the journal as a forum for debate and commentary on issues related to the above.

Perspectives on Terrorism has sometimes been characterised as ‘nontraditional’ in that it dispenses with some of the rigidities associated with commercial print journals. Topical articles can be published at short notice and reach, through the Internet, a much larger audience than subscription-fee based paper journals. Our on-line journal also offers contributors a higher degree of flexibility in terms of content, style and length of articles – but without compromising professional scholarly standards.

The journal’s Research Notes, Special Correspondence, Op-Eds and other content are reviewed by members of the Editorial Team, while its Articles are peer-reviewed by outside academic experts and professionals. While aiming to be policy-relevant, PT does not support any partisan policies regarding (counter-) terrorism and waging conflicts. Impartiality, objectivity and accuracy are guiding principles that we require contributors to adhere to. They are responsible for the content of their contributions and retain the copyright of their publication.

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