America's Real Enemy

THE SALAFI-JIHADI MOVEMENT

Katherine Zimmerman

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CRITICAL THREATS

AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

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Executive Summary

The United States is losing the war against an enemy it has misunderstood for decades. Al Qaeda, the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS), and the Salafi-jihadi groups that threaten the United States are stronger, smarter, and more resilient than they were on September 11, 2001. Americans have confused tactical successes on the battlefield against ISIS and al Qaeda with progress in this war. They have narrowed their understanding of the threat to faraway and compartmentalized fights in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia, and to the random acts of inspired violence conducted by "lone wolves." Yet 16 years after going to war, the US is even further away from winning.

The Salafi-jihadi movement—not simply distinct groups or individuals—threatens the United States, the West, and Muslim communities. The movement draws strength from its ideology, which helps to unify and band together a network of individuals, groups, and organizations seeking a shared global outcome: destruction of current Muslim societies through the use of force and creation of what they regard as a true Islamic society. This network is the Salafi-jihadi base and constitutes the primary source of strength for al Qaeda and ISIS. New groups would form from the movement if the existing ones are ever destroyed. This corporeal manifestation of the Salafi-jihadi movement is the proper target of American efforts in this war.

The Salafi-jihadi ideology, which has existed in its current form since at least the 1960s, holds that it is the duty of every true Muslim to use force to reestablish a caliphate as it existed in the early years of Islam. The ideology provides a strategic political-military doctrine for members of the Salafi-jihadi movement. It transcends any single individual or group. The inherently global nature of Salafi-jihadi strategic objectives means that it is impossible to disaggregate the movement and defeat only those parts of the base that are attacking the US directly—although this is precisely the US strategy. Local victories for Salafi-jihadi groups advance those of the global movement. The different components of the Salafi-jihadi base are linked: Even those that eschew attacks against the US contribute to the strength of the ones focused on such attacks. The US cannot defeat the global threat without defeating the localized groups.

The movement's current strength stems from its relationship with Sunni communities. The Salafi-jihadi movement has always focused on winning over those groups so that they willingly accept and support its ideology. But only recently has it had success within those communities that might translate into long-term gains. Uprisings that began with the 2011 Arab Spring and spread elsewhere created conditions that drove popular support to Salafi-jihadi groups. The upheavals, initially caused by popular grievances against existing states, began to damage societal order in those countries. As conflict spread, Sunni populations came under threat, real and perceived, from the Shi'a, Kurds, anti-Islamist factions, Russia, and others. To defend against these threats, Sunni communities became willing to accept the presence of and, in some cases, support Salafi-jihadi groups.

The United States cannot kill its way out of this war, nor will it defeat the movement by countering its ideology or messaging. The Salafi-jihadi movement is stronger today because current conditions in the Muslim world have induced Sunni communities to accept help from whoever offers it in order to survive. The movement's strength stems from its relationships with the population, which Salafi-jihadi groups will continue to cultivate as long as current conditions persist.

The Salafi-jihadi movement focuses on people. To win, the United States must also focus on the people in order to break the existing ties between the Sunni populations and the Salafi-jihadi base. Concentrating on people is the only path that will lead to victory.

Introduction

America is losing the war on terror, yet many Americans think the United States is winning. The fact that there has been no attack on American soil on the scale of 9/11 has created a false sense of security. Dismissals of Orlando and San Bernardino as "lone-wolf" attacks further the inaccurate narrative that al Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) are somehow "on the run." According to senior American officials for at least seven years, those groups have been "on the run"—a "fact" that in itself demonstrates the falsity of US pretentions to success. Tactical successes on battlefields in Iraq, Syria, and Libya add further to the illusion of success. But if 16 years of war should have taught us anything, it is that we cannot kill our way out of this problem.

To start winning, Americans must redefine the enemy. A global movement—not individual groups, not an ideology, and certainly not poverty—is waging war against us. This movement is the collection of humans joined by the Salafi-jihadi ideology, group memberships, and common experiences into a cohesive force that transcends the individual or the group. Al Qaeda is but one manifestation of this decades-old ideology and movement. The global Salafi-jihadi movement was and remains more than just al Qaeda—or ISIS. It consists of individuals worldwide, some of whom have organized, who seek to destroy current Muslim societies and resurrect in their place a true Islamic society through the use of armed force. America and the West have no chance of success in this conflict unless they understand that this movement is their true and proper adversary.

The need is urgent. Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the global Salafi-jihadi movement together are stronger today than they have ever been. Salafi-jihadi groups are active in at least six failed states (Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, and Mali) and four weak states (Afghanistan, Egypt, Tunisia, and Nigeria). They provide governance by proxy or control territory in at least half of these states. Both ISIS and al Qaeda pursue deadly attack capabilities to target the West, as the terrorist attack in Manchester once again demonstrated. Europe and the American homeland face an unprecedented level of facilitated and inspired terrorist attacks. This situation is not success, stalemate, or slow winning, and still less does it reflect an enemy "on the run." It is failure.

Staying the Course for Far Too Long

American counterterrorism strategy has not fundamentally changed since the US attacks against Afghanistan after 9/11. Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and now Donald Trump have focused on militarily defeating groups through a combination of targeted strikes and operations to deprive them of particular terrain they control. Bush and Obama made limited efforts to counter Salafi-jihadi recruiting efforts, but with no effect. All these efforts have focused on attacking narrowly defined groups and the individuals associated with them. Apart from the limited experiments at serious counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan, all three presidents have sought to kill their way out of the problem. None has recognized or addressed the global Salafi-jihadi movement as the real threat, and none, therefore, has taken any meaningful steps to confront it.

The use of US military force against select groups generates effects, to be sure. But the effects are temporary, and hard-fought wins evaporate rapidly because the Salafi-jihadi ideology provides strategic doctrine for organizations globally that persists beyond the destruction of any collection of individuals. Shared experiences on the battlefield, in training, in captivity,

and elsewhere build human networks that transcend organizational relationships. These experiences are also laboratories in which Salafi-jihadis improve their means and methods. The deep resilience of the movement resulting from this overarching doctrine, shared experiences, and global nature is why the US continues to lose this war.

Why Now?

Salafi-jihadis believe that participation in armed conflict to create a true Islamic polity is obligatory for all true Muslims. The theological underpinnings of Salafi-jihadism have existed since at least the 13th century. The Islamist movement that began at the end of the 19th and carried into the 20th centuries resurfaced these arguments, which Muslims largely rejected as extremist or, in some cases, heretical.

Some point to these facts to argue that the problem is inherent in Islam—some even go so far as to say that Islam itself is the problem. Such arguments must ignore long periods of history during which Muslims concerned themselves with their own affairs, often more peacefully than their Christian brethren in Europe, and certainly without making serious efforts to attack the West.

Others now argue—also wrongly—that the movement's current strength reflects some fundamental change in its character or manner of presentation. Today's Salafi-jihadi movement is not a new phenomenon nor has its ideology fundamentally changed in recent years. Adaptions in the messaging of that ideology, its placement into colloquial language and distribution through new mediums, are only new means of distribution and not reasons for the expansion of the Salafi-jihadi movement. Al Qaeda put the ideology on the internet with the late cleric Anwar al Awlaki, and ISIS weaponized social media, but the global movement is also strong in areas without internet penetration. The message itself and the groups propagating it have hardly changed in the past decade, yet its fortunes have risen dramatically since 2011. We must look elsewhere to understand why the movement is growing in strength today.

Part of the explanation is that the movement is learning from its failures and mistakes. The modern Salafi-jihadi movement formed during the Afghan jihad. This fight, and the ones that followed, provided experiential learning that refined the movement's strategic thought. Salafi-jihadi groups coalesced repeatedly after Afghanistan—in Algeria, Bosnia, Tajikistan, Somalia, Egypt, Chechnya, again in Afghanistan, and then in Iraq—but each time remained isolated. The movement took those lessons to heart.

Salafi-jihadi leaders know that the movement's strength derives from its relationship with the Muslim community. The movement seeks to conduct a global insurgency, a task that requires popular support—or at least toleration—to end its isolation in the Muslim world. Its leaders have focused on the relationship with that community for decades, but prior efforts to engage were either futile or short-lived. Local Sunni communities rejected Salafi-jihadi ideology repeatedly. The ultra-conservative interpretation of Islam ran afoul of local custom, of local Islam. The call to violent jihad lacked resonance. Coercive tactics backfired, and the introduction of new, alternative systems of governance proved reversible. The failed Salafi-jihadi leaders generally died. Those who have survived have learned lessons from all these encounters.

However, the real reason for the current success of the Salafi-jihadi movement is the transformation of conditions in the Muslim-majority world since 2011. Events outside the movement's control removed a primary obstacle to its ability to build local support, by mobilizing Sunni communities in local, national, and regional conflicts that caused and resulted from the Arab Spring.

Dissatisfaction with governance across the Middle East and North Africa gave rise to popular uprisings that destabilized neighboring regions and spiraled rapidly into a Hobbesian state of nature in many places. Domestic conflict in many states shifted rapidly from a question of political rights to one of individual or communal survival. The movement, whose leaders had studied prior setbacks for how to improve, was primed to offer help to communities that suddenly felt themselves facing existential threats. It gained acceptance at a basic level simply by providing limited

amounts of governance and security in places where governments and security forces had either collapsed or become enemies of the people they ruled. The Salafi-jihadi movement thus brilliantly seized an unexpected opportunity and is now positioned where it has never been before in its decades of existence: at the cusp of widespread success.

American counterterrorism strategy has ignored these transformations almost completely. It remains focused on disrupting or destroying external attack nodes, reducing the military strength of select groups, and killing group leaders. American policymakers' efforts to reduce the war to a targeting drill requires misdefining the enemy: It is possible to target individuals or networks, but not a movement. The elements of American power now operate against merely a fraction of the movement. They may destroy that fraction, but will not destroy or even defeat the movement itself.

The US must develop a new strategy to counter the movement as a whole—not just al Qaeda, ISIS, or even local groups that seemingly present the greatest threats. The strategic focus on only components of the movement—from al Qaeda to ISIS to the ideology—has been misplaced. A strategy must be based on an understanding of the Salafi-jihadi movement from its ideology to its military strengths to its popular outreach and governance. It must proceed from an understanding of why the movement has gained strength recently after foundering for so many years. It must start by redefining the enemy at the most basic level.

Understanding the Salafi-Jihadi Movement

Much of the Salafi-jihadi movement operates in a policy gray area. It poses no immediate threat to Americans, and most of its members are not actively plotting to harm the United States directly. Local groups, organizations, and individuals may speak out against the United States and propagate anti-American sentiments, even encouraging attacks against the US or the West, but not take action themselves. Members might even facilitate such actions against the US or the West, but not participate directly. These facts led the Obama administration to define the threat down to only those groups and individuals actively planning attacks. That narrowing of the threat definition, however, obscures the critical relationship between the attack plotters and the mass of the Salafi-jihadi movement without which they cannot exist—and which can easily replace them when we have destroyed them.

Beyond al Qaeda and ISIS: The Salafi-Jihadi Base

The Salafi-jihadi movement manifests as a physical network of like-minded people, groups, and organizations operating in pursuit of shared overall goals. It draws strength from its ideology, which directs the efforts of the various groups and organizations in a common direction even without direct coordination among them. Local Salafi-jihadi groups, organizations, and individuals constitute an identifiable transnational network even when they try to obscure their roles in it. These component parts are not organized hierarchically and continuously interact in complex ways, but as a whole constitute a primary source of strength for the enemy groups the US already identifies: al Qaeda and ISIS. The US must expand its definition of the enemy to include this Salafi-jihadi base.

Islamic tradition contains the concept of a local base serving the greater global cause: the Ansar who welcomed the Prophet Mohammed to Medina. The Ansar is a collective name given to the local tribes that supported the Prophet Mohammed by welcoming the Prophet's followers into their homes in Medina after the emigration (*hijra*) from Mecca. They accepted Islam and fought alongside the Muslims even after Mohammad's death. The Salafi-jihadi movement preserves this concept and practice of a local base—nearly always referenced as the Ansar—supporting émigrés (or foreign fighters) to this day.

Al Qaeda and ISIS draw their resilience from the Salafi-jihadi base, transnational by nature with hyper-local roots. They replenish their ranks from it. They also rely on the base to meet many of their operational requirements. It provides a point of entry into local conflicts,[1] and al Qaeda and ISIS are often first able to constitute themselves in new areas through the coercion or co-optation of a local group. For example, al Qaeda cultivated relations and supported local Somali Islamist groups for more than a decade before it had the beginnings of an affiliate in Somalia.[2] ISIS also entered such theaters as Libya by gaining the allegiance of a few key leaders and co-opting an existing local network that it transformed into an external ISIS branch.[3] The base plays a facilitating role by moving people and resources across terrain and a resourcing role by providing local supplies or capabilities. Most significantly, it is a ready recruiting pool from which both leaders and foot soldiers can be pulled. The ability to regenerate personnel is a critical capability for both al Qaeda and ISIS and explains

why both groups remain vibrant after the US and its allies have killed so many of their fighters and leaders.

The local Salafi-jihadi base advances the objectives of both al Qaeda and ISIS. The successes of groups at the local level in transforming Muslim society into their vision of a just Islamic society achieve the objectives of the transnational groups, which seek to unite these pockets into polities governed by a single ruler. Al Qaeda and ISIS believe that only through a global agenda—attacking the West and other non-Muslim forces—can local objectives be achieved and sustained. Salafi-jihadis generally understand conflict with the non-Muslim world, especially the West, as inevitable. Some individuals or groups may eschew advocating for or conducting such attacks, but their creed itself defines the West as an enemy. Few would argue and even fewer act against attacks targeting the West. The refusal to support may be practical—such as fear of blowback—but not ideological. The local and global groups thus operate in tandem to further the goals of the Salafi-jihadi movement.

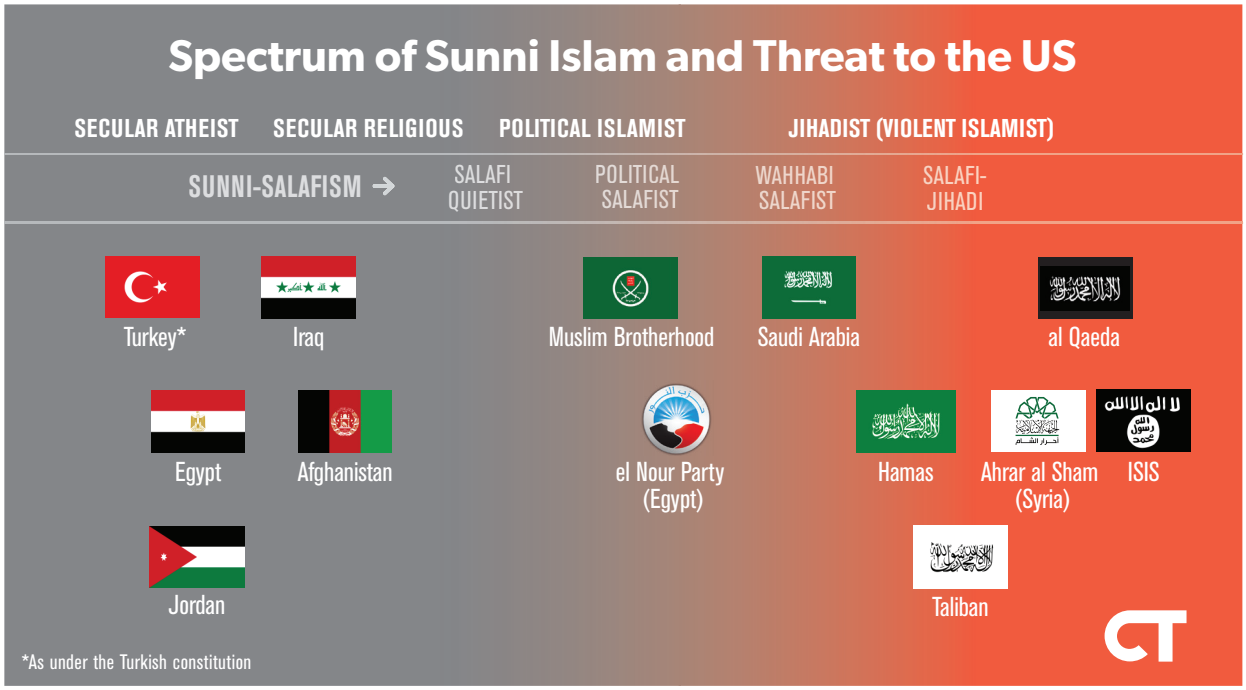
The marbling of the Salafi-jihadi movement—the intermixing of the "locally focused" groups with transnational groups such as al Qaeda and ISIS—is part of its strength. Transnational groups, especially al Qaeda, seek to intertwine their networks with the local networks, rooting the groups in local conflicts and creating openings for their entry and establishment. This rooting creates the appearance that local groups alternately join and reject the global vision and objectives as they break and reform relations with the transnational groups. Yet much of the shifting, realignment, and intergroup discord is organizational rather than ideological or methodological. Organizational tensions—personal power politics and operational-level disagreements—are normal in human groups. They do not indicate fundamental breaks from overarching objectives. The fluidity of individuals and groups to move from local to global objectives is inherent in Salafi-jihadi doctrine and captured in the world vision that doctrine espouses. Mistaking the fractures and shifting within the movement for weakness is a strategic error encouraged and compounded by efforts to distinguish between "globally focused" groups and individuals who can be targeted and "locally focused" ones who cannot.

Ideology Unifies the Base

The envisioned end state that both al Qaeda and ISIS pursue is not uniquely theirs. A broader faction in the Muslim-majority world seeks to spread the practice of a "true" interpretation of Islam while establishing polities under *shari'a* governance.[4] This faction is Salafi. Salafis are orthodox Sunni Muslims who believe the Muslim community, the *umma*, has strayed from true Islam,[5] which they define as the Islam practiced in the time of the companions of the Prophet and his early followers.[6] Specifically, Salafis hold that Muslims must return to the fundamentals of Islam contained entirely in the Qur'an and the *hadith* (sayings and actions of the Prophet) in order for the *umma* to be as strong as it was in the Golden Age.[7] Those Salafis committed to the use of armed force to achieve these aims, including the senior leaders of ISIS and al Qaeda, are Salafi-jihadis.[8] Salafis are not America's enemies, nor do they threaten us so long as they do not support Salafi-jihadis.

Salafism is a small part of Sunni Islam, and Salafi-jihadism is a small part of Salafism. Like all major contemporary religions, the practice and observance of the religion varies greatly among Sunni Muslims, as does the application of these values to political order and governance. Sunni Islam ranges from the secular atheist application, such as the Turkish constitution as applied by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, to a secular religious application, such as that enshrined in the Egyptian constitution. There are political Islamists, such as Turkish President Reçep Tayyip Erdogan, and violent Islamists, such as Hamas in Gaza. The Salafi spectrum ranges from those who abstain from politics and violence, known as quietists,[9] to those such as the Egyptian al Nour party who pursue political power to effect change, known as political Salafis, to those who justify violence for such purposes, the Salafi-jihadis. Even Salafi-jihadis disagree among themselves over when, where, and against whom violent acts are justified to achieve their aims. The spectrum of beliefs and

Figure 1. Sunni Islam Spectrum



Source: Author's diagram.

practical applications is wide and complicated—but not beyond comprehension.

All Salafi-jihadis are committed to the use of armed force to achieve their aims: to create a true Muslim state by imposing their interpretation of *shari'a*. Salafi-jihadis argue that it is an obligation for Muslims today to purify Islam, which was polluted over the centuries by innovations (*bid'a*), and that the method of purification will necessarily include violent jihad. No Muslim ruler presides over a true Islamic society today according to this view. Those rulers who claim authority have falsely appropriated it from Allah, are propagating heresy, and are promoting apostasy. Therefore, removing the ruler is a religious obligation in order to rebuild a just and true Islamic society. Some ideologues extend this obligation to craft the justification for jihad against the West as the supporter of these rulers.

The concept of an obligation, *fard*, is critical in Islam. Obligatory acts belong to one of the five categories of behaviors governed in Islam: *fard* (obligatory), *mustahabb* (encouraged), *mubah* (neutral), *makruh* (discouraged), and *haram* (forbidden). Obligatory acts are further broken down into those that are obligatory for every individual, *fard 'ayn*, and those that are obligatory for the *umma*, *fard al kifaya*, in which it is obligatory that some members of the *umma* complete the act.

Islam defines five basic acts as *fard 'ayn* for all Muslims.[10] Conducting violent jihad is not among them; it is *fard al kifaya*—obligatory only on the community and even then only in certain circumstances. Salafi-jihadi ideology holds that the conditions today are such that violent jihad is a *fard 'ayn* for all Muslims. Mainstream, orthodox Sunni leaders disagree. Failing to conduct violent jihad is therefore a grave sin for Salafi-jihadis, but not for the overwhelming majority of Sunni Muslims.

Salafi-jihadis believe that the only way to revive true Islam is to guide their actions in rigid allegory to the initial struggle to spread Islam during the age of the Prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs.[11] They divide the Prophet's life into at least three phases: Mecca I, Medina, and Mecca II.[12] Mecca I is a time of

tolerance to gather strength. The focus is on developing new adherents and organizational capacity as a covert group while not under direct attack by the state. The Medina phase occurs when the group must defend itself. The group establishes itself in a sanctuary from which to conduct attacks to weaken the state and in which the group can begin to develop institutions and expand its military capacities. Mecca II sees the launch of an offensive to destroy and replace the state. Finally, Salafi-jihadis look for subsequent guidance to the years after the death of the Prophet Mohammed when the Rightly Guided Caliphs expanded Muslims lands.

The ideology of Salafi-jihadism has a strong foundation in Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic theology—to a certain point.[13] Text drawn from the Qur'an and the *hadith* support some of the ideological arguments for Salafi-jihadism, giving it an apparent legitimacy, although Salafi-jihadism has never gained more than a minority of followers. Like forms of orthodoxy calling for violence in other religions, it is a marginalized interpretation of the faith. A version of this ideology—Kharijitism, which led to the assassination of the Fourth Caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib—has been branded as a heresy.[14]

Origins of Salafi-Jihadism. The Salafi-jihadi strain did not arise immediately within Islam. Conditions largely drove its development. Killing another Muslim is forbidden in Islam except in certain cases. The question of who is a Muslim, and therefore whether it was possible to take up arms against others who called themselves Muslims, sparked the beginnings of the theological line of argument that led to the Salafi-jihadi ideology. Salafi-jihadi ideology carries forward concepts of who can rightly claim to be a Muslim that were first developed when Muslim powers fought one another to the current day, when nonstate actors seek to contest states claiming to be Muslim.

Scholars (and Salafi-jihadis) can trace elements of Salafi-jihadism back to the writings of the 13th century scholar Ahmad ibn Taymiyya.[15] Ibn Taymiyya issued a *fatwa* (religious ruling) that broke from Islamic tradition and authorized the use of force in battle against a group claiming to be Muslim. Twentieth-century Islamists advanced arguments that became a foundational core of Salafi-jihadi ideology. These Islamists include Mohammed Rashid Rida, who called for the restoration of the Caliphate;[16] Abul A'la Maududi, who described much of Muslim society's history as un-Islamic or in the state of *jahiliyya*[17] (ignorance of Allah's guidance) and called for adherence to *shari'a*; Hassan al Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood; and Sayyid Qutb, who wove together tenets from ibn Taymiyya, Rashid Rida, Maududi, and Hassan al Banna in *Milestones*[18] to lay out a plan to return Islam to its roots. Qutb called for a vanguard[19] to lead Muslims in the effort to revive Islam.

The early ideologues focused on how to unite and expand the *umma*, rejecting Muslim states as un-Islamic and too proximate to Western ideals. Maududi was the first 20th-century scholar to base his theory on the original founding of Islam.[20] He argued against modernization and Western concepts and reasserted the Islamic concept of the sovereignty of Allah, asserting that nothing was outside Allah's law. Maududi argued that Islam's purpose was to establish Allah's sovereignty on earth through man—the Caliph—acting by virtue of Allah's delegation of sovereignty to him and bound by *shari'a*.[21] He was less revolutionary than Sayyid Qutb and others, however, and advocated for a political party, his vanguard, to pursue society's "Islamization from above" and the return of the Caliphate.

Qutb claimed that the *umma* had been nonexistent for centuries because Muslims had ceased practicing correctly and worshiped false deities in the form of their secular rulers. He dedicated a chapter[22] of *Milestones* to the creation of the *umma*, which starts with the creed, the *shahada* or declaration of faith ("There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is the messenger of Allah."). Qutb's understanding of the *shahada* was revolutionary, for he argued that to declare the faith was also to reject any form of human government. He believed the *umma* must begin with the creed and separate itself from society, although winning over this society remains key. He writes in his introduction to *Milestones*: "Islam cannot fulfill its role except by taking concrete form in a society." Both Qutb and Maududi sought first to build the *umma*, by which

they meant a new community of righteous Muslims, and then to engage with society writ large to reconvert it to Islam. Qutb's understanding, and to a lesser degree Maududi's understanding, of Islam diverged significantly from the understanding of Islam during their own lives and even that of Muslims for many centuries prior.

Qutb's argument for undertaking violent jihad focused on transforming the societies in which his new *umma* was forming. He claimed that the new *umma*'s experiences would follow the Prophet Mohammed's, predicting that the Muslim states and societies would reject the new community and act against it:

> Since [Islam] comes into conflict with the *jahiliyya* [ignorance of the Word of Allah] which prevails over ideas and beliefs, and which has a practical system of life and a political and material authority behind it, the Islamic movement had to produce parallel resources to confront this *jahiliyya*. This movement uses the methods of preaching and persuasion for reforming ideas and beliefs; and it uses physical power and jihad for abolishing the organizations and authorities of the *jahili* system.[23]

Like the Prophet and his followers, the new *umma* must proselytize, defend itself, and eventually eliminate its opposition. Qutb, unlike later Salafi-jihadi theorists, saw jihad as beginning first against those directly oppressing the *umma*, then against the Muslim state, and finally against the non-Muslim world.

Salafi-Jihadism in Practice. The jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan was a critical turning point because it transformed the ideology into a global movement. The Afghan-Soviet war was the first conflict in the modern era that drew in Muslim recruits of all nationalities. Notably, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict never had such an effect on Muslims worldwide in part because the Palestinian resistance was secular and because travel to join the fight was difficult.[24] The thinking of the Salafi-jihadi ideologues advanced during the Afghan war from focusing nearly exclusively on the societies and states in which they lived to focusing on the broader Muslim community. The mujahideen's success in Afghanistan proved that victory was possible and also that it was possible to cause an Islamic emirate to be established in order to lay the foundation for the future Caliphate.

The Salafi-jihadi thought leaders active during the Soviet-Afghan war further developed Sayyid Qutb's concepts. Abdullah Azzam, a religious cleric turned global recruiter, fathered modern Salafi-jihadi thought as he led the Afghan-Arab jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan.[25] Azzam was a Palestinian and shifted the target of jihad from an internal enemy (the ruler or the state) to an external enemy (the aggressor).[26] He viewed Israel as an aggressor against the Palestinian people and argued that the Soviet Union played the same role in Afghanistan.[27] Whereas Sayyid Qutb argued that *Dar al Islam*[28] (the domain where Islam rules) had not existed for centuries,[29] Azzam conceived of *Dar al Islam* as the land where Islam was accepted (in however flawed a manner) and sought first to defend those lands from unbelievers.[30] He wrote from the battlefield and called all Muslims—even those who had strayed—to fight, arguing that because Afghans could not win the war themselves, it was *fard 'ayn*, an individual obligation, for all to come to their defense. Azzam redefined the jihad from Qutb's revolutionary fight against the state from within to a fight to drive non-Muslim invaders from Muslim lands.[31] The shift from Islamism's identification of an internal, Muslim problem to an external, apostate enemy transformed the Salafi-jihadi ideology into a truly global movement.

Abdullah Azzam developed his own theory of a vanguard force toward the end of the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan.[32] The mujahideen fighting and training in Afghanistan hailed from across the Muslim world and were indoctrinated in Salafi-jihadi ideology in the trenches. Azzam envisioned their leaders as members of a vanguard force, redefined from the vanguard Sayyid Qutb describes.[33] Azzam sought to build a "solid base" that would be a military force to reconquer Muslim lands. He likened the formation of this force to the first generation of Muslims trained under the Prophet Mohammed. Azzam and Osama bin Laden founded al Qaeda[34] (literally, "the base") after the war ended to continue the movement.[35]

Al Qaeda's establishment as a formal organization dedicated to jihad to make Islam victorious across the world was transformational for the Salafi-jihadi movement. It linked global objectives to those of local organizations with national objectives (overthrowing the ruler and state).[36] Yet how to prioritize the fight remained in contention. Azzam's writings indicate that he viewed the next priority for the movement to be other Muslim lands that were under attack by an aggressor—Palestine remaining high on his list. Ayman al Zawahiri, an Egyptian leader who had tethered himself to Osama bin Laden in the mid-1980s to gain resources for his group in Egypt,[37] pushed for al Qaeda to support groups seeking to topple the regimes.[38] Zawahiri had bin Laden's ear after Azzam's 1989 assassination,[39] and he took al Qaeda in that direction initially. Azzam's thinking—the defense of Muslim lands—did not disappear, however, and came to be central to al Qaeda's message, especially after 9/11.

Abdullah Azzam's ideas continue to reverberate in Salafi-jihadi discourse, and his writings remain a source of inspiration for individuals worldwide. Azzam's approach to building a global network by connecting various individuals and groups continued after his assassination in 1989. Azzam established branches of his "Service Bureau," the organization dedicated to recruiting and training foreigners to fight in Afghanistan, in places such as the United States. This effort created a significant global footprint and produced a group of hardened activists whose beliefs transcended national divisions. Osama bin Laden was but one of many future leaders in this group. Bin Laden rose to prominence in the Salafi-jihadi movement because he inherited Azzam's transnational networks, not just because he had the money to fund al Qaeda's operations.

From Ideology to Movement

The Salafi-jihadi movement formed through shared experiences as much as it formed through shared ideology, theory, and doctrine. Like-minded individuals gathered on the training ground and battlefield in various theaters. These individuals joined local groups or received support from local groups. Common cause unified them as they mobilized and remobilized for jihad. Organizational networks built in theater to distribute and share resources, and relationships—new and established—crosscut groups to reinforce the movement. The experience of jihad, of fighting on the battlefield, became important to establishing credentials and in kindling the global movement. Ideology unifies and guides the global Salafi-jihadi movement, but the movement is constantly evolving how it expresses itself on the ground to adapt to and improve operations under new conditions.

A competitive-cooperative structure has characterized the ideology and the movement throughout the 20th century. A loose-knit leadership group that dispersed geographically and among different organizations shapes the overall movement by advancing thought, theory, and practice. The leadership group coordinates organizational efforts, including the sharing of critical resources to further the movement's overall objectives. At the same time, however, the leaders are all competing to be the first to realize success.

The movement grew from the volume and geographic distribution of Muslims who answered the call to jihad. Afghanistan became a melting pot for ideas—dominated by the likes of Abdullah Azzam—and a source of inspiration for the mujahideen who returned home. These fighters founded Salafi-jihadi groups in their home countries, triggering a global surge for Salafi-jihadism and the diffusion of the movement into the corners of Muslim-majority lands. Their shared experiences and relationships developed in Afghanistan connected them, building an instant potential network that spanned Muslim lands. This network later formed the roots for the expansion of al Qaeda's branches.

Returnees from Afghanistan caused a surge in the number of Salafi-jihadi groups in the Muslim world in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The armed Islamist groups that had been active before the Afghanistan jihad were few and nationally organized. These included the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Algerian Armed Islamic Movement. The mujahideen brought with them lessons learned in the field and connections

to external funding, generating a pulse in the local groups that strengthened the global movement. By the early 1990s, Salafi-jihadi groups were active across North Africa, the Middle East, the Caucasus, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Afghanistan showed that success was possible, and new leaders seized on growing popular dissatisfaction with authoritarian governments to recruit and mobilize against the states. Some individuals continued on to new battlefields—Bosnia and Chechnya—as international theaters for jihad. Yet not one fight succeeded in collapsing the state. Most lost soundly instead.

Nevertheless, fronts for jihad create touch points for foreign fighters to learn, trade experience, and improve their overall methodology. The dispersion of these foreign fighters when the wars end—after Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Somalia, Iraq, and eventually Syria—lends itself to an iterative and adaptive approach among groups that share the same fundamental ideology but may not develop formal organizational affiliations. The fronts for jihad culled the means and ways for Salafi-jihadi groups through proof of success and were practical universities for students of the Salafi-jihadi ideology. Alumni then translated the experience and knowledge back to their homelands, bringing with them personal relationships that helped coalesce a global movement around the shared Salafi-jihadi ideology. Bin Laden's al Qaeda became a force multiplier for many of the local Salafi-jihadi groups, meeting basic organizational requirements such as funding and, in the process, building a complex web of organizational and personal relationships that al Qaeda and other transnational Salafi-jihadi groups use.

The resounding defeats of Salafi-jihadi groups by the mid-1990s broadly cemented some lessons. First, the absence of a unified effort within a country undercuts progress. Groups' local rivalries undermined overall success as groups sought to outdo or marginalize others and took unnecessary risks. Second, Western support for Muslim-majority governments was a key obstacle to success. The external support blocked the mujahideen's effort to collapse these governments. Yet the West, particularly the US, was not willing to pay with its lives for these governments and therefore could be compelled to remove its support. The US retreated from both Somalia and Lebanon after taking casualties that seemed very limited by the standards of those who had fought the Soviets in Afghanistan, killing more than 10,000 Soviets in the process. Lastly, the efforts failed because the groups lost or never had popular support. The rising civilian death toll split the population from the Islamists, isolating them and enabling security services to round up the remaining supporters.

These lessons shone through clearly in the Algerian jihad during that country's civil war. Algeria received support from France to crush the resistance. Multiple Salafi-jihadi groups were active in Algeria in the early 1990s. They competed against each other for leadership of the Algerian movement, which the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) had brought into being. Among these groups were the Armed Islamic Movement (MIA) and its splinter group, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). The MIA attacked the state and refrained from broadly targeting populations. The GIA took a more radical approach, expanding the definition of its enemy over time to include foreigners, civil servants, MIA members, and civilians disobeying its edicts. It escalated the level of violence to the point of terrorizing the population.[40] A faction, primarily a group of Afghan Arabs (Arabs who had fought the Soviets), split from the GIA over the treatment of civilians and formed a new group, the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC). The GSPC, as its name implies, focused on *da'wa*—religious outreach to the population—and combat against the Algerian state. The GSPC would later change its name to al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), after an Afghan-Arab assumed leadership.[41] The GIA, which had continued its brutal attacks, lost popular support, and Algerian security forces arrested its remaining leadership in 2004.[42]

Ayman al Zawahiri, today's leader of al Qaeda, experienced these lessons firsthand. His involvement in and observations of the jihadi movement in Egypt in the 1980s and 1990s shape his current decisions and guidance for al Qaeda. He was a prominent leader of the Egyptian movement and watched as his group, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), among others, became

isolated through the loss of popular support and left Egypt in defeat by the mid-1990s. Zawahiri oversaw the EIJ's turn to increasing violence, including the first suicide attack by a Sunni group, in the early 1990s as the group competed in Egypt with the Gama'a al Islamiyya in attacks against the Mubarak regime. The mounting civilian casualties, particularly from a November 1993 bombing next to a girls' school, alienated the population. Imprisoned Gama'a al Islamiyya and EIJ members signed a nonviolence agreement with the Egyptian government that Zawahiri vehemently opposed.[43] Zawahiri watched Egypt's Islamist revolutions collapse as the Egyptian government co-opted groups that were imprisoned or on the run and without any popular support. He remains determined to prevent such a defeat from happening again.

Al Qaeda: Isolated in the Shadows. Al Qaeda focused on exporting the jihad to the Muslim world in the 1990s. Its leaders sought to replicate the success from Afghanistan by sharing resources and skills with local groups to help them become true insurgent forces against local governments. The vision was to lead multiple local revolutions to return true Islam to the Muslim world. In turn, al Qaeda itself would specialize in external attacks to compel Western nations, primarily the US, to disengage from Muslim lands. Yet al Qaeda was unable to reproduce what had happened in Afghanistan and remained a covert organization, operating on the periphery of society.

Al Qaeda dedicated its resources toward unifying the ranks of the local Salafi-jihadi groups and supporting them in their fights.[44] Osama bin Laden's resources and the funds collected through the charity networks that Abdullah Azzam established fed finances to local groups. Senior veterans who had become members of al Qaeda were dispatched to the various states to advise and assist these groups. These operatives reported back to bin Laden on their efforts. Al Qaeda members in East Africa, for example, complained of the local clan politics and the lack of infrastructure, which made operations difficult.[45] Al Qaeda did not have authority over local groups' actions or decision-making since they remained independent from al Qaeda's direct command. However, it did help to shape and guide the groups, further spreading its ideology. And the al Qaeda operatives' reports back to bin Laden and al Qaeda leadership gave the al Qaeda organization good visibility on the challenges that local groups faced, enabling it to update continuously its understanding of what its strategy should be.

Success in galvanizing mass support nevertheless eluded al Qaeda throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the 1998 East African embassy bombings, and the 2000 USS *Cole* bombing drew new recruits, but not the broad popular support al Qaeda sought. The September 11 attacks drove Muslim popular support toward the United States and cost al Qaeda its Afghanistan sanctuary. The US invasion of Afghanistan decimated al Qaeda's leadership and scattered it, setting al Qaeda on course to adapt its organization into a network of affiliates directly responsive to bin Laden's guidance and tasked with advancing al Qaeda's objectives. Al Qaeda leadership tapped the leaders it knew from the Afghanistan front and began cultivating group relationships.[46] However, these new al Qaeda affiliates still did not gain significant popular support outside of the Iraq war zone. Al Qaeda's call for change to return to a true Islamic society fell on relatively deaf ears.

Al Qaeda leadership saw failure when it looked at the distance between its groups and the Sunni people. It had failed to galvanize support among the very population that it was trying to lead for two decades. The activities for which al Qaeda became known—terrorist attacks—were only a small part of al Qaeda's struggle. Ayman al Zawahiri argued in his 2001 seminal work, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, that al Qaeda's jihad[47] would expose the "treason" of rulers before the *umma* and "demonstrate that their treason is a flaw in their faith."[48] Al Qaeda saw outreach, its *da'wa*, as a fundamental component of its grand strategy.[49] It had strived to build ties to and cultivate relationships within the Sunni population. Its focus remained on securing the support of the *umma*. Zawahiri wrote:

> The *jihad movement must come closer to the masses*, defend their honor, fend off injustice, and lead

> them to the path of guidance and victory. . . . [It] must dedicate one of its wings to work with the masses, preach, provide services for the Muslim people, and share their concerns through all available avenues for charity and educational work. . . . The people will not love us unless they felt that we love them, care about them, and are ready to defend them. In short, in waging the battle the jihad movement must be in the middle, or ahead, of the nation. *It must be extremely careful not to get isolated from its nation* or engage the government in the battle of the elite against its authority. (emphasis added)[50]

Yet the majority of Sunni Muslims rejected al Qaeda's tenets and the ideas put forth by the Salafi-jihadi movement. Salafi-jihadi groups and ideologues were isolated from the majority of the Sunni people. The population tolerated Salafi-jihadism in as much as it existed and did not affect day-to-day activities, but the movement itself was effectively under quarantine, unable to infect the masses.

Al Qaeda's Lessons Learned. The alienation of Muslims and subsequent lack of support for the global jihad was a problem for the Salafi-jihadi movement. The movement would never achieve its end state if it did not have a relationship with the Sunni population. Al Qaeda refocused its energy not on learning how to improve its war-fighting approach, but on its approach to gaining popular support.

Al Qaeda's strategy of attacking inside Muslim states in the early 2000s negatively affected support for the movement. A September 14, 2006, letter to Osama bin Laden from an unnamed individual openly critiqued bin Laden's decisions to focus al Qaeda's efforts on Saudi Arabia in 2003[51] instead of on Iraq and Afghanistan, where the US military had deployed, or Kuwait, from which the US military was operating to support its Iraq war efforts.[52] The author writes, "Public opinion polls in the Muslim world prove that support to you [bin Laden] among the Arab and Muslim people has shrunk after you targeted the Peninsula." The author added that Muslim states had also taken action to limit support for the mujahideen. He ends by suggesting bin Laden focus on attacking the US, the "head of the snake," and supporting the jihad in Iraq and Afghanistan. He implored bin Laden:

> Stay away from operating inside Muslim countries in order to protect the reputation of the mujahidin, *protect their acceptance within Muslim societies*, prevent any harm to the mujahidin and supporters of jihad, prevent the secularists and liberals from exploiting these events, and direct the souls of the youth for the great battle against the head of the snake. (emphasis added)

Al Qaeda in Iraq controlled Anbar province and the group was nearing the height of its power during the war.[53] The author implied that winning in Iraq would galvanize the movement, as many had been hopeful to see the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (the Taliban) secure the country just before the October 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan.

However, internal misgivings surfaced over how al Qaeda in Iraq skyrocketed to power even as the group neared success. A 2004–05 exchange between al Qaeda in Iraq emir Abu Musab al Zarqawi and Ayman al Zawahiri, then-deputy to Osama bin Laden, laid bare the disagreement over how to generate support within the Sunni population. Zarqawi denigrated the Iraqi Sunni in a 2004 report back to al Qaeda leaders in Pakistan. The masses, he wrote, are the silent majority, the sheikhs and scholars are primarily Sufi and "doomed to perdition," the Muslim Brotherhood "trad[es] in the blood of martyrs," the mujahideen are unexperienced and afraid of death, and the foreign fighters' numbers are negligible.[54] Zarqawi's plan was to mobilize the Sunni by stoking sectarian war through targeted attacks against the Shi'a. He believed that the Sunni would fight only when they faced an existential threat from the Shi'a and set about provoking that threat.

Zawahiri responded in 2005 by focusing on the issue of popular support—of the relationship with the *umma*.[55] Zawahiri warned Zarqawi against "separating from the masses," calling into question Zarqawi's oversight of slaughter in Iraq. Zarqawi and his successors continued apace, however, and the Shi'a counterattacks against the Sunni community at large did,

indeed, mobilize that community. Al Qaeda in Iraq managed to put itself at the head of that mobilization for a time, seeming to validate Zarqawi's approach. But Zarqawi led his group too far, validating Zawahiri's concern. A popular uprising against al Qaeda in Iraq, the *sahwa* (Anbar Awakening), along with a US shift in strategy (the "surge"), defeated the group. The events reinforced Zawahiri's opinion that the coercion of a population through violence and brutal tactics would isolate the movement.

The global movement learned from its experience in Iraq that it could not survive without popular support. Al Qaeda senior operative Atiyah Abdul Rahman expressed the fear in March 2007 that al Qaeda in Iraq leadership—specifically Abu Hamza al Muhajir and Abu Omar al Baghdadi (Zarqawi's successor)—were alienating the people.[56] Al Qaeda also learned that it could not survive on military force alone. A document found among al Qaeda correspondence discussing al Qaeda in Yemen reads: "We should not attempt to control just because we have the military power to do so, while we still do not have the power to sustain the people in their livelihood."[57] Al Qaeda's focus turned to the people.

The effective defeats of al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Iraq and the elimination of al Qaeda operational cells in places such as Yemen defeated only the militarized components of al Qaeda and the Salafi-jihadi movement. They did not remove the will of the remaining individuals to reconstitute or sufficiently set conditions to prevent their return.

Rather, al Qaeda senior leadership internalized the lessons it saw in those defeats. It reemphasized the requirement to focus on the relationship with the Sunni population. Al Shabaab's success in Somalia derived from its ability to provide governance alongside its insurgent force.[58] Much internal leadership correspondence from the late 2000s and early 2010s focused on the sanctity of Muslim blood—even of Shi'a—and called for careful planning to avoid spilling the blood of Muslim civilians.[59] The Salafi-jihadi movement went to ground until it could rise up again as an insurgent force.

Salafi-jihadi leaders studied the movement's failures and called for strategic and operational changes to build and then fortify the connection to the *umma*. Al Qaeda in particular adapted its operations and advised local associated groups to focus on building popular support. One method was mediation, a method that the Prophet Mohammed had used to gain strength in Medina. Mediation remains a primary way for the Salafi-jihadi base to gain initial legitimacy within populations. Al Qaeda leadership frequently discussed not better ways to kill Americans, but how to better capture and retain the support of the *umma*.

Al Qaeda and Salafi-jihadi leaders never ceased efforts to build a strong transnational movement in the Sunni Muslim population. They learned from failure, modified operations based on conditions, and remained viable, if weakened, into the 2000s. Those who remained on the battlefield had witnessed defeat. They had survived sustained US and partnered counterterrorism operations against them. And they had begun to understand how to convey their Salafi-jihadi message in such a way that the local populations did not immediately reject it. These al Qaeda and Salafi-jihadi leaders were further dispersed geographically and operating toward a common objective. The movement had become resilient, adaptive, and complex. Yet it remained weak and far from its goals and the people it sought to lead and rule.

The Movement Today

A series of exogenous events accomplished for al Qaeda what it had failed to do for decades: the mobilization of the Sunni population against the states. The popular uprisings that collapsed states across the Middle East and North Africa—Syria, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia—brought the objectives of the masses into alignment with those of the Salafi-jihadi movement. Both mainstream Sunni Muslims, driven by anti-government grievances, and Salafi-jihadis sought to collapse the regimes. Thus began a period of resurgence for al Qaeda and an opportunity for Salafi-jihadis to apply their lessons learned to co-opt primarily secular and democratic movements.

The 2011 Opportunity

The Salafi-jihadi movement, and especially al Qaeda leadership, seized the opportunity that change had brought to extend its tendrils into local populations in 2011. Momentum had been running against the Salafi-jihadi movement, which authoritarian regimes had repressed and US and partnered military actions had expelled from holding terrain outside of Somalia. Yet the repressive tactics of the authoritarian regimes also stoked the popular dissatisfaction that swelled to bring down those regimes. The Arab Spring, which began as the US and the West had begun to adopt increasingly isolationist policies, created initial conditions for the emergence of the Salafi-jihadi movement from the shadows.

The release of Salafi-jihadi leaders who had been imprisoned in Arab Spring states produced local receptors through which the global Salafi-jihadi movement could work. These leaders had the local connections and credentials to lead local engagement efforts. Many of these leaders were not members of al Qaeda—Osama bin Laden's consolidation over the Salafi-jihadi movement had happened while many were imprisoned. The injustices they experienced while in prison were the very same experienced by political prisoners who had had nothing to do with the Salafi-jihadi movement previously, a shared experience that created a line of sympathy between two movements with vastly different end states in mind.

The revolutions brought further unrest, mobilizing a Sunni popular base. The short-term objectives between this mobilized, popular base and the Salafi-jihadi movement aligned in such a way that Salafi-jihadi leaders were able to insinuate themselves into the local insurgencies. Salafi-jihadi leadership pushed the narrative that the West's hesitation to support local movements—a hesitation rooted more in Western policy paralysis than in the rejection of the Arab Spring ideals—was a sign of the West's hypocrisy and its continued support for autocratic governments.

The outcome of the Egyptian Arab Spring—the crushing of political Islam—effectively closed off political activity as a means to achieve an Islamist state. Egyptians elected Muslim Brotherhood member Mohamed Morsi by popular vote in the country's first competitive presidential election in summer 2012. Morsi's actions as president convinced many both inside and outside Egypt that it was too dangerous to permit the Muslim Brotherhood political space. The Egyptian military, acting with foreign support, ousted Morsi. Al Qaeda members quickly used the "bullets not the ballot" trope to recruit, a concept echoed within the global movement.[60] Other Arab governments also cracked down on Muslim Brotherhood parties in the region. These actions cemented the idea that political processes would not provide redress for Islamists' grievances and further polarized the region by driving political Islamists toward violence to protect their belief system.[61]

Sectarianism and regional power politics further drove support to the Salafi-jihadi movement. A series of US policy decisions rooted in the Iran nuclear deal fostered a narrative propagated by the Salafi-jihadi movement that the US did not back the Sunni and emboldened the Iranian regime to conduct expeditionary operations. The Syrian armed opposition perceived the US response to the Assad regime's August 2013 chemical weapons attack as a betrayal of the promise that US President Barack Obama had made a year prior.[62] The Gulf States read minimalist responses from the US military to increasingly aggressive behavior by Iranian naval vessels in the Persian Gulf as American acceptance of growing Iranian influence. They sought to push back against Iran and contain its growth, and they identified Syria as the primary battlefield on which to do so. The Gulf States sought to fill the void left by the US in Syria, but their increased engagement also threatened Iran and its proxies, accelerating the regionalization of Syria's civil war. Gulf States ranked Salafi-jihadis as less threatening than Iran and calibrated their assistance into Syria accordingly. The interaction of these developments served to reinforce sectarian trends, which only further empowered the Salafi-jihadi movement.

Al Qaeda's Reemergence

Al Qaeda crafted itself as a supporter of the local movements, religious or not, during the 2011 Arab Spring. Its global network positioned it to coordinate across theaters and pump resources into local conflicts to shape their development. Al Qaeda also tapped its deep interlaced human networks to establish or reestablish contact with local Salafi-jihadi leaders and groups, pledging support and providing strategic guidance. Local al Qaeda affiliates became vectors to move resources strategically within the Salafi-jihadi movement such that al Qaeda developed relations with Salafi-jihadi groups in nearly all of the popular uprisings.

Al Qaeda's quiet momentum offset the May 2011 loss of its charismatic leader, Osama bin Laden. It began operating under new names: Ansar al Sharia, Ansar al Din, and Jabhat al Nusra. The Ansar al Sharia groups in Libya and Tunisia included veteran Salafi-jihadi leaders who had fought against the Soviets or trained in Afghanistan and were known to senior al Qaeda leadership. Ansar al Sharia Libya governed towns and cities after the 2011 Libyan civil war. Ansar al Sharia Tunisia was behind a string of assassinations of leading secular Tunisian political figures. Farther afield in Afghanistan, the Taliban began to reemerge, recapturing areas where al Qaeda had run training camps. Yet it was in Yemen, Mali, and then Syria where al Qaeda made significant plays.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al Qaeda's Yemeni affiliate under Osama bin Laden's protégé Nasser al Wahayshi (Abu Basir), was best positioned in al Qaeda to expand in 2011. AQAP operated from sanctuaries in Yemen outside of the government's reach, and the US had paused targeted strikes in the country after accidentally killing a tribal mediator. AQAP had applied al Qaeda's lesson to limit civilian bloodshed. The group took care to target only foreigners and members of the Yemeni government and security forces as it grew from 2006 forward.[63] AQAP leaders also exploited their understanding of Yemeni society to be responsive to popular grievances against the government.

Before the Arab Spring, AQAP was under minimal pressure and reacted rapidly to replace the vestiges of the Yemeni state as it broke down. Bin Laden and Wahayshi discussed al Qaeda's situation at the start of the protests in Yemen, focusing on whether Wahayshi had sufficient popular support to lead an effort to establish an Islamic emirate.[64] Bin Laden referenced the experience in Anbar while querying Wahayshi about his relations with the tribes and stated, "If the mujahidin improve their dealings with the tribes, most likely the tribes will lean toward them; the blood's effect on the tribal societies is great."[65] He analogized al Qaeda's efforts to a bridge, an image that resurfaced in later al Qaeda correspondence, to note the requirement of gathering all the elements before launching a project. If started without all the necessary material, a bridge—or al Qaeda's efforts—would collapse. Bin Laden's guidance focused on the required elements for success, namely its popular support and whether

al Qaeda would retain that support if pressured militarily. Al Qaeda's military strength in Yemen was a secondary priority.

AQAP took control of parts of southern Yemen through a fielded insurgent force, Ansar al Sharia. The new force dropped al Qaeda's name, and its membership was local—the Ansar. AQAP operatives were Ansar al Sharia leaders, but not all members of Ansar al Sharia were members of al Qaeda. It was a way to expand al Qaeda's popular base in Yemen without compromising al Qaeda's position as a vanguard. Ansar al Sharia governed for about a year with support from local tribes, who sought stability and security. It publicized its good works, such as fixing potholes and charitable activities. It also began to enforce *shari'a* and then carry out the *hadd* punishments (punishments mandated by Allah). Ansar al Sharia began losing popular support as the Yemeni government reformed in late 2011 and promised resources and as the communities rejected the draconian lifestyle, especially after a February 2012 crucifixion. A Yemeni military and allied tribal militia offensive swept AQAP and Ansar al Sharia from southern Yemen by summer 2012.

The experience in Yemen—its short-term successes and ultimate collapse—informed how al Qaeda operated in Mali and Syria, two new fronts for global organization. AQAP emir Nasser al Wahayshi advised his Algerian counterpart, who had overseen al Qaeda's rise in Mali, to implement *shari'a* gradually so as not to estrange the population and to avoid declaring a state because it would provoke the West and because the population would then expect all of its needs to be met.[66] More telling is a partial set of documents outlining al Qaeda's strategy in Mali.[67] The concept was to hijack the local Azawad insurgency, describing the time as "a historic opportunity that must be exploited to interact with the Azawad people, including all its sectors, with the aim of uniting it and rallying it behind our Islamic project, by adopting its just cause and achieving its legitimate goals, while giving it an authentic Islamist tinge." Al Qaeda leadership decided that the group would not be in the forefront, but that local organizations were to lead, building bridges to different segments of society: "The aim of building these bridges is to make it so that our Mujahideen are no longer isolated in society, and to integrate with the different factions, including the big tribes and the main rebel movement and tribal chiefs." Al Qaeda focused not on military successes and terrain, but on the connection to the population.

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb implemented the plan through a local affiliate, Ansar al Din. Ansar al Din initially partnered with the Tuareg who had rebelled against the Malian state to gain control of the Azawad region. AQIM and a separate AQIM splinter group provided scaled-up attack capabilities to support the offensive in 2012. Ansar al Din, with AQIM's blessing, then moved to establish *shari'a*-based governance, using Timbuktu as a capital. The group turned against the Tuareg factions that resisted the authority of Islamic law, marginalizing the very groups that had initiated the Azawad insurgency. Ansar al Din advanced south in Mali, provoking a French intervention in January 2013 that removed Ansar al Din from governing populations. Twice in two years, al Qaeda had established *shari'a*-based governance only to be removed by a military intervention. Both times, its local insurgent force was ousted with the support of the local population.

Al Qaeda in Syria improved on the model, advancing its effectiveness by not just focusing on relationships with different groups, but also entwining itself with society.[68] Al Qaeda began building support through its military operations, but then branched into shaping the governance of areas outside of Assad regime control. Jabhat al Nusra, al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, aided in establishing *shari'a* committees in opposition-controlled areas in 2013 that were not comprised solely of Jabhat al Nusra members, but represented local factions as well.[69] Abu Mohammed al Julani, al Qaeda's leader in Syria, said of guidance from Ayman al Zawahiri:

> We are committed to this and this is a basic part of the principles of jihadist work in general, including work by al Qaeda. We will not impose a ruler on the people. We seek the implementation of sharia and any ruler should be committed to the rules of the sharia and qualified for that. We will then accept

> him. In this context, we will accept what the people accept. Therefore, the directives are wise ones in accordance with the Holy Book and Sunnah, and such guidance only aims to achieve harmony and unity with other Sunni people and with the sea in which we swim.[70]

The group capitalized on the perceived betrayal by the West after the August 2013 chemical weapons attacks to embed itself further within the opposition. It began to shift the nature of the Syrian armed opposition to more closely align with its efforts and is actively consolidating strength in Syria.[71]

Al Qaeda emir Ayman al Zawahiri issued general guidelines for jihad in September 2013 that laid out for all fighters the rules of engagement with various enemy groups and also directions for how to engage the Muslim masses.[72] Importantly, Zawahiri emphasized the nonmilitary component of jihad by calling for the mobilization of the masses behind the Islamic vanguard force. Zawahiri ordered his followers to refrain from killing noncombatants, harming Muslims through indirect fire or destroying their property, and targeting mosques, markets, and other public spaces. He called for cooperation with other groups against common enemies and declared that al Qaeda prioritizes first the far enemy—the United States—and only the near enemy in self-defense such as in the Maghreb, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Somalia, and Yemen. Zawahiri's guidance showed that al Qaeda continued to embrace its role as the tip of the spear and the vanguard force, but also aimed to build connections to a popular base and ensure that al Qaeda as a vanguard does not separate from that base.

The Islamic State Digression

The dramatic conquests of ISIS caught the world's attention. However, the group is but a digression from the main current of the global Salafi-jihadi movement. Its barbaric theatrics to instill fear and its reliance on force to coerce conversion to the faith are at odds with the teachings of the global movement and, many would argue, with Islam.[73] In Islam, conversion at the tip of the sword is forbidden. Yet ISIS's contribution to the movement cannot be dismissed. ISIS rallied a global human grouping around the idea of reestablishing the Caliphate now and surged support to the Salafi-jihadi movement writ large. This effect will outlast the Islamic State as it has been realized.

The rapid rise of ISIS in Iraq shows how a small group of veteran Salafi-jihadi operatives and leaders can exploit conditions to reconstitute an insurgent group and transform that group into a global movement. ISIS rose from the ashes of al Qaeda's defeat, and sectarian Iraqi politics breathed life into its embers. The group broke from al Qaeda when it rebranded as ISIS in April 2013. Jessica Lewis McFate at the Institute for the Study of War warned of al Qaeda's resurgence in Iraq in September 2013.[74] She forecast the return of a strong, Salafi-jihadi insurgency in Iraq.

Few, if any, foresaw the imminent objective of declaring ISIS-held territory to be part of the returned Islamic Caliphate, a powerful concept within Islam and the Salafi-jihadi movement.[75] Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed Caliph, called for the allegiance of Muslims globally to his rule in June 2014 based on the individual Muslim's religious obligations to recognize the Caliph when the Caliphate returned.[76] He emphasized the uncompromising observance of a radical conservative interpretation of Islam, and ISIS's willingness to use barbarity to impose it raised ISIS to the global stage. Individuals and groups outside of Iraq and Syria began responding to his call almost immediately, and ISIS recognized five new *wilayat* (provinces) in November 2014.[77] By January 2015, ISIS could claim to have inspired attacks globally.[78]

ISIS is building a global network to connect its dispersed branches with the leading group in Iraq and Syria. It expands in Muslim lands by collecting pledges of allegiance from existent or freshly formed groups. The central group initially offered resources, especially finances, to newly pledged *wilayat*.[79] ISIS's ideology requires that all new member groups subjugate themselves to the authority of the Caliph and practice ISIS's version of Islam. It typically sent trusted individuals who had trained in or met with leadership in Iraq and Syria to be the local leadership cadre,

entrusted to enforce adherence to ISIS's ideology.[80] There are cases where a local leader has become the leader of an ISIS *wilayah*, although these leaders were already well established in local groups. ISIS has recognized formal *wilayat* of its Caliphate in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Libya, the Sinai, Afghanistan, Nigeria, and the Caucasus.[81] These branches vary in size and capability; none show the level of sophistication in political-military campaign design that is signature to the group in Iraq and Syria. They all attack seams within the populations and exploit local dynamics to provoke the mobilization of a Sunni base, which is a mark of the Iraqi group's influence.

The ISIS network is not yet fully constituted and may still be disaggregated through nexus targeting. It is not clear that ISIS has as robust a human network behind it as al Qaeda's network, which developed over decades of shared experiences. There are a handful of ISIS liaisons operating between major branches, an indication that ISIS has begun to develop lateral lines of support among its branches in addition to the vertical lines back to the group in Iraq and Syria.[82] Such developments reduce the requirements for every branch to retain direct lines of communication back to the central leadership and elevate certain groups to coordinate regional activities and build a local hub-and-spoke network. ISIS as a networked organization may be susceptible to sustained pressure on certain nodes, but ISIS as an idea—the idea of the Caliphate—is more challenging and the greater contribution from the group to the global Salafi-jihadi movement.

The immediacy and urgency of ISIS's call to jihad galvanized support in both the Muslim-majority world and, more importantly, the West. Thousands upon thousands of fighters answered ISIS's 2014 call to fight in Iraq and Syria against the Shia and a Western-imposed power. There had already been high mobilization to Syria to fight against the Iranian-backed Assad regime. By the end of 2013 it was, in fact, the largest mobilization of foreign fighters to the Muslim world in the modern day.[83] The mobilization was not in response to a foreign occupation or the presence of foreign troops, which had previously been al Qaeda's primary means of recruiting fighters. The response to ISIS eclipsed this number.[84] ISIS's call resonated because the sectarian war forming in both Iraq and Syria showed a strong alliance against a vulnerable Sunni population. To the fighters that joined, ISIS's momentum was evidence that ISIS was following the true path of Allah and therefore on course to victory.

The West's predictable response to the rise of ISIS—a military coalition—has weakened ISIS as an organization in Iraq and Syria, but has not reduced its effect on the Salafi-jihadi movement. Recent losses in Iraq, Syria, and Libya may have dampened the flow of foreign fighters to ISIS, but so too has the directive from ISIS leadership to remain in the West to conduct small-scale attacks.[85] These attacks—ranging from directed to enabled to inspired[86]—are occurring with alarming frequency. ISIS continues to inspire attacks and promote such activity through its media networks as actions of "soldiers of the Caliphate." More dangerous, however, is the proof of concept through ISIS's mobilization of "fight-in-place" attackers for the Salafi-jihadi movement. Al Qaeda, which began attempts to inspire such attacks in 2010, never quite achieved this level of success. These attacks have polarized public opinion, in some places isolating or even alienating Muslim communities from their governments. The effect is intentional since it drives support for far-right parties, which in turn reinforce the polarization through anti-refugee or anti-Muslim rhetoric. Continued attacks claimed in the name of the Salafi-jihadi movement may only further this trend.

Al Qaeda's Quiet Return

Al Qaeda's efforts to win over the population continued even as ISIS claimed attention. The devolution of the popular uprisings into continued conflicts improved al Qaeda's chances of success. Syria became the main battlefront. While ISIS had used conquest and bombastic proclamations to capture popular support and gain momentum, al Qaeda worked quietly with a softer approach to securing support. It operated through Jabhat al Nusra, its vanguard force

in Syria, and through al Qaeda members or known Salafi-jihadi leaders who came to be part of the leadership of other Salafi-jihadi groups, such as Ahrar al Sham operating in Syria. Al Qaeda leveraged decades of experience to conduct what is turning out to be a very successful Salafi-jihadi experiment.

Al Qaeda in Syria actively adapts to its environment to retain its popular support base. It couches its message within the Syrian context, and its access to resources through the Salafi-jihadi movement allowed it to buy cooperation from components of the Syrian armed opposition. Al Qaeda could not offer capabilities like those of the US TOW missile program in Syria, but it offered weaponry and supplies without a long vetting period and could respond much more rapidly to ground developments than any other external actor because it was operating directly on the battlefield. The group supported other Salafi-jihadi groups in Syria, asking for deconfliction of military operations at a minimum while pressing continuously to unify the ranks against the Assad regime and its allies. Al Qaeda veteran military strategists provided guidance that helped to begin unifying parts of the fractured opposition into military operations rooms under al Qaeda influence that led to greater coordination.[87] It also commenced a state-building process much more gradual than its predecessors in Yemen and Mali, transforming the structures of governance from within so as to couch them fully in local context rather than completely changing the administration.[88]

Salafi-jihadi influence is growing within the Syrian armed opposition because of how al Qaeda is actively reshaping the opposition.[89] Jabhat al Nusra in particular has used a carrot-and-stick approach to shape the opposition. It is willing to work with nearly all groups in the opposition, under the belief that an existential threat to Sunni requires the *umma* to unite in its own defense. Yet as Jabhat al Nusra works with armed opposition groups, it also works to more closely align their objectives with those of the Salafi-jihadi movement. The group has also targeted components of the armed opposition. For example, in March 2016, it stole TOW missiles and other supplies from Division 13, a Free Syrian Army unit, ultimately dislodging the unit from the town it held.[90] The groups that work with Jabhat al Nusra have eventually merged into the group or subordinated themselves to Jabhat al Nusra–dominated operations rooms. Ahrar al Sham, which retains a more Syrian face than Jabhat al Nusra, has taken a similar approach.

The role of al Qaeda—not as a Salafi-jihadi vanguard force, but as fighters on the battlefield against the Assad regime—was and remains incredibly important to the Syrian opposition. Many in the opposition perceived US airstrikes targeting al Qaeda figures in Syria as weakening their own cause rather than eliminating terrorists among their ranks.[91] Al Qaeda sought to preserve this image, eschewing involvement of the Syrian group in transnational attacks that could degrade its popular support in Syria and refocus counterterrorism efforts on al Qaeda after ISIS drew fire. It is successfully managing Syrian public concern about working with a designated terrorist group by downplaying its connections to the transnational al Qaeda organization. Jabhat al Nusra rebranded in July 2016 and declared that it had cut ties to al Qaeda externally.[92] The al Qaeda affiliate then maneuvered through a series of mergers to advance al Qaeda's objective of unifying the ranks.[93]

Al Qaeda in Syria is one of the most effective armed opposition groups on the ground, but its true strength comes from how it is reweaving the fabric of Syrian society. It began through a military line of effort, but as the Syrian opposition became more fully formed, it extended both religious and political lines of effort.[94] Jabhat al Nusra, Ahrar al Sham, and others all ran *da'wa* programs alongside the provision of basic goods or services to begin to inculcate the people with Salafi-jihadi ideology. Al Qaeda is increasingly intertwining its structures, especially *shari'a* courts, with local administrations to gain legitimacy and shape the future of Syria.[95] Al Qaeda's responsiveness to popular sentiment enabled it to set the conditions in Idlib province in northwestern Syria so that the skeleton of an Islamic emirate began to form.[96] Al Qaeda is accomplishing its objectives in Syria behind the front lines of the country's civil war.

The Salafi-jihadi experiment in Syria is one of the most successful to date and serves as a model that al Qaeda follows elsewhere. AQAP in Yemen is

charting a similar course. It regrouped after its 2012 losses in southern Yemen and returned to conducting a low-level insurgency by 2013. A few hotspots in Yemen fed the local Salafi-jihadi base.[97] The 2014 collapse of the Yemeni political transition process and the arrival of full-fledged civil war in 2015 gave AQAP a second opportunity to gain popular support in Yemen. It did not repeat mistakes from 2011, but rather operated through newly established hyper-local proxy groups. It took over Yemen's third largest port city, which it held for a year, and used its local militia force to provide security. AQAP's proxy then facilitated the negotiations for a Salafi-dominated local administration to provide governance.[98] The group had reestablished itself in the territory it controlled in 2011 before an Emirati-led counterterrorism operation reversed its gains.[99]

The entanglement of the Yemeni civil war in sectarian and regional conflicts sets conditions for AQAP to grow strength on the ground. AQAP ceded control of much of its territory after the Emirati-led offensive, but it remains embedded with tribal militias in central Yemen fighting in the civil war. It gains popular support by providing weapons, training, and capabilities to local militias fighting on the front lines, especially to local forces that are not receiving support from the Arab coalition that intervened in Yemen. The regional conflicts playing out in Yemen are changing the nature of the fight, and sectarianism is creeping into Yemeni identities.[100] Iranian and Saudi support for opposing sides furthers the polarization within Yemen. Salafi militias, some of which include Salafi-jihadi fighters, are some of the more effective forces on the ground in key flashpoints and therefore receive additional support. Sustained US and Emirati counterterrorism operations against AQAP risk creating a narrative similar to al Qaeda's narrative in Syria that the US is aligned against the Sunni. A surge in US airstrikes targeting AQAP in central Yemen shifted momentum to the opposing side in March 2017.[101]

Al Qaeda's long-term investments in parts of Africa are also beginning to pay off. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb cultivated a strong network of Salafi-jihadi individuals in the Sahel who facilitated al Qaeda's expansion in the region. These individuals jointly provide al Qaeda access to new communities and to the trade and smuggling networks that crisscross the continent. They include local leaders who can bring their communities along in support of al Qaeda's objectives. The leader of Ansar al Din, an AQIM-affiliated group drawn primarily from the Ifoghas Tuaregs, used a personal relationship with an influential individual in the Fulani[102] to foster the establishment of a Salafi-jihadi militia fighting for Fulani rights against the Malian state[103] and the expansion of al Qaeda's reach into the Fulani community helped to extend its area of operations into Burkina Faso.[104]

The localization of al Qaeda into these communities enables it to spread its ideology and network. The local groups remain reactive to shifts in the local context and seek to generate permanent ideological influence over their communities. Al Qaeda as a transnational organization and movement has grown stronger in Syria, Mali, Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, and elsewhere through its strategy of strategic patience and pragmatism. It would not have been successful in most of these cases, however, without reliance on the local network for access to infrastructure and the human Salafi-jihadi network underpinning the operations of each of its affiliate groups. This network, the Salafi-jihadi base, is more potent today because it has focused on strengthening its connections to the Sunni masses, the *umma*, and uniting the *umma* under the Salafi-jihadi movement. Al Qaeda is on course to establish an enduring presence in multiple Sunni communities that will enable it to further weave Salafi-jihadi ideology into the fabric of these societies.

The West, particularly the US, fell for al Qaeda's trap. Al Qaeda leadership, sensitive to the US policy debate, calibrated the movement's activities to remain below the level at which they would force a US policy decision. US policymakers translated the absence of a transnational attack as a sign of al Qaeda weakening. Al Qaeda, meanwhile, intentionally kept its names out of the headlines, which instead followed ISIS's graphic, public brutality with morbid intrigue. Al Qaeda groups promoted their local focus to continue to mislead US policy conclusions that al Qaeda was no longer a threat. Yet al Qaeda did not abandon its pursuit of attack capabilities and continued to build these capabilities.[105] Al Qaeda sought to enable

and inspire attacks in the West, it just did not direct or coordinate them. The local focus of al Qaeda was intentional, as was the absence of a planned, transnational attack.

The strengthening of al Qaeda is more dangerous than the success of ISIS. Al Qaeda's softer approach to building popular support at the grassroots level evoked little, if any, reaction from the West. The West bought al Qaeda's line that its local focus is a local issue. Al Qaeda further managed the reactions of the communities into which it was insinuating itself by permitting outbursts of local resistance and adjusting its time line to avoid generating backlash. ISIS's conquest, by contrast, resulted in the West mobilizing a military effort against the group and harsh reaction from its conquered communities over time. ISIS's coerced popular support in the Muslim world will collapse. Al Qaeda is positioned to absorb the remnants of ISIS, benefit from ISIS's global mobilization, and sustain its own momentum within Sunni communities to strengthen the Salafi-jihadi movement.

Leading the Salafi-Jihadi Movement

The ongoing competition between al Qaeda and ISIS to lead the global Salafi-jihadi movement is primarily an ideological battle. Al Qaeda and ISIS leaders wage a war of words against each other, accusing the other of misleading followers and advocating a heretical interpretation of Islam.

Al Qaeda and ISIS each seek to be the Salafi-jihadi vanguard. Al Qaeda held this position uncontested since the group's founding in 1989 until ISIS erupted onto the global stage in June 2014.[106] Al Qaeda's dominance over the movement stemmed from Osama bin Laden's vision to use his organization to unify the global jihad and al Qaeda's ability to conduct and publicize mass-casualty attacks against the US and Europe. It gained name recognition through these attacks and prestige through its ability to provide local groups with outsized resources. Al Qaeda operatives advised, assisted, and helped resource the efforts of local Islamist groups in the 1990s and into the early 2000s. Al Qaeda attack cells complemented the local groups by focusing on the external enemy: the West. Bin Laden's later public recognition of regional al Qaeda groups—the affiliates—expanded the al Qaeda brand name, and these groups, among them ISIS's predecessor, replicated the efforts of the original group in Afghanistan and Pakistan.[107] ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi contested this position when he declared the Caliphate and demonstrated success on the ground.[108]

The Salafi-jihadi ideology serves as strategic doctrine for al Qaeda and ISIS alike. Having such a strategic doctrine creates resilience to leadership changes in the groups and a continuity of efforts over time. A motif that reappears in Salafi-jihadi thought is the line of mujahideen that stretches from the Prophet Mohammed's time to the Last Day: Individuals may be felled, but another mujahid will rise in place to continue the fight.[109] The Salafi-jihadi belief that the original spread of Islam is an allegory for how to proceed today generates the phased strategy signature to the movement. Conditions mandate the forward movement through these strategic phases. Al Qaeda believes the conditions are such that the movement is in the Medina phase, as defined previously.[110] ISIS believes the conditions are more advanced than that. It declared the Caliphate as the last phase (Mecca II) before the coming Day of Judgment.[111]

Both al Qaeda and ISIS are manifestations of a Salafi-jihadi insurgency. Terrorism is one weapon in their arsenals, but neither group defines its objectives as simply killing Americans or other Westerners. Instead, al Qaeda and ISIS combine terrorism with guerrilla tactics, low-end conventional military capabilities, and population-centric campaigns to contest the state or other armed opposition group and to expand their support bases. They sustain nested campaigns in pursuit of the Salafi-jihadi movement's objectives. Al Qaeda works with local groups[112] to unify their efforts whereas ISIS works to subsume these groups into its organization. They both seek to galvanize and lead an insurgency that overthrows the international state system and establishes an Islamic caliphate first across Muslim lands, but eventually the world.

Minor ideological differences, refined by the interpretation of previous experiences, lead to the visible

differences in how al Qaeda and ISIS implement their strategies.[113] A pivotal point of reference is the Anbar Awakening in Iraq in 2006.[114] Al Qaeda took the defeat of its Iraqi affiliate in Anbar as a sign that the group must cultivate popular support. The group that would become ISIS decided instead that the group had not been dogmatic enough in its actions.

This divergence in interpretation is apparent in action. First, al Qaeda and ISIS disagree over whether participation in current democratic systems to effect change is a sin. Al Qaeda has cultivated Salafi political parties in order to promote *da'wa* (proselytizing) and to identify a pool of would-be recruits from the broader movement for its elite organization.[115] ISIS rejects any political participation as being supportive of a heretical government. Second, they differ over whether violent jihad is required over *da'wa*. Al Qaeda thus relies primarily on religious figures and organizations to spread its message within a population, whereas ISIS uses military conquest. Finally, they answer differently the question of who is a Muslim and therefore whose blood is licit. Al Qaeda holds that Shi'a could in most cases be excused for theological errors and that Sunni Muslims must be taught true Islam, like children, before being judged for their actions.[116] Al Qaeda leadership instructs local leaders to enforce *shari'a* gradually, as happened under the Prophet Mohammed. ISIS, on the other hand, holds that anyone who does not believe in and follow its strict interpretation of Islam is infidel and can—and in some cases must—be killed.

The question of which group's strategy—and therefore its ideology—is correct remains unanswered today. The argument may seem petty, but both ISIS and al Qaeda seek to consolidate leadership over the global movement. Al Qaeda reacted to ISIS declaring the Caliphate with a long diatribe against ISIS for not consulting with others to generate consensus in advance,[117] attacking ISIS's credentials because the idea of consensus within the *umma* is a powerful one in Islam.[118] ISIS, in turn, dedicated energy to responding in full to the accusation.[119] Such examples abound. The groups are advocating to the members of the Salafi-jihadi movement that their theo-ideology is the true religion Allah revealed to the Prophet Mohammed.

For Sunni, success on the ground is indicative of Allah's favor shown to those on the true path. Al Qaeda's focus on popular support laid the foundation for a strong base going into the Arab Spring. The group recovered from the initial setback of popular, secular uprisings in the Arab world by co-opting many of those movements and expanding its popular base. Al Qaeda's losses have since proven to be temporary, and its affiliates in Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and Mali have all grown stronger. For ISIS, the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq by the end of 2011 set the stage for a resurgence.[120] It exploited the increasingly sectarian environment under Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki, and its declaration of a Caliphate was far ahead of al Qaeda. The Salafi-jihadi movement will interpret the defeat or weakening of either al Qaeda or ISIS as a divine mandate in support of the other and consolidate under it as the vanguard force.

Two global organizations vying for leadership has not weakened the Salafi-jihadi movement. The shifting of resources and allegiances among groups and organizations has had no inherent effect. Salafi-jihadi groups aligned with al Qaeda before 2014 in a bid for access to al Qaeda's resources or its brand-name recognition. Such affiliation with al Qaeda did not necessarily mean that the groups were part of the al Qaeda organization itself, although they often became part of al Qaeda's broader network. Al Qaeda's success served as an attractor within the global movement. ISIS's rise introduced a second pole to which groups gravitated. The rapid realignment of groups with ISIS did not weaken al Qaeda organizationally. None of the al Qaeda affiliates defected, nor did any close al Qaeda associates flip to ISIS.[121] Rather, groups' new adherence to ISIS was largely a bid for access to ISIS's coffers and to tap into the media surge surrounding the organization. Over time, ISIS has cultivated branches within the Salafi-jihadi base, which established ISIS's presence in the Muslim world and developed a parallel network to the one al Qaeda had built.[122] The result has been a net positive for the Salafi-jihadi movement.

The different approaches of al Qaeda and ISIS have fortified and added resilience to the Salafi-jihadi movement. Both al Qaeda and ISIS sustain and are

expanding their networks within the Muslim world. They have attracted new recruits, and the fight for Syria outshines both Iraq in the 2000s and Afghanistan in the 1980s. Syria is the new melting pot for the mujahideen. Foreign fighters flowed to Syria, a fight in Muslim lands that began with virtually no foreign troops on the ground, at historic rates, far surpassing the numbers that responded to the presence of US troops in conflicts. There is also unprecedented recruitment from the West. Al Qaeda continues releases of propaganda material intended to inspire what it calls "open-source jihad"[123] and to draw recruits to fight in Syria. The continued flow of fighters to join al Qaeda in Syria shows that al Qaeda retains an extensive recruiting network in the West. ISIS weaponized social media platforms as both a recruitment tool and a means of directing a dispersed network of would-be "soldiers of the Caliphate."[124] It continues to adapt in the cyber world to build a virtual caliphate. ISIS has also claimed or is credited with an unprecedented number of attacks from individuals who chose to fight in place rather than travel for jihad.[125] ISIS's attack campaigns targeted seams in the population—sectarian seams in Iraq and Syria and power politics in Libya—such that it helped to polarize the population. Such polarization aided the Salafi-jihadi movement by drawing lines around the enemy. Al Qaeda, near forgotten as Western and regional military resources shifted to counter ISIS, met less resistance to its local operations and continued to expand. Focusing on the strength of individual groups and not on the movement has repeatedly misguided US policy formation.

The rise and fall of ISIS in local communities—facilitated in part by US counterterrorism policies—may well strengthen al Qaeda. ISIS subsumes weak or broken local governance structures by force and rapidly introduces its state components. The local population therefore rarely recognizes the ISIS government and authorities as legitimate. The popular rejection of ISIS brands the movement as fundamentally foreign to the locality. Al Qaeda's persistent localization into the community—its willingness to coordinate local representative *shura* councils and co-optation of existing governance structures—binds it more closely to the community. In some cases, such as in Derna, Libya, al Qaeda–linked groups helped oust ISIS and were welcomed as the more "moderate" force.[126] Al Qaeda's acceptance by local populations as an alternative to ISIS and as a local partner is a significant win for the Salafi-jihadi movement as it moves from isolation into societies.

Al Qaeda is likely to emerge as the vanguard force for the Salafi-jihadi movement again. Estimates of al Qaeda's weakness rest on its displayed military strength.[127] ISIS fields a terrorist army, and its barbaric domination of populations displays brute strength. Measuring by force, ISIS is stronger, even after sustained military operations against the group. Measuring by popular support, al Qaeda wins. This popular support is what al Qaeda's leaders, particularly Ayman al Zawahiri, have courted and sought to capture. And they have done so in such a way that it will be difficult to break the bonds. Al Qaeda in Yemen, Mali, and elsewhere married into the populations, capturing familial loyalties that complicate the question of extricating al Qaeda from society. It has taken a softer approach to coercing populations, modulating its message and actions based on the local context. Al Qaeda's intertwining with the Sunni population and societal building blocks from local governance structures to the family makes it more enduring than ISIS's top-down approach.

Current Conditions Drive Nonideological Support to the Salafi-Jihadi Base

The breakthrough moment for the Salafi-jihadi movement was exogenous to its own efforts. The popular dissatisfaction with poor governance in the Muslim world caused uprisings against the states that began to degrade and destroy societal order. As conflict spiraled and spread, Sunni populations came under real and perceived threats against their livelihoods and very lives. A broad contingent of the Sunni became willing to accept the presence of, cooperate with, or even coordinate with members of the Salafi-jihadi base in an effort to survive. Current conditions—not ideological agreement or acceptance of terrorism tactics—drive popular support to the Salafi-jihadi base. The strengthening of the base through this relationship with the population is why the Salafi-jihadi movement, including ISIS and al Qaeda, is demonstrably stronger today.

Global events and trends shaped conditions in such a way that the Sunni population is mobilized and under threat across multiple states. The level of change and conflict is unprecedented. Regional state and popular systems had previously contained and dampened the effects of local conflicts, keeping them separate and preserving the local order. That safety net failed. A sectarian war has engulfed the Middle East, and as it spread, it has ensnared power conflicts, such as that between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and ethnic conflicts, such as that between Turkey and the Kurds. Widespread popular resentment and disillusionment with national governments and the political processes are causing states to collapse and placing other states at real risk of collapse, leaving many populations vulnerable.

The Salafi-jihadi movement benefits from the ongoing conflicts in the Muslim-majority world that drive the unprecedented expansion of Sunni communities' tolerance of and popular support for the Salafi-jihadi base. Actors from state-based to transnational to substate seek to mold the shape of governance and power dynamics in the region. Global trends also affect the region: the assault on international order, violations of international norms, erosion and collapse of states, and the emergence of power vacuums. The synergy of these trends creates opportunities for change, which all actors have seized. However, their attempts to reshape the region generate unintended effects and increasing entropy, further imperiling Sunni communities. Sunni populations living in fear of subjugation, starvation, or extermination are now willing to support, tacitly or actively, Salafi-jihadi groups that offer a chance at survival.

Expansion of the Salafi-Jihadi Base

The base is growing exponentially. The number and membership of local Salafi-jihadi groups have increased since at least 2013.[128] The growth is partially due to the massive mobilization of foreign fighters, especially from the West, to fight in Iraq and Syria. Yet it is also occurring at the local level, where ideological motivations are much more muddied and local foot soldiers are more likely responding to environmental changes than to a sudden ideological resonance with Salafi-jihadism. The expansion of the base bolsters al Qaeda's and ISIS's strength, but the base itself

has not delivered new capabilities to either group, and its growth alone does not explain their newfound momentum.

No fundamental shift in the Salafi-jihadi ideology occurred to make it more appealing to a broader popular base. Salafi-jihadi leaders have refined the ideology over time, but the call to violent jihad remains the same. The Salafi-jihadi base still represents only a small minority of Sunni Muslims, and its ideology remains on the fringe of the more prominent and mainstream interpretations of Sunni Islam. The ideology itself is not new and usually is not a main driver for membership in local groups.[129]

Al Qaeda and ISIS have refined their propaganda to better penetrate the West and non-Arab communities in particular. Technology facilitates the transmission of their message to a broader audience, as does the movement away from discourse in Arabic to vernaculars to make the theological arguments more accessible to would-be recruits. Al Qaeda began using such tactics in 2010 but was unable to mobilize mass recruits as foreign fighters or as fight-in-place attackers.[130] ISIS weaponized social media and technology, exploiting easily available mass-distribution and encryption tools to create a global community. This approach certainly surged recruitment. But even the mass-market messaging from ISIS did not change the ideology. Further, ISIS's social media strategy does not penetrate internet-poor communities, where the Salafi-jihadi base expanded most. The internet is not the reason why the movement has grown. The resonance of the Salafi-jihadi call came from global conditions and the threat to Sunni communities.

The foot soldiers that have joined Salafi-jihadi groups fight for the same reasons foot soldiers join other insurgencies. Local fighters sign up to be members of local Salafi-jihadi groups because these groups offer them something tangible in return. Some fight to earn money that in turn goes toward supporting families or dowry payments. Some fight to defend their homes, and the Salafi-jihadi groups seem to be best positioned to provide protection. Some fight to contest the government or another opposing force that is generating local grievances. Many of the Salafi-jihadi groups do not require ideological alignment for membership.[131] However, ideological subscription to Salafi-jihadism is increasingly prevalent in the higher leadership echelons of these local groups. The base's ability to recruit local fighters and deploy a sizable force in support of the same short-term objectives buoys the strength of the Salafi-jihadi movement overall.

Some quietist and political Salafis have recalculated their position toward the use of violence and now see it as a requirement for their own defense. The shrinking space for Salafism in the political arena in many Arab states, notably Egypt, left them with the perceived choice of abandoning beliefs or taking up arms. For other Salafis, such as those in Libya or Yemen, the outcomes of the civil wars affect their futures. Libyan Salafis who had been quietist may act on the sense of threat that a leading powerbroker poses because of his close alignment with the Egyptian and Emirati governments. Yemen's al Houthi movement attacked Salafis directly, detaining them or burning down their homes, and made it clear Salafism was not acceptable under the al Houthi regime. These Salafi fighters and clerics who may not necessarily believe in the use of armed conflict to establish a true Islamic polity but who justify violence in defense of themselves add another source of recruits for the Salafi-jihadi base. Some of these Salafis who mobilized in defense will almost certainly fight for the expansive vision of shaping the state to be a true Islamic government, aligning their actions with the Salafi-jihadi movement. Their mobilization alongside the base could increase its local legitimacy and further build local support for the Salafi-jihadi movement's struggle.

The increase in the number of actual groups that are part of the base and the number of fighters that are members of the base does not account for the full strength of the movement today. A large number of groups were operating as part of the base in the 1990s, but the Salafi-jihadi movement was incredibly weak. The number of groups has also changed due to intentional strategies to unify groups organizationally and then subdivide. The unification and fracturing of organizations without any change to their manifesto has not affected the overall strength of the Salafi-jihadi base. The number of fighters, likewise, swells the

ranks, but does not achieve the Salafi-jihadi objective of the *umma*'s willing subjugation to and acceptance of Salafi-jihadi Islam.

Support for the Salafi-Jihadi Base

The start of widespread popular support for the Salafi-jihadi base is the single most significant change that strengthened the Salafi-jihadi movement. The Salafi-jihadi base had been isolated from society (and repressed by governments) for the decades that it had existed. Sunni communities began to tolerate the presence of Salafi-jihadi groups and in some cases accepted draconian forms of Salafi-jihadi governance. This change in popular support drew the base out from its position of separation from society. It occurred only because the living conditions of the Sunni populations changed.

Sunni populations live under conditions threatening individuals' daily survival or prospects for a better future. Sunni Arab states, many consumed with their own domestic policy concerns or focused on the growing threat from Iran, were unable to fill governance vacuums or, when they did intervene, did so in such a way as to worsen the plight of the very populations they sought to help. Nearly all of the regional states from the Sahel through South Asia lack the capacity to address adequately the complex threats now challenging the international order. Western states, specifically the US and France, sought quick fixes to secure their short-term national security interests that left untouched the hard problems, the grievances driving multiple insurgencies today. Governance vacuums and direct military threats to local Sunni populations made them particularly exposed.

The Salafi-jihadi base is uniquely positioned to gain from these conditions and capture the popular support of the Sunni. It frames itself as the defender of the Sunni against the Shi'a, Iran, the West, Russia, and others. US policy decisions, particularly those regarding Syria, made to prevent the US from becoming entangled in local conflict have fed a ground truth narrative that the US does not care about the Sunni or, worse, is actively supporting the aggressors against the Sunni. Salafi-jihadi groups flourish in power vacuums with active insurgencies, now found in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, Mali, Nigeria, Afghanistan, and parts of South Asia. Al Qaeda and ISIS likewise grow stronger as local groups that are part of their transnational networks become empowered.

Ideological alignment within local communities is rarely a preexisting condition before the Salafi-jihadi base offers support. Salafi-jihadi groups gain entry into populations by co-opting grievances shared among populations to increase the resonance of their Salafi-jihadi ideology. Disillusionment with the political processes and perceived grievances create parallels between the efforts of Salafi-jihadi groups and local insurgent groups. *Da'wa* (proselytizing) remains a key component of Salafi-jihadi groups' activities. They deliver sermons or teachings alongside other resources such as humanitarian assistance and military training. This practice is critical for the local component groups of the Salafi-jihadi base to cultivate their local acceptance. Al Qaeda in particular operates this way, which has enabled it to build local networks into communities otherwise external to the organization.

Salafi-jihadi groups are embedding themselves in the local insurgency in order to hijack it and establish themselves as the leaders of the revolution. Their prior battlefield experiences and existent military capabilities, from asymmetrical attack capabilities to small-unit maneuvers, help establish these groups as a valuable partner. The willingness of Salafi-jihadis to die for their cause—a willingness not always shared by other insurgents—adds to their formidability.[132] Salafi-jihadi groups run military training camps, improving basic soldier skills, and widen coordination on the battlefield. They also deploy to the front line regardless of its location since their fight is not tied to terrain, unlike those of local or tribal militias.

The ability of the local Salafi-jihadi base to respond rapidly to local developments, couch its actions in local terms, and meet the immediate needs of the very population it seeks to win over helps build popular support. The Salafi-jihadi groups identify the requirements of the people and then act to meet them, receiving support from the broader base. Transnational

groups or even more established regional groups provide the means for the Salafi-jihadi base to meet the population's needs, effectively resourcing a grassroots effort to build popular support. Salafi-jihadi groups provide governance, security, and social services in power vacuums, providing the day-to-day stability many populations seek. The trade, however, is that the Salafi-jihadi groups use governance and legal frameworks derived from a conservative understanding of *shari'a*. These groups use their position of power to transform governance structures from the educational system to the court system. The Salafi-jihadi groups provide local security, seeking to monopolize force and positioning themselves to be able to control the population in the future.

The pragmatic and gradualist approach of the Salafi-jihadi base[133] to create and then foster a relationship with a popular support base has been effective. The tolerance that the Syrian armed opposition now shows for Salafi-jihadi groups is the preeminent example of how the Salafi-jihadi base builds its relationship with the population.[134] The transformation of the Syrian opposition occurred slowly over multiple years and could not have occurred without at least tacit popular support for the Salafi-jihadi groups. Anti-government grievances, a population under threat, sectarianism, and polarization of the population were all conditions present that helped the Salafi-jihadi base accomplish this goal.

The Salafi-jihadi base still has a massive task in front of it, even given the conditions that facilitate the base's expansion and drive populations to tolerate the base's ideological extremism. Salafi-jihadi ideology and the global movement's objectives run counter to the beliefs and ideas of most Sunni. The acceptance of Salafi-jihadi groups within Sunni populations today and the mainstreaming of groups that societies had hitherto marginalized and isolated are reversible. However, al Qaeda's relationship with the Salafi-jihadi base and strategy to transform Muslim societies will add to the challenge. Al Qaeda is poised as a global movement to capitalize on the strength of the Salafi-jihadi base and embed itself fully in some segments of Sunni populations.

Changing the Counterterrorism Approach

The US cannot kill its way out of its war with al Qaeda, ISIS, or even the global Salafi-jihadi movement. It also cannot win simply by going after the threat groups or countering the Salafi-jihadi ideology. The strength of the Salafi-jihadi movement is its relationship with the Sunni population—with the *umma*. The individual leaders, the groups and their safe havens, and the ability to conduct transnational terrorist attacks are all important components of the global movement, but eliminating these components without breaking the tie between the movement and the population is a losing game. The US counterterrorism strategy must focus on destroying the relationship between the Salafi-jihadi movement and Sunni populations.

The belief that eliminating only a particular individual or group would neutralize the threat has misled the US to focus on degrading, defeating, and even destroying al Qaeda and ISIS groups. The US military has specialized in eliminating al Qaeda and ISIS leaders and cells and is incredibly successful at this task.[135] The debate over who or what is al Qaeda or ISIS derives from a requirement to delineate clearly which targets are legitimate. The correct decision to not try to kill every individual connected to al Qaeda or ISIS led the US to define the enemy down for its own policy constraints.

But targeting individuals and groups has not led to lasting success. The threat adapted or seemingly appeared in a new place, proving its resilience to direct and indirect military pressure. American pressure on discrete parts of the Salafi-jihadi movement ignored its growing strength elsewhere. The US is making the same mistake with its focus on ISIS. The current fight against ISIS is a digression from the fight against the global movement and a diversion from the war that the United States should be fighting. The US can win against ISIS and lose the bigger fight.

The way to begin winning is to focus where the enemy focuses. The Salafi-jihadi movement is fighting for popular support. The US must, too. The Salafi-jihadi base delivers protection, stability, and assistance to a threatened and aggrieved population. The US and its partners instead bring guns to a governance fight. They focus on killing off segments of the Salafi-jihadi base, some of which are the very forces on which the population relies. Even where the focus is on returning governance, the American bias has been to rely on potential strongmen who promise stability. Stability—synonymous with authoritarianism here—drove the very grievances that enabled the Salafi-jihadi base to expand in the first instance. The stability that President Abdel Fatah el Sisi brings to Egypt, where terrorist attacks are now on the rise, is an example of the hollowness of this promise.

Reversing the conditions that facilitate the bond between the Salafi-jihadi base and local populations must be a priority for the US. The base has grown strongest in the context of multiple civil wars and live conflicts because the wars have mobilized Sunni populations and created requirements for their defense that the local population cannot meet alone. Local wars and conflicts that seemingly fall outside of US interests such as the contest for northern Mali have, in fact, strengthened the Salafi-jihadi base. Resolving these wars—no easy task—to demobilize the populations is a first step to constraining the base's ability to insinuate itself into populations and generate support. This must be done in such a way as to not produce further grievances that instead drive the population to continue to resist.

Expedient solutions on the ground are not the answer. Local partners are appealing because they are already present and usually mobilized. They make themselves more appealing by casting themselves as the local force with which the US would want to partner. The US has convinced itself that working by, with, and through partners is always a better solution than working unilaterally. Such is not always the case. Relying on incapable or even bad partners creates more and worse problems than the partner sometimes solves. Such is the case with partnering with the Syrian Kurds against ISIS, which alienates Sunni Arabs who reject the Kurdish political vision, or even the Nigerian government under Goodluck Jonathan, whose actions strengthened Boko Haram's insurgency. Bad partners may instead cohere the Salafi-jihadi base with the local population in such a way as to make separating the two more difficult. They may also increase conflict or grievances rather than reduce them, feeding the very conditions that facilitate the expansion of the Salafi-jihadi base by enabling it to build bridges to parts of the population or to intermix into society.

US policies must drive toward legitimate and response governance solutions in areas penetrated by or vulnerable to the Salafi-jihadi base. The absence of the state in many cases adds complexity to an already challenging problem because the mechanism by which policies have historically been implemented is nonexistent. In all but the most extreme cases there remain local administrations or governance structures that could serve as viable channels with the necessary caveats that these administrations accept the reestablishment of a national, state-based governance system and that they do not add to grievances. Such solutions permit the prosecution of a population-centric strategy that actively removes the conditions strengthening the Salafi-jihadi base and that helps inure the population to further penetration.

The global Salafi-jihadi movement is, at its core, a global insurgency. Its strength, its center of gravity, is its relationship with the *umma*, the Sunni populations. That relationship was deficient for decades because the means the Salafi-jihadi movement propounded to reestablish the Islamic Caliphate were unacceptable. The stresses on populations today—the threat to existence—have changed the population's calculus to a short-term decision cycle for survival. These conditions enabled the Salafi-jihadi base to build popular support and thereby strengthen the global movement. The only path to victory is combating these conditions, focusing on the population, and breaking the ties between the people and the Salafi-jihadi base. Anything less ensures another generation of Americans will be fighting the same war and losing.

Glossary of Terms

Caliphate. Islamic polity headed by the leader of the entire Muslim community and the religious successor to the Prophet Mohammad. The Prophet reportedly prophesied the return of the Caliphate after a period of darkness.

fard 'ayn. An act obligatory for every individual Muslim.

fard al kifaya. An act obligatory for the *umma* but not any particular individual.

hadith. The sayings and actions of the Prophet Mohammad.

ijma'. Consensus among the *umma* on a matter of Islamic jurisprudence.

jahiliyya. Ignorance of Allah's word.

jihad. As used here, violence in the way of Allah.

Rashidun or Rightly Guided Caliphs. The four immediate successors of the Prophet Mohammed (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali) under whom the Muslim territory expanded beyond the Arabian Peninsula to include what is now Iran, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and parts of Turkey and Libya.

Salafi. An orthodox Sunni Muslim who believes that Muslims must return to the fundamentals of the religion contained entirely and completely in the Qur'an and the hadith.

Salafi-jihadi base. The physical network of people, groups, and organizations who subscribe to Salafi-jihadi ideology and operate in pursuit of shared overall goals.

Salafi-jihadi movement. The ideological movement that holds that it is a religious obligation for individual Muslims to use armed force to cause the establishment of true Muslim state governed under a Salafi interpretation of *shari'a*.

shahada. The declaration of faith in Islam (*la ilaha illa-illahu muhammadun rasulu-llah,* "There is no god but Allah. Mohammed is the messenger of Allah.").

shari'a. Islamic religious law.

takfir. The practice of labeling other Muslims as apostates.

umma. The Muslim community.

wilayah. Province.

wilayat. Plural of *wilayah*.

Notes

1. Historical analysis has discussed al Qaeda's use of local Salafi-jihadi groups and its mergers with these groups to gain access to the local infrastructure. This analysis focused on al Qaeda's strength, not the global movement's strength. See, for example, Combating Terrorism Center, "Al-Qa'ida's Five Aspects of Power," January 15, 2009, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/al-qaida's-five-aspects-of-power.

2. Combating Terrorism Center, "Al-Qaida's (Mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa," US Military Academy, July 2, 2007, http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Al-Qaidas-MisAdventures-in-the-Horn-of-Africa.pdf.

3. Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Islamic State's Burgeoning Capital in Sirte, Libya," Washington Institute, August 6, 2015, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-islamic-states-burgeoning-capital-in-sirte-libya.

4. Salafis emphasize the elimination of *shirk* (idolatry, or here, the attribution of divine authority to a man or group of men) and affirmation of *tawhid* (Allah's unity).

5. The term "true Islam" or "true Islamic society" as used in this paper should be understood as the Salafi-jihadi interpretation of Islam. The use of the term does not imply that the Islam in practice today is impure or deviant from the religion.

6. The term "Salafi" comes from the Arabic phrase *al salaf al saliheen* (pious predecessors), referring to the first three generations of Muslims including the companions of the Prophet.

7. Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

8. The concept of "jihad" is complex in Islam. The term in Arabic means "striving in the way of Allah" and does not necessarily connote violence. Here, "jihad" is used for violent acts in the name of Allah. Salafi-jihadi is used to classify those individuals who are Salafi and believe that conducting violent jihad is a religious obligation. For a more complete exposition of jihad today, see Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadi Ideology and the War on Terror* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

9. For more on quietist Salafism, see Jacob Olidort, "The Politics of 'Quietist' Salafism," Brookings Institution, February 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Brookings-Analysis-Paper_Jacob-Olidort-Inside_Final_Web.pdf.

10. These are (1) the declaration of the *shahada* (*la ilaha illa-illahu muhammadun rasulu-llah*, "There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is the messenger of Allah"); (2) *salat* (prayer); (3) *zakat* (charity); (4) *sawm* (fasting); and (5) *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca).

11. The Rightly Guided Caliphs, also known as the Rashidun, are the four immediate successors to the Prophet Mohammed: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali, under whom the Muslim territory expanded beyond the Arabian Peninsula to include what is now Iran, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and parts of Turkey and Libya.

12. Some have identified additional subphases between Mecca I, Medina, and Mecca II. Mary Habeck, for example, assesses that al Qaeda envisions seven strategic phase lines.

13. See Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy*, chap. 2.

14. It has also been branded as a heresy by modern-day Salafi-jihadis, ironically, who hotly contest the notion that their views have anything to do with those of the Kharijites. The branding of Salafi-jihadi ideology as heretical is not a consensus within Islam. ISIS's ideology, which has strong *takfiri* influence (the labeling of other Muslims as apostates), has led more Muslims to brand it as a heresy than to label al Qaeda as such. The Kharijites can be characterized as a group that held extremist positions on who is and is not a Muslim—rejecting Ali as Caliph because he submitted the decision of his rule to human arbitration (and judgment belongs to Allah alone) and also claiming that professed Muslims who sinned were not Muslims unless they repented. They separated from other Muslims, believing it was forbidden to live among those who did not share their views. See Tamara Sonn and Adam Farrar, "Kharijites," Oxford Bibliographies, December 14, 2009, http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0047.xml?rskey=mrepDU&result=102; and Hassan Mneimneh, "Takfirism," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project,

October 1, 2009, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/takfirism.

15. Ibn Taymiyya's arguments were heavily influenced by his experience under the Mongols, particularly the third Mongol invasion of Syria in 1303. He argued that the Mongols were not Muslims despite claiming to be so because they ruled by manmade laws rather than *shari'a*. Such an argument was controversial then and now because it transferred from Allah to man the judgment of who is a Muslim. It permitted ibn Taymiyya to then argue for an individual obligation on all Muslims to conduct violent jihad against the invading Mongols. Ibn Taymiyya was the first to authorize lethal force in battle against a group claiming to be Muslim. Al Qaeda and other Salafi-jihadi groups cite ibn Taymiyya's arguments in their own edicts.

16. The Ottoman Empire was the last recognized Caliphate. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk abolished the Caliphate on March 3, 1924, and expelled the last Caliph, Abdulmejid II, from Turkey. The Prophet Mohammed is reported to have prophesied the fall of the Caliphate and its eventual return after a dark period of violence. The call for the restoration of the Caliphate surged in the 20th century and was repeated by political Islamists and Salafis. See Vernie Liebel, "The Caliphate," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 3 (May 2009): 373–91, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40262673; and *Encyclopedia Britannica Online,* s.v. "Caliph," https://www.britannica.com/topic/caliph.

17. *Jahiliyya* is the state of ignorance of divine guidance from Allah. Qutb argues in *Milestones* that today's *jahiliyya* is a rebellion against Allah's sovereignty in which man now claims the "right to create values, to legislate rules of collective behavior, and to choose any way of life."

18. Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* [*Ma'alim fi al-Tariq*] (Egypt: Kazi Publications, 1964).

19. Qutb authored *Milestones* for this vanguard, which he sees as Muslims who seek to revive Islam, and his introduction addresses the vanguard directly. He did not provide information on how to create the vanguard.

20. Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, trans. Anthony F. Roberts (Cambridge, MA: Belknapf Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 34–35.

21. Maududi was a prolific writer and had actively envisaged the structure of an Islamic state, which he described as a theo-democracy because of the Islamic emphasis on *ijma'* (consensus). Liebel, "The Caliphate"; Abdul Rashid Moten, "Islamization of Knowledge in Theory and Practice: The Contribution of Sayyid Abul A'Lā Mawdūdī," *Islamic Studies* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 247–72, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20837343; and Elisa Giunchi, "The Political Thought of Abul A'Lā Mawdūdī," *Il Politico* 59, no. 2 (April–June 1994): 347–75, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43101492.

22. Qutb, *Milestones*, chap. 3.

23. Ibid., chap. 4.

24. These are described as reasons to fight in Afghanistan in Abdullah Azzam, *The Defense of Muslim Territories* (1984), translated excerpts, in *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, edited by Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

25. Key texts include Azzam, *The Defense of Muslim Territories, Join the Caravan,* and *The Solid Base.*

26. Thomas Hegghammer, "Abdallah Azzam, the Imam of Jihad," in Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, 98–99.

27. Azzam, *The Defense of Muslim Territories*.

28. Ibn Taymiyya's categorized the world into distinct territories based on internal conditions, which define a Muslim's obligation. According to Taymiyya, Dar al Islam is the domain where true Islam ruled, Dar al Kufr is where unbelievers ruled, and Dar al Harb is where unbelievers rule and are in active or potential conflict with Dar al Islam.

29. According to Qutb, Dar al Islam was "the place where the Islamic state is established and the *shari'a* is the authority and Allah's limits are observed, and where all Muslims administer the affairs of the state with mutual consultation." Qutb, *Milestones,* chap. 9.

30. Azzam, *The Defense of Muslim Territories.*

31. Certain non-Muslims, those of the Book (Christians and Jews), could remain only if they accepted Islam's rule and paid the *jizya*, a per capita tax levied on *dhimmi* communities. See Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, 300, note 25. See also Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security* 35, no. 3 (Winter 2010/11): 53–94, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40981252.

32. See Abdullah Azzam, *The Solid Base* (1988), translated excerpts, in Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*.

33. Qutb's model followed a revolutionary plan in which a small vanguard force could overthrow a government and then establish an

Islamic polity.

34. The name al Qaeda translates to "the base." Azzam's 1988 treatise, *The Solid Base*, effectively served as the mandate for the new organization.

35. Azzam and bin Laden differed on next steps for the jihad after Afghanistan. Azzam sought to first liberate Muslim lands under foreign occupation, such as his native Palestine, whereas bin Laden focused on the Arab regimes.

36. For al Qaeda's constitutional charter for al Qaeda's mission and goals, see Combating Terrorism Center, Harmony database, s.v. "Al-Qaida's Constitutional Charter," https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/al-qaida-constitutional-charter-english-translation-2/.

37. Stephane LaCroix, "Ayman al-Zawahiri, Veteran of Jihad," in Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, 154–55.

38. Ibid., 158–59.

39. To this day, it is not known who ordered Azzam's assassination. One theory is that Zawahiri ordered the hit, but there are many other likely theories.

40. GIA leaders called fighting an obligation for Algerians and quickly expanded the definition of its enemy to include journalists, the families of soldiers, and civil servants. The GIA continued to add enemies to its lists, including MIA members, intellectuals, foreigners, and civilians who did not abide by the GIA's Islamic edicts. It also extended its battlefront to include France, which was supporting the Algerian government.

41. Abdelmalek Droukdel, the current emir of AQIM, was in Afghanistan before returning to fight in the Algerian civil war. For more on AQIM, see Andreas Hagen, "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Leaders and Their Networks," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, March 27, 2014, http://www.criticalthreats.org/al-qaeda/hagen-aqim-leaders-and-networks-march-27-2014.

42. BBC News, "Algeria Reveals Rebel Crackdown," January 4, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4144265.stm.

43. See Laura Mansfield, trans., *His Own Words: A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al Zawahiri* (TLG Publishers, 2006), 136–76.

44. The group also organized attacks against the United States for its "occupation" of Muslim holy lands during the First Gulf War, striking American targets in the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, and New York. Al Qaeda worked with local groups, such as the Afghan Arabs in Yemen, who helped facilitate the 1992 attack on US marines transiting Aden en route to Somalia.

45. For more on al Qaeda operations in East Africa in the 1990s, see Clint Watts, Jacob Shapiro, and Vahid Brown, "Al-Qaida's (Mis) Adventures in the Horn of Africa," Combating Terrorism Center, July 2, 2007, http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Al-Qaidas-MisAdventures-in-the-Horn-of-Africa.pdf.

46. For more on how the al Qaeda network operates, see Katherine Zimmerman, "The al Qaeda Network: A New Framework for Defining the Enemy," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, September 10, 2013, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/the-al-qaeda-network-a-new-framework-for-defining-the-enemy.

47. Al Qaeda's leadership's discussion of jihad focuses on the "greater" jihad: the violent struggle in the way of Allah. See Mary Habeck, "Attacking America: Al Qaeda's Grand Strategy in Its War with World," Foreign Policy Research Institute, February 18, 2014, http://www.fpri.org/article/2014/02/attacking-america-al-qaedas-grand-strategy-in-its-war-with-the-world/.

48. Mansfield, *His Own Words*, 212.

49. Habeck, "Attacking America."

50. Mansfield, *His Own Words*, 208–9.

51. Al Qaeda conducted a series of attacks in Saudi Arabia in the early 2000s, conducting mass-casualty attacks in 2003 and the Khobar massacre in 2004. For a chronology of al Qaeda–linked attacks in Saudi Arabia in 2003, see Reuters, "Bombings and Arrests in Saudi Arabia," November 9, 2003, http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/11/08/saudi.chronology.reut/. See also Abdul Hamid Bakier, "Lessons from al-Qaeda's Attack on the Khobar Compound," *Terrorism Monitor*, August 11, 2006, https://jamestown.org/program/lessons-from-al-qaedas-attack-on-the-khobar-compound/.

52. See Combating Terrorism Center, trans., "Letter of Advice to UBL," September 14, 2006, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/letter-of-advice-to-ubl-original-language-2.

53. Thomas E. Ricks, "Situation Called Dire in West Iraq," *Washington Post,* September 11, 2006, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/10/AR2006091001204.html.

54. Musab al Zarqawi, letter, trans. Coalition Provisional Authority, US Department of State, February 2004, https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/31694.htm.

55. Ayman al Zawahiri, "Zawahiri's Letter to Zarqawi," Combating Terrorism Center, July 9, 2005, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-english-translation-2.

56. Combating Terrorism Center, trans., "Letter from [sic] Hafiz Sultan," https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/letter-from-hafiz-sultan-english-translation-2; and SITE Intelligence Group, "Zawahiri Details Relationship with ISIL, Repeats Call to Return to Iraq," May 2, 2014.

57. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, trans., "Three Stages Letter," https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2017/english/Three%20Stages%20Letter.pdf.

58. An excellent survey of al Shabaab's rise in Somalia is Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia* (London: Hurst, 2013).

59. The adherence to this guidance varies among groups. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan in the late 2000s targeted mosques and Shi'a, eliciting reprimands from al Qaeda's Adam Gadahn in January 2011 and Mahmud al-Hasan and Abu Yahya al-Libi in December 2010. See Adam Gadahn, "Letter from Adam Gadahn," Combating Terrorism Center, SOCOM-2012-0000004, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/letter-from-adam-gadahn-english-translation-2; and Mahmud al-Hasan and Abu Yahya al-Libi, "Letter to Hakimullah Mahsud," SOCOM-2012-0000007, Combating Terrorism Center, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/letter-to-hakimullah-mahsud-english-translation-2. Al Qaeda also holds that it is acceptable to kill Muslim civilians (as human shields) in cases where it is unavoids able. For al Qaeda on human shields, see Abdullah Warius and Jarret Brachman, "Abu Yahya al-Libi's 'Human Shields in Modern Jihad," *CTC Sentinel*, May 15, 2008, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/abu-yahya-al-libi%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Chuman-shields-in-modern-jihad%E2%80%9D.

60. Al Shabaab, an al Qaeda affiliate active on Twitter at the time, tweeted, "change comes by bullet alone; NOT the ballot." See American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, "Gulf of Aden Security Review," July 5, 2013, https://www.criticalthreats.org/briefs/gulf-of-aden-security-review/gulf-of-aden-security-review-july-5-2013. For al Qaeda's response to the ousting of Mohamed Morsi, see Robin Richards, "The al Qaeda Network's Response to Egypt," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, July 23, 2013, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/the-al-qaeda-network-responds-to-egypt.

61. Nathan Brown noted in a paper for Carnegie that Morsi's removal and the ensuing struggle between the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the new government led some in al Azhar, a Sunni religious institution recognized as the primary Egyptian authority on religious affairs, to see the contest as one between religion and secularism, driving some to take sides with the Muslim Brotherhood. Georges Fahmi writes for Chatham House that the number of Muslim Brotherhood members in Egypt to turn to violence remains lower than expected, except that there are warning indicators that a surge in support for the use of violence may come in the near term. He describes tensions within the Muslim Brotherhood movement between those who had experienced the failures when the movement had used violence and the newer members, who know only of its political defeat. These newer members are increasingly advocating the use of limited violence in their approach—a "painful nonviolent" approach—rather than all-out conflict. The use of violence overall has been increasing. See Nathan J. Brown, "Official Islam in the Arab World: The Contest for Religious Authority," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 11, 2017, http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/11/political-islam-in-arab-world-contest-for-religious-authority-pub-69929; and Georges Fahmi, "Why Aren't More Muslim Brothers Turning to Violence?," Chatham House, April 27, 2017, https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/why-aren-t-more-muslim-brothers-turning-violence.

62. Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President to the White House Press Corps," White House, August 20, 2012, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/08/20/remarks-president-white-house-press-corps.

63. AQAP's sensitivity to civilian lives continues, and it actively promotes the steps that it took to avoid hitting civilians. The leadership has apologized and paid blood money according to local custom when the group has misstepped, such as a May 2012 suicide bombing of a military parade and December 2013 complex attack on a military hospital. Katherine Zimmerman, paper on AQAP after the Arab Spring and rise of ISIS, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, forthcoming; and Katherine Zimmerman, "Yemen's Pivotal Moment," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, February 12, 2014, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/yemens-pivotal-moment. AQAP video footage showing improvised explosive devices (IED) targeting Yemeni military vehicles also shows civilian vehicles passing over the IEDs safely. For an example, see SITE Intelligence Group, "AQAP Video Shows Manufacture,

Use of IEDs on Yemeni Soldiers in Hadramawt," July 20, 2015.

64. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence released some of the documents recovered during the May 2011 Abbottabad raid that killed Osama bin Laden. A series of letters between Nasser al Wahayshi (Abu Basir) and Osama bin Laden (Zamarai) and Mahmud al Hassan (Attiya) revealed the decision-making process: Zamarai, "Letter to Abu Basir," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2017, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2017/english/Letter%20to%20Abu%20Basir.pdf; Abu Basir, "Letter from Basir to the Brother in Command," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2016/english/Letter%20from%20Basir%20to%20the%20Brother%20in%20Command.pdf; Office of the Director of National Intelligence, trans., "Letter to Abu Basir," 2016, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2016/english/Letter%20to%20Abu%20Basir.pdf; and Attiya, "Letter from Atiyah to Abu Basir," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2017/english/Letter%20from%20Atiyah%20to%20Abu%20Basir.pdf.

65. Zamarai, "Letter to Abu Basir," 2017.

66. Rukmini Callimachi, "Yemen Terror Boss Left Blueprint for Waging Jihad," Associated Press, August 9, 2013, http://www.pulitzer.org/files/2014/international-reporting/callimachi/08callimachi2014.pdf. For the letters, see Associated Press, "Al-Qaida Papers," http://hosted.ap.org/specials/interactives/_international/_pdfs/al-qaida-papers-how-to-run-a-state.pdf.

67. Rukmini Callimachi, "In Timbuktu, al-Qaida Left Behind a Manifesto," Associated Press, February 14, 2013, http://www.pulitzer.org/files/2014/international-reporting/callimachi/04callimachi2014.pdf. For the translated documents, see Associated Press, "Mali-al-Qaida's Sahara Playbook," http://hosted.ap.org/specials/interactives/_international/_pdfs/al-qaida-manifesto.pdf.

68. Jennifer Cafarella, "Jabhat al Nusra in Syria," Institute for the Study of War, December 2014, http://www.understandingwar.org/report/jabhat-al-nusra-syria.

69. BBC News, "Syria's Al-Nusrah Front Leader Interviewed on Conflict, Political Vision," BBC Monitoring Worldwide, December 2013 (accessed April 24, 2017, via LexisNexis).

70. Ibid.

71. Jennifer Cafarella, Harleen Gambhir, and Katherine Zimmerman, "Jabhat al Nusra and ISIS: Sources of Strength," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, and the Institute for the Study of War, February 11, 2016, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/jabhat-al-nusra-and-isis-sources-of-strength.

72. SITE Intelligence Group, "Zawahiri Gives General Guidelines for Jihad Regarding Military, Propaganda," September 13, 2013.

73. The clear divergence from any interpretation of mainstream Islam led Arab states to declare ISIS's ideology as un-Islamic and that members of ISIS are not Muslim. Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and others participated in a US-led air campaign against ISIS in Syria. Egypt conducted strikes against ISIS in Libya.

74. Jessica Lewis McFate, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent," Institute for the Study of War, September 10, 2013, http://www.understandingwar.org/report/al-qaeda-iraq-resurgent.

75. Salafi-jihadi thought leaders argued that violent jihad was an individual obligation since the fall of the Caliphate. A 2007 al Qaeda video featuring Ayman al Zawahiri also included a recording of Abdullah Azzam discussing the obligation for jihad. Azzam says: "An individual duty ever since the Caliphate fell . . . so it's not an individual duty in Afghanistan only. . . . And the wonder of wonders and strangest of the strange are those scholars who are still debating is jihad an individual or a collective duty. I do not know where these people acquire their knowledge. . . . If they had studied one book of Fiqh, as it is well known that the attacker is to be repelled, the attacker who seizes the people and wants to take their wealth or attack their honor, or religion, or country, it is well known that it is an individual obligation to repel him." Al-Sahab Media Production, "Al-Sahab Media Production Releases al-Zawahiri's 'Review of Events' Video," trans. Bryn Mawr, December 18, 2007, https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/4671/ZAW20071216.pdf.

76. The ISIS declaration of a Caliphate reverberated within the Salafi-jihadi movement and without. The requirement to recognize Baghdadi rested on whether he was a true Muslim and whether the Caliphate itself was legitimate. Al Qaeda argued against the Caliphate's legitimacy. Some Salafi-jihadi groups expressed support for the Islamic Caliphate, but stopped short of recognizing it. Others believed the Caliphate had returned.

77. Boko Haram's leadership recognized the Caliphate and Baghdadi as the religious authority. ISIS did not recognize the group,

which followed practices against ISIS's ideology. An example is the Boko Haram practice of enslaving Muslim apostates. ISIS forbids this practice. (The punishment for apostasy is death.) Jacob Zenn, conversation with author.

78. Amedy Coulibaly killed a police officer in Montrouge, Paris, and four people in a Jewish deli in Paris. He claimed his attacks in ISIS's name and stated they were in retribution for Western attacks against ISIS militants. See also Tim Lister et al., "ISIS Goes Global: 143 Attacks in 29 Countries Have Killed 2,043," CNN, February 23, 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/17/world/mapping-isis-attacks-around-the-world/; and Stacy Meichtry, Noémie Bisserbe, and Benoît Faucon, "Paris Attacker Amedy Coulibaly's Path to Terror," *Wall Street Journal,* January 14, 2015, https://www.wsj.com/articles/paris-attackers-path-to-terror-1421204761.

79. Reporting indicates that ISIS provided sufficient resources to new *wilayat* such that they could outcompete more established Salafi-jihadi groups financially and offer fighters better salaries. See ISIS in Yemen as an example. Elisabeth Kendall, "Al-Qaida and Islamic State in Yemen: A Battle for Local Audiences," in *Jihadism Transformed: Al-Qaeda and Islamic State's Global Battle of Ideas*, edited by Simon Staffell and Akil Awan (London: Hurst Publishers, 2016), 89–110, https://www.academia.edu/15757466/Al-Qaida_and_Islamic_State_in_Yemen_A_Battle_for_Local_Audiences; and Katherine Zimmerman, "Province Ties to the Islamic State Core: The Islamic State in Yemen," in *Beyond Syria and Iraq: Examining Islamic State Provinces*, edited by Katherine Bauer (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2016), 24–29, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus149_Bauer.pdf.

80. For example, an ISIS emir in Libya had reportedly been dispatched from Syria. See Emily Estelle and Katherine Zimmerman, "Backgrounder: Fighting Forces in Libya," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, March 3, 2016, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/backgrounder-fighting-forces-in-libya.

81. Harleen Gambhir, "ISIS-Linked Regional Activity: June 2015," Institute for the Study of War, June 27, 2015, http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/isis-linked-regional-activity-june-2015.

82. For example, Salmi Salama Salim Sulayman 'Ammar was ISIS Wilayat Sinai's representative in Libya. US Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Designates al-Qaida, al-Nusrah Front, AQAP, and ISIL Fundraisers and Facilitators," press release, May 19, 2016, https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl0462.aspx.

83. Thomas Hegghammer notes that the jihad against the Soviets may have attracted more foreign fighters over the decade-long war but that there had not been more than an estimated 3,000–4,000 foreign fighters in Afghanistan. The number in Syria reached 5,000. Thomas Hegghammer, "Syria's Foreign Fighters," *Foreign Policy*, December 9, 2013, http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/12/09/syrias-foreign-fighters/.

84. Eric Schmitt and Somini Sengupta reported that a confidential US intelligence assessment estimated that 30,000 fighters had gone to Iraq and Syria from 2011 to 2015. The same assessment estimated about 15,000 fighters to have traveled from 2011 to 2014. Eric Schmitt and Somini Sengupta, "Thousands Enter Syria to Join ISIS Despite Global Efforts," *New York Times*, September 26, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/27/world/middleeast/thousands-enter-syria-to-join-isis-despite-global-efforts.html.

85. Griff Witte, Sudarsan Raghavan, and James McAuley, "Flow of Foreign Fighters Plummets as Islamic State Loses its Edge," *Washington Post,* September 9, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/flow-of-foreign-fighters-plummets-as-isis-loses-its-edge/2016/09/09/ed3e0dda-751b-11e6-9781-49e591781754_story.html.

86. The three categories for attacks are part of a policy framework for US responses. Directed attacks are attacks that groups coordinate, plan, and partake in directly. The planning and support occur within the group. Enabled attacks are attacks for which groups might provide support, but that do not involve the organization itself. The planning occurs external to the group. Inspired attacks are attacks that do not have ties back to the group, but that may follow general guidance to conduct specific tactical operations.

87. Katherine Zimmerman, "The Khorasan Group: Syria's al Qaeda Threat," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, September 23, 2014, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/the-khorasan-group-syrias-al-qaeda-threat.

88. Jennifer Cafarella, "Jabhat al Nusra in Syria," Institute for the Study of War, December 2014, http://www.understandingwar.org/report/jabhat-al-nusra-syria.

89. The Russian air campaign in Syria has also shaped the Syrian armed opposition. Russian air strikes targeted the largest pockets of the opposition forces that did not have significant Salafi-jihadi penetration. See Genevieve Casagrande's work on mapping Russian air strikes in Syria for the Institute for the Study of War: Genevieve Casagrande and Ellen Stockert, "Russia Lays a Trap in Syria," Institute

for the Study of War, May 21, 2017, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2017/05/russia-lays-trap-in-syria.html.

90. Thannassis Cambanis, "The Syrian Revolution Against al Qaeda," *Foreign Policy*, March 29, 2016, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/29/the-syrian-revolution-against-al-qaeda-jabhat-al-nusra-fsa/.

91. See, for example, Sam Dagher and Maria Abi-Habib, "Syrians March to Protest U.S. Airstrikes Strategy," *Wall Street Journal*, September 26, 2015, https://www.wsj.com/articles/syrians-march-to-protest-u-s-strategy-on-airstrikes-1411773983.

92. Katherine Zimmerman and Jennifer Cafarella, "Avoiding al Qaeda's Syria Trap: Jabhat al Nusra's Rebranding," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, and Institute for the Study of War, July 29, 2016, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/avoiding-al-qaedas-syria-trap-jabhat-al-nusras-rebranding.

93. Jennifer Cafarella, "Al Qaeda Resumes Offensive Operations in Syria," Institute for the Study of War, March 3, 2017, http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/al-qaeda-resumes-offensive-operations-syria.

94. Jennifer Cafarella, Harleen Gambhir, and Katherine Zimmerman, "Jabhat al Nusra and ISIS: Sources of Strength," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, and the Institute for the Study of War, February 11, 2016, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/jabhat-al-nusra-and-isis-sources-of-strength.

95. Jennifer Cafarella, "Jabhat al Nusra in Syria," Institute for the Study of War, December 2014, http://www.understandingwar.org/report/jabhat-al-nusra-syria.

96. See Yasir Abbas, "How al Qaeda Is Winning in Syria," War on the Rocks, May 10, 2016, https://warontherocks.com/2016/05/how-al-qaeda-is-winning-in-syria/.

97. An example is the fighting around Dar al Hadith school in Dammaj, Sa'ada, in northern Yemen. Fighting broke out between students at the Salafi religious center and Zaydi Shi'a al Houthi members in October 2013. The fighting escalated, pulling in a few thousand Salafi fighters from across Yemen and spreading to neighboring areas. The conflict had sectarian roots, but spread as local tribes sought to contain the al Houthis influence. A negotiated ceasefire mandated all nonlocal students return home, dispersing the Salafi youths that had been fighting. A second example is the low-level fighting that occurred in central Yemen in al Bayda governorate in 2013 and 2014. AQAP clashed with al Houthi members who were contesting AQAP's sanctuaries in the governorate. On Dammaj, see "Clashes in Dammaj Take a Turn for the Worst," Yemen Post, October 29, 2013, http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=7321&MainCat=3; Mohammed Ghobari, "Three Killed in Yemen Sectarian Clashes as Truce Fails to Take Hold," Reuters, November 3, 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-violence-idUSBRE9A205V20131103; and "Yemeni Gov't Evacuates Salafis from Northern Conflicts," Xinhua News, January 13, 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2014-01/13/c_133041541.htm. On al Bayda, see Middle East Eye, "Houthi Rebels Seize Province, Clash with al Qaeda in Yemen's Rada'a," October 21, 2014, http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/houthi-rebles-clash-al-qaeda-yemens-radaa-415481037.

98. Katherine Zimmerman, "AQAP: A Resurgent Threat," *CTC Sentinel*, September 11, 2015, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/aqap-a-resurgent-threat.

99. Katherine Zimmerman, "Al Mukalla Is Not Raqqa," AEIdeas, May 3, 2016, http://www.aei.org/publication/al-mukalla-is-not-raqqa/; and Katherine Zimmerman, "Yemen Situation Report," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, May 2, 2016, https://www.criticalthreats.org/briefs/yemen-situation-report/2016-yemen-crisis-situation-report-may-2.

100. Author's conversations with nongovernmental organizations operating programs in Yemen.

101. Maher Farrukh, "Targeting AQAP: U.S. Airstrikes in Yemen," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, March 7, 2017, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/targeting-aqap-u-s-airstrikes-in-yemen.

102. The individual is also identified as Peul or Fulbe.

103 For an overview of the ethnic and tribal communities in Mali, see Mike McGovern, "Understanding Conflict Drivers and Resilience Factors in the Sahel: Desk Study," Navanti Group, June 7, 2013, https://sahelresearch.africa.ufl.edu/files/USAID-USSOCOM-Sahel-Desk-Study-7-Jun-13.pdf.

104. Katherine Zimmerman and Alix Halloran, "Warning from the Sahel: Al Qaeda's Resurgent Threat," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, September 1, 2016, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/warning-from-the-sahel-al-qaedas-resurgent-threat.

105. Ibid.

106. For more on the al Qaeda and ISIS competition, see Katherine Zimmerman, "Competing Jihad: The Islamic State and al Qaeda," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, September 1, 2014, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/competing-jihad-the-islamic-state-and-al-qaeda.

107. For more on how the al Qaeda network operates, see Zimmerman, "The al Qaeda Network."

108. Charles Caris, "The Islamic State Announces Caliphate," Institute for the Study of War, June 30, 2014, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/06/the-islamic-state-announces-caliphate.html.

109. Al Qaeda operative Abu Zubaydah, currently held in Guantanamo Bay, told one of his interrogators that he is a single mujahid in a long line of mujahideen. See the public event: American Enterprise Institute, "Inside the Islamist Terrorist's Mind: A Conversation with Former CIA Interrogator James Mitchell," December 6, 2016, https://www.aei.org/events/inside-the-islamist-terrorists-mind-a-conversation-with-former-cia-interrogator-james-mitchell/. An al Qaeda statement released after the death of Osama bin Laden also carried forward this idea. Al Qaeda General Command wrote that bin Laden died "along an established path followed by the best of those who came before him and those who will come after him." Steven Nelson, "Al Qaeda Vows Revenge for Osama bin Laden's Death," Daily Caller, May 6, 2011, http://dailycaller.com/2011/05/06/al-qaeda-vows-revenge-for-osama-bin-ladens-death/.

110. Mary Habeck, in her forthcoming book on al Qaeda's strategy, further breaks out the phased strategy into six phases: Mecca, Hijra, Medina, Badr, Haybiyya, and Fath Mecca. Al Qaeda's most advanced phase is in Syria, where it is in the Badr phase (overt *shari'a* courts, building an army, and administering territory).

111. According to Habeck's breakdown, ISIS would be in the Fath Mecca phase. Its leadership is openly discussing the coming of the apocalypse. See Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *Atlantic,* March 2015, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/.

112. Al Qaeda's most fertile ground for coordination is within the Salafi-jihadi movement, but it works with political Islamist and even secular groups in order to achieve its ends.

113. For background, see Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy*; and Mary Habeck, "Assessing the ISIS—al-Qaeda Split," Insite Blog on TerrorismandExtremism,June18,2014,http://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/about-us/21-jihad/4388-assessing-the-isis-al-qaeda-split-introduction.

114. Conclusions drawn from discussions since 2014 with Frederick Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, and Jessica Lewis McFate.

115. Al Qaeda senior leaders encouraged the establishment of Salafi political parties in order to shape the political environment and serve as a vetting service for new recruits. The al Rashad Union in Yemen is linked to AQAP. Abdulwahhab Muhammed Abdulrahman al Humayqani, its secretary-general, is a US-designated member of AQAP. US Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Designates Al-Qa'ida Supporters in Qatar and Yemen," press release, December 18, 2013, https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2249.aspx.

116. The analogy to children repeatedly surfaces in al Qaeda leadership statements. The movement also identifies the slow revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Mohammed as a reason to move slowly toward implementing *shari'a*. Al Qaeda does hold that it is permissible to kill certain groups within the Sunni. These groups broadly include members of the government, military, and security services. The local leadership delineates carefully between "civilian" Sunni and enemy Sunni. An example is al Qaeda in Yemen, where Yemeni soldiers were conscripts until the recent civil war; therefore, it was not permissible to execute captured soldiers before giving them a chance to repent. Al Qaeda removed the requirement of offering soldiers a chance to repent in fall 2016, when military membership was on a volunteer basis.

117. SITE Intelligence Group, "AQIM Argues IS' 'Caliphate' Lacks Shariah Requirements for Establishment," December 30, 2014. See also SITE Intelligence Group, "AQIM Rejects IS' Declared Caliphate, Calls Jihadi Leaders to Rectify Issues," July 14, 2014.

118. Consensus, *ijma'*, is an important concept within Islam and Islamic jurisprudence, known as *fiqh*. The emphasis on consensus comes from a *hadith* in which the Prophet Mohammed was reported to have said: "My community (umma) will never agree on an error." *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, s.v. "Ijma," http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e989.

119. See, for example, the late ISIS spokesman Abu Mohammed al Adnani clearly stating that the Caliphate is here and will remain in a speech on March 12, 2015, and ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi's speech on May 14, 2015. SITE Intelligence Group, "IS Spokesman Threatens Enemy to Convert or Be Subjugated, Accepts Boko Haram's Pledge of Allegiance," March 12, 2015; and SITE Intelligence

Group, "IS Leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi Addresses Muslims in New Speech," May 14, 2015.

120. Jessica Lewis McFate, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent," Institute for the Study of War, September 10, 2013, http://www.understandingwar.org/report/al-qaeda-iraq-resurgent.

121. A possible exception is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which split in mid-2015 with a significant faction declaring support for ISIS. The IMU-ISIS faction joined ISIS Wilayat Khorasan in Afghanistan and lost to the Taliban in Zabul province. The IMU-ISIS faction contests Taliban control in Jowzjan province. Under a year after the IMU's announcement of its support for ISIS, a new faction redeclared its allegiance to al Qaeda. For more, see Caitlin Forrest and Richard DeKold, "Warning Update: The Expansion of ISIS in Northwestern Afghanistan," Institute for the Study of War, February 22, 2017, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2017/02/warning-update-expansion-of-isis-in.html; and Bill Roggio and Caleb Weiss, "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan Faction Emerges After Group's Collapse," Long War Journal, June 14, 2016, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/06/islamic-movement-of-uzbekistan-faction-emerges-after-groups-collapse.php. For more on group proximity to al Qaeda, see Zimmerman, "The al Qaeda Network."

122. ISIS's ability to prosecute a global campaign is evidence of its network. See Jennifer Cafarella and Melissa Pavlik, "ISIS's Global Campaign Remains Intact," Institute for the Study of War, June 14, 2017, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2017/06/isiss-global-campaign-remains-intact.html.

123. AQAP's English-language *Inspire* magazine, launched in July 2010, includes a section dedicated to "open-source jihad." AQAP includes how-to manuals from making basic bombs to using everyday objects, such as large trucks, as weapons in this section. See Katherine Zimmerman, "Expanding the Campaign of Violence: Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's English-Language Magazine," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, July 13, 2010, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/expanding-the-campaign-of-violence-al-qaeda-in-the-arabian-peninsulas-english-language-magazine.

124. ISIS describes individuals who conduct an attack in the name of the Islamic State as "soldiers of the Caliphate," distinguishing these attacks from those claimed by ISIS branches.

125. It is difficult to assess the true number of ISIS-inspired attacks. Many individuals claim their attacks in the name of ISIS today, and local security services sometimes credit the attack to ISIS without clear evidence. Individuals may affiliate with ISIS as a way to tap into the global ISIS network, which immediately celebrates their attack and recognizes their action. Individuals who were not directed or enabled by al Qaeda used to claim attacks in al Qaeda's name in order to draw media attention. The distinction, however, between an individual being radicalized by al Qaeda or by ISIS is one that is useful in understanding the overall influence of each organization, but does not matter when looking at the strength of the global Salafi-jihadi movement.

126. This phenomenon is seen in the places such as Derna, Libya, where al Qaeda's presence is more acceptable to the population as compared with that of ISIS because of ISIS's more extreme actions.

127. See, for example, Aaron Y. Zelin, "The War Between ISIS and al-Qaeda for Supremacy of the Global Jihadist Movement," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 2014, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote_20_Zelin.pdf.

128. Seth G. Jones, "A Persistent Threat: The Evolution of al Qa'ida and Other Salafi Jihadists," Rand Corporation, 2014, 27, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR600/RR637/RAND_RR637.pdf.

129. Local fighters report the appeal of a steady salary or community defense as reasons to join the groups initially. The ideological underpinnings influence high-level leadership and shape the strategic decision-making process.

130. AQAP issued a serial English-language magazine beginning in summer 2010 that focused on placing the religious justification for attacks and the tools for conducting attacks in the colloquial and available for a mass audience. It developed the theme of "open-source jihad," which it has continued to date. Many of the ISIS-inspired attacks relied on AQAP's propaganda in part. AQAP's leadership continues to push for "inspired" attacks in the West, and al Qaeda's Hamza bin Laden's statements in 2016 and 2017 also called Muslims in the West to arms.

131. ISIS is an exception.

132. The tenacity of Salafi-jihadi fighters is widely documented across insurgencies. These individuals believe that dying while fighting for Allah guarantees them entry to heaven.

133. ISIS remains an exception.

134. The Syrian armed opposition was highly secular when the civil war began. Al Qaeda intentionally insinuated itself into the opposition and, over time, changed the nature of the groups. For more on the 2012 Syrian armed opposition, see Joe Holliday, "Syria's Armed Opposition," Institute for the Study of War, March 2012, http://www.understandingwar.org/report/syrias-armed-opposition. For a 2015 laydown of the Syrian armed opposition, see Jennifer Cafarella, "Syrian Opposition Guide," Institute for the Study of War, October 7, 2015, http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/syrian-opposition-guide. For how Jabhat al Nusra worked through the opposition, see Jennifer Cafarella, Harleen Gambhir, and Katherine Zimmerman, "Jabhat al Nusra and ISIS: Sources of Strength," American Enterprise Institute, Critical Threats Project, and Institute for the Study of War, February 11, 2016, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/jabhat-al-nusra-and-isis-sources-of-strength.

135. General Stanley McChrystal discusses the development of a precision-killing machine within the US military in Iraq, for example, and how he realized the enemy was still winning despite this machine. Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Group, 2013).

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She has testified before Congress about the threats to US national security interests emanating from al Qaeda and its network. She has also briefed members of Congress, their staff, and members of the defense community. Her analyses have been widely published, including in CNN.com, FoxNews.com, *Hill*, *Huffington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post*.

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