



The evolution of extremist Jihadi
ideology: From Ibn Taymiyyah to Baghdadi

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Summary

This report assesses the evolution of extremist jihadi ideology with the main focus on the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) group's ideology. The 15 year project that is ISIS shows how it has evolved in the presence of al-Qaeda and that the position of al-Qaeda is now under threat from a more extremist group. The report analyses the various core ideas from the evolution of Political Islam in the 20th century with key figures such as Sayyid Qutb. ISIS is the third generation of mujahideen and their ideology is based on the works of several religious figures both ancient and modern. Some key texts and fundamentals are quoted to show the basis of extremist jihadi ideology that is prevalent today in the Middle East.

Introduction

In 1979 the fourth wave of terrorism termed the 'religious wave' started and was predicted to disappear by 2025 if the pattern of three predecessor waves of terrorism is relevant. However, the uniqueness and persistence of the wave indicates that terror is deeply rooted in modern culture and fourth wave groups use a variety of sacred texts or revelations for legitimacy (Rapoport, 2004). Rapoport (2004) adds further that what makes the wave so interesting and frightening is that the issues emerge unexpectedly or, at least, no one has been able to anticipate their course. The most destructive day in the long history of terrorism was seen on September 11, 2001 in the United States. Al-Qaeda group leader Osama bin Laden claimed the direct responsibility for that attack (CBC, 2004). Bin Laden kept the lid on a violent stew brewing in the next generation of jihadis fighting in Iraq under the leadership of new more brutal figures like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Watts, 2014). Al-Qaeda was considered the biggest threat in the 21st century but after the death of Bin Laden in 2011 al-Qaeda's position as the top terrorist organisation is under threat from another terrorist group named Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS).

ISIS has occupied more than twenty thousand square miles of Iraqi and Syrian territory to form an 'Islamic State'. It is also one of the largest self-funded terrorist groups that currently do not rely heavily on external donor networks (US Department of Treasury, 2014). ICSR (2015) reported that ISIS was 'annexing' territory in Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Sinai, Yemen, and possibly expanding in Afghanistan and Pakistan too. With its famous slogan *Baqiya wa tatamaddad* (remaining and expanding), ISIS main priority is building out its caliphate (ICSR, 2015). Gerges (2014) argued that ISIS is a symptom of the broken politics of the Middle East, the disputes of state institutions, and the civil wars in Syria and Iraq. However, it is important to understand the realm of political Islam, its strategy and ideologies to understand the movements and motivation of ISIS. The first part of this report looks at the history of ISIS to give a clear idea of its evolution. The phenomena of political Islam is outlined in the second part, to understand jihadist movements. The evolution of jihadist strategy and the third generation of mujahideen are addressed in the third and fourth chapters respectively. In the final chapter, ISIS ideology will be explained in further detail to deconstruct the driving force behind its actions.

Evolution of ISIS

Since the 1998 U.S embassy bombings in East Africa, the terrorist threat posed by al-Qaeda was considered the biggest globally. Tracing back to the foundations of al-Qaeda, in 1988 when there were signs of a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Abdallah Azzam decided to keep the army of Arab volunteers whom he created four years earlier for anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan. Chaliand and Blin (2007) highlight that he decided to use the army to undertake a much vaster mission - the reconquest of the Muslim World. In 1989, the violent death of Azzam in Peshawar led Osama Bin Laden to become al-Qaeda's leader. He gave a new direction to the jihadist strategy that called for operations in Muslim and non-Muslim countries (Chaliand and Blin, 2007). Osama Bin Laden's earliest propaganda was written in formal and scholarly prose in the 'Open Letter' to King Fahd in 1995 with a declaration of war. To strengthen his argument, he made use of historic statements, drawing on scions of radical Islam such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahhab (Angel Rabasa.[et al.], 2006). Two examples of al-Qaeda innovation are the small boat packed with explosives that devastated the USS Cole in 2000 and the use of planes as suicide bombs in the September 11, 2001 attacks. The September 11 attacks represents the most sophisticated and deadly to date (Angel Rabasa.[et al.], 2006).

Some of the jihadist groups like Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and the Zarqawi network in Iraq were integrated into al-Qaeda and its direction (Angel Rabasa..[et al.], 2006). In general, they share the common goal of creating a 'true' Islamic state with the strict implementation of Islamic law, *Sharia*, but the specific platform to operate each group is slightly different (Bennett, 2013). Among these groups, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's network in Iraq initially pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda to form Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) but underwent transformations in name, leadership, strategy and ideology, and split off as Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) and then to Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), which is considered one the most threatening groups at present, using the name Islamic State following its declaration of a caliphate in 2014.

Although Zarqawi pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden, there was friction and an ideological clash from the beginning (Harmony Project, 2007). Due to escalations of the campaigns against Shiites, there were numerous critics on his actions. Even Zarqawi's Jordanian mentor Abu Mohammed al-Maqqdisi criticized him on both religious and political grounds (Hunt, 2005). Regardless of all critics Zarqawi continued his actions but he died in an American airstrike in mid-2006. Soon afterwards, under its new leader, Abu Hamza al Muhajir, AQI joined with other groups to become The Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), headed by Abu Omar al Baghdadi. In 2010, Abu Omar al Baghdadi was killed and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim al-Badri) became the leader who renamed the group as The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) (Barrett, 2014).

Gerges (2014) argues that ISIS was born of an unholy union between an Iraq-based al-Qaeda offshoot and the defeated Iraqi Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein, which has proved a lethal combination. On June 29, 2014, Taha Subhi Falaha (Abu Muhammad al-Adnani), spokesman of ISIS announced the restoration of the Islamic Caliphate under the leadership of Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali al- Badri, also known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Lister, 2014). ISIS is a symptom of the broken politics of the Middle East and the fraying and de-legitimisation of state institutions, as well as the spreading of civil wars in Syria and Iraq (Gerges, 2014).

Political Islam

The decline of the Ottoman Empire, which for several centuries has provided a viable political system for most of the Arab world, and its eventual collapse in the early 20th century, as a consequence of Western Imperialism, left a political void that was replaced by a flawed nation-states system. The artificial borders created by the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 were filled with autocratic regimes in the 1950s and 1960s following their independence.

Political Islam is the Muslim response to the Western Nation-State. It descends from the idea that Islam already entails political implications and aspirations and therefore, politics must be an extension of the faith. Scholars such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Abul Ala Maududi, and Sayyid Qutb¹, were the main ideologues of Modern Political Islam, with contributions spanning from the late 19th century until the second half of the 20th century.

In strong opposition to the Western world, Maududi opined that since Islamic principles are being mixed with Western values, Muslims were falling into Jahiliyya (state of ignorance), a reference to

¹ Poirson, T. and Oprisko, R. L., *Caliphates and Islamic Global Politics*, (2014). Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2535500>. p. 15

the condition prior to the revelation of Islam. He reinforces the concept of al-hakimiyya, sovereignty of God over all the earth, which has to be explicit in the constitution of the state for it to be Islamic. Qutb went further, proclaiming that true Islam was almost extinct, because the Muslims have failed to follow the Sharia, the traditional Islamic law. Mainly influenced by the medieval Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyyah², Qutb's masterpiece *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (Milestones) is considered a political manifesto in Islamic terms and a precursor of the radical Jihadism. He professes *tajdid* (Renewal) of Islam, in order to purify and reform the society, by a return to the Quran and Hadith. He considers "all these societies un-Islamic and illegal"³ and therefore *kuffar* (disbeliever), a legitimate target for Jihad⁴. Then he explains his strategy to restore Islam: "It is necessary that there should be a vanguard which sets out with this determination and then keeps walking on the path, marching through the vast ocean of Jahiliyya which has encompassed the entire world"⁵. This vanguard, modelled after the original Muslims, will employ two principles: "Preaching", to convince the people to become true Muslims, and "the physical power and jihad" to remove the Jahili system⁶.

Soon after the publication of *Milestones*, Qutb was to be sentenced to death in 1966 for plotting to overthrow the government. His idea found fertile ground in the mind of a minority within the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna on a socialist-Islamist platform. The organisation was outlawed in 1948 for planning a revolution. After the actual coup d'état that ousted the monarch in 1952 it had had a period of cordial relations with the military junta, partly because the Brotherhood had a direct involvement in the revolution. Soon thereafter though, due to growing disagreements (and a failed attempt to kill Nasser), the Brotherhood was dissolved and most of the members arrested.

Among those arrested was Shukri Mustafa⁷. He was the epitome of the radical current inside the Brotherhood. He, and many of his fellow inmates⁸, became influenced by Qutb and Maududi works and formed the radical group *Jama'at al-Muslimin*⁹ that preached *mufasala kamila* (Total

² One famous fatwas he issued was against the Mongols, which declared the obligatory nature of the Jihad against them, based on their adherence to man-made law and not to sharia, despite their conversion to Islam.

³ Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 67

⁴ "From that day [the day when the Muslim community was born], the Muslim's country has not been a piece of land, but the homeland of Islam (Dar-ul-Islam) - the homeland where faith rules and the Sharia's of God holds sway, the homeland in which he took refuge and which he defended, and in trying to extend it, he become martyred. This Islamic homeland is a refuge for any who accepts the Islamic Sharia to be the law of the state, as is the case with the Dhimmies [non-Muslim peoples residing in a Muslim state for whose protection and rights the Muslim government was responsible]. But any place where the Islamic Sharia is not enforced and where Islam is not dominant becomes the home of Hostility (Dar-ul-Harb) for both the Muslim and the Dhimmi. A Muslim will remain prepared to fight against it, whether it be his birthplace or a place where his relatives reside or where his property or any other material interests are located." Ibid. p.102

"Since the objective of the message of Islam is a decisive declaration of man's freedom, not merely on the philosophical plane but also in the actual conditions of life, it must employ Jihad. It is immaterial whether the homeland of Islam - in the true Islamic sense, Dar ul-Islam - is in a condition of peace or whether it is threatened by its neighbours. When Islam strives for peace, its objective is not that superficial peace which requires that only that part of the earth where the followers of Islam are residing remain secure. The peace which Islam desires is that the religion (i.e. the Law of the society) be purified for God, that the obedience of all people be for God alone, and that some people should not be lords over others." Ibid. p. 48

⁵ Ibid. p. 7

⁶ Ibid. p.42

⁷ Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and Pharaoh: Muslim extremism in Egypt*, pp. 69-78.

⁸ The group will be named by the media: *al Takfir wal-Hijra* (excommunication and exodus) because it practised the Takfir and lived in grottoes on the mountains.

⁹ Founded by Sheikh Ali Abduh Ismail, who left the group (and its Takfir ideology) following Supreme Guide of Muslim Brotherhood Hassan al-Hudaybi's rejection of Qutb's ideas in 1969.

Detachment) from the Jahiliyya society that had to be excommunicated. Shukri Mustafa was eventually released in 1971, after about 6 years in prison, and sentenced to death in 1978, as a consequence of his group's violent confrontations with the Egyptian state.

The limited impact of Jama'at al-Muslimin must not mislead¹⁰; the group is widely considered the forerunner of the radical jihadist groups that preach Takfir, such as ISIS. Its concept of Hijra would become the cornerstone of al-Qaeda's thirst for a safe haven from where they could train and educate future mujahideen to wage the Jihad.

About the same time in Syria, a similar radical organisation splintered from the local branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. The leader of this faction was Marwan Hadeed. His objective was to wage Jihad against the secular Baath regime. At first he tried to convince the Muslim Brotherhood to fight along with him. Then, after their refusal, he formed al-Tali'a al-Muqatila (The Fighting Vanguard), inspired by Qutb's work, in 1975. Despite his death in prison in 1976, the Vanguard survived until 1982, when the government decided to crush the insurgency in the radical Sunni stronghold of Hama.

Jihadists consider the Syrian Vanguard as the first generation of modern mujahideen and its founder Hadeed as a crucial figure in the global Jihad. In fact, future al-Qaeda cadres shot their first bullet in Syria.

As Rapoport (2004) pointed out, the 4th wave of terrorism was just about to unleash its power. This wave revolves around "Islamic" themes and it was triggered by 3 events in the Muslim world in 1979: A) the Iranian Revolution; B) USSR invasion of Afghanistan; C) Revolts against the Saudi Monarchy.

All of these events will create the conditions, motivations and objectives for the second generation of mujahideen¹¹, namely al-Qaeda.

Evolution of Jihadist strategy

The guerrilla war against the Soviets acted as an incubator for the new generation of jihadists that would gather around Bin Laden and Zawahiri. Notwithstanding the apparent unity, from the beginning al-Qaeda has been shaped by different currents, one committed to building a military organisation to effectively wage Jihad, while the other wanted to establish a Jihad brand, an umbrella organisation that could provide battle standards and practices as well as funds to whomever wants to

¹⁰ Laying on Qutb thesis of the vanguard, Shukri Mustafa explains his strategy: "power, like everything else, has degrees. The phase begins, in my view, when the circle of oppression and weakness is broken; it then progresses to conquest and expansion" Kepel, p. 82

It is worth mentioning that another radical group, led by Muhammad abd al-Salaam Faraj, did distance from the "phase of weakness" of Shukri Mustafa, positing Jihad as the 6th pillar of Islam which must be satisfied immediately. Trevor Stanley, *Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj: Founder of Jama'at Al-Jihad, the group that killed Anwar Sadat*, Perspectives on World History and Current Events, 2005. URL: <http://www.pwhce.org/faraj.html> Downloaded: 5 February 2015.

¹¹ The Iranian revolution set the viability of the fight against a secular regime for the implementation of an Islamic State. The invasion of Afghanistan provided a strong motivation for the jihadists and channelled resources and mujahideen for the cause. While the two revolts against the Saudi Monarch, respectively led by Sunni Islamist that wanted a more conservative Islamic State, and a Shia minority that claimed discrimination by the Sunni majority, have to be taken in account because they will make aware the Saudi government of the perils coming from the Islamist movements. This is especially relevant in the context of the first Gulf War, when Bin Laden offered Saudi Arabia the support of al-Qaeda against Saddam Hussein. The King refused this offer and decided to rely on American forces. This event provoked the reaction of Bin Laden, who issued a fatwa against the American occupation of Muslim lands in 1992 and will determine al-Qaeda objectives after the "victory" against USSR.

undertake jihad. The latter eventually prevailed¹², at least until 2003 when, in the aftermath of 9/11, al-Qaeda had fled Afghanistan and Bin Laden's strategy began to be disputed.

Among the main grievances:

- Al-Qaeda must seek effective Jihad, and thus put aside the ideological purity¹³.
- The predilection of al-Qaeda for like-minded Salafi and Arabs was a constraint to the development of Jihad. They should focus on efficient collaborations in a broader context¹⁴.
- The financial dependence on wealthy donors was a hindrance to the development of Jihad, as the funds could easily be disrupted¹⁵.
- The decision to formally pledge allegiance to the Taliban that were considered heretics¹⁶.
- Al-Qaeda should revise its objectives and focus on the "near enemies" in the Middle East, all the apostate regimes that do not follow Sharia, not on the "far enemies", the U.S. and the "Western/Christian" world¹⁷.
- Bin Laden's leadership¹⁸.

The loss of Afghanistan produced a schism in al-Qaeda. The "Hawkish" group, led by Bin Laden and Zawahiri, found refuge in the mountains near Pakistan. While the opposition group moved to Iran, to regroup and prepare the next stage of Jihad. The latter group advocated for a different approach.

During the Soviet occupation, Afghanistan was a "Jihad University" where Mujahedeen could have military and theoretical training. Here, Qutb's ideas merged with the Saudi Wahhabi ideology introduced by Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.

Maqdisi is considered one of the leading Jihad theorists. His work has been influenced by Juhaiman al-Utaibi, from whom he took and expanded the concept of al-wala wel bara¹⁹ (loyalty and renunciation) in the 1984 book "Millat Ibrahim wa da'awat al-anbiya wal mursaleen" (The Sect of Abraham and the Preaching of the Prophets and the Deliverers). In a similar fashion to Qutb²⁰, Maqdisi advocates loyalty only to regimes and governments that apply Sharia. And, when it's not the case, he motivates Muslims to act - through the renunciation - against those institutions.

Maqdisi's ideas were well received in Jordan, where he founded Bayt al-Imam (House of the Imam) in 1993, together with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a mujahid that Maqdisi met in Afghanistan during the late campaign against the Soviet Union. The objective of the group was to overthrow the government and establish an Islamic State. However, they were soon discovered and both Maqdisi and Zarqawi were convicted.

¹² Also because it was Bin Laden's vision and he was the one who personally invested his financial resources in the project.

¹³ "the foremost requirement of a jihadi strategy is that it be *effective*, not that it be ideologically pure or symbolically potent". Brown, V., *Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in al-Qa'ida from 1989-2006*, p. 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32 from "Letters from bin Laden: A Collection of letters from Osama Bin Laden to various persons in Saudi Arabia Statements 7 -21". And, *Ibid.* pp. 60-62, from "Mustafa's History of the Afghan Jihad". And, in McCants, William, Jarret Brachman, and Joseph Felter. *Militant Ideology Atlas: Research Compendium*, p. 65, from "The Mainstay on Preparing Provisions for Jihad"; and p. 159, from "Inquiries and Doubts Surrounding the mujahideen and Their Operations".

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-16

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.16-18

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19

¹⁹ According to Maqdisi this concept descend directly from the Quran (Sura: Al-Mumtehana: 4)

²⁰ He was probably influenced by Qutb's brother, Muhammad, who was a famous professor of Islamic studies in Saudi Arabia, where Maqdisi spent some time during the late 1980s when he was studying Muhammed bin Abdul Wahhab and Ibn Taymiyyah. Maqdisi, *Democracy: a Religion!*, 2012, pp. 8-10.

Zarqawi, once a disciple of Maqdisi, would eventually become the leading figure for the third generation of mujahideen. Moreover, his role is pivotal in ISIS ideology.

The time in prison is a founding moment in Zarqawi's life. He rose to a leader status, attracted several recruits and adopted more radical Islamic beliefs, and although supposedly criticised by Maqdisi the two would not openly quarrel until late 2004²¹.

At that time, after several ups and downs, Zarqawi became the infamous leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. The embracement of a strict interpretation of Salafi Jihadism mixed with intransigency, brutality and strong feelings of doctrinal superiority are the main traits of Zarqawi's ideology. In particular, the tactics employed such as the beheading of hostages, the fomentation of sectarian hate against Shiites, and the indiscriminate use of suicide bombers drew criticism, even from within the radical jihadist community. Nonetheless, his actions were still supported by the al-Qaeda splinters, such as Saif al-Adel and Abu Musab al-Suri (and probably Abu Bakr Naji²²).

This faction opposed Bin Laden's strategy to directly attack U.S., as it led to the loss of the safe haven in Afghanistan. Moreover, Zarqawi's fate had been intertwined with this group and only under this lens it is possible to understand the motives that led to his demotion.

Zarqawi's original sin was his Jordan obsession. Since the beginning of his career in the Jihad ranks, he has nurtured the idea of supplanting the Jordanian regime with an Islamic one. He had gradually detached from his superiors' orders²³, to the point that he decided, probably unilaterally, to organise a terrorist attack against Jordan. In November 2005, the attack took place and then in January 2006, al-Qaeda forced al-Qaeda in Iraq to join the Mujahideen Shura Council, an umbrella organisation. Then, in April, Zarqawi was demoted to a purely military role, and eventually killed by a US airstrike in June.

The attack against Jordan seriously alienated popular support²⁴, central to any insurgency, and it was a clear violation of the assigned order to establish an Islamic State in Iraq. And, even though his successor, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, hurried to declare the Islamic State of Iraq in October 2006, the momentum was lost. Although heavily damaged, the movement went, once again, underground.

²¹ When Maqdisi published *Waqafat me'a themerat al-jihad* (An Appraisal of the Fruits of Jihad) and a (admonition) letter: *Al-Zarqawi, munaseha wa munasera* (Al-Zarqawi: Advice and Support).

²² Naji's identity is surrounded by mystery. Somebody theorised that it's a collective pseudonym used by different theorists of the Jihad, others believe that it's Muhammad Khalil al-Hakaymah.

²³ The orders were restated in the letter from Zawahiri to Zarqawi, (2005):

“Jihad in Iraq requires several incremental goals:

The first stage: Expel the Americans from Iraq.

The second stage: Establish an Islamic authority or emirate, then develop it and support it until it achieves the level of a caliphate - over as much territory as you can to spread its power in Iraq i.e. in Sunni areas, is in order to fill the void stemming from the departure of the Americans, immediately upon their exit and before un-Islamic forces attempt to fill this void, whether those whom the Americans will leave behind them, or those among the un-Islamic forces who will try to jump at taking power.

There is no doubt that this emirate will enter into a fierce struggle with the foreign infidel forces, and those supporting them among the local forces, to put it in a state of constant preoccupation with defending itself, to make it impossible for it to establish a stable state which could proclaim a caliphate, and to keep the jihadist groups in a constant state of war, until these forces find a chance to annihilate them.

The third stage: Extend the jihad wave to the secular countries neighbouring Iraq.”

²⁴ See for example the survey from Pew research in Jordan between 2004 and 2006, available at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/02/05/extremism-in-muslim-nations/>

Proving amazing resilience, the third generation of mujahideen would reveal itself to the world with a series of attacks in Baghdad, just after the US withdrawal in late December 2011.

Apart from Zarqawi's tactics and intransigency, this new generation has been strongly influenced by the work of the al-Qaeda offshoots, which provided a new framework for the Jihad movement as well as a long term strategy.

Influence on Third generation of Mujahideen

The Management of Savagery, written by Abu Bakr Naji, is part of the core texts of ISIS curriculum. The book is a "scientific" analysis of steps and improvements that the Islamist movement has to go through in order to "extricating the Umma from the degradation²⁵". Drawing from Western thinkers, Naji writes that when a state collapses there will be a period, comparable to the state of nature, where a primitive law of the jungle will be the norm. In this state the people will be craving for someone to manage this savagery and the Islamist must take advantage of this event. Naji argues that the path for the establishment of the Islamic State passes through 3 stages:

Power of Vexation and Exhaustion. The jihadists must proliferate in numbers, attracting new youth with qualitative operations, and, organised in small cells, they will attack everywhere in the Islamic world, in particular against the economic centres of the countries (i.e. touristic sites, oil refineries), to exhaust the forces of the enemies. This will bring about a period of open confrontation with the government that will try to protect its core economic activities, and so leaving adrift the periphery. The people will feel abandoned and will protest against the government, which will come down hard as usual. The savagery will follow.

Management of Savagery. In this second phase, jihadists must be prepared to take over the control of part of the state. Therefore, they should study political science and the art of administration, even from western books. If they will succeed in managing this stage, they can establish an Islamic state, which will be the third phase.

In the book Naji is particularly concerned in giving advice for this second phase. One of the central themes is the use of violence. He states that the world is in a stage comparable to the one after the death of the Prophet, where the Companions had to use violence to unify the Umma. "Even al-Siddiq (Abu Bakr) and Ali b. Abi Talib burned (people) with fire, even though it is odious, because they knew the effect of rough violence in times of need²⁶". Then, he criticizes those who study theoretical jihad as they are often against the use of violence, which is more than necessary for Naji in this stage²⁷. Moreover, he stresses the importance of communication²⁸, and its role in the polarization of the Umma²⁹, which will mangle the social cohesion³⁰ of the West.

²⁵ Naji, *Management of Savagery*, p. 6.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 74.

²⁷ "to fight and move from one stage to another unless the beginning stage contains a stage of massacring the enemy and making him homeless" Ibid. p. 72.

²⁸ "the first step in putting our plan in place should be to focus on justifying the action rationally and through the sharia and (to argue that) there is a benefit in this world and the next (for undertaking the plan). Second, we must communicate this justification clearly to the people and the masses such that any means or attempt to distort our action through the media is cut off." Ibid. p. 98.

²⁹ "By polarization here, I mean dragging the masses into the battle such that polarization is created between all of the people". Ibid. p. 107.

³⁰ "The overwhelming military power (weapons, technology, fighters) has no value without the cohesion of society and the cohesion of (society's) institutions and sectors." Ibid. p. 18.

Lastly, he is in favour of opening the Jihad to any group that could give benefits, as long as they convert to Islam, even though they might “differ over the correct intellectual or operational matters³¹”.

About at the same time, another influential book started to circulate in Jihad forums “The Global Islamic Resistance Call”, by Abu Musab al-Suri. The author’s objective is to bridge the acquired knowledge of the Jihadi movement to the new generation that is going to appear as a response to the fight in Iraq. In particular, he presents a set of faults that were made during the previous two generations of mujahideen, such as the loss of safe haven, the lack of financial resources, the death of many of the leaders, the lack of strategy and planning, and the weakness in the media.

Moreover, he defines the methods that should be used by this 3rd generation, as the ones employed by al-Qaeda were disastrous. He advocates terrorism by individuals or small autonomous cells, detached from central control, which “is the basis in tiring the enemy and making him reach a state of collapse and retreat³²”. This will prepare the ground for an open confrontation, “Without confrontation in the field and seizing control of the land, we cannot establish a state, which is the strategic goal of the resistance.³³” Suri, in contrast with the dominant paradigm, states that the Islamist should exploit democracy, and “secretly use this comfortable and relaxed atmosphere to spread out, reorganize their ranks, and acquire broader public bases³⁴”, and in due course create security problems in their own countries. Lastly, he identifies a list of priority areas to start the attack, and put the countries of the Arab peninsula, the Levant, Egypt and Iraq in the group of the most adequate, for their unique mix of political, geographical and popular conditions.

The last contribution pertinent to ISIS ascent is from Saif Al-Adel, who, in a book written by Fouad Hussein, presents al-Qaeda’s twenty-year plan from 2000 to 2020³⁵. The first phase (2000-2003) started with 9/11 attacks that were instrumental to provoke US war against the Islamic world, which, in turn, led to the awakening of the Muslims. In the second phase (2004-2006) al-Qaeda wants to develop from an organisation to a movement that could attract young recruits, with a militarised Iraq as the base for the global Jihad. During the 3rd phase (2007-2010) the focus will be on Syria and in the 4th (2010-2013) the objective is going to be the collapse of the hated Arabic governments as well as the growth in strength of the movement, with a focus on cyber-terrorism. After that, an Islamic caliphate can be declared in the fifth stage (2013-2016), to which would soon follow the total confrontation between “believers and non believers” (6th stage 2016-2020), and the “definitive victory” will be the last stage.

ISIS Ideology

ISIS is a 15 years project, that began in 1999 with Zarqawi’s Jamaat al-Tawhid wal Jihad, that combined the lessons learned from previous critics and setbacks in the Jihad together with notions of political science. So, we must carefully divide what ISIS thinks from what ISIS wants.

³¹ Ibid. p. 80. And continues: “as long as these differences are over interpretation rather than intent — knowledge of this is determined from the context of circumstances – and (as long as) they do not publicly acknowledge any (matter of) difference.”

³² Abu Musab al Suri’s Military Theory of Jihad, SITE group.

Available at: <http://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/about-us/21-jihad/21-suri-a-mili>

³³ Wright, L., *The master plan*, (2006), The New Yorker.

Available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/09/11/the-master-plan>

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Roggio, B., *The Seven Phases of The Base*, (2005).

Available at: http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2005/08/the_seven_phase.php

From a theological perspective, ISIS adheres to the extremist vision of Neo-Takfirism that has been introduced in Jordan by Zarqawi, and departs from the regular Takfirism, as in the form of Qutb's, for the sectarian approach and the lack of a theoretical corpus.

They preach strict religious practises, with a direct reference to the life and examples of the Prophet and his companions during the early stage of Islam. Moreover, they advocate religious activism through Jihad against infidels. Here lies a fundamental difference with respect to the Salafi-Jihadi current, in Maqdisi's words: "For these [people, a proclamation of] takfir does not require proof; it becomes a sort of [instinctive] vengeful reaction that does not spare anyone except those who completely share their path and beliefs."³⁶

A common factor of the Takfirist ideology, both old and new, is the centrality of the prison experience. In fact, Qutb, Zarqawi and Baghdadi turned to a more radical world view while under arrest, probably due to the physically demanding atmosphere and the presence of radicals. The focus on piety, intended as rigid religious observance, is a way to repent of the wrongdoing previously committed, which is an easier (and more accessible) mean to obtain admiration than the actual learning of religious texts, especially for turbulent people. The inclination towards men of action, rather than religiously savvy, is particularly evident by the few authoritative Islamic scholars supporting ISIS³⁷, and from the call to the scholars in Baghdadi's speech in July 2014³⁸. One of ISIS most important campaigns, "Breaking the Walls", aimed at freeing the prisoners in the Iraqi jails, in order to augment their operational capabilities on the territory, and replenish their ranks with Iraqis.

The other side of the coin is violence as Shapiro (2013) points out, people who are good at conducting violent operations (as career criminals), usually employ more violence than politically desirable. Nonetheless, ISIS propaganda is able to compensate for the predictable backlash³⁹. Every operation carries references to the "glorious past", the early Islam, and it is profusely spread all over the internet via social networks and specialised forums.

In this case, their ability to present "Islamic" justification serves the battleground logic. The exploitation of political cleavages, as the sectarian divide in Iraq, has favoured both the recruitment of personnel and the destabilization of the country.

Furthermore, keeping in mind the concept of the polarization of the Umma stated by Naji, we can better understand ISIS strategy. The Hollywood style videos showing brutal acts are intentionally directed to spark outrage in the West, which is a way to break its social cohesion. The destabilization, resulting from the marginalization of Islam in the Western society, forces the conflict to a rigid dichotomy between Muslim and Non-Muslim, thus creating an invaluable source of human capital ready to fight for their community. This narrative is the only one that can function in an asymmetric warfare, as it mitigates the feeling of weakness that strongly deteriorated the morale of the jihadists in the previous conflict in Iraq.

Lastly, the politicization of Jihadism is another factor to account for. The mere fact that they were able to rise and establish a semi-state almost out of the blue should make clear that they are not just a bunch of radicalized individuals. Rather, they are an organisation with solid strategy and tactics. The

³⁶ Alshech, E., *The Doctrinal Crisis within the Salafi-Jihadi Ranks and the Emergence of Neo-Takfirism*, (2014), *Islamic Law and Society*, 21(4), p. 433.

³⁷ Kareem, B. A., *What we Learn from ISIS list of "Scholars"*, <http://www.bilalabdulkareem.com/scholars1/>

³⁸ "We make a special call to the scholars, fuqahā' (experts in Islamic jurisprudence), and callers, especially the judges".

³⁹ See for example,

<http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/religion-geopolitics/commentaries/glance/briefing-note-isis-their-own-words>

ascent of ISIS was assisted by convenient partnerships. In fact the help from former Baathist, who provided intelligence and military knowledge, as well as the support from the populace in Anbar, the Sunni tribes, was crucial.

Besides, the copycat effect, the increase in ISIS affiliated organisations could be explained with the contribution from Suri who suggested a decentralized strategy with many autonomous cells that will tire the enemy and prepare the ground for the successive steps.

So, we must not underestimate the rationality of terrorist organisations. Even though they employ a 7th century dialectic, they are definitely aware of 21st century tactics and they are capitalising on that.

Conclusion

This report has highlighted the roots and the evolution of modern Jihadism, and its pertinence with respect to ISIS ideology.

Modern Jihad is a radical movement that encompasses theology and politics. And therefore, any solution must address those two fields.

On the political side, foreign intervention by the West seems only to have had negative consequences. The choice to bridle different societies and cultures with authority heavily backfired, and what was intended to be a means to obtain stability and security is now a powder keg.

Hence, it is fundamental to rethink the policy towards Middle East. Dominance and foreign intrusion are means from an older time, which create resentment and frustration. The grievances need to be discussed in a political arena where all the voices are represented and heard. Any other solution that does not take into consideration the reality of the political situation risks augmenting militancy.

On the other hand, theology plays a strong role. While the West has gone through the secularization of the political scene, this has not been the case in the Middle East. So, either we can wait for this to happen, and it could take centuries, or we can try to find a way to reconcile religion and politics. Which is the right way to avoid the marginalization of Islam in the West that creates radicalized individuals.

Only by addressing the root causes of the phenomenon will it be possible to defeat ISIS and avoid the spread of violent extremist Jihadi ideology.

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