Jihadist Organizational Failure and Regeneration: the Transcendental Role of Takfiri Violence

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Introduction

It is a common expectation that Islamist terrorism like previous terror waves will end. Much of this conclusion is based on David Rappaport's theory that modern terror waves last for a generation.[1] The anarchist, anti-colonial, radical left and Islamist terror cycles he describes have a natural progression leading to their demise. Rappaport argues waves end because a variety of forces (state resistance, generational change and political concessions) dissipate its dynamism.

Rappaport's Islamist cycle may not terminate because the fanaticism of jihadist terror diverges from past extremist violence. The wave's completion could never materialize because of modern Jihadism's irrational quest for a mythical *ummah* or Islamic community. This objective requires jihadists to use extreme levels of *takfiri* violence against Muslim *apostate* enemies. Islamic extremist violence is especially virulent against religious minorities like Sufis, Alawites and Shi'tes that give Syria's civil war an alarming quality that could spread across the region.

Jihadist movements have unique cycles of creation, destruction and recreation that contravene logical convention. Driven by radical ideology, militants sacrifice their lives and slaughter innocents in a futile quest to recreate a utopian community. This dynamic could explain why Islamic revolutionary elites have failed to achieve their objectives yet irrationally continue to mount attacks. Within the mindset of Islamic radicals, terminating jihad would acknowledge the present state of *jahiliyya* (ignorance from divine guidance) in Islamic society and deny Muslim masses the fulfillment of Allah's aspirations.

The essay's organization proceeds as follows: (1) it argues that Islamist terror is driven by irrational forces; (2) it analyzes jihadist values and doctrines that animate Islamic revolutionaries; (3) it argues that jihadist movements go through a cycle of mobilization, extremism, implosion and recreation; and (4) it assesses the prospects for jihadist revitalization, extremism, and decline in the region's main battlegrounds. Examples from the Iraqi, Algerian and Egyptian jihadist campaigns (past and present) are used for illustrative purposes.

I.   The Irrationality of Islamist Waves of Terror

Developing theories that explain terrorism's rise, maturation and decline is a rational exercise. Analysts explaining terrorism have resorted to root cause, psychological, class polarization and organizational dynamics models—all theories based on logical cause and effect sequences.[2] We are told by researchers that terrorist behavior including suicide bombing is rational.[3]

These assumptions reflect a Western Liberal Enlightenment bias toward logical explanations for seemingly inexplicable phenomena. The imposition of rationality by analysts upon group behavior reflects their empirical training. This can lead them to misinterpret group intentions and behaviors when they are driven by illogical theological imperatives. The religious fundamentalism that drives some terror groups may create sharp deviances from expected outcomes. This conclusion has been recognized by some analysts in the evolving literature on terrorist wave theories. Bruce Hoffman, for example, argues that religious based terror diverges from the ethno-nationalist and radical left spurts of violence that occurred in the 1960's and 1970's in terms of its indiscriminate targeting of civilians.[4]

Paul Berman's *Terror and Liberalism* establishes a similar argument.[5] According to Berman, irrational millenarian impulses drive Islamist movements. He argues that modern Islamist ideology rests upon communist and fascist thought that rejects liberalism and embraces a culture of war, death and martyrdom. Seeing European liberalism as a corrupt, alienating and oppressive system, Berman argues that Muslim Brotherhood theorists Hassan al Banna and Sayyid Qutb embraced alternative philosophies that reified primordial and communitarian values German Romanticism of the 19th century that contributes to the development of Nazi ideology similarly rejected liberal individualism in favor of Volkish communal-religious identity.[6] Within Berman's reasoning, Islamism's emphasis on individual submission and its exaltation of a puritanical *ummah* meshes well with the collectivist aspirations of Hitler's Volkish state. Both philosophical currents are responding to Liberalism's emphasis on individual freedom, material pursuits and secularism.

As the Brotherhood progressed, its radicalism strengthened under Nasser's repressive state. Its most famous theorist Sayyid Qutb developed doctrines embracing a totalitarian Islamist state and the cleansing of pernicious Western influence. The Egyptian writer believed that Islam's acculturation of Western values was the cause of Muslim backwardness and a return to genuine Sharia rule was a precondition for an Islamic resurgence. Central to Qutb's argument was that Islam's absorption of Greek, Persian and European influences diverted the religion from its natural divine path. Qutb believed foreign acculturation had produced a state of ignorance of divine truth or *jahilliyya* that needed to be purged from Muslim society.[7]

Qutb formed revolutionary cells within the Brotherhood organization that were committed to the violent overthrow of Nasser's *apostate* regime. His brand of totalitarian Islamist agitation has inspired many jihadists from Osama bin Laden to Ayman al- Zawahiri to Abu Musab Zarqawi. His 1966 hanging by Nasser's state and subsequent *martyrdom* consolidates his revered status for jihadists. Qutb ideas endured long after his martyrdom. His impact was especially pronounced in Egypt and it spawned a number of radical splinter groups who became disenchanted with the Muslim Brotherhood's reconciliation with the Egyptian state during the 1970's Sadat era. Qutb's ideas continue to be the inspiration behind Ansar Jerusalem's present terror campaign in the Sinai and across Egypt.

Berman's argues that the Brotherhood's totalitarian ideology reaches its most sophisticated expression in Sayyid Qutb's *Milestones* and *In the Shade of the Quran*.[8] He traces the roots of modern violent Islam to Qutb's solution to Muslim alienation in societies that separate political from religious authority. Berman argues that Qutb believed that Muslim society had become spiritually vacuous because Islam had progressively absorbed foreign influences that deviated from true Quranic principles. This had produced for Qutb a "hideous schizophrenia' that separated the earthly from the spiritual that could only be overcome by vanguard elites whose divine duty was to revolt against Western influences.[9]

Berman argues Qutb provides many of the justifications that drive today's jihadists. They seek to create an authentic Islam stripped of foreign liberal influence and modern jihadists believe they have divine sanction to engage in violence against *apostate* regimes. This includes killing all *apostates* and *infidels* that hinder the development of a purified *ummah*. Under such an interpretation, all manner of barbarism can be justified. Since jihadists believe that Allah has appointed them to undertake a cleansing of the world and insure the spread of an uncontaminated Islam, they do not doubt that victory is preordained. Little will deter them from performing their *divine* duty. Death is welcomed as an opportunity for martyrdom and slaughter of Islam's enemies becomes a moral imperative. Such a world view defies logical reasoning.

Ephraim Karsh argues that throughout Islamic history aspirations to achieve a universal caliphate have consistently failed because of ideological and ethno-tribal divisions.[10] The history of Islam is replete with examples of extreme intra-Muslim violence and sectarian feuding. Despite these failures, utopian aspirations for a collective *ummah* continue. The evolution of modern jihadism similarly is driven by collective aspirations frustrated by power struggles and ideological divisions.

Jihadist doctrine, moreover, rests upon micro-communities that radicals hope will be a catalyst for a single caliphate. In their quest for a perfect society jihadists have committed atrocities. The Armed Islamic Group's (GIA) brutalization of the civilian population during the 1990's Algerian civil war was an early precursor to Al Qaeda in Iraq's (AQI) barbaric violence after the 2003 U.S. invasion. Both the GIA and AQI insurgency campaigns failed because the extreme violence

invited popular revulsion and local resistance. These campaigns fractured internally as some militants bolted the insurgency in protest.

Extremist violence, internal division and failure have plagued Egyptian jihadists. Breaking from the Muslim Brotherhood in the late 1970's Tawid al Jihad mounted an intense terror campaign highlighted by the 1981 assassination of Answar al Sadat during a military parade. Brutal state repression of the organization's membership led to its internal fracturing into two competing groups. The organization's successors Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EJI) and the Jama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group) launched 1990's terror campaigns aimed at destroying the country's lucrative tourist industry and degrading the security services. The economic ramifications of the attacks and the large number of Egyptians killed dramatically depleted EJI and the Islamic Group's public support. With most of its militant's dead or imprisoned, Egyptian jihadism had been pronounced dead by the late 1990's. Many jailed Islamic Group and EJI leaders renounced violence and sought reconciliation with the Egyptian state and society earning them the ire of their exiled unrepentant leaders. [11]

Al Qaeda's post 9-11 diffusion illustrates the central leadership's inability to control recalcitrant affiliates committed to local utopian visions. Bin Laden's Abbottabad letters repeatedly criticize the ultra-violent and sectarian agenda of Al Qaeda's branches in Iraq, Somalia and the Maghreb.[12] Similarly Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb emir Abdelmalek Droukel cautioned his militants in Mali to end their 2012 brutalization of the Sufi Muslim community.[13] Despite the warnings of bin Laden and Droukdel, local leaders are in the grip of a religious frenzy that impels them to behave in counterproductive ways. The irrational desire to create a purified ideal community frequently leads to extreme violence that rally opponents and prompt internal divisions among jihadists.

Thomas Hegghammer notes the jihadi community has a persistent tendency toward fracturing and division with multitudes of splinter movements driven by opportunistic leaders who have their own particularistic vision.[14] All seek to recreate an unobtainable mythic ideal though divinely inspired violence. Much of this fracturing is a consequence of divisions within the jihadist community over the role of *takfir* in religious armed struggles. It is to this issue that we now turn.

II.   Jihad and Takfir: The Foundation of Modern Islamist Terror

The jihadist world view entails a set of beliefs that impel some purposeful violent action. The connection between Islam and Jihadism can be quite complex and thorny. The centrality of jihad in Islam has inspired much controversy among scholars.[15] Controversies are endemic to scholarly investigation of Jihadism for it is a minefield beset by definitional quandaries and methodological problems.[16]

Though Jihadism has roots in Islam it is a conceptually distinct doctrine recognized by diverse theorists[17]. Jihad's meaning is a source of contention—classical Quranic interpretations view it as spiritual struggle but also as a defensive religious war. Islamic legal scholar M. Cherif Bassiouni argues that jihad has been transformed over time into a political doctrine calling for violent agitation against Muslim *apostates* and foreign *infidels*.[18] Some Muslims view Jihadism as a perversion of Islam, because of its follower's takfiri tendency to view co-religionists as "apostates". Most Muslims accept jihad as an important religious duty but view it as a defensive doctrine and not as an affirmative obligation to violently spread Islam.[19] Historically jihad has been a collective responsibility undertaken by state entities in the defense and expansion of Islam.

Modern Jihadism is pronounced in its violent agitation against impious Muslims and foreigners. It is an ideology that espouses multiple confrontations. While Jihadism seeks the recreation of the "enlightened rule" of Mohammad and his four "righteous "successors, it is not purely a Salafist doctrine, and is influenced by Marxist and fascistic ideas that transport it far from the classical tenets of Islam. Like the Nazis, jihadists espouse a culture of war and death. Jihadism's propensity for violence knows no bounds and seeks to eviscerate that which lies in its immediate path. A fact underscored by the bloody history of Jihadism waged primarily against Muslims. Jihadism desires the recreation of a mythic idealized past. It's emotive and spiritual power is based upon the exaltation of a glorious past, its castigation of an ignominious present and its promise of a transcendent future that restores God's sovereignty (*Hakimiya*) on Earth.

The theological impulse for war contained in the Medina *suras* contributed to violent confrontations in Islam's formative development.[20] Early Islam was beset by violent power struggles that contradict the jihadist conception of a mythic idealized past. Internecine conflict over who should rule the *ummah* endures to this day and is a persistent theme of Islamic history. Given Islam's prohibition against murder and especially intra-Muslim violence, jihadists have searched for religious sanctions for taking Muslim life. This invites discussion of *takfir* doctrine and its central role in sanctioning the killing of co-religionists in jihadist warfare.

The doctrine has its closest analogue in the Christian concept of ex-communication in which fellow Muslims strip co-religionists of their Islamic status providing theological sanction for their killing.[21] Typically jihadists rely on fatwas or religious decrees by radical imams to engage in intra-Muslim violence. Portraying adversaries as enemies of Islam or *apostates* facilitates extremist violence. The same fatwas are commonly used to allow mujahidin to participate in *martyrdom* operations that kill many innocent civilians. Under extremist interpretations, jihad is a religious duty that exculpates Muslims from religious prohibitions and justifies brutal tactics against Islam's enemies. It becomes an elastic doctrine where the divine necessity of creating a

purified *ummah* sanctions cruelty against *infidels* and *apostates*. Extremists are advocates of collective *takfir* that ex-communicates all Muslim supporters of regimes they oppose and permits the killing of women and children.[22] Al Qaeda's current leader Ayman Zawahiri justifies collective *takfir* based on a utilitarian calculus that permits slaughter of innocents to advance the jihadist cause.

Many jihadists do not accept the legitimacy of collective takfir. Some militants argue takfir applies exclusively to impious rulers or can only be imposed on an individual basis after careful investigation.[23] The Jordanian-Palestinian religious scholar Abdullah Azzam rejected takfiri ideas as un-Islamic for its sanctioned intra-Muslim violence and the doctrine became the basis of his conflict with Usama bin Laden in Al Qaeda's formative development in the late 1980's.

Azzams's 1989 killing outside a Pakistani mosque allowed bin Laden and his Egyptian lieutenant Ayman al- Zawahiri to chart the terror organization's trajectory toward a takfiri path that justified multiple confrontations with the Western *far enemy* and the Muslim apostate *near enemy*. Azzam did, however, contribute to Radical Islam's reformulation of jihadist doctrine. Working within the context of Soviet aggression in Afghanistan, India's disputed sovereignty over Kashmir, Zionist oppression in Palestine and Arab government's inability to defeat Israel, Abdullah Azzam controversially defined jihad as an individual duty. In his book in *Defense of Muslim Lands: The First Obligation after Faith* Azzam provide license for what the 9-11 Commission referred to as the *golden chain* of private charities and foundations committed to finance the flow of Arab jihadists to Afghanistan.[24] Private and charitable financial contributions co-joined with Azzam's religious arguments for jihad to provide the impetus for the Afghan war and Al Qaeda's subsequent development.

While mujahidin had little impact in defeating Soviet forces, Afghanistan did create a new mythology.[25] Viewed from this prism, Arab mujahidin *success* in Afghanistan re-awoke Islamic fighting spirits and created a financial infrastructure for violent causes. Both factors would have profound consequences for the West and the Islamic world as mujahidin returned home after their successful struggle. Shortly thereafter Islamist insurrections in Algeria, Libya and Egypt began. Most of these revolts were spearheaded by returning Arab jihadists. Typically these revolts ended in failure.

Despite these failures Islamist insurgencies often reappear. Today Egypt, Syria and Libya are threatened by Islamist terror groups that were weakened decades ago. Once defeated jihadist organizations rebrand themselves resurfacing opportunistically to threaten security. Driven by irrational religious imperatives, jihadists continue to mount insurgencies that seemed doomed to fail. Their extremism invariably leads to miscalculation and implosion, yet these fanatical imperatives also impel its followers to continue the struggle. Jihadist organizations have regenerative capabilities that promise a never ending warfare.

III.   Toward a Regenerative Wave Theory of Jihadist Organizations

This paper conceptualizes a wave theory of continuous jihadist warfare composed of four phases: mobilization, extremism, implosion and rebirth. This process is sketched in the chart located on the next page. Each phase involves a sequence of events that characterize jihadist terror. The general evolution of the wave is easily discernible. After an initial burst of organizational dynamism and mobilization, Jihadist movements employ counterproductive violence to satisfy their millenarian ambitions. The ideological extremism of the jihadist group prompts internal divisions, popular revulsion and galvanizes opponents. This juxtaposition of forces leads to jihadist failure and a concomitant inability to create a stable Islamic state. The Algerian GIA and Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), for example, suffered severe reversals at the hands of security forces and local militias. Egypt also has witnessed bursts of jihadist violence throughout the 1980's and 1990's with high profile attacks against security services, foreigners and tourist resorts. Long thought dormant Egyptian jihadi terrorist violence has been catalyzed by the July 2013 military coup that deposed Muhammad Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood's democratically elected government. The same extremist visions that led to implosion, however, contribute inexorably to the group's regeneration. What follows is an explanation of how these four stages progress. The GIA 1990's Algerian campaign, AQI's insurgency in post Saddam Iraq and rise, decline and reemergence of Egyptian jihadist violence are used to illustrate this process.

A REGENERATIVE WAVE THEORY OF JIHADIST ORGANIZATIONS

MOBILIZATION

⬇

Communal Identity, Religious Convictions and Past Conflicts become the basis of Islamist Grievances	Catalytic Trigger or Galvanizing Event enrages Fundamentalist Forces	Mujahidin Organize and Form a Fighting Force and Declare Jihad

EXTREMISM

⬇

Drive for Ideological Purity and Use of Takfir to Justify intra-Muslim Violence	Mujahidin drive enemy forces from town and villages	Jihadist Quest for Islamic State results in Implementation of Sharia Law	Brutalization of Religious Minorities. Apostates and Women occurs

IMPLOSION

⬇

Popular Revulsion at Extremist Violence and Rejection of Sharia State by Native population	Internal Group Fragmentation as Jihadists Debate Propriety of Takfiri Practices	Local and External Enemies-Mobilize against Jihadist Forces	Temporary Jihadist Defeat and Retrenchment

REBIRTH

⬇

Denial of Mistakes made in Previous Jihadist campaign by Mujahidin Veterans	Jihadists Regroup And Rebrand themselves as the struggle continues to create a Mythic Idealized Community Free of Apostates	Jihadists Seek Revenge against Victorious Apostate Forces and Renew their Attacks against Regime Forces and their Civilian Supporters

Jihadist Mobilization

Jihadist waves of violence are triggered by some kind of *catalytic event* like the USSR's occupation of Afghanistan, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the Algerian government's suspension of the Islamist 1991 election victory and Egyptian government's signing of the 1979 Peace Accords with Israel. Provocative actions by foreign governments or native regimes create a fertile climate for jihadist mobilization. Jihadi movements can also be ignited by profound political transformations. The Arab Spring, for example, has resulted in regime turnover and turbulent transitions that have created opportunities for jihadist forces. The *creation of mujahidin organizations* by charismatic leaders hoping to exploit religious passions and take advantage of opportunities to kill *apostate* or foreign forces creates a *dynamic of organizational growth* resulting in the recruitment of many young committed fighters.

The Algeria, Iraqi and Egyptian jihads were ignited by events that galvanized Islamist forces. The Algerian army's decision to nullify the 1991legislative election victory of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) enraged many of the party's supporters. Ex-mujahidin were particularly incensed. Algerian fighters played an important role among Arab foreign forces in the Afghan jihad. They would play a leading role in Algeria's subsequent civil war.

Ex-veterans of the Afghan campaign formed the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in 1993 which became the operating center of Islamist resistance. The severity of Algiers counter insurgency campaign propelled jihadist forces to accelerate car bombings, urban terror and guerrilla campaigns. The GIA progressively radicalized into a takfiri organization whose leadership under Djamel Zitouni propelled the group into extreme forms of violence.[26] Regime and guerrilla fighting resulted in over a hundred thousand deaths in less than a decade. Both sides committed numerous atrocities.

Enraged by French support for Algiers repression of the Islamist movement, the GIA hijacked an Air France jet in 1994 and attacked the Paris Metro a year later. The Algerian diaspora community in France played a critical role in supporting the Algerian Islamist insurgency. GIA behavior was particularly savage destroying entire villages. Its 1997 campaign killed hundreds of civilians in two villages south of Algiers and featured impalements, beheadings, shootings, kidnapping and killing of women. GIA militants infamously beheaded two hundred villagers in the Southern town of Benthalia.[27] The group's brutal campaign of assassination targeted foreigners, journalists, intellectuals and entertainers. French priests, bishops and monks ritualistically had their throats slit and their churches were razed and desecrated.

AQI ascension in Iraq was catalyzed by the 2003 U.S. invasion. Historically repressed by Saddam Hussein's secular regime, Iraqi jihadist forces were weak prior to the war. Jihadist forces was strongest in the Kurdish north under Mullah Krekar leadership.[28] His group Ansar al Islam had developed a relationship with Jordanian leader Abu Musab Zarqawi. Both organizations cooperated to smuggle Kurdish fighters to the Afghan-Pakistan region for terror training.[29] Zarqawi came to the Kurdish north in anticipation of the U.S. invasion and promptly moved to *Sunni Triangle* hoping to capitalize on the budding insurgency against U.S. and coalition forces. Shortly thereafter Zarqawi aligned with Al Qaeda in 2004 forming AQI and swearing allegiance to its Saudi leader.

By 2005 Zarqawi was a key part of the Sunni insurgency opposed to U.S. forces and Baghdad's Shia dominated government. AQI's savvy media campaign featured video attacks against coalition forces, dramatized its martyrdom rituals, showed beheadings of foreign hostages and glorified its assault against the *apostate* Shia community.[30] AQI attracted tens of thousands of foreign fighters and galvanized the Sunni dominated insurgency. Zarqawi's AQI not Bin Laden's based Waziristan group was in the forefront in the jihadist struggle against Western forces and their apostate allies.

Egyptian jihadism was dramatically spurred by a number of events in the 1970's. President Sadat's relaxation of state coercion, tacit acceptance of Muslim Brotherhood charitable networks and promotion of conservative Islamic values created a fertile micro climate for jihadists.[31] Enraged by the Muslim Brotherhood's accommodation with the *apostate* Egyptian state as well as Sadat's signing of the Camp David Accords, groups like Tanzim wal Jihad (Unity and Jihad) and Takfir wal Hijira (Excommunication and Exile) sought to violently seize power. Writing in his seminal tract *The Neglected Duty* Unity and Jihad leader Muhammad al-Faraj emphasized the transcendental importance of attacking the apostate *near enemy* as a precondition to propel the Muslim world toward a genuine Islamic society.[32] Waging jihad, Faraj reasoned, was an important religious obligation requiring extreme action. He saw it as a first step toward a renewed war with Israel and the liberation of Jerusalem.

Faraj hoped that his group's October 1981 assassination of Anwar Sadat during a military parade would invite mass rebellion. Instead, Sadat's successor Hosni Mubarak unleashed security forces crushing Unity and Jhad. Like his idol Sayyid Qutb, Faraj would achieve *martyrdom* upon his conviction for treason and execution. Thousands of the organizations militants were imprisoned.

Egypt was struck by continuous levels of terrorist violence throughout the 1980' and 1990's as new jihadist organizations mounted vigorous campaigns aimed at destroying Egypt's lucrative tourist industry.[33] The infamous jihadist butchering of 62 foreign tourists in November 1997 at Luxor's archeological sites gained international repute.

Beyond the terrorist violence, Islamic radicals hope to break the strictures of *jahiliyya* apostate society and restore an authentic Islamic state. AQI's fighters for example desired the creation of Islamist enclaves in areas where they dislodged government forces. Creating idealized Islamic communities drives much of Al Qaeda's jihadist doctrine. Theorists like Abu Bakr Naji and Abu Musab Suri envision mythic communities free of apostate influence. Such communities they reckon are vital for jihad's success.

Bakr's *Management of Savagery* and Suri's *Call to Global Islamic Resistance* borrow heavily from Che Guevara's *el foco* theory where rebel control over territory becomes a foundation for further assaults against regime forces.[34] Like Che, they are animated by a revolutionary ideal to cleanse impurity and create a utopic society. Typically this requires high levels of violence against those who refuse to conform to the new revolutionary order.

The Armed Islamic Group in Algeria and Al Qaeda in Iraq were able to dislodge regime forces and establish Islamic rule in some localities. Both used government withdraw as an opportunity to create idealized communities. Invariably they displaced local rulers though extreme coercion and rigidly implemented Sharia law; these tactics invited resistance by villagers and tribal elders.

Egyptian Islamist violence in the Mubarak era similarly was motivated by the *cleansing* society of apostasy and Islamizing the social order. Driven by ideological imperatives Tawid al Jihad's successors Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman's Islamic Group and Ayman al-Zawahri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad mounted a brutal terror campaign of targeted assassinations of political leaders, bombings, attacks on Coptic communities and economic sabotage killing thousands.[35] Egyptian jihadists nearly killed Hosni Mubarak in his 1995 trip to attend an African Union conference in Addis Ababa. Throughout the 1990's Egypt was caught in a brutal cycle of terrorist violence and state repression. Thousands died during this terrible period. Jihadists hoped to destroy the foundations of Egyptian security and economic welfare earned very few supporters.

Jihadist Extremism

Mujahidin forces responded to state and societal resistance. Since Islam explicitly forbids intra-Muslim violence, jihadist groups had to employ *takfiri* measures. By branding co-religionists as *apostates*, jihadist forces have license to kill their Muslim adversaries. This frequently has resulted in the massacre of women, children and particularly religious minorities.

Jihadist *implementation of Sharia law* usually takes on an ultra-fundamentalist caste. Opposition is ruthlessly swept away as *local leaders are killed*, *women are subjugated* and *religious and ethnic minorities are persecuted*. Typically ritualistic violence is employed to preserve order. Wartime conditions and security imperatives are used to justify such extreme behavior. For the disciples of takfir, the imperatives for a successful jihadist struggle sanctify killing fellow Muslims.

The GIA took advantage of Algiers withdraw of security forces from the southern countryside to impose their ultra-extremist version of Sharia law.[36] The impact was particularly severe for Christian communities who were brutalized with many priests and bishops killed and village women savagely repressed. Foreigners were commonly the targets of a concerted GIA assassination campaigns. Local tribal elders were displaced and village governance became the province of Sharia councils with total power over virtually all aspects of human existence.

AQI similarly displaced local tribal sheiks through a brutal assassination campaign. The implementation of Sharia sought to emulate Taliban rule.[37] Women belonging to important tribal elders were forced into marriage with Al Qaeda leaders. Liquor stores were banned and the patronage networks of Sunni Sheiks were confiscated to insure AQI monopolization of smuggling routes. Those who resisted were harshly repressed.

AQI's campaign against Shia, Kurdish and Christian communities was explicitly designed to spark sectarian civil war. Zarqawi's group attempted to demonstrate its prowess and jihadist fervor by beheadings Western hostages. American Nicolas Berg's beheading was famously posted on AQI internet sites. No group or institution was off limits: security services, UN facilities, churches, mosques, funerals, markets, and religious ceremonies were specifically targeted for car bomb and suicide martyrdom operations.

The violent extremism of jihadist forces and their draconian implementation of Sharia law in Algeria and Iraq did have unintended consequences. The GIA and AQI had believed that their killing of apostate forces and the spectacular nature of their terror attacks would galvanize jihadist forces. Instead GIA and AQI fanaticism prompted greater resistance, popular revulsion and internal dissension.

Egyptian jihadist violence similarly employed takfiri justifications for killing fellow Muslims and targeting civilian activities. Driven by Sayyid Qutb's concept of an enlightened vanguard desirous of cleansing Egypt of impure foreign influence, no target was off limits. EJI's exiled leader Ayman al Zawahiri sanctioned his group's extreme violence by endorsing collective takfir effectively excommunicating all government supporters (military and civilian) paving a path of destruction. While damaging to the Egyptian state, takfiri violence undermined the EJI's popular appeal.

Jihadist Implosion

Jihadist momentum during the initial stage of an insurgent campaign frequently results in terrible excesses and mistakes. The ideological zeal to destroy apostate forces, wartime pressures and the creation of Islamist enclaves where rebels have displaced government forces often *alienates the local population*. The maximalist agenda of the most radical faction in the movement and its controversial use of takfir often contribute to *internal fracturing within jihadist ranks.*

Organizational fissures are particularly pronounced as *government forces rally and local groups resist* Islamist designs. Jihadist use of takfiri doctrine branding all non-supporters as apostates drastically *enlarges the number of enemies* contributing to the regime's efforts to divide rebel ranks. During the Algerian civil war and post-Saddam Iraq jihadist campaigns lost momentum due to internal splits, local resistance and regime countermeasures.[38] Governments opposed to Islamist rebels were able to use anti-jihadist militias to maximum effect.

The GIA's brutality created dissension among war weary Islamist rebels who increasingly saw their forces checked by the regime and its local allies. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) took advantage of Algiers reconciliation measures and its amnesty seekers soon became the target of GIA death squads. The GIA's radical leadership split the organization's ranks with moderates bolting the organization to form the Salafist Group for Preaching Jihad (GSPC) that was committed to targeting only *apostate* troops but not civilians.[39] Sickened by the GIA's nihilistic and barbarous path, its London media representatives Abu Qatada and Abu Musab Suri belatedly repudiated the group's activities.[40] Secure in its Taliban protected Afghan redoubt, Al Qaeda switched its allegiance to the newly formed GSPC that a decade later would be formally incorporated into AQ's franchise.

Despite Al Qaeda support, the GSPC insurgency weakened and many of its best mujahidin went to support the Iraqi jihad. Algerians swelled the ranks of suicide bombers and foreign fighters in Iraq. GSPC leader Abdelmalek Droukdel and AQI emir Zarqawi had established a strategic relationship after the U.S. invasion suggesting that Algerian jihadists had international ambitions. This association resulted in the GSPC's eventual incorporation into Al Qaeda.

Announced by Ayman al Zawahiri in June 2007 Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) became the terror network's presence in the North African theatre. Droukdel and AQIM's emirs hoped the alliance would revitalize the Algerian jihad allowing it to benefit from AQ''s bomb-making expertise and international fame.[41]

Since its inclusion into bin Laden's franchise, AQIM's attacks are more sophisticated with greater IED capability and there have been more bombings against foreign interests. Despite enhanced sophistication, AQIM's terror campaign did not present a significant threat to Algerian state. Algiers aggressive polices against the Islamist insurgency have moved AQIM predominately to the Sahel were the Algerian state is the weakest and friendly Tuareg tribes offer the group financial succor and geographic space for terrorist training.[42] AQIM's Sahelian katibas or brigades have compromised security interests in Mali, Chad and Niger.

Jihadist extremism in Iraq had similar negative consequences. Zarqawi's campaign to spark a sectarian civil war became dysfunctional. Al Qaeda leaders who sanctioned Zarqawi's integration into Al Qaeda became disenchanted with the Jordanians anti-Shia crusade and his butchering of thousands of Muslims. Confiscated by U.S. forces a 2005 letter to Zarqawi by Ayman al Zawahiri warns AQI's emir that his strategy is headed toward a dangerous path.[43] AQ's Egyptian leader urged Zarqawi to refocus his energies on U.S. and Iraqi security forces.

Undaunted by the criticism Zarqawi continued his spectacular attacks against the Shia civilian and religious establishment. Dominated by non-Iraqis, AQI fighters displaced local power structures and established Sharia councils. Tribal elders and village leaders resisted AQ's efforts and broke their alliance with Zarqawi's group. Rebel ranks divided with the Sunni indigenous guerrillas and their tribal leaders joining forces with America against AQI. The formation of anti-AQI militias in late 2006 culminated in the Anbar Awakening movement. America's arming of Sunni militias opposed to Al Qaeda combined with U.S. Special Force's raids and assassinations degraded AQI capabilities.[44] This confluence of events had a devastating impact on AQI killing thousands of its militants. By 2008 Anbar Province's security had been dramatically transformed and the area was relatively free of a sizeable Al Qaeda presence.

With its charismatic leader killed in a U.S. June 2006 air strike AQI fractured and the group sought renewal by elevating Iraqis into key leadership ranks. It Post Zarqawi proclamation of Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) did little to enhance its prestige that by 2009 had plummeted. Al Qaeda's remnants in Iraq moved to Sunni or mixed areas around Tikrit, Kirkuk and Mosul. Prior to the 2011 departure of U.S. troops, Iraq appeared to have contained Al Qaeda's terror campaign.

The Egyptian jihadist campaign two decades ago invited a severe state repression. Given their hierarchical leadership structures and declining popularity, EJI and the Islamic Group were effectively dismembered by Egypt's ruthless security services. Abu Musab Suri in his writings describes the 1990's Egyptian jihad as a "total failure". With thousands of its militants dead or

imprisoned, EJI and al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (The Islamic Group) by the late 1990's encountered an existential crisis. Their exiled leaders Ayman al Zawahiri and Omar Abdel Rahman (imprisoned for his role in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing) lost control over their Egyptian branches and soon repudiated local leaders efforts to renounce violence and seek reconciliation.

In his memoirs of the Egyptian jihadist struggle Ayman al-Zawahiri's *Bitter Harvest* savages the Muslim Brotherhood and many jihadi groups for their betrayal of Islam. His commitment to wage jihad was and is shared by many Egyptian extremists. Jihadist determination to renew attacks on South Sinai seaside resorts popular with Israeli tourists between 2004 and 2006 failed to gain popular traction. High profile bombings in Taba, Sharm el-Sheikh and Dahab succeeded in killing more Egyptians than foreign tourists and adverse economic ramifications played into Mubarak's justification for repression. Divisions within the jihadi community and the counterproductive impact of their extremist violence stalled jihadist momentum. Having failed repeatedly, Egyptian jihadists remain undaunted.

Algeria similarly had blunted an Islamist insurgency that was confined to the impoverished Sahel and remote North East mountains. AQIM or AQI leaders do not seem cognizant of the strategic errors made during their jihadist campaigns. The turmoil of the Arab Spring, however, has significantly changed the fortunes of AQI, AQIM and Egyptian jihadi groups in the Sinai, giving them renewed momentum and regenerative opportunities.

Jihadist Rebirth and the Beginning of a New Cycle

The failed Iraqi, Algerian and Egyptian insurgencies inspired internal debate within Al Qaeda's central hierarchy. Captured by U.S. forces after their 2011 killing of bin Laden in their Abbottabad raid, bin Laden letters criticize the behavior of affiliated organizations in Iraq, Somalia, Yemen and the Maghreb. Zarqawi's Iraq campaign is denounced for its sectarian agenda and shedding of Muslim blood.[45] AQ's media advisor American Adam Gadan was so concerned that AQ's branches were hurting the parent organizations reputation that he advocated ending links to the organization's regional appendages.[46]

Bin Laden lamented the *near enemy* focus of his affiliates and urged them to target the United States, perform acts of charity and end their insurgency against Muslim governments. The emirs of AQIM, AQI, AQAP and Al Shabaab were chastised by bin Laden and Abu Yahyah al- Libi for their improper execution of jihad. Prior to his death the historic leader hoped to centralize media operations and achieve strategic control over the terror organizations diffuse and fragmented network.

AQ's advice to its regional emirs has had little impact. Most have retained their *near enemy* focus, takfiri principles, and sectarian agenda. This is especially true of AQIM in the Sahel after Qaddafi's 2011overthrow and the rebranded Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). Both groups have been *renewed by the turmoil of the Arab Spring* that has given them a strategic opening to wage jihad. Unsurprisingly neither has altered their ultra-violent takfiri and sectarian strategy.

Despite Western hopes for successful democratic transitions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, these states are in chaos. The dismantling of intelligence and security infrastructures in these counties and the release of thousands of Islamist radicals has catalyzed native jihadist organizations.[47] Dormant for years jihadist groups are now resurgent across the region.

The Rejuvenated Jihadist Struggle in Egypt

The January 2011Arab street protests resulted in the fall of the Tunisian and Egyptian governments. Thought impregnable, Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak dictatorships rapidly succumbed to massive public discontent and non-violent demonstrations. The collapse of Tunisian and Egyptian authoritarianism was expedited by the protesters use of social media to organize mass demonstrations. Hailed by Western observers as a new democratic beginning in the Arab Middle East, the *Arab Spring* gave way to turmoil, institutional instability and violence.[48] The emergence of a security vacuum in Egypt and Tunisia has re-catalyzed local jihadist movements.

Egypt has been particularly impacted by rapid political change. The country's chaotic democratic transition featured the 2012 election of Muhammad Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood government whose amnesty polices for imprisoned Islamist radicals and weakening of the security services enhanced the offensive capability of dormant jihadist terror organizations. Morsi's good relations with Hamas facilitated arms smuggling across clandestine tunnels between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. The flow of weapons and foreign fighters has augmented the combat capability of jihadist groups. The impoverished Sinai has become a magnet for radical organizations intent on attacking Egypt and Israel.[49] Allied with Bedouin tribes, jihadi organizations hope to construct a terror safe haven in the Sinai.

Islamic radicalism has deep roots in the Sinai and is pronounced among certain Bedouin tribes. Marginalized by Mubarak's regime Bedouins dominated clandestine trade on the Peninsula and they control local arms smuggling operations.[50] Working with Palestinian jihadists groups in Gaza Bedouins have radicalized. Hostile to an Egyptian state that denies them government employment and benefits, Bedouins have connections to Sinai Al Qaeda affiliates. Foreign fighters from Libya, Syria and Yemen are flocking to the Peninsula to form terror training camps.[51]

Formed in February 2011Ansar Bayat al- Maqdis (Ansar Jerusalem) is a Salafi-jihadist organization operating in the Sinai and the Gaza Strip. Built upon anti-Zionist and Islamist ideologies, the network hopes to overthrow the Egyptian state and *liberate* Jerusalem. The group has launched attacks against Israeli and Egyptian interests. Sinai's natural gas pipeline that fuels into Israel and Jordan's population has been repeatedly targeted. Troublesome during Morsi's reign, Ansar Jerusalem has been reinvigorated by the July 2013 overthrow of Morsi's government. Ansar Jerusalem has launched hundreds of attacks against Egyptian police, army and security installations killing 350 police and soldiers.[52] Combined with government counter strikes against the network's leaders and members, close to a thousand people have died since the July coup.

Ansar Jerusalem's rapid growth has also been facilitated by the global jihadi community. The group's relationship with Al Qaeda's Yemeni and Maghreb branches and the flow of sophisticated arms and foreign fighters across the region has increased its offensive ability. The group communicates it messages across Al Qaeda media organizations.

Its assaults against the Egyptian state include targeted assassinations, bombings of security complexes in Islamiyya, Mansoura and Cairo, gas pipeline attacks, a tourist bus and an unsuccessful attempt to kill Egypt's interior minister. Like its EJI predecessor Ansar Jerusalem has declared a war against Egyptian state and society. Its fanatical pursuit of jihadist violence is likely to persist. Some observers worry about a possible terror attack against the Suez Canal.[53] Late last year a cargo ship was attacked by Islamist radicals armed with rifle propelled grenades. With more sophisticated weapons, the network could launch a devastating strike against the Canal with potentially disastrous consequences for the Egyptian economy.

The Long War Journal reports over 270 attacks in the Sinai by jihadi organizations since the July coup.[54] The Egyptian military offensive in the Sinai has resulted in many civilian deaths and has alienated Bedouin tribes some of whom are Ansar Jerusalem allies. Egypt, however, has seen dramatic bursts of past terrorist violence that eventually dissipated. The Sinai was a flashpoint for jihadi organization a decade ago with dramatic attacks in southern resorts killing hundreds of foreign tourists and Egyptians. Despite the surge in terrorist violence, Ansar Jerusalem's terror campaign is unlikely to be any more successful that JEI's 1990's offensive. The group's January 2014 spate of attacks against security complexes, police stations and a cinema have evinced a public backlash, The Egyptian military, moreover, is simply too powerful, well financed and organized to permit a Ansar Jerusalem Sinai terror safe haven. Egypt is neither Mali nor Syria. Buttressed by close coordination with Israeli intelligence, Egypt's military offensive have killed some of the terror networks commanders and hundreds of its militants.[55]

AQIM and its Post Qaddafi Regeneration in the Sahel

Maghrebi and Sahelian jihadi organizations have been given a sharp impetus by the NATO assisted 2011 overthrow of Qaddafi's forty year dictatorship. Composed of hundreds of militias, rebel forces have not been de-mobilized by Tripoli's new *democratic* government. Islamist rebels aligned with AQIM are particularly strong in the eastern part of the country. These forces have attacked Western interests. AQIM associate Ansar al Sharia, for example, stormed the U.S. consulate building on September 11, 2012 killing four Americans including U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens.

Events in the lawless Sahel have been even more dramatic. Qaddafi's overthrow forced thousands of his Malian-Tuareg mercenaries back to their home country accelerating irredentist and separatist passions. Having failed in prior insurgencies against the central government in Bamako, Tuareg rebels found their capabilities enhanced by the flow of mercenaries and their advanced Qaddafi era weapons.

Islamists aligned with the Tuareg rebel insurgency.[56] This partnership was facilitated by past contacts. AQIM and Tuareg leaders were involved in the smuggling of drugs, tobacco and arms and they were hostile toward regional governments. The jihadist organization's financial coffers have been enriched by its lucrative kidnapping of Westerners in the Sahel and the tens of millions of dollars of ransom money have been paid to the terror organization by European and North American governments and businesses.

By January 2012 Tuareg-Islamist rebels made significant advances against poorly trained and armed government forces in Mali's North. The insurgency fueled political tensions between Bamako's civilian government and its armed forces. The Army's March 2012 coup overthrowing Mali's democratic government created such chaos that it resulted in the military's disengagement from the rebellious North. Capitalizing on the power vacuum, Islamist-Tuareg rebels seized territory declaring a independent Tuareg Islamist state. AQIM's alliance with the Tuareg rebels did not last and by June 2012 Tuareg rebels were driven by AQIM and its allies from the North's major cities.

Islamist forces were composed of AQIM, the Tuareg Ansar Dine and the Sahelian Movement for Unity of Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA).[57] This triumvirate partitioned power in Northern Mali. Given a unique opportunity to create a fundamentalist state the Islamists soon implemented a harsh version of Sharia. Fueled by irrational passions for a transcendental mythic *ummah,* Islamic militants committed the same excesses that hampered the GIA and AQI insurgencies. Limbs were amputated from suspected thieves, adulterers were stoned, women were brutally persecuted by religious police, alcohol was prohibited, music banned and violators severely lashed.

Islamists forces brutalized the Sufi population and destroyed their religious shrines, mosques and monuments. Buildings were destroyed, burial sites were desecrated, library books were burned and historic monuments recognized by UNESCO were razed. AQIM's atrocities, extremism and behavior soon generated local, regional and international adversaries. AQIM erection of a fundamentalist state and terror sanctuary similarly alarmed the international community.

Concerned France, the UN and West African governments readied efforts to assist Mali beleaguered government to retake the North and drive the Islamists from power. Forcing Mali's military to relinquish power to a new civilian government committed to democratic elections, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) with French and UN financial and logistical assistance sought to invade the North by late 2013. Islamist ambitions and miscalculations, however, accelerated the international community's plans.

By early 2013 Islamist forces were moving against towns in central Mali and poised to march against Bamako. Had AQIM and its allies stormed the capital, thousands of French nationals would be subject to the depredations of fanatical Islamist militants. Faced with such an apocalyptic event, Paris militarily intervened in January 2013 with Malian and ECOWAS support. Within a few months Islamists forces were routed and the North's main cities of Timbuktu, KIndal and Gao were liberated. Remaining Islamist sympathizers were brutally killed by enraged mobs angered by AQIM's repressive rule.

Islamist forces retreated to the Northern Mountains victims of a cycle of extremism and implosion that has haunted past jihadist movement. Some of AQIM's historic leaders like Abu Zaid were killed in fighting against French and Chadian forces, others like Mokhatar Belmokhtar had formed their own splinter organizations. Confronted by advancing French Forces, Islamist ranks fractured with elements of Ansar Dine and MUJWA willing to participate in amnesty and demobilization programs.

AQIM continues to wage jihad against regional governments and its militants have regrouped in in Tunisia, Algeria, Libya and Niger. AQIM and its allies in Algeria, Mali and Niger have struck against African troops and French economic interests. These organizations continue to endanger regional security. Despite the loss of a key Malian safe haven, it is premature to say AQIM's has imploded. What is clear, however, is that Al Qaeda in Iraq and Syria is resurgent.

AQI's Rebirth, the American Withdraw and the Syrian Jihad: Mobilization followed by Extremism

Prior to the 2011 U.S. military disengagement, AQI was in retreat. Iraq was recovering from the calamitous 2005-2007 civil war. AQI's attacks had been drastically reduced. Despite the controversy engendered by bin Laden and Zawahiri's criticism of its sectarian strategy, AQI continued its attacks against Shia and Christian targets. Terrorist violence was considered manageable. AQI had been written off by most analysts as a defeated organization.

Al Qaeda's position in Iraq began to change dramatically after the departure of American troop and accelerated tensions between Sunni, Shia and Kurdish political blocs in Iraq's fractured government.[58] Without American leverage to broker reconciliation between Iraq's quarrelsome political parties and U.S. military assistance in counterterror operations, AQI has been able to recover. Since 2011 Sunni perceptions that the Shi'ite-Kurdish dominated government in Baghdad is intent on isolating and persecuting their community have increased. The 2011 arrest warrant for a prominent Sunni politician accused of sponsoring terror seems to have been an important trigger in accelerating sectarian tensions that AQI has successfully exploited. Its network of suicide bombers, financial patrons and car bomb factories has been reinvigorated.

Fernando Renaires notes that suicide bombings, car bombs, and I.E.D attacks doubled a year after the departure of American troops.[59] The failure of Iraq's political elites to agree on oil profit distribution between groups, provincial autonomy and resolve the status of Kirkuk have poisoned relations between communities. Violence has reached 2007 levels with thousands dying monthly in terrorist attacks. AQI's has targeted Iraqi security forces and Shia, Kurdish and Christian communities with car bomb attacks against police barracks, military installations, markets, mosques and churches. It has not deviated from its late leader Abu Musab Zarqawi sectarian approach.

Confessional violence and civil war in neighboring Syria has had a synergistic effect on reviving Al Qaeda's regional fortunes. Syria is no stranger to Sunni Islamist rebellions. The Baathist Party's seizure of power in the 1960's and the ascension of Alawi and Christian minorities in Syria's government and security forces under the Assad family engendered Sunni opposition. Islamists and jihadists were particularly incensed by the secular Socialist ideology of the Syrian regime.[60] By the late 1970's jihadist forces mobilized and a rebelled. Syrian security forces in1982 destroyed Islamist forces in the beleaguered city of Hama. Some 10,000 rebels and civilians were killed by Hafez al Assad's Alawite dominated security forces. His son (Bashar) has been even more brutal in his attempts to destroy todays Sunni dominated insurgency.

By March 2011 Damascus began to be effected by the destabilizing impact of the Arab Spring. Protests in Sunni towns like Daraa and Homs were savagely repressed by Assad's army and militias. The murder and mutilation of child protesters catalyzed the rebellion that initially was secular, non-violent and democratic. Both the exile Syrian National Council and its military ally the Free Syrian Army (FSA) were initially dominated by moderate secularists and Islamists,

Since 2012 the fighting has dramatically intensified and Syria has subdivided into warring confessional communities involved in an existential struggle. Sunni jihadists seek revenge for the regime's destruction of the 1979-1982 Islamist revolt and are animated by the secular and confessional character of Assad's Regime. They consider the Alawi Shia *apostates* and their Christian allies *infidels* who have declared war against Islam. The latest estimates put the death toll at over 130,000 dead, 6 million displaced and close to three million refugees. Given such a distressing panorama, extremists are now on the ascendant.

This is especially true of the Sunni rebels where Al Qaeda aligned jihadist forces have undertaken key roles in the insurgency. This should not be surprising. During the Iraq war, Assad facilitated a foreign fighter supply network devoted to transporting and financing Sunni jihadists. Damascus became a vital link in the flow of AQI fighters to Iraq and Zarqawi had a substantial Syrian based AQI financial and logistical infrastructure. This network now provides succor to anti-Assad jihadists that feature dozens of groups including Al Qaeda affiliates Al Nusra Front and Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (ISIS).

Formed in January 2012 Al Nusra Front is a Syrian jihadist organization that has used foreign fighters mainly for martyrdom missions. The group has ruthlessly attacked Syrian security forces and Alawi militias with military assaults, car bombs, suicide bombers and I.E.D assaults and it has taken a leading role in the fighting against Assad's regime. The group has been involved in a leadership dispute with AQI. In February 2013 AQI leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced that al Nusra was an appendage of his organization that now has been recast as Al Qaeda in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). After a confusing delay, Al Nusra Front leader Abu Muhammad al-Juliani rebuffed the attempted merger in a dispute mediated by Ayman al Zawahiri.[61]

Al Qaeda's Egyptian leader decided to keep the organizations separate, a decision protested by ISIS emir. Irrespective of the quarrel, ISIS and Al Nusra Front have mounted joint operations and they have pursued a ruthless sectarian agenda. Kurdish, Christian and Alawi communities have been attacked by Al Nusra Front and ISIS. Al Qaeda affiliates control vast areas in the northern and eastern Syria and their strict implementation of Sharia that has created tensions and local resistance. ISIS and al Nusra Front have repeatedly clashed with Kurdish and Syrian rebel forces in areas they control. Both organizations are eager to construct an extremist Islamic emirate that ISIS leader al-Baghdadi hopes will stretch across Iraq and Syria.

Radical Islamist and jihadist forces comprise some 40 to 50 percent of rebel militias and their battlefield capability greatly exceeds their secular Free Syrian Army (FSA) rivals.[62]This trend is dramatically illustrated by the 2013 formation of the Islamic Front in comprised of over forty thousand fighters from dozens of rebel groups. Jihadist forces have mobilized and their efforts to establish an Islamic emirate have inspired dysfunctional extremism. Al Qaeda militants in Syria have beheaded Catholic priests and captured soldiers. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reports that radical Islamist groups including Al Nusra Front and ISIS killed 190 civilians in Latakia in June 2013 military operations designed to cleanse Alawi villages.[63] Entire families were summarily executed. Hundreds of women and children were kidnapped. ISIS groups, moreover, maintain a network of detention camps across northern Syria notorious for their use of torture and killing of anyone opposed to their rule. Many civilians opposed to local rule by ISIS forces have been killed, jailed or tortured.

Al Qaeda affiliates in Syria now control more territory than any other place in the world and the flow of foreign fighters into the country greatly exceeds the number who fought against the American occupation in Iraq. Recent estimates put the number of foreign fighters waging jihad in Syria to be around six thousand including Pakistani and Chechen brigades.[64] Syria is the number one jihadist battleground in the world.

How will this dynamic of jihadist mobilization and extremism evolve in Syria? If the past is a good indicator, jihadist extremism will mobilize opponents aligned against the jihadists. This has already occurred. Al Qaeda affiliates face a formidable array of opponents that include some FSA units, some Islamist rebel groups, Kurdish Brigades, Christians, Assad's army, Hezbollah, and aligned Alawite militias.

Signs of a possible Al Qaeda implosion can be seen in Syria. January 2014 witnessed fighting between rebels and ISIS forces. Enraged by ISS's killing of a trusted Al Sharam negotiator and repeated attacks against rebel groups, FSA and Islamic Front brigades launched an offensive against ISIS positions in Aleppo, Idlib and Raqqa. Over a thousand people have died as ISIS forces have retreated from Aleppo. ISIS units have even fought Al Nusrah brigades, whose central leadership wants a truce between Islamist combatants.

Echoing Al Nusra Front concerns is Ayman al-Zawahiri's Syrian representative Abu Khalid al-Suri who across Al Qaeda's media outlet calls upon the ISIS to repent for its savage treatment of Muslims. In a desperate plea for jihadist unity Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri has called across jihadi social media outlet for a cessation of the fighting between Al Qaeda's rival Syrian branches. His entreaties were ignored. Enraged Zawahiri publically rebuked the ISIS network in January 2014 revoking any organizational or ideological connections to the Baghdadi's group. ISIS retaliated by vigorously counterattacking a rival Islamist groups and on February 22 killed Al Qaeda's Syrian representative al-Suri in a suicide martyrdom operation.[65] There have been repeated massacres between Islamist rivals as Al Nusra Front has pledged to destroy the ISIS if it does not halt its attacks against fellow jihadists. Al Qaeda's operations in Syria are fractured and dysfunctional. Syria has two wars with the fight against Assad's Baathist regime weakened by rebel internecine fighting.

While stronger than its Syrian operations ISIS's position in Iraq is also pressure. Al Qaeda's terrorist offensive in Anbar Province has resulted in a alliance between Malaki's Shia dominated government and Sunni tribal militias opposed to Al Qaeda's efforts to carve out a jihadi state. Government forces and allied Sunni tribes have attacked ISIS held areas in Ramadi and Fallujah. Hoping to emulate the U.S. government 2006-2009 successful use of Anbar Awakening Movement militias against Al Qaeda, Malaki is sending funds and arms to reinforce the fighting capability anti ISIS tribal groups. Dozens of ISIS fighters have died in the recent fighting in Anbar Province as they defend their positions in Fallujah and Ramadi.

Al Qaeda's offensive in Syria and Iraq is far from over and the network's resiliency is a guarantor of future violence. Despite a strong jihadist presence including Pakistani and Chechen allies, it is unlikely ISIS or Al Nusra Front will be able to defeat their opponents. If jihadists see Assad's forces gaining ground and local resistance to their rule increasing, they will continue t fracture. Since Hezbollah's summer 2013 military intervention, Assad's forces have strengthened and the rebels, notably in the battle of Qusayr, have experienced reversals. Their ranks continue to fragment.

The war has reached a stalemate in which confessional extremism militates against a peaceful resolution and chronic divisions among the rebels make a Sunni military victory unlikely. Islamist forces at best can hope that the sectarian passions continue to swell their combat ranks and help them consolidate control over territory they rule. Yet as the foreign presence in Al Qaeda grows, it is likely to alienate the local populations they govern. ISIS' position in Syria is fragmenting as it faces regime and rebel attacks. Under such a scenario, ISIS and Al Nusrah's dreams of a mythic idealized Syrian-Iraqi *ummah* are as likely to be as successful as AQIM's efforts to recreate a modern version of Muhammad's Medina community in Timbuktu, Goa and Kindal.

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