

# Islamic Regression, Jihadist Frustration and Takfirist Hyper Violence

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## Introduction

Islamic civilization's regression after Europe's Enlightenment contradicts Muslim religious prophecies. *Sunna* and *hadith* of the Prophet's reported words and actions imply Islamic conquest of the planet [1]. Islam's early Mideast, North African, European and Central Asian conquests and its advancements in arts, sciences, math and philosophy reinforced these eschatological beliefs. Starting in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Islamic civilization, however, stagnated. There are contrasting explanations for this loss of dynamism [2]. These debates frequently centered on the Ottoman Empire's erosion.

Bernard Lewis argues Islam's acculturation of external influences was critical to its expansionism and its subsequent descent was due to its rejection of cross civilizational contact [3]. The Ottoman's failure to conquer Vienna in the 17<sup>th</sup> century exemplified their decay reinforced by Russia's conquest of its Central Asian territories decades later. Napoleon's Egypt campaign a century later solidified Ottoman decline. Countering defeats by European powers, the Ottomans westernized.

Europeanization did not reverse Ottoman atrophy. World War I led to the Empire's defeat and European colonization of its North African and Mideast territories. Faced with foreign occupation, nationalist secular movements gained ground. The Turkish nationalists served as an aspirational model for these movements. Creating a secular Turkey's Kemal Ataturk in 1924 abolished the caliphate. The Ottomans ignominious fate gave rise to contradictory reactions.

Frustration over the *umma's* (community) erosion contributed to Islamic revivalist movements [4]. Fundamentalist groups in Egypt and Pakistan aimed to restore Muslim civilization's lost promise by fortifying Sharia. They believed Islam's decline was due to deviant foreign values and practices. Muslim revivalists attributed Ottoman collapse to Westernization. They viewed Muhammad's Medina community and his four righteous successors rule as congruent with Islam's divine trajectory. Early Islamic civilization's fidelity to Quranic principles, accordingly, was consistent with Allah's *divine plan* for humanity guaranteeing universal social justice and prosperity.

Brotherhood ideologues urged the restoration of medieval religious values to spur the faith's renewal. The movement expanded rapidly across the Muslim world. Though a minority dissident movement the Brotherhood steadily gained ground as secular Pan Arab nationalism faltered [5].

Islamist movements aspired to capture political power. They believed Sharia's imposition would avenge Islam's past humiliation and restore its predestined future. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood employed various methods to seize state power. The 1949 assassination of MB's founder Hassan al-Banna and the imprisonment of thousands of its members led to a number of failed coup attempts. The Brotherhood responded to state repression by resorting to violence and terror. During the 1960's Sayyid Qutb's reformulation of the Brotherhood's ideology catalyzed its radicalization [6]. His vision of totalitarian Islamist society has tantalized a generation of jihadists.

Inspired by Qutb's ideas jihadist fervor and resilience are difficult to combat. Jihadism evokes a brutal fanaticism. Jihadists seeks Allah's

blessing and proudly await their anointment to walk in his shadow. This vision propels them exciting their imagination. Modern jihadism has become more takfirist, violent, and sectarian. Frustrated by their inability to seize power, jihadist strategies employ increasing brutality.

Jihadist violence also prompts intra-movement divisions. While some extremists have recanted violence most intensified their savage tactics [7]. Jihadist takirism and brutality wage insurgencies against multiple enemies. Intra- jihadi conflict, moreover, invite more savage tactics to quell internal dissent. Historical and religious forces reinforce those jihadists advocating takfirist violence. Islam's prophesied potential and its degenerative state furthermore unleash frustration inviting more brutality.

The Afghan jihad, the Iranian Revolution and the Grand Mosque of Mecca seizure by a millenarian cult contributed to the movement's sectarian, takfirist and apocalyptic evolution. These events historic coalescence reinforced Islamic eschatological beliefs that intra Islamic conflict (*fitna*) is a sign of impending apocalyptic war. These forces, however, did not mature until the Islamic State's (IS) emergence.

This paper examines jihadism's radicalized evolution in three stages. First, it discusses its takfirist political and religious foundations. Second, it analyses specific intra-jihadi debates that propelled more extremist visions. Third, it examines the social and political forces contributing to this ideological trajectory. The essay concludes the Islamic State's takfirist, apocalyptic vision and caliphate centric strategy reflects these trends.

## The Jihadi-Takfirist World View

Religious extremism plays a decisive role in jihadism's takfirist evolution. It contributes to the movements evolving hyper violent world view. A *Weltanschauung* that fuses three concepts (*al-wala, wal-bara', takfir and jihad*) that have intensified over time. Under IS doctrinal al-reformulation this tri-part foundation has never been more extremist. Jihadism's evolution reflects an elitist violence driven by frustration, intra-jihadi conflicts and religious zeal [8].

*Al-wala'* and *wal-bara'* separates a community of believers from non-believers [9]. It speaks to a community [*umma*] governed by a shared faith that dissociates from others. The doctrine delineates a world of virtuous belief and an outside order governed by wickedness. It seeks to create a community congruent with early Islamic practice whose virtuous ideal is Muhammad's Medina community.

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By constructing a spiritual refuge separated from *apostasy*, jihadists aspire to expand their micro-community that through war and conquest. As Nelly Lahoud notes *al-wala', wal-bara'* is a key principle of the jihadist movement [10]. It is, moreover, an individualized concept for each jihadist determines the community's standards. Given such variances, internal conflict arises.

*Al-wala', wal-bara'*'s propensity for violence is rooted in early Islamic history. The Kharajites were so wedded to Muhammad's Medina ideal that they rebelled against his immediate successors for their Quranic deviations [11]. Their desire to create an ideal micro-culture led them to expel those whose faith they questioned. Early Islamic rule was convulsed by internecine violence driven by doctrinal conflicts and power struggles [12].

*Al-wala', wal-bara'* lends itself to a takfirist world view. Jihadists decouple from the world separating good from evil. This invites resistance against *apostate* forces. Since jihadists view Muslim society as stricken by Post-Islamic ignorance (*jahiliyya*) most co-religionists are *apostates* [13]. Jihadists see these societies as gravely ill for they venerate man's law over God's rightful sovereignty (*hakimiyya*). Jihadists view societal ignorance as so pronounced that that missionary preaching (*da'wa*) has little resonance. With regimes so implacably vile jihadists only recourse is societal separation and rebellion.

If jihadists are to perform their divinely mandated mission to purify Islam they must resort to violence against regime supporters. Given theological prohibitions against murdering fellow Muslims, this requires co-religionists' expiation from the faith. Historically *takfir* was practiced selectively against impious individuals subject to clerical adjudication [14].

Over time, however, jihadists expanded *takfir*'s scope. Some expiations are political (regime officials and their supporters) others sectarian (Shi'ites, Alawites and Druse) and some reflect intra-jihadist quarrels. The latter is seen in the fighting between the Islamic State and Al Qaeda [15]. Takfirists often reference Ibn Taymiyyah medieval rulings on *apostate* Mongol Muslim rulers, Shi'ites, Alawites and Duse interpreting them broadly [16]. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, for example, expanded Taymiyyah ruling that Shi'ite leaders should be killed into a sectarian genocidal campaign [17].

Resorting to takfirist excommunication legitimates killing Muslims. By doing so jihadists defend *al-wala' wal-bara'* preserving its communal virtue. This requires a strategy of offensive warfare (*jihad*) to (1) ensure the *umma*'s protection and (2) expand the boundaries of its governance.

Jihad's meaning and scope inspire controversy [18]. Multiple interpretations engender complex doctrinal and definitional debates. Historically jihad involved personal struggle with one's faith (*greater jihad*) and defensive war (*lesser jihad*). Modern jihadists have expanded it to include aggressive warfare against *apostates* and their *infidel* masters. It is a strategy of expansive war that seeks the annihilation of many enemies.

Jihadist doctrine aspires to create a pure Islamist micro-culture. Despite their opposition to the Islamic State's *caliphate*, Al Qaeda ideologues envision an emirate to lead the global jihadist struggle. Abu Bakr Naji, for example, advocates creating a nascent jihadist state from disorder and upheaval [19]. Once implanted this micro-community would serve as an insurrectionary jihadist vanguard to inspire regional destabilization.

Naji's book *The Management of Savagery* is viewed as the Islamic

State's model for warfare and Sharia governance [20]. In its first issue of its English language magazine *Dabiq* IS sketches Naji prescribed path to power falsely attributing these stages to Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) founder Abu Musab al-Zarqawi [21]. The Islamic State sees its de facto administrative headquarters in Raqqa as new Medina and its caliphate's governing blueprint. According to Aymen Jawad al-Tamimi Raqqa's administrative and judicial rulings have been extended throughout IS's Iraqi-Syrian *wilaya* (provinces) [22].

*Al-wala', wal-bara', takfir* and offensive *jihad* are bedrock jihadist principles. They propel the movement into greater violence and barbarism. Jihadism's *community of believers* is exclusively narrow. Having rejected the contemporary Muslim world, jihadists hope their violence against the *apostate* order will spur apathetic Muslim masses.

Abu Musab al-Suri believed that revolutionary success against *apostate* regimes and their Western patrons would inspire ordinary Muslims into armed revolt [23]. Only a few have heeded his call. Muslim majorities' failure to revolt has produced jihadist alienation, frustration and violence. The dynamic produces a more exclusivist *community of believers*, broader takfirist doctrines and pitiless warfare. Intra-jihadist rivalries, competition and violence flow from this process. Jihadist individualism guarantees doctrinal disputes and brutal power struggles.

## Takfirist Jihadism Evolutionary Dynamic

Historically jihadism's takfirist orientation has intensified. While the forces causing this development are complex, a few overlapping factors predominate. They contribute to the movement's centrifugal pressures inviting frustration leading to more takfirism and violence. Jihadist failure to achieve Islam's prophetic destiny, to avenge Muslim dishonour and to quell intra-movement conflict drives this frustration and violence. Fractures, disputes and savagery are inherent in the jihadist movement whose aspirational unity has proved illusory. Why is this?

First, the movement's individualism invites severe conflict. Its key foundations (*al-wala', wal-bara', jihad, and takfir*) are individuated. As a profession of faith jihadists see their violence against non-believers as a moral obligation. Each is driven by an ethic to defend the faith's purity, avenge its shame and propel its expansion.

Nelly Lahoud argues the movement's individualism implies varying interpretations over the scope of jihad, takfir and communal association [24]. Though revered by today's jihadists, Muhammad's successors were repeatedly challenged by Kharajite revolts. Centuries later the *Assassins* murdered Muslim leaders they considered *apostates* [25]. Islam's mythological *golden age* was awash with blood, civil wars and succession disputes.

Second, creating a jihadist mass movement is difficult. With its doctrinal variances, disputes over tactics and leadership rivalries, building mass movements is problematic. Ephraim Karsh argues that the vision of an *umma* led by a single political authority has disintegrated when challenged by cultural, tribal and clan loyalties [26].

Jihadists become frustrated with their societal rejection. They retaliate against those whose interests they proclaim to defend. Modelled on Leninist democratic centralist principles, jihadism's elitist nature militates against its mass movement development. Donald Hancock notes that Usama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri regularly chastised the masses' for their apathy [27]. These recriminations are unsurprising given jihadist views on *jahiliyya* and communal ignorance. Their frustrations lead them to takfirism, brutality and internal conflicts.

Third, jihadism unsuccessfully navigates between Medina and Mecca's competing historic poles. Considered by jihadists as Allah will incarnate recreating Muhammad's Medina community is critical. It is that experience that intoxicates them for a new Medina's perfection is seen as the bedrock of a future revolutionary state. This vision inspires fanaticism and brutality.

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's (AQIM) savage rule in Timbuktu and the medieval brutality of IS's Raqqa seem driven by visions of a new Medina. Sharia law is rigidly enforced in Raqqa as is *hudud* punishments. Stoning, amputations, crucifixion, flogging, summary executions and the destruction of religious iconography are almost daily rituals.

Other complications arise. Translating the new Medina's purity into a revolutionary jihadist state has proved vexing. Faced with the complex tasks of military expansion and administration, jihadists are subsumed by doctrinal and tactical quarrels. The community loses its moralistic ethos and collective solidarity. Ideological disputes arise over how to challenge apostate practices and the depth of Sharia's implementation. The ensuing violence breaks the *umma's* solidarity.

The Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) behaviour in the 1990's is illustrative [28]. The group's ideological extremism and brutal Sharia imposition invited internal dissension and popular resistance. Both forces propelled the movement into disintegrating violence. Like the extremist Khmer Rouge GIA members soon turned their rage inward. The GIA's inability to sustain Medina's ideal led to frustration, aggression, conflict and disintegration.

The tension of harmonizing communal purity and furthering mass revolutionary development may account for jihadist extremism and infighting. Charles Lister argues that IS and AQ have competing models to lead the global jihadist movement. Seeking to monopolize control under its authority IS's *ink spot* model seeks caliphal control over its outlying provinces while Al Qaeda's insertion into the broader revolutionary movement emphasizes consensus between different jihadist organizations [29]. IS-AQ Ideological and military confrontations reflect their respective visions. This divergence produces internal disputes and intra-movement violence.

The Islamic State and Al Qaeda rivalry reflects generational conflicts within the jihadist movement. The competition centres over how best to manage centrifugal pressures that have plagued modern jihadism. The IS-AQ divorce is the culmination of decades of jihadist doctrinal and ideological innovations. Successive jihadist theorists have modified past practices and created new strategies to rectify the *umma's* degeneration and propel its predestined expansion. Past defeats of Islamic revolts fuelled greater aggressiveness enlarging the scope of jihadist enemies. Since Sayyid Qutb's *Milestones* modern jihadism has evolved in hyper violent takfirist direction.

Began by Sayyid Qutb's the movement's doctrinal evolution as modified by Abd al-Salam Faraj, Abdullah Azzam, Usama bin Laden, Ayman al Zawahiri, Abu Musab al-Suri, Abu Bakr Naji and Abu Musab Zarqawi have contributed to IS' apocalyptic, takfirist and sectarian world view. It represents a dialectical process where jihadism's core foundations have radicalized. Cross generational intra-jihadist criticism and revisionism has led to ideological extremism. The next section of the paper fleshes out modern jihadism's takfirist progression.

### Jihadist Dialectics: From Qutb's to Zarqawi

Historically jihadist debates have been animated by two questions. First, *what* or *who* has caused Islam's atrophy? Second, *how* do Muslims

overcome this state of regression to fulfill Islam's prophetic dominance? Jihadist theorists seek to answer these questions.

Jihadism has demonized and enlarged those culpable and prescribed more drastic solutions to propel Islam's purification and advancement. The missionary *dawa* preaching of Sayyid Qutb's has given way to Abu Musab al Zaraqwi's and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's sectarian slaughters. This radicalization process is unearthed by exploring four doctrinal refinements. These are: (1) Abd al-Salam Faraj's modification of Sayyid Qutb's concept of jihadist struggle; (2) Bin Laden's reorientation of Abdullah Azzam's jihadist warfare doctrine; (3) Abu Musab Suri and Abu Bakr Naji's Post 9-11 insurgency strategies; and (4) the doctrinal disputes between Ayman al-Zawahiri and IS's ideological progenitor Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

### Qutb and Faraj

Qutb's importance for modern jihadist theorists is widely acknowledged. His *Milestones* is unequalled in its rejection of foreign cultural influence and its exaltation of a mythic Islamic past. Inspired by Hassan al Banna critique of Western influence, Qutb's joined the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and played a formidable role in the party's ideological development. Qutb's ideas paved the way for the Brotherhood's most aggressive opponents who rejected their 1970's policy of accommodation to the Egyptian state. One notorious acolyte Ayman al Zawahiri saw the Brotherhoods informal deals with the Sadat and Mubarak regimes as a betrayal of Qutbian principles.

Qutb argued that European influence produced ignorance (*jahiliyya*) of Allah's will [30]. He believed that *jahiliyya* was abetted by Muslim apostate rulers and Islamic religious revisionists who aspired to make Islam congruent with modern (Western) society. Qutb's argued that no genuine Islamic society could exist without Sharia law. He was especially critical of the traditional clergy of Al Azhar University who he viewed as providing religious sanction for impious rulers.

Qutb argued Nasser's secularization policies denied Muslims the fulfillment of Allah's will that reached its zenith under Muhammad and his immediate successors. Because the 7th century *umma* made no separation between politics and religion, any deviation from Muhammad's Medina model was to be rejected. By separating religion from the state, Qutb reasoned, Nasser and Ataturk were apostates complicit in Western efforts to destroy Islam. Under such circumstances, *jihad* against such rulers was a moral obligation.

Qutb argued that *jahiliyya* was analogous to Muhammad's pre Islamic era. Like the Prophet, Qutb believed this state of *ignorance* needed to be destroyed. Since *jahiliyya* was so profound, Qutb thought only an enlightened few remained faithful to Allah's original vision. They, Qutb argued, would lead an Islamic rebellion [31]. Qutb's vanguard would preach the true message and transform the society. Once Muslims restored traditional Islamic principles they would rebel against impious rulers.

This perspective espouses aggressive jihad that rejects confining religious struggle to private belief. Qutb's views espouse a totalistic Islam that fuses politics, personal morality and religion [32]. Its desired end state the restoration of God's sovereignty (*hakimiyya*) modelled upon Sharia law securing justice and divine order.

Qutb's evolution toward totalitarianism was not immediate. As John Calvert work speaks tellingly, Qutb emerged a radical as a result of thirty year evolution from secular nationalist to Jihadist totalitarian [33]. His imprisonment and torture by Nasser's regime radicalized him.

Only late in life did Qutb see a Manichean world separated by Islamic purity and Satan. Between these two worlds there was no compromise.

Some suggest that Qutb's philosophy was nonviolent and that he sought revolutionary transformation through preaching to transcend *jahiliyya* [34]. Under such an interpretation a missionizing revolutionary vanguard can convince ignorant masses to revolt against *apostate* rulers. According violence could be limited against recalcitrant rulers once Muslims reconnected with their faith. The revolution would not be bloody.

While not doubting Qutb's sincerity, Calvert argues that Qutb did support violent agitation. His organization of revolutionary cells resulted in his 1964 arrest. Like most totalitarians, Qutb's was convinced that moral suasion buttressed by violence could impel others toward a righteous path.

His ideas contributed to the spread of revolutionary jihadist groups Unity and Jihad in Egypt. One of his followers Abd al-Salam Faraj was a leader in *Islamic Jihad* hoped to expand upon his mentor's legacy [35]. Faraj's 1979 political tract *The Neglected Duty* elevated jihad to a central pillar of Islam and stressed attacking the *near* rather than the *far enemy* [36].

Faraj argues that jihad was neglected because Egypt's clerical establishment legitimated the apostate regime. Its religious teachings, accordingly, emphasized deference toward rulers and aspired to make Islam apolitical. By rediscovering *jihad* as a personal moral duty, Faraj argued, Muslims could liberate society from repressive apostate rule. Under Faraj's theories the struggle against the *near enemy* transcended the fight against the Zionist *far enemy*. Until *apostate* regimes were overthrown by Islamic revolutionaries wars against Israel would likely fail. The restoration of God's sovereignty (*hakimiyya*) in Egypt would mobilize the *umma* into action against the Zionist state. The path to liberate Jerusalem accordingly lies through Cairo.

Unlike Qutb's Faraj believed in revolution from above. He critiqued the Muslim Brotherhood's *dawa* and charitable activities as ineffectual [37]. His engineering training made him contemptuous of religious scholars and Quietist Salafists. The restoration of *jihad* as a central pillar in Muslim life and violence's utility permeate his philosophy. The destruction of *apostasy* requires immediate action. Only by organizing revolutionary cells and striking at the regime's leadership could the masses be roused into action.

Faraj's revolutionary cell organized the 1981 assassination of Egypt's President Anwar al-Sadat before a military parade celebrating Egypt's role in the 1973 war. Faraj hoped that Sadat's killing would impel the masses to revolt. *Islamic Jihad's* assassination of Sadat in 1981 instead bred a brutal army crackdown that degraded the terror network. Unlike Qutb's, Faraj did not see insurrection preconditioned upon society's voluntary religious transformation. Like his mentor he would be hanged. Had Faraj succeeded in toppling the regime his revolutionary state would like be repressive.

## Azzam and Bin Laden

Inspired by Qutb's vision Abdullah Azzam, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri have reinterpreted his message. They reversed Qutb's order of conflict by targeting foreign powers, as a preceding step for a larger war against the Muslim apostates [38]. Their reinterpretation of Qutb's is a consequence of Islamist failure to overthrow the apostate *near enemy* [39].

Historically jihadist rebellions have faltered. The Muslim

Brotherhood's failed 1950's and 1960's insurrections, the Assad regime's defeat of the Islamist 1980's revolt in Syria and the collapse of the Algerian and Libyan jihads in the late 1990's are testimony to jihadists inability to overthrow regimes. Only in weak or non-existent states like Afghanistan and the Sudan in the 1990's did Islamic militants seize power.

Wars against foreign powers, however, were viewed as a resounding success. The Afghan jihad effectiveness revised Qutb's revolutionary scheme. The Palestinian Abdullah Azzam preached that the *umma's* defense against foreign aggression was an individual duty. Jihad he argued should be a pillar of Muslim life [40]. Its significance lies in private responsibility to wage *defensive* jihad. No state or official sanction was necessary to legitimate jihadist activity. The theory legitimated private organization and finance of jihadist forces.

With his religious studies doctorate and recruitment of Arab Afghans, Azzam fused jihadist thought with action. Aside from Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi he is exceptional outlier among jihadists who lack formal religious training. Azzam's personal connections to bin Laden and Zawahiri during the Afghan jihad insured his significance [41]. The Palestinian argued that glory through combat against foreign aggressors was a precursor for martyrdom. Azzam lectures on jihad at Jeddah's King Abdul-Aziz University riveted bin Laden during his student days.

Bin Laden was recruited in Pakistan as part of Azzam's support network for Arab fighters resisting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. While Azzam's doctrine of resistance was defensive and centered against foreign occupiers of Muslim land, it was a stepping stone for more aggressive version of jihad.

Within this context, Al Qaeda was born. Azzam's advocacy of an International jihadist force to defend Muslim territory in Kashmir and Palestine offered these fighters an attractive opportunity. In *Defense of Muslim Lands* Azzam calls jihad a personal duty. His jihadist vision was innovative [42]. Classical jurists conceived jihad more as a collective duty by the *umma* (*Dar al Islam*) to violently engage foreigners in *Dar al Harb* (*the House of War*).

Azzam's reimagining of *jihad* allowed for a private network to combat foreign aggression against *Allah's domain*. Under his vision, Al Qaeda (The Base) was formed in 1988 to train, recruit and send jihadists to liberate Muslim territory. The creation of an international network devoted to jihad was a godsend for radical Islamists seeking battlefield glory. Emboldened by the Afghan jihad's success, these militants hope to achieve similar success in Kashmir and Palestine [43]. Many sought assistance to wage jihad at home against *apostate* regimes.

Azzam's pivotal role in Al Qaeda's development didn't last. His ambiguous *defensive jihad* doctrine invites many interpretations. How might one define *Allah's domain* or the territorial reach of *Dar al Islam*? Historically, Islam stretched from Spain to South East Asia. Most of this territory is governed by what jihadists consider infidel regimes.

Bin Laden and Zawahiri wanted a more expansive warfare strategy that permitted insurrections against *apostate* Muslim regimes [44]. Their jihadist vision endorsed a *takfirist* struggle against the *near enemy*. Bin Laden-Zawahiri's version of jihad was unacceptable to Azzam who disliked intra-Muslim conflict [45]. Both wanted to expand jihad by taking the fight to America in retaliation for US Gulf policy and support for Israel.

This conflict led to a power struggle with bin Laden's achieving dominance over the organization. OBL's charisma and his fortune

captured the attention of Al Qaeda's Shura advisory council that in August 1988 elected Osama as emir. The Bin Laden and Azzam dispute invites controversy [46]. Bin Laden's break with his former mentor may have been driven by Zawahiri who coveted Osama's patronage to secure control over the fractured Egyptian jihadist movement. Lawrence Wright argues that Zawahiri's disputes with Azzam and his desire to exploit bin Laden's finances explain the breach. After Osama was named emir, Azzam's role in AQ was marginal.

Under OBL and Zawahiri's Al Qaeda trained groups to be dispatched on multiple fronts. They organized committees governing military, media and financial affairs. Al Qaeda's expansive jihad included liberating Muslim territory from foreign aggression, fighting Muslim apostate regimes and attacking U.S. interests.

Azzam's November 1989 death accelerated AQ's maximalist trajectory. His car bomb assassination outside a Pakistani Mosque raised questions over who killed him and how his death impacted Al Qaeda's progression? Whether Osama was responsible or not, Azzam's assassination allowed AQ to pursue an expansive jihadist agenda targeting *near* and *far* enemies.

Based on late Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) leader Nasir al-Wuhayshi reminiscences bin Laden's pre 9-11 policy was driven by frustration over jihadist's failure to overthrow the *near enemy*. According to Wuhayshi bin Laden and Zawahiri reckoned that jihadist insurrection against *apostate* regimes produced divisions within the movement and that targeting America would catalyze unity. Accordingly AQ could capitalize upon widespread revulsion toward the US for its Mideast policy.

OBL and Zawahiri believed America and Israel allied with Gulf Arab *apostate* regimes to control Mideast oil and destroy Islam. OBL viewed the 1991 Gulf War as establishing a US protectorate over Saudi Arabia. Al Qaeda's *far enemy* strategy broadened the jihadist struggle by targeting the US homeland. No longer would jihadists fight infidels only on threatened Muslim land but they would take the war to their territory. By attacking US interests across the world, Al Qaeda hoped to intimidate America and force its Mideast financial and military disengagement. Deprived of US support apostate regimes, they reckoned, would fall before Islamist revolutionary movements.

Under Taliban protection OBL and Zawahiri launched attacks against US interests in Saudi Arabia, Africa and Yemen. Al Qaeda's *Holy Tuesday* 9-11 attacks changed the jihadist dynamic. The New York and Washington attacks struck at the financial and military symbols of US power. Fawaz Gerges notes the 9-11 attacks were unpopular among some jihadists. By beginning a war with the United States, Al Qaeda brought unwarranted attention on the global jihadist movement. The US counter strike against Al Qaeda's Taliban sanctuary shattered its hierarchical network and succeeded in destroying Mullah Omar's state. Deprived of state patronage Al Qaeda's became a hunted, degraded and harassed organization. The subsequent *war on terror* and open jihadist military fronts in Afghanistan and Iraq impelled further doctrinal reformulations.

## Suri and Naji

Many studies assess Al Qaeda's post 9-11 strategy and operational capability. The networks dispersion has resulted in varying interpretations of AQ's potency. The search to divine AQ's post 9-11 strategy led many to the work of Syrian jihadist Abu Musab Suri. For some observers Suri is the architect of Al Qaeda's efforts to defeat the West after 9-11.

His writings, lectures and video tapes dominate many jihadi websites. No other modern jihadist has written so clearly or extensively. Suri's 1,600 page book *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* is considered by many jihadists as the blueprint to defeat the West. So influential was Suri that at the time of his 2005 arrest in Pakistan the FBI had assigned a 5 million dollar reward for information leading to his capture.

Suri writings emphasize jihad through uncoordinated small groups attacking Western interests. Al Qaeda's dispersion seems consistent with home-grown terrorist theories popular in press and academic circles. The rise of home-grown terrorism falsely attributed for the Madrid and London bombings no doubt attracted attention to Suri's ideas. Moreover, his analysis is based on activism in the Syrian, Algerian and Afghan jihads and decades of intellectual reflection.

His connection to Al Qaeda and other jihadist organizations, moreover, is uncontested. Suri was an important figure in Al Qaeda Spanish network. Having spent years living in Spain, he had strong relationship with the Spanish network's leader Abu Dadah who played a role in facilitating a 9-11 planning conference in Tarragona. Suri was also a GIA and Al Qaeda media representative in London during the 1990's. Most famously he was the conduit for Bin Laden's meeting with Peter Bergen in 1998 shortly after the African Embassy bombings and bin Laden's declaration of war against the United States.

Suri's loyalty to Al Qaeda is suspect. During his Afghanistan years he clashed with bin Laden. When he ran his own camp during the Taliban period, Suri did not swear *bay'ah* (fidelity) to bin Laden. Their contrasting personalities, furthermore, found bin Laden angered by Suri's volatility and brashness.

The Syrian criticized Osama when the Saudi leader refused to follow Taliban orders and moderate his attacks against US interests. Suri admired Mullah Omar and he managed the Taliban's propaganda operations. He viewed Taliban's rule as ideal.

Suri was appalled by Osama's lack of respect for the Taliban and his unwillingness to coordinate policy with Omar's government. He, moreover, criticized AQ's hierarchical structure which left it vulnerable to American military retaliation after 9-11. By his account, Al Qaeda lost 80% of its Afghan force after 9-11. Al Qaeda's vaunted Brigade 055 was decimated in the U.S. retaliation. His work is a devastating indictment of past jihadist organizations and strategies.

His *Global Islamic Resistance Call* warns that hierarchical jihadist organizations are vulnerable to police disruption. According to Suri the Syrian Brotherhood revolt in Hama unwisely confronted the Syrian state allowing the Assad's regimes to unleash its massive firepower. Suri is critical of Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) whose organization played a pivotal role in Al Qaeda's development. He describes the EIJ's terror campaign as a "total failure". Having been a passionate supporter of the Algerian GIA he later condemned the group's extremist mistakes.

Instead of central direction Suri advocated *tanzim* or system not organization. Borrowing from Che Guevara's "el foco" theory, Suri's doctrine involves open fronts conducted by small, uncoordinated groups. Suri's decentralized jihadist insurgency has numerous advantages. Each cell's independence is less susceptible to government retaliation. Even if police and intelligence forces penetrate and destroy one cell its impact would be minimal on the revolutionary movement. Unable to effectively retaliate, the enemy would be drawn into multiple fronts characterized by repeated strikes by small groups. Michael Ryan argues that Suri's doctrine was influenced by Robert Taber's *War of the Flee* in its advocacy of decentralized guerrilla warfare.

Suri expected that the US military would be unable to combat decentralized insurgencies whose exponential growth guaranteed victory. Defeated America would disengage from the Middle East leaving their *apostate* allies vulnerable to Islamist revolts.

Suri sees the US exercising imperial control over the Middle East. He argues that the 1991 Gulf War was a ploy by the West to control Mideast oil and reinforce apostate rule. Anglo-American capitalism, moreover, culturally polluted Muslim society. Islam, he reckons, has a retributive right to attack the American homeland, kill its civilians, and employ mass casualty attacks.

Suri's advocates using weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to punish and terrorize the West. His strategy's seeks the excitation of communitarian passions. Suri believed that American military campaigns in Islamic lands would unleash religious passions unifying the *umma*. Small bands would rise to fight American forces across the globe. Decentralized jihadist cells would harass Western forces and each violent encounter would inspire more combatants.

Suri's views over jihadist capacity to stir mass religious passions seem dependent upon mystical forces. These sentiments belie his reputation as a realist but it is typical of jihadist thinkers whose faith is divine guidance is unshakeable. They fervently believe that the slumbering *umma* can arise from its jahilli ignorance once witnessing heroic battlefield exploits and martyred jihadists.

Enraged by *jahilli* ignorance, Suri clings to takfirist ideas. He is reluctant to follow his doctrine's consequences. Indeed, his takfirist ideas impede mass mobilization for they reify vanguard elites committed to the *true path*. Invariably they retaliate against Muslims who oppose their elitist movement. Muslim majorities have not responded in sufficient numbers to evoke the transformation envisioned by Suri's book. By 2011 Al Qaeda was considered a spent organization whose leadership cadres, offensive capacity and leadership were degraded.

Tactically, Suri's decentralized jihad has limited utility. Composed of inexperienced amateurs small autonomous groups often fail. The damage small cells can do is limited and their ineffectiveness reduce jihadism's appeal. Mass excitation of jihadist passions, moreover, requires central direction. How else could *jahiliyya* be transcended? Suri assumes that the internet and social media could stimulate the *umma's* revolutionary awakening. Yet the *jihadosphere* is so immense, so fractured and so quarrelsome that such unity is unlikely. Only a strong bureaucratic entity could direct the masses in the desired direction.

Suri is unlikely to have exerted influence on Al Qaeda post 9-11 strategy. Bin Laden's disliked him and his outsider role limited his leverage within the network. Significantly, Suri's work has never been endorsed by Al Qaeda's central media operations. Near the end of his life bin Laden wanted to centralize operations among Al Qaeda's regional franchises to ensure greater strategic direction.

Suri's influence is trumped by Abu Bakr Naji whose e-treatise *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Phase in Which the Ummah will Pass* has been endorsed by al Qaeda media operations. Will McCants and Michael WS Ryan argue that IS's strategic direction is inspired by Naji's book. Though falsely attributed to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, IS first issue of its Dabiq e-magazine, outlines Naji's stages of jihadist insurgency.

Naji's e-treatise was published in 2004 by an AQ media outlet. His *exhaustion and vexation strategy* is consistent with Al Qaeda's actual attacks in Europe and its assaults against coalition troops in

Afghanistan and Iraq. Naji advocates a campaign designed to weaken the West's resolve and force its Mideast disengagement. His goal is to cripple Al Qaeda's *far* and *near enemies*. Naji declares:

"The primary goal for the stage of the power of "vexation" and "exhaustion" is:

1) –*exhaust the forces of the enemy and the regimes collaborating with them, disperse their efforts, and working to make them unable to catch their breath by ways of operations of the choice states, primary or otherwise. Even if the operations are small in size and effect...*

2) –*attract new youth to the jihadi work by undertaking qualitative operations...by qualitative operations...like the operations in Bali...and the large operations in Iraq.*

Naji emphasizes the targeting of civilians, transport infrastructure and economic institutions. His strategy is driven by a desire to inflict immense damage upon the West and their *apostate* enemies. Mass casualty attacks are designed to sway public opinion and pressure Western policy-makers to end anti-terror measures. No type of attack is excluded and Naji prioritizes WMD attacks against civilians.

He endorses attacking any regime allied with Washington. Assaults against Muslim *apostate* governments are emphasized. Like Suri's *Global Resistance Call*, Naji's uses takfirist doctrine to justify brutal attacks against *impious* Muslims.

Naji argues that the USSR's collapse and the Cold War's end ushered forth American-Israeli imperial aggression against the Muslim World. He interprets the Gulf War as an insidious American bid to appropriate Muslim land and resources. Continued American support for Israel and its policies in the occupied territories are offered as proof of a Zionist-Crusader conspiracy to destroy Islam and reinforce *apostate* rule. The Saudi monarchy is, accordingly, the handmaiden of American influence and power in the region.

*The Management of Savagery* advocates alliances with regional jihadist groups to "open fronts" across the Muslim world. Citing Paul Kennedy's work on imperial overextension, Naji believes American military forces can be drawn into multiple battle zones for they like the Russians in Afghanistan will suffer crippling losses.

Naji believes jihadist attacks in North America and Europe could fracture international coalition's will to fight and sway public opinion against military intervention. Naji's *vexation and exhaustion* doctrine emphasizes central direction of the mujahidin struggle against America for only one jihadist organization can coordinate a systematic global terror campaign.

Battlefield success, therefore, must be buttressed by a two- fold propaganda strategy. First, depicting mujahidin victories against Western troops and strikes against the Western homeland weaken enemies and arouse Muslim passions to join jihadist forces. Second, it sways Western public opinion toward disengagement from Islamic battlefields. Operating from this premise IS November 13, 2015 attacks in Paris were designed to pressure France to disengage military operations against its caliphate. IS celebrates its attacks against *apostates* and their infidel masters across multiple media forums.

Naji's strategy aspires to provoke regional disorder. Citing Taliban rule as a model, Naji expects that Islamic states will arise to *manage* anarchy. He advocates stern measures for those who oppose these micro states. Naji references Muhammad's successor's warfare strategies to further these emirates. Commenting on the Islamic State's caged immolation of a captured Jordanian Airforce pilot, Fernando Reinares references Naji's support for Abu Bakr's use of fire against enemies.

His war strategy seeks the caliphate's resurrection. Naji's *near and far enemy* merger advocates alliances with multiple networks. Against these enemies there can be no mercy. Naji speaks favorably of Egyptian *Islamic Jihad's* targeting of the tourist industry their crippling economic impact.

Brynjar Lia's analysis of AQ Post 9-11 media strategy provides further evidence that Naji's *vexation and exhaustion* strategy drives the terror network's behaviour. Lia argues that AQ propaganda emphasized striking the West and Muslim *apostate* regimes. Al Qaeda media outlets endorsed economic strikes, attacking civilians, and brutalizing enemy troops. He argues that Al Qaeda's list of enemies has grown as has its support for expanded violence. This conclusion reinforces Thomas Hegghammer who argues Post 9-11 jihadists groups have *cross-hybridized*.

Lia's analysis can be extended to IS whose sectarian strategy is a pillar of its propaganda messaging. The caliphate's takfirist philosophy and barbarism is even more pronounced than its AQI progenitor.

### Zawahiri and Zarqawi

Al Qaeda's decision to use Iraqi Kurdistan as a rear operations base increased with America's war plans against Saddam Hussein's regime. During the late 1990's Abu Musab al- Zarqawi had built a financial and recruitment network with Kurdish Islamists in Iraq and Europe. The loss of the Taliban safe haven after 9/11, made Iraqi Kurdistan invaluable to Al Qaeda.

The U.S. invasion dispatched Saddam's army prompting state implosion. With its small force, the U.S. military struggled against multiple insurgent groups. Many former Iraqi soldiers joined the resistance.

Zarqawi's group (al-Tawid wal-Jihad) centered its operations in Tikrit, Baghdad and Ramadi. Known as the *Sunni Triangle* the region became the resistance movement's epicenter. Zarqawi's network of foreign fighters, explosives factories, media operations and criminal activities involved over a thousand militants. The group's effectiveness was magnified by its nihilistic violence and sophisticated media campaign. Zarqawi's smuggling of foreign suicide bombers through Syrian networks unleashed brutal violence in Iraq.

His pre 2004 operations targeted US forces, foreign workers, Iraqi security services and construction projects. The Jordanian also struck at the Iraqi religious establishment. His 2003 Najaf bombing killed eighty people including Shi'ite cleric Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir-al-Hakim. Zarqawi's network beheaded foreign workers, employed suicide bombers and improvised explosives against Coalition and Iraqi forces.

His role in the insurgency was accentuated by his propaganda campaign glorifying his network's jihadist exploits. Capitalizing on new communications technology Zarqawi posted videos of suicide bombings, grotesque beheadings, attack coalition forces and he used the internet to recruit funds and foreign fighters. As a consequence, Zarqawi contributed to the emergence of a virtual *jihadosphere* linking internet videos, chat rooms, Facebook, and You Tube activity. His e-magazine *The Camels Hump* trumpeted his networks exploits, published information on car bomb making, IED fabrications, and insurgent guerilla tactics. He provided the model that guides IS more robust, complex and brutal propaganda strategy.

Despite its success, Zarqawi was convinced that he needed a new strategy. Intercepted by US forces, Zarqawi's 2004 letter to Al Qaeda

outlines his sectarian strategy targeting Shia civilians and its religious centres. He reckoned that only a sustained campaign against the Shia could trigger a sectarian civil war and American disengagement. Once Iraq imploded, Zarqawi believed he would form a jihadist state.

His letter inveighs against the Shia for they are "*the insurmountable obstacle, the prowling serpent, the crafty, evil scorpion, the enemy lying in wait, and biting poison*". Zarqawi describes them as "*the enemy*" and that they conspired with the Americans against the Sunnis. Zarqawi's hoped to unite the Sunni world against the Shia- American alliance to create a "greater Israel" in Iraq.

Starting in 2004 Zarqawi negotiated with Al Qaeda about an alliance. These conversations centered on his anti-Shia Strategy. The Jordanian's hatred of the Shia and his mercenary killing of Muslims horrified Al Qaeda. Bin Laden and Ayman Zawahiri urged Zarqawi to renew the fight against the American infidel and avoid sectarian attacks.

By spring 2004 Al Qaeda Central was eclipsed by Zarqawi's network. Iraq was the key jihadist battlefield. Zarqawi not bin Laden was venerated in internet jihadist chatter rooms and Iraq was the key recruiting ground for suicide bombers. Fearing being left behind in the jihadist struggle if they rejected his proposed alliance, Al Qaeda acceded to Zarqawi's plea.

Zarqawi's hatred of the Shia led him to target their mosques, pilgrims, clerics and religious celebrations. His letter to Al Qaeda describes the Shia so:

*"These confirmed polytheists, who stand and pray at gravesides, who organized funeral possessions, who treat the Companions (of the Prophet) as infidels and insult the mothers of the faithful and the elite of this (Islamic) nation, do all they can to distort the Koran, presenting it as an offshoot of logical thought in order to disparage those who have a correct knowledge of it, in addition, they speak of infallibility of the (Islamic) nation...and in many other forms they give clear proof of atheism that abounds in their published works and original sources."*

His critique of the Shia emphasizes their religious rituals. The Shi'ite reverence for Ali and Husayn (the prophet's son in law and grandson) for Zarqawi smacked of polytheism anathema to the Sunni tradition.

The Jordanian hoped his attacks against the Shi'ite religious establishment would goad Muqtada al Sadr militia to retaliate against Sunnis. Zarqawi's sectarian war in Iraq he hoped would escalate across the region. Driven by ethno-sectarian rage Zarqawi also targeted Kurds, Sufis, and Christians. All of whom are described in disparaging terms. His terror campaign had devastating consequences.

Sunni-Shi'ite conflict reached unsustainable levels. Experts doubted that Iraq could avoid civil war. U.S. Marine intelligence report in 2005 said that Anbar Province was lost for Al Qaeda had created a dangerous terror sanctuary. Scholarly opinion, similarly, urged American withdraw and a containment policy to limit the regional impact of the disastrous Iraq war.

By 2006 Zarqawi's strategy seemed to be working well. Why didn't it succeed? Ayman al Zawahiri wrote to Zarqawi in 2005 that his strategy risked alienating popular support. Intercepted by US forces Zawahiri's letter argues Zarqawi course is unsustainable. The Egyptian wrote that "in the absence of this popular support, the Islamic mujahed would be crushed in the shadows" and "...among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never fine palatable-also are the scenes of slaughtering hostages." Zawahiri describes sectarianism as subsidiary to the fight against the Americans.

Zawahiri prediction was lost on Zarqawi who never wavered in his approach. Other AQI missteps proved more lethal. Among the most important of these was Zarqawi's war against the Sunni Anbar sheiks.

Starting late in 2006 the Iraqi Sunni insurgency against the Americans began to weaken. Al Qaeda's use of Anbar Province brought it into conflict with tribal sheiks who chaffed at AQI's efforts to dominate smuggling operations and impose Sharia. AQI responded by killing them and intensifying its Islamization policy. Claiming to represent an authentic Iraq resistance, AQI's core leadership was incongruously composed of foreigners. Their priority in creating a pan-Islamist jihadist state diverged from the interests of the Iraqi nationalists.

Zarqawi's attacks against all who opposed him contributed to his death. Hunted by US forces with a \$25 million bounty on his head, his time was limited. Based on an informant's tip Zarqawi was connected to a cleric whose movements were monitored by a US task force. Tracked to a rural safe house, US Special Forces took no risks bombing the building with two 500 pound bombs. Zarqawi's 2006 death was greeted with jubilation among Shi'ite Iraqis.

Zawahiri's debate with Zarqawi over his takfirist campaign resurfaced with the February 2014 split between Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. Zarqawi's successors have intensified his brutal sectarian warfare. Today IS's media venerates its founding father and his brutal warfare doctrines. While blunted almost a decade ago AQI sectarian strategy has greater resonance in today's Mideast. The religious passions generated by the intra-confessional Syrian civil war catalyzed the Islamic State's development. Such an outcome was building for generations.

## The Contextual Development of Jihadist Hyper Takfirism and Violence

David Rappaport argues that the Islamist *fourth wave* of terror began in 1979. The year was extraordinary for it generated expectations of Islam's rebirth. The Afghan jihad galvanized Islamic world. The vast flows of foreign fighters to Afghanistan and the insurgency's success in defeating Soviet forces reinvigorated Islamic militancy. It laid the formation for Al Qaeda's transnational jihadist finance and terror infrastructure.

Though foreign fighters played a marginal role in the Afghan jihad, they were mythologized. *Arab Afghans* returned home and led bloody insurgent campaigns in Egypt, Algeria, and Libya. The brutality of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EJI) and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) their targeting of regime forces and civilians undermined their popular appeal. Their collective failure and Hafez al-Assad's crushing of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood a decade earlier was blamed on Zionist-Crusaders intent upon destroying Islam. This conviction gained momentum with the 1991 US military intervention that drove Iraq's military from Kuwait.

The 9-11 attacks and the *War on Terror* refocused jihadist energies in fighting the Western *far enemy*. US support for governments in Kabul and Baghdad effectively fused the *near* and *far* enemy. Since the 2003 US invasion of Iraq jihadist enemy hierarchies have blurred. The spread of Al Qaeda's franchises to Iraq, the Maghreb, Yemen and Somalia fused global and local jihads broadening enemies. While Al Qaeda's branches failed to achieve jihadist emirates, they unleashed horrible carnage. Wartime pressures and frustration have propelled greater jihadist violence. Near the end of his life bin Laden lamented the takfirist and *near enemy* focus of his affiliates. The gap between bin

Laden's *far enemy* vision and the behavior of his regional appendages was so great that AQ's American media advisor Adam Gadahn urged separating from affiliates.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution produced contradictory reactions among Sunni jihadists. Though inspired that a pro-Western regime was overthrown by an Islamic revolution, some Sunni jihadists saw Shia revolutionary agitation as threatening. Others while distaining the Shia's revisionism cooperated with Tehran. Al Qaeda, for example, established a relationship with Hezbollah during its Sudanese sanctuary period.

The expansion of Shi'ite influence in the region after the 2003 Iraq war propelled Sunni jihadism into more sectarian-takfirist directions. Iran's military engagement through its *Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps* (IRGC), and its promotion of its Hezbollah and Shia militia proxies in Iraq, Syria and Yemen generated Sunni resistance. The Syrian civil war has degenerated into a sectarian bloodbath with alarming regional security ramifications.

Sectarian conflict generates apocalyptic sentiments among Sunni and Shi'ite jihadists who see the killing fields of Syria as a *prophetic sign*. Relying on hadiths that foretell discord (*fitna*) in the Muslim world they see the Syrian civil war as a precursor to the Mahdi's emergence, Issa's (Jesus) return and Islamic victory over Satanic forces. Until the advent of the Islamic State apocalyptic jihadist movements were either historically distant or outliers. Like Baghdadi's proto-jihadist state, the 19th century millenarian Sudanese Mahdiyyah challenged Western regional hegemony. Modern apocalyptic movements also precede the Islamic State. The 1979 Grand Mosque of Mecca seizure by Juhayman al-Otaybi's millenarian cult is especially relevant. Not until recently has this group's significance been adequately appreciated. Jean Pierre Filliu argues apocalyptic beliefs since the 1970's has risen across the Sunni Muslim world. Foreshadowing IS' emergence he argues jihadism integration with apocalyptic ideology could have revolutionary potential.

Jihadist frustration, sectarian passions, apocalyptic ideology and takfirist orientations created the desire for one integrative network. This configuration of forces is represented in the Islamic State's controversial world view that paradoxically galvanizes and divides the jihadist movement.

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