



## After Osama bin Laden and in the Aftermath of the Khorasan Pledge

Yossef Bodansky

June 2015

### Executive Summary

---

- \* The Islamic Caliphate declared by Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi a year ago is a most profound and defiant a challenge of Orthodox Jihadism to the Muslim World, and, to a lesser extent, to the entire modern world.
- \* The establishment of the Caliphate in mid-2014 is the inevitable outcome of the evolution of political Islam in the last half-a-century. The Caliphate is the culmination of the Jihadist doctrine introduced by Osama bin Laden and his coterie with the sole profound deviation being over relationship with Shiite Iran.
- \* In a perverse way - bin Laden will contribute far more to the evolving global Jihad movement as a martyr than he could as a leader living in seclusion. In the last months of his life, bin Laden himself realized this and he returned to visible interaction that inevitably hastened his martyrdom.
- \* In Spring 2014, the DI'ISH decided the theological debate by introducing "the Khorasan Pledge" in the context of the history of the Jihadist struggle in the Middle East and beyond. In Summer 2014, DI'ISH announced the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate on the territories under their control as the first step in restoring the glory of all Muslims and the liberation of all lands ever ruled by Muslims.
- \* Over the following year, the Islamic Caliphate was joined through declarations of oaths of allegiance - Bay'ah - by Jihadist leaders all over the Muslim World. The spread and ascent of the Islamic Caliphate is the outcome of an unprecedented burst of enthusiasm for Islamist-Jihadist causes throughout the entire Muslim World - including emigre communities in Western Europe and North America.
- \* The new Caliphate is the dream comes true of the entire Islamdom. As such, the idea and hope represented by the Caliphate will not go away irrespective of the fate of Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Jihadist state he established at the heart of al-Jazira.
- \* In Summer 2015, the Islamic Caliphate committed to delivering an epic spectacular strike at the heart of the US and the West. Given Baghdadi's resolve to consolidate a region-wide Islamic Caliphate and then put the Jihadist Trend on an irreversible path to global dominance - a Jihadist attempt to launch an epic spectacular strike is only a question of time.



## About ISPSW

---

The Institute for Strategic, Political, Security and Economic Consultancy (ISPSW) is a private institute for research and consultancy. The ISPSW is objective and task oriented and is above party politics.

The increasingly complex international environment of globalized economic processes and worldwide political, ecological, social and cultural change, brings with it major opportunities but also risks: thus, decision-makers in the private sector and in politics depend more than ever before on the advice of highly qualified experts.

ISPSW offers a range of services, including strategic analyses, security consultancy, executive coaching and intercultural competency. ISPSW publications examine a wide range of topics connected with politics, economy, international relations, and security/defense. ISPSW network experts have worked – in some cases for several decades – in executive positions and thus dispose over wide-ranging experience in their respective fields of expertise.

## About the Author of this Issue

---

Yossef Bodansky has been the Director of Research at the International Strategic Studies Association [ISSA], as well as a Senior Editor for the *Defense & Foreign Affairs* group of publications, since 1983. He was the Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare at the U.S. House of Representatives between 1988 and 2004, and stayed on as a special adviser to Congress till January 2009. In the mid-1980s, he acted as a senior consultant for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of State.

He is the author of eleven books – including *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (*New York Times* No. 1 Bestseller & *Washington Post* No. 1 Bestseller), *The Secret History of the Iraq War* (*New York Times* Bestseller & *Foreign Affairs Magazine* Bestseller), and *Chechen Jihad: Al Qaeda's Training Ground and the Next Wave of Terror* – and hundreds of articles, book chapters and Congressional reports.

Mr Bodansky is a Director at the Prague Society for International Cooperation, and serves on the Board of the Global Panel Foundation and several other institutions worldwide.



*Yossef Bodansky*



## Analysis

---

A year ago, in late June 2014, the Islamic State announced the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate on the territories under their control in what used to be Syria and Iraq. The Caliphate was to be the first step in restoring the glory of all Muslims and the liberation of all lands ever ruled by Muslims. This was the first time a Caliphate was declared since Kemal Ataturk formally abolished the Ottoman Caliphate in March 1924. Moreover, such an audacious undertaking was not attempted by the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan or the Chechens in the North Caucasus. They only established localized Emirates over lands they claimed.

In early July 2014, Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi delivered a sermon in the just captured Mosul in which he elaborated on the historic global mission of the new Islamic Caliphate and his own role as Caliph Ibrahim. Over the next year, the Islamic Caliphate was joined through declarations of oaths of allegiance - Bay'ah - by leaders of Wilayat (Provinces) in the Sinai Peninsula, central Yemen and southern Saudi Arabia, northern Libya and Tunisia, the Sahel, northeastern Nigeria, Chechnya and Ingushetia, and Khorasan (Afghanistan and the Fergana Valley). Other major Islamist-Jihadist entities and their leaders, including in the North Caucasus and Central Asia, are known to be discussing their own bay'ah with al-Baghdadi and the leaders of the Caliphate. The spread and ascent of the Islamic Caliphate is the outcome of an unprecedented burst of enthusiasm for Islamist-Jihadist causes throughout the entire Muslim World - including emigre communities in Western Europe and North America.

Throughout Islamdom, the reign of the first two Rashidun Caliphs - Prophet Muhammad's immediate successors Caliph Abu-Bakr (573-634) and Caliph Omar (577-644) - is considered the apogee of human governance and a time of near-perfection that all humans must strive to attain. The crux of the message of Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi in both word and action is "Yes, we can!" The Muslim World is capable of restoring the Caliphate of the first two Rashidun Caliphs irrespective of the sensitivities and norms of the modern world.

Thus, the new Caliphate is the dream comes true of the entire Islamdom. As such, the idea and hope represented by the Caliphate will not go away irrespective of the fate of Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Jihadist state he established at the heart of al-Jazira (eastern Syria and western Iraq in modern terms). Hence, the Islamic Caliphate declared by Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi is a most profound and defiant a challenge by Orthodox Jihadism to the Muslim World, and, to a lesser extent, to the entire modern world.

\*

The establishment of the Caliphate in mid-2014 is the inevitable outcome of the evolution of political Islam in the last half-a-century. The Caliphate is the obvious culmination of the Jihadist doctrine introduced by Osama bin Laden and his coterie with the sole profound deviation being over relationship with Shiite Iran (where bin Laden encouraged expedient cooperation while Baghdadi insists on irreconcilable Sunni-Shiite enmity).

Islam has always rejected the notion of a modern state and only legitimized the all-Islamic Sharia-ruled entity called the Caliphate. The rise and fall of a myriad of Islamic political entities throughout Islam's history is considered necessary reactions to prevailing circumstances rather than desirable or legitimate solutions. However, in the early-1960's, Said al-Qutb, the key luminary of modern political Islam, decreed that Islamism must accept the existing modern state with its fixed boundaries as an inescapable and unavoidable reality. The road to the utopian Caliphate, he wrote, starts with the transformation of existing states into Muslim states and then using these states as the building blocks of the Caliphate. In the early-1990's, Hassan al-Turabi, the most



important theologian of modern Jihadism, further legitimized the role of a modern Islamic state as crucial and expedient phases in the restoration of the Caliphate under contemporary conditions. Turabi also encouraged other expedient measures - most notably close cooperation with Shiite Iran - as necessary and desirable in pursuit of the triumph of Jihad.

The foundations of the contemporary Caliphate were laid by Osama bin Laden and his coterie in the late-1990's. In a perverse way - bin Laden will contribute far more to the evolving global Jihad movement as a martyr than he could as a leader living in seclusion. Indeed, in the last months of his life, bin Laden himself realized this and he returned to active interaction with his supporters in Afghanistan and Pakistan - cognizant that this visible interaction would inevitably hasten his own martyrdom.

Bin Laden has never been a "Leader" (Za'im) of an institutional movement, but rather an important team-player in a historical process. He carved himself this role back in the late-1990's as the Jihadist movement he was instrumental in inspiring and shaping was rising to world prominence. Back in Summer 1999, I stressed this aspect in the concluding paragraph of my book *bin Laden: the Man Who Declared War on America*: "Ultimately the quintessence of bin Laden's threat is his being a cog, albeit an important one, in a large system that will outlast his own demise - state-sponsored international terrorism. This is not to belittle the importance of bin Laden, Zawahiri, and their comrades in arms. Islamist international terrorism, perpetrated by deniable all-Islamic fronts such as bin Laden's, made up of individuals genuinely convinced of the righteousness of their cause and methods, enables the sponsoring states to escalate their struggle against the West at a relatively low level of risk. ... The availability of weapons of mass destruction and the audacity to reach out into the heart of the United States make this trend all the more frightening."

Prominent Jihadist leaders continued to stress this aspect - the crucial importance of the trend or movement, and its resilience to the martyrdom of leaders - even after 9/11 when the public awareness - both fear and adulation - of specific Jihadist leaders reached an all-time height. In 2002, Zawahiri stressed that "Jihad in the path of Allah is greater than any individual or organization." Senior leaders like Osama bin Laden "are merely two soldiers of Islam in the journey of Jihad, while the struggle between Truth and Falsehood transcends time." Hence, the Jihadist cause and trend would not rise and fall because of their martyrdom. Indeed, one of the first reactions to the announcement of bin Laden's death on the Jihadist Internet criticized the conspiracy theories and stressed that all leaders are replaceable. "Why can't people admit he was killed? He is a human being, not a prophet. Another man will replace his shoes, it's easy." And another commentator reiterated: "The killing of Sheikh Osama bin Laden does not affect the progress of victory, Inshallah. After the death of Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, Jihad did not stop. It went on... And went on... And went on..."

\*

The current Jihadist trend that is popularly associated with the brand name "Al-Qaida" is but the latest face of an evolving conflict between Islamdom and Western modernity. This crisis has been intensifying for a quarter of a millennium now as Islamdom's isolation turned into subjugation when the West penetrated the Hub of Islam - the area between Morocco in the west and India in the east, between Central Asia in the north and Central Africa in the south - where Muslims not only constitute the overwhelming majority of the population but also determine the socio-political and civilizational way of life. The process began with Napoleon's arrival in Egypt in 1798 and culminated in the artificial redrawing of the Middle East's map by the imperialist powers in the early-1920's. The aggregate experience has been a trauma from which the Muslim world, particularly



the Hub of Islam, is yet to emerge. The still spreading and escalating wave of grassroots Intifada's is the most indigenous and desperate outburst in this quest to rid Islamdom from the vestiges of Western political structures and the civilizational values that come with them.

The Jihadist trend is the outcome of this lingering trauma - emboldened and facilitated by the toppling of the Shah and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The founding fathers of the movement are members of the unique generation of mujahedin that fought together in Afghanistan in the 1980's and were subsequently inculcated in the initial formulation of the Sunni Jihadist doctrine in Sudan under Hassan al-Turabi - the theological father of modern Jihadism who integrated the tenets of Khomeini's Shiite Islamic Revolution into the radical doctrine of the Sunni Muslim Brothers. Subsequently, most of these commanders and key operatives trained in the same camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the 1990's. Hence, these mujahedin were inclined to see the Muslim World and its vanguard - the Jihadist Trend - as monolithic.

Actual implementation of the global Jihad started with the establishment on February 15, 1998, of the "World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders" - the real operational arm of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri - and the launch of an uncompromising war against the United States. Bin Laden also elucidated his vision of the relentless, fateful, global Jihad against the US in a late-1998 book titled *America and the Third World War*. The book stressed the imperative of a global Intifada against the entire US-led West. The Front and bin Laden's book indicated the maturing and evolution of the Jihadist trend into a global movement with coherent strategic world view and tangible global aspirations - a process that culminated in the September 11, 2001, spectacular strikes in New York and Washington.

It took the Jihadist movement a few years to recover from the global onslaught and ensuing loss of major commanders and intellectuals that followed 9/11. It was only in the year between Fall 2004 and the early Winter of 2005 that the Islamist-Jihadist movement finally underwent the most profound evolution of its onslaught within the Muslim world as well as against the West. This evolution is the most important development since Osama bin Laden's original articulation back in 1998-9 of the logic of uncompromising Jihad for the establishment of an Islamist Caliphate and the imperative to strike out at the heart of the West in order to expedite the ascent of this Caliphate. It is a total war in which, as far as Islamdom is concerned, there can be no coexistence, or even compromise, with their hated foes.

The crucial phase of this "Global Jihad" was launched back in late Fall 2004 by an Islamist-Jihadist leadership emboldened by their resurrection of a supreme leadership - Osama bin Laden's Shurah Kabirah - in Afghanistan-Pakistan and Iran, as well as the conclusion of the "Shield Fatwa" debate in favor of bin Laden's interest in using WMD (especially nuclear weapons) in spectacular strikes at the heart of the United States. Evicting the US and key allies from the Caliphate region, destroying Israel, and toppling Arab and Muslim regimes are merely necessary means to attaining these higher objectives. The long-term world view of bin Laden's Shurah, and the shape of things to come, were clearly articulated in the "Working Strategy Lasting Until 2020" which was completed in Winter 2004/5. The Strategy was developed and written by a small group of Jihadist leaders sheltered in Iran under the guidance of Saif al-Adel (Sword of Justice, also known as Muhammad Ibrahim al-Makkawi, Ibrahim al-Madani, and Omar al-Sumali) - the then Tehran-based Egyptian ex-Colonel who, in mid-May 2011, was appointed the "caretaker" leader of al-Qaida. The new doctrine largely endorsed the strategy of consolidating the Jihad first in the Hub of Islam which had long been favored by Ayman al-Zawahiri.



One of the most important aspects of the 2020 Strategy was the reiteration of the preeminence of Tehran for the Islamist-Jihadist trend. At the time of the Strategy's formulation there existed a tendency to ignore Iran's crucial role because of the high profile of the Sunni Jihadism of Osama bin Laden and the anti-Shiite character of some of his neo-Salafite Takfiri devotees. Now, a pragmatic Islamist-Jihadist leadership based its strategic working plan on a broad Jihad front spanning the areas of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq and on to the Mediterranean through Syria and Lebanon north to the Caucasus via eastern Turkey and back eastward across Central Asia. Dubbed "the Jihad Triangle of Horror" - this region would serve as a springboard for a global surge against the West. In formulating the "Working Strategy Lasting Until 2020", the Islamist-Jihadist leadership was cognizant that its own grand-strategic objectives correlated closely with these of the Mullahs in Tehran - and therein the key to the close cooperation in its implementation.

The ultimate grand-strategic objective of the "Working Strategy Lasting Until 2020" is for an Islamist-Jihadist Caliphate to replace the United States as the world's sole preeminent hyper-power. By Spring 2005, the Islamist-Jihadist camp committed to the implementation of the trend's long-term strategy to achieve victory over the West and establish by 2020 an Islamist-Jihadist Caliphate as the world's sole preeminent hyper-power. In military terms, the ultimate defeat of the US-led West, in which Russia is a key power, will be achieved as the aggregate impact of two types of war: (1) the attrition of the Western allies by ensnaring them in a myriad of endless debilitating quagmires - particularly in Iraq, Afghanistan-Pakistan, the Caucasus, and Israel; and (2) the demonstration to all of the inherent weakness of the US-led West through a series of spectacular strikes at the heart of the West. The "Working Strategy Lasting Until 2020" defined seven distinct phases of the ascent of Islam:

- The First Phase - 2000-2003 - is "the Awakening" and its objective is to provoke the US into declaring war on the Muslim World and thereby "awakening" Muslims. By 2005, the first phase was considered very. "The battle field was opened up and the Americans and their allies became a closer and easier target."
- The Second Phase - 2003-2006 - is "Opening Eyes" and its objective is to open the eyes of "Islamic communities" worldwide to the "Western conspiracy" against them. Consequently, al-Qaida will evolve into a grassroots movement.
- The Third Phase - 2007-2010 - is "Arising and Standing Up" and its objective is to mobilize the Arab World to confront anti-Jihadist regime. "There will be a focus on Syria," the authors articulated. The Islamist-Jihadist confrontation with Israel will also escalate during this period in order to make the Jihadist trend recognized by all Muslims as their saviors.
- The Fourth Phase - 2010-2013 - is aimed to bring about the collapse of hated Arab regimes. The authors believe that "the creeping loss of these regimes' power will lead to a steady growth in strength within al-Qaida." Invigorated Jihadist groups will be in position to carry out strikes on US economy by cutting oil suppliers and using cyber-terrorism.
- The Fifth Phase - 2013-2016 - is aimed to facilitate the declaration and establishment of an Islamic Caliphate. By then, Western influence throughout the Muslim World will have been reduced and Israel will have been weakened to the point that no viable resistance is possible. This period will be the start of Islam's ascent to becoming the new world order.



- The Sixth Phase - 2016-2020 - is the period of “total confrontation” between the Caliphate-led Islamdom and the West’s desperate effort to prevent its inevitable collapse. In practical terms, “Islamic army” throughout the West will rise up to instigate “the fight between the believers and the non-believers” over the control of the rest of the world.
- The Seventh Phase - 2020- - is the era of the “Definitive Victory” in which the rest of the world will have already been defeated by the “one-and-a-half billion Muslims” so that a global Caliphate is irreversibly consolidated.

Most significant, however, were the concurrent grassroots developments throughout the Hub of Islam in the aftermath of the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. The Western calls for “freedom” and “democracy” fell on fertile grounds throughout the entire Arab world. In 2004/5, Zawahiri and the clairvoyant leaders of the Jihadist movement recognized this trend and launched a profound reform of the Islamist world - replacing the erstwhile centralized monolithic Islamism with a myriad of localized Islamist movements that both adhere to a joint grand-strategy while preserving and celebrating the unique character of their respective societies.

Significantly, these new Jihadist groups - Al-Qaidat Jihad - are identified by the traditional population-defined Islamic regions - Greater Syria (Bilad al-Sham), Greater Egypt (Bilad al-Kanana), Mesopotamia (Bilad al-Rafidayn), Arabian Peninsula (Bilad al-Jazira) and the Islamic Maghreb (which includes the parts of Western Europe once ruled by Islam) - rather than the modern Arab states they operate in and against. With these new regional entities there rose to prominence a new generation of local Jihadist leaders - both military commanders and theological authorities.

In mid-June 2005, bin Laden’s Shurah Kabirah distributed among key commanders and religious leaders throughout the world a “letter to the Muslim Ummah” announcing that bin Laden was preparing for the next round of escalatory Jihad and instructing the various Islamist-Jihadist leaders about their anticipated roles. “First of all, let us make it clear that Sheikh Osama bin Laden is safe and sound along with his colleagues at a secure place. He is preparing for the next round of Jihad,” the letter started. The letter emphasized the regional character of the main Jihadist fronts. It instructed the local leaders that it was imperative to recruit would-be mujahedin in, and expand the Islamist Jihad to, neighboring and adjacent areas. “O beloved Ummah, we are fully prepared to face the infidels. For this purpose, we should make war preparations so that Jihad should continue. We want to make it clear that at present, Jihad is obligatory on all Muslims who are living around Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Chechnya. Then, it becomes the responsibility of the entire Ummah to wage Jihad,” the letter explained.

Bin Laden’s Shurah Kabirah was in the process of articulating the modalities for conducting and waging the Jihad it was preaching. Back in the late-1990's, the Jihadist uppermost leadership was cognizant that the aftermath of the spectacular strike at the heart of America they were then planning would necessitate a profound change to the Jihadist trend. In Summer 2000, with the Jihadist movement committed to the next era of confrontation with the West, Abu-Musab al-Suri was entrusted with writing the long-term doctrine for the next phase of global Jihad. Abu-Musab al-Suri is the *nom-de-guerre* of Mustafa Setmariam Nasr who is still the most important ideologist of the global Jihadist movement. He spent most of 2002-5 sheltered by Iranian Intelligence mainly in Marivan, northwestern Iran. Several of his closest allies, mainly Saif al-Adel and Saad bin Laden, are from that period. In August 2005, Abu-Musab al-Suri completed a 1,600-page book called *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*. This book is still the most prescient thesis on the long-term evolution of the



Jihadist movement and particularly the conduct of "Global Jihad".

*The Global Islamic Resistance Call* provided both the practical and theological framework for the profound changes that the Jihadist movement underwent in 2004-5 and articulated the future course. Abu-Musab al-Suri did so by adapting the Jihadist doctrines of such luminaries as Abdallah Azzam to the prevailing conditions in the post-9/11 world. *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* is ultimately an extremely practical and pragmatic study of previous Jihads, emerging trends in the world, and realistically attainable objectives of the Jihadist trend.

Abu-Musab al-Suri concluded that "Global Jihad" will ultimately be won by evolving, pragmatic and adapting vanguard whose spectacular struggle will excite and mobilize the grassroots into politically-significant "awakening" that will ultimately change the Arab-Muslim World. Despite al-Qaida's post-9/11 notoriety, he warned against self-aggrandizement. "Al-Qaida is not an organization, it is not a group, nor do we want it to be," Abu-Musab al-Suri wrote. "It is a call, a reference, a methodology." Although al-Qaida was playing a major role in the then current phase of the worldwide Islamist uprising, it would ultimately give way to a new generation of populist movements. Eventually al-Qaida's leadership would be eliminated, he predicted, and the Jihadist trend must be ready to smoothly hand over the mantle to a next generation of leaders.

The Jihadist ideology for the mobilization of global Jihad and struggle presently represented through al-Qaida will provide cover for the evolution of "leaderless resistance" comprised of a myriad of elite vanguard entities - that is, highly trained individuals or small autonomous groups operating separately but in accordance with a common master-plan and grand strategy. The objective of these vanguard groups will be to wear down the enemy's society and governments. Progress will differ from one country to another and from one region to another. However, sooner or later the Jihad will transform in some countries or regions into "open fronts" - that is, overt Islamist insurrections. Abu-Musab al-Suri stressed that "without confrontation in the field and seizing control of the land, we cannot establish a state, which is the strategic goal of the resistance."

In mid-2009, Tehran joined the trend, promoting the establishment of the independent Islamic Republic of Eastern Arabia as the instrument for unifying the peninsula's Shiites under Iranian influence. "The decision of the proclamation of the Republic was based on the demands of the people of the region," explained a statement posted on an opposition website. Since then, Iran has invested huge resources in training, organizing and arming the IRGC-controlled Jihadist cadres that will lead the inevitable independence war of the Islamic Republic of Eastern Arabia.

Meanwhile, prostrate and oppressed grassroots simmered in frustration for almost a decade throughout the Arab World - fearful of challenging their respective authoritarian regimes while dreading a US military intervention in order to sustain the state-based status-quo. However, once the Hub of Islam became convinced that the US was in decline and withdrawing from the Greater Middle East - a wave of Islamist-oriented Intifada's erupted with fury and spread throughout the entire Greater Middle East. Because the common denominator of the diverse Intifada's is the uncompromising grassroots rejection of their respective modern states - these Intifada's reaffirm the main argument of Saif al-Adel's "Working Strategy Lasting Until 2020" and Zawahiri's structural reforms. Hence, the ensuing spread and intensification of the Intifada's have transformed them into a regional phenomenon that now dominates the grand dynamics of the Greater Middle East and ushers in a new era of Jihadism - albeit dominated by the new generation of local leaders.



By Fall 2010, the Iran-based group of Jihadist leaders led by Saif al-Adel and Mahfuz bin-Waleed (aka Abu-Hafs al-Mauritani, the chief of al-Qaida's religious committee before 9/11) returned to Pakistan and began to openly challenge bin Laden's and the Shurah's coping with the brewing crisis in the Greater Middle East. Their argument, as articulated in their milestone book *Twenty Guidelines for Jihad*, is that given the Islamist-orientation of, and widespread grassroots support for, challenges to the Arab States - the traditional bin Ladinist doctrine of all or nothing, that is, of replacing the existing states with Jihadist Emirates, was no longer relevant and even counter-productive. Adhering to this established doctrine "means isolation of yourself and the mujahedin from the mainstream Islamic movements and from the Muslim world. It makes the task easier for the enemy to isolate you and target you," they warned. Instead, they argued for cooperation with all local movements in the quest for attainable goals such as replacing pro-Western states with anything Islamist-oriented. Such new regimes, under Iran's strategic umbrella, would contribute to the eviction of the West from the Greater Middle East and ultimately the Hub of Islam. Saif al-Adel and his allies stressed further that there must be a new balance of authority between the center - bin Laden's Shurah Kabirah - and the rapidly growing localized Jihadist movements. "All Jihadi groups should be under one leadership, which must consult with experts and scholars from the whole Ummah," they wrote.

By Winter 2010/11, the Jihadist Trend, and particularly bin Laden's Shurah Kabirah, acted on this advice and resolved not to miss the profound character of the unfolding Intifada's. Al-Qaida launched new initiatives to reestablish close ties with a myriad of Ikhwan-affiliated Sunni Arab organizations and Palestinian groups. The Jihadists sought to revive old contacts in order to consolidate "a new nexus for a joint struggle against Western interests in the Muslim world." It became imperative to not only remain closely associated with the Arab grassroots and their aspirations, but to ensure the success of these Islamist-oriented Intifada's in the face of growing suppression by the states' Mukhabarat's and armies.

Bin Laden was clearly cognizant of the historic significance of the tumultuous transformation of the Arab World. In early 2011, he began drafting a special message to the Ummah with observations and instructions about the next phase. (The US SEAL recovered several drafts and related references during the raid on Abotabad.) He stressed the importance of the revolutionary process unfolding and urged the grassroots not to miss the historic opportunity by repeating the mortal errors of previous Islamist and popular revolutions. "Among the primary reasons for the success of the revolutions is learning from previous experiences, particularly the history of revolutions," bin Laden emphasized. History, particularly in the Muslim World, teaches that the key to the triumph of a revolution is not toppling the old regime - but the establishment of an Islamic just leadership in its place. Hence, there is no substitute for worthy leaders.

"The revolution must be led by powerful, trusted men who are not afraid of dying. They should take into consideration the importance of accuracy in measuring the appropriate conditions to begin the revolution, without haste or delay. Haste could abort the revolution and delay could waste the opportunity for many decades. Here it is worth indicating that some Islamic countries today need weeks to prepare and to conduct awareness before beginning the revolution, and some need months. Toppling the tyrants needs a conditioned leadership capable of bearing the necessary costs for change. Freedom isn't achieved without a heavy price, and blood is a component that cannot be separated from the other components to achieve it. I am well aware of the fact that exposing the people of the Islamic Nation to death is a very difficult matter, but there is no other way to save them. No other way."



Bin Laden emphasized that he was cognizant of the immense challenges and hardships facing the Arab grassroots in their efforts to launch Intifada's. However, he stressed, the unique importance of the moment warrants all sacrifices. "Oh, sons of my Muslim Nation, you are at a dangerous crossroads and have a rare historic opportunity to get out from the subjection of slavery. Seize it and break the shackles to become free of the global Zionist oppression. It is a great offense and huge ignorance to lose this opportunity for which the Muslim Nation has waited many decades." In conclusion, bin Laden reiterated that this was first and foremost the uprising of the grassroots of the Muslim Ummah. "The battle today between the people and the ruler is a battle of wills, and the revolution is a revolution of glory and dignity." Worthy leaders will only serve to channel and consolidate the popular up-surge.

Osama bin Laden meant every word he was drafting and particularly the imperative for raising revolutionary leaders to capitalize on the escalating Intifada's. In early 2011, he personally launched a new initiative jointly with the Muslim Brothers to "establish a new nexus for a joint struggle against Western interests in the Muslim world." At the program's core are teams of highly trained Jihadist operatives called "the Son of the Soil/Land" (Ibn ul-Balad). These teams deploy to the countries where Intifada's are already taking place or being prepared in order to assist the local Muslim Brothers and Islamist groups in their struggles against the local security authorities, Western intelligence services, and all other "enemies of Islam" and Islamism-Jihadism. Once these Intifada's are consolidated, the Jihadist Trend will use them as the springboard for a new era of Global Jihad to be perpetrated jointly by the revitalized "Shadow Army" (Laskhar al-Zil) under the command of Ilyas Kashmiri (who would be target-killed in a drone strike on June 3, 2011) and the various localized Tanzim al-Qaida specialized elite forces.

In order to emphasize the crucial importance of the new initiative, bin Laden started visiting training camps along the Durand Line in order to encourage and excite the Arab Jihadists selected for this program. This was needed because some of the most promising Jihadists set their eyes on spectacular martyrdom operations and not long-term clandestine work and possible arrest and torture by some Arab Mukhabarat. Similarly, it became imperative for bin Laden to personally convince and reassure old-time allies such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (with whom bin Laden met in Bajaur for a major dinner) to lend their support and resources to the new "Son of the Soil/Land" initiative. Hence, Osama bin Laden's personal interceding was so important and effective. He knew, and so told confidants, that he was taking immense personal risks. In the last couple of months there were several reports about his visits to these camps - and it was really a question of time before he would be located by US intelligence, tracked down and assassinated.

And so it was on May 1st, 2011.

Thus, by the time he was killed by the US raiding Special Forces - Osama bin Laden was racing to retain leadership of a movement he indeed was instrumental in creating but has since become profoundly different from what he has originally envisioned. The new Jihadist trend is defused, independent, and led by a new leadership organized by Zawahiri - a mixture of the centralized al-Qaida effectively led by the returnees from Tehran and the up-and-coming leaders of the various regional al-Qaidat Jihad groups. This Jihadist trend will outlive bin Laden, Zawahiri and their generation. As a sacred martyr, Osama bin Laden's name and reputation will be used to give credence to the new Jihadist doctrine. All the ideas of Saif al-Adel and the new generation of commanders and thinkers will be attributed to bin Laden's sacred legacy without him being able to challenge or refute. Bin Laden's daring visits to the training camps that led to his discovery and martyrdom will now serve as testament to his commitment to the new doctrine - even though it deviates profoundly from the original doctrine



of a monolithic centralized Jihad he had espoused. But it would be this new Jihadist doctrine - implemented by “the Son of the Soil/Land” initiative, the revitalized “Shadow Army”, and the myriad of regional al-Qaidat Jihad groups - that will capitalize on the flames now engulfing the Hub of Islam in order to take on the West with a grassroots-driven ferocity Osama bin Laden did not dare to dream about. A commentator on the Jihadist Internet declared: “The death of the Amir of the Mujahedin Sheikh Osama bin Laden - as he had wished - [heralds] a new victory for the approach of the Islamic Jihad!”

Anjem Choudary, the leader of the UK-based Jihadist group al-Muhajirun, put the martyrdom of bin Laden in the context of the Jihads to come. “To Muslims everywhere and to non-Muslims as well, I remind you that Al-Qaida is not a group rather it is today a phenomenon of struggle and resistance against the occupation of Muslim land and the defense of Muslim life, honor and property wherever it is being attacked. As such this idea cannot be killed nor assassinated for it lives in the hearts and minds of all Muslims and in the revelation of the Quran and the example of the Messenger Muhammad. Indeed the blessed Prophet of Allah said that the Jihad will continue until the Day of Judgement.” The long-term impact of bin Laden’s martyrdom on the Jihadist trend should be assessed in this context, Choudary stressed. “Rather than dampening the spirits of those who are today engaged in Jihad physically around the world and who considered Sheikh Osama bin Laden as their Amir, his death will merely act as an incentive to prove to the world that the death of anyone will not affect them. Hence in the coming days and weeks we will no doubt see increased activities from the Mujahedin and more intense fighting in the battlefields of Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Chechnya, etc.,” Choudary predicted. “May Allah (SWT) accept Sheikh Osama bin Laden Shaheed (martyred), Inshallah,” he concluded.

\*

The Jihadist supreme leadership moved quickly to consolidate a functioning bin Laden Shurah. Around May 15, Jihadist circles reported that Saif al-Adel was appointed “caretaker” leader of al-Qaida until a successor for Osama bin Laden was selected and nominated by the bin Laden Shurah. Ayman al-Zawahiri remains the spiritual guide would “monitor international contacts” of the Jihadist Movement.

In late-May, the Shurah Kabirah, then under Saif al-Adel, released Osama bin Laden’s last address to the Islamic Ummah which was recorded in April 2011. It is clear from the text that bin Laden himself was considering the recorded message as a “living will” of sorts.

Bin Laden focused on the historic significance of the upheaval engulfing the Arab World. “Days of glory came to the people of Islam, and meanwhile rulers departed from the lands of the Arabs.” However, the real significance of the Intifada’s throughout the Arab World is in their setting example and inspiration for the entire Ummah. “With the fall of the tyrant also fell the meanings of humiliation, submission, fear, and limitation, and the meanings of freedom, dignity, courage, and initiative arose. The winds of change were blowing with desire for liberation,” bin Laden gloated.

Bin Laden urges the masses in the streets and squares to persevere till the establishment of Islamist regimes in their countries. He suggested how to consolidate success for the benefit of the entire Ummah. “Maintain the initiative, and beware of dialogue, for there is no half-way meeting point between the people of righteousness and the people of deception. ... The Ummah has saved you for this glorious event, so continue the path, and do not be afraid of difficulties.”



Hence, bin Laden implored the masses to be cognizant of the historical significance of the moment and the gravity of the challenges ahead so that they do not sacrifice the future of the Ummah on the altar of expediency. "Before you there is a dangerous crossroads and a great, historic, and rare opportunity for advancing the Ummah and becoming liberated from serving the whims of the rulers, manmade laws, and Western domination. It is a great sin and great ignorance to waste this opportunity that the Ummah has awaited for many decades, so take it and destroy the idols and pagans, and establish justice and faith."

In order to ensure the ultimate success, bin Laden urged all Islamists and Jihadists to "cooperate with people whose revolution has not been launched yet, so as to specify the zero hour and what its pre-requisites are." He stressed the importance of expertise - of the kind "the Son of the Soil/Land" initiative is to provide - to the ultimate success of revolts against, and confrontations with, existing regimes. Given the correct conduct of the Jihadist upsurge, bin Laden predicted, "the winds of change will encompass the whole Islamic world, with Allah's permission. The people should prepare what is necessary and not go through with something before consulting the faithful people of experience, who stay away from half-solutions and befriending the oppressors." The Islamist-Jihadist Trend will be there at the forefront as the vanguard of the new Jihadist surge for the liberation of the Ummah and the banishment of the West.

Significantly, in the address, Osama bin Laden alluded to his own fate as well, asserting: "Glory is regained by blood, and lions [=Osama] die defending their dens."

Osama bin Laden might be dead - but the flames of Jihad are rising again.

\*\*\*

In Spring 2014, the majority of the popular forces in the Middle East failed to exploit the conducive conditions for escalation of the fighting. With very few exceptions, the warring sides emerged from the bitter fighting of the second half of 2013 and the harsh Winter that followed quite exhausted and embittered. Rather than return to the carnage, attrition and suffering of past years - wider than ever segments of the grassroots populace were inclined to resign to fate and embrace relative security, stability and livelihood. The governments on whose lands fighting and insurrection continue were cognizant of the trend and were therefore eager to reach whatever compromise possible with the grassroots populace in order to defuse and stifle the resumption of indigenous insurrections.

Alas, this was not to be. The existential and quintessential demands of the majority of protagonists did not, and still do not, lend themselves to compromise. Most fundamental is the irreconcilable rift between the unprecedented resolve of sub-state entities (tribes, clans, urban interest groups, etc.) to dominate their lives and fate, and the imperative for states to reassert their preeminence. Furthermore, many of the sub-state interest groups are cross-border entities and thus incompatible with the revival of the centralized modern state. The growing relevance of the sub-state entities led to the awakening of the historic and never truly dormant enmities and power struggles between the region's minorities and the Sunni-Arab al-Jazira. These enmities and mistrusts not only have a profound impact on the support for modern states but, more important, on the grassroots willingness to consider, let alone support, democratic governance where central power reflects demography.



No legal and governance reforms will erase the revival of these heritage-legacy conflicts. Absent creative innovative relations between state authorities and sub-state grassroots populace - these enmities will continue to fester and provoke more foci of insurrection and fratricidal violence. No matter how attrited and exhausted - sub-state grassroots populace will not give up the struggle for their self-determination for they no longer trust any other entity and source of power to protect them and provide for their well-being. Thus, even though there is genuine desire among both the elites and grassroots to bring the current fratricidal carnage to an end - the prevailing conditions and mega-trends in the greater Middle East make it impossible. Finding viable long-term solutions to the festering conflicts is extremely challenging if not impossible.

Meanwhile, these lingering tensions provide fertile ground for outside forces - both regional states and Jihadist movements - to challenge the mega-trends and exacerbate the carnage in quest for their own strategic, economic and theological interests. The evolving conflicts that will become even more lethal and fratricidal are between the forces/trends trying to consolidate the heritage-based new regional order and between the forces/trends advocating radical changes including the return to a mythical glory of the past. Meanwhile, the fighting and trauma have markedly exacerbated the profound mistrust between Shiites and Sunnis.

\*

Back in Summer 2012, the Jihadists interpreted their imminent triumph in Afghanistan and Pakistan, coupled with the ascent of Iran, as the beginning of the fateful "End-of-Time Battle" for the Middle East. According to the Sayings attributed to Prophet Muhammad, the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Khorasan (which encompasses the greater Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir and Iran) would create conducive conditions for Islam's triumph in the "End-of-Time Battle". According to the Prophet's Sayings, Jihadist forces would then arrive in the Middle East from the East and wage the fateful victorious battle for the liberation of Bilad al-Sham and al-Jazira, and the establishment of the Mosque of al-Aqsa in Jerusalem (Islam's original Qiblah - that is, the direction of prayers - in 610-623) as the center of a new Caliphate.

Since the outbreak of the Arab Intifada's or Awakening, the Jihadist Shurah has been working on laying the ground for Islamist-Jihadist ascent in the Middle East. Extensive organizational, financial and security support has been provided to the various Islamist-Jihadist entities throughout the Middle East by teams of highly trained Jihadist operatives called "the Son of the Soil/Land" (Ibn ul-Balad) that operate within non-state regional and heritage frames of reference. As well, special and terrorist operations have been conducted jointly by teams of the revitalized "Shadow Army" (Laskhar al-Zil) that had been trained in Afghanistan-Pakistan and Chechnya, and elite Jihadist networks of the various localized "Al-Qaidat Jihad" (the Foundation of Jihad) movements throughout the region that are also organized along heritage lines since the middle of the first decade of the 21st Century. The outcome of this effort is now apparent in the growing presence and influence of foreign volunteers in Bilad al-Sham and al-Jazira, the Sinai Peninsula, and Libya-Egypt.

The dramatic transformation of the Sunni Jihadist trend has influenced the realignment of the Turkish-Iranian grand strategy. Since the original outbreak of the Arab Intifada's back in late 2010, both Ankara and Tehran have been torn by conflicting vital interests. Both powers have always had a common end objective - to suppress the possible ascent of traditional Sunni Arabism hailing from Bilad al-Sham and al-Jazira. However, they have differed on the regional posture that would contain this ascent of Arabism. Ankara has been determined to expand its regional hegemony to the detriment of the traditional power system originating from the Arabian Peninsula by establishing a north-south Sunni Wedge that will absorb the House of al-Saud.



Tehran has been loath to give up on its east-west Shiite Crescent with Lebanon's HizbAllah and Iraq's Shiite Government that gives Iran access to the shores of the Mediterranean. Presently, the common denominator of both powers remains the determination to quickly dominate the Sunni heartland between central Syria and western Iraq. At the same time, the Iranian-Turkish fierce competition on implementation and supremacy remains the key to the escalating fratricidal war in Syria and Iraq.

This is why the ascent of DI'ISH (aka The Islamic State of Iraq and Sham) and its Emirate of the Euphrates Valley is so problematic for both Ankara and Tehran. The power struggle between DI'ISH and the various Jihadist groups affiliated with Ayman al-Zawahiri's Al-Qaida (such as Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham, etc.) is really about the quintessential issue whether the Sunni Jihadist movement being neo-Salafi - and thus inherently anti-Shiite - can secretly cooperate with Iran and receive comprehensive assistance via the IRGC's Quds Forces (weapons, funding, guidance, shelters in Iran, etc.). The conflict became vicious and vindictive in late-February 2014 after the assassination in Aleppo of Abu-Khaled al-Suri - Zawahiri's personal emissary to Bilad al-Sham and Abu-Musab al-Suri's closest friend. The assassination not only resulted in escalation of the fighting between Jihadist forces in northern and central Syria - but also started a profound theological debate about whether the Jihadist movement should uncompromisingly confront all apostates and Shiites or cooperate with some of them in the expedient pursuit of such higher goals as the establishing an Islamist Caliphate in the greater Middle East.

In mid-April 2014, the DI'ISH escalated the dispute with a major symbolic step of great significance. DI'ISH's Abu-Muhammad al-Adnani set the tone with a fierce communique. "Al-Qaida today is no longer a Foundation of Jihad," he wrote. "Its leadership has become a hammer to break the project of the Islamic State." The threat cannot be tolerated because "the leaders of Al-Qaida have deviated from the correct path [of anti-Shiite zeal]. They have divided the ranks of the mujahedin in every place."

In late-April, the DI'ISH escalated the theological struggle by introducing "the Khorasan Pledge." Muhammad al-Adnani explained that drastic steps were imperative because "Al-Qaida deviated from the rightful course," and therefore "it is not a dispute about who to kill or who to give your allegiance. It is a question of religious practices being distorted and an approach veering off the right path." Nine prominent Al-Qaida Emirs from the Middle East, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran declared their allegiance to the new Emir of the Faithful Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Qurashi (real name Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim al-Badri) - the Emir of DI'ISH. The nine are Sheikh Abu Ubaidah al-Lubnani, Abu al-Muhannad al-Urduni, Abu Jurair al-Shamali, Abu al-Huda al-Soudani, Abdulaziz al-Maqdisi (brother of Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi), Abdullah al-Punjabi, Abu Yunus al-Kurdi, Abu Aisha al-Qurtubi, and Abu Musab al-Tadamuni. Simply put, the Emirs accepted "the Khorasan Pledge" over their bay'ah (secret oath of allegiance) to Zawahiri and Mullah Omar.

The nine Emirs published a lengthy theological thesis in which they explained the urgent imperative to adopt "the Khorasan Pledge" in the context of the history of the Jihadist struggle in the Middle East and beyond. They analyzed the dispute over the Takfiri quintessence of the Jihad and especially the dispute between Abu-Musab al-Zarqawi and Zawahiri over the Jihad in Iraq in the first decade of the 21st Century. This theological dispute is even more prevalent in the current war in Bilad al-Sham "where it was the duty of DI'ISH to reach out and provide support for its people, to defeat the conspiracy of the two armies - the Syrian Army and the Free [Syrian] Army." Cognizant of the inevitable triumph of the Jihadist forces, the nine Emirs explained, "the forces of infidelity and apostasy quickly sowed the seeds of hypocrisy, using new groups under Islamic sounding names to be a rival and an obstacle to the Islamic State." The Emirs allude to the al-Qaida affiliates



that were guided by Abu-Musab al-Suri (since Iran arranged his release from Syrian jail in Winter 2011/12) into secret cooperation with the Quds Forces in order to sustain their Jihad. They refuse to accept the excuses of al-Qaida leaders that “the groups did not have any courage to enforce judgements over those who disobey Sharia, under the pretext of avoiding a clash with the people or due to their inability and incapacity, although they enforced in secret more than they did out in the open.”

On the contrary, the nine Emirs stress, the tacit and expedient cooperation with Shiite Iran was not limited to the Jihadists under duress in Syria but was rather a new trend in the Islamist movement. The most glaring example of the theological corruption of the Islamist-Jihadist creed is “former Egyptian President Muhammad Mursi, who was proven to be an apostate, even for those who had a semblance of comprehension. Or was it an indication of a new kind of Jihad?” The Emirs emphasize that Mursi’s rapprochement with Iran and other apostate states, as well as refusal to launch a Jihad against Israel, while he was ostensibly the Egyptian leader on behalf of the Muslim Brothers was a conscientious betrayal of the Islamist creed. Mursi and his allies made “a political call, without mentioning the question of arms. They replaced many Sharia terms with new concepts, which carry different interpretations.” It is because of this deviation from the right and righteous path that the Islamists lost power in Egypt.

The nine Emirs regret that they did not rise to meet the challenge earlier - before the Muslim Nation suffered so much. In conclusion, they write, “we ask Allah for forgiveness for being late to reveal the truth and fix what we corrupted, disobeyed, and did not accept. Thus, we wrote this message to the Muslim Nation and to ask forgiveness from our Lord. We showed that DI’ISH was right. It raised the banner without hesitation, weakness, or account to anyone but Allah. We count them as such and, as long as they persevere, they have [our support and allegiance] for its Emir of the Faithful Sheikh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Qurashi and our obedience in fortune and adversity and in hardship and prosperity, without challenging his command. But if it alters or deviates, it will only get from us what others had gotten before.”

Although the theological campaign surrounding the “Khorasan Pledge” glosses over the specific issue of Sunni-Jihadist cooperation with Shiite Iran, it is very explicit about the viciousness of the ensuing fratricidal fighting. DI’ISH holds the establishment Jihadist trend responsible for starting the destruction of Bilad al-Sham, Iraq and northern al-Jazira on the altar of relations with Iran. Abu Ali al-Anbari, a DI’ISH senior commander from Iraq now fighting in Syria was very explicit about the intensity of the fight against al-Qaida-affiliate forces. “Either we eliminate them or they will eliminate us,” he repeatedly told a commanders’ gathering. Both the DI’ISH commanders and senior Emirs joining the “Khorasan Pledge” are cognizant that the schism that erupted in al-Jazira will spread and might ultimately split the entire Jihadist Trend on the basis of Takfiri orthodoxy.

\*

The challenge of the “Khorasan Pledge” could not be ignored by the Jihadist supreme leadership. After hesitant challenges to the “Khorasan Pledge” on religious grounds by Syrian and other Middle Eastern Imams had no impact on the growing number of signatories - the upper-most leaders had to attempt to stall the erosion of their stature. On 2 May, Ayman al-Zawahiri personally intervened and issued a 24-minute long recorded message. Although Zawahiri’s message focused on the Emir of DI’ISH - Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Qurashi - in person, the primary audience was the entire Jihadist milieu throughout the Middle East. Incapable of excommunicating the Takfiri Jihadists, Zawahiri instead urged DI’ISH to leave the fighting in Bilad al-Sham to the Jihadists of the al-Qaida affiliates and return to Iraq and resume their Jihad against contemporary



challenges - that is, the prevention of the Shiite regime in Baghdad from controlling Sunni areas. On the personal level, Zawahiri called Baghdadi “al-Qaida’s rebellious soldier.”

The supreme leadership is cognizant of the growing popularity of Takfiri Jihadism throughout the greater Middle East and therefore cannot afford to alienate the Takfiris. Hence, Zawahiri’s message is a blend of religious reprimands and pleas for operational cooperation. The lengthy message, personally read by Zawahiri, was based on thorough research and study, and thus reflected the seriousness by which the establishment leadership takes the challenge represented by DI’ISH and the Takfiri camp. Moreover, Zawahiri stressed that his intervention comes at the request of a Syria-based Jihadist leader “brother Abu Karim” (real name Hani al-Sibai). Zawahiri stressed that in principle “the sedition between the mujahedin in Syria” is intolerable and self-defeating to all Jihadists. However, he elected to become personally involved solely because of “the appeals of Sheikh Hani al-Sibai, who believes that by answering his questions there might be an end to the fighting between the mujahedin.”

At first, Zawahiri analyzed the entire decade-long theological disputes with the Jihadists of Iraq who demanded theological authority in the name of Takfiri orthodoxy. Zawahiri stressed that the Jihadists of Iraq pursued this dispute even though “the Islamic State in Iraq is a division of al-Qaidat al-Jihad” - that is, the Foundation of Jihad which is more of a theological authority than an operational command. Zawahiri acknowledged that the leaders (including Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir) and mujahedin of the DI’I (the Islamic State of Iraq) originally pledged allegiance to al-Qaida and recognized Osama bin Laden’s leadership.

Moving on to the current crisis, Zawahiri conceded that the DI’ISH leadership attempted to avert a crisis with Jabhat al-Nusra and even sought his - Zawahiri’s - help and that of the Shurah Kabirah in Pakistan. Most important, according to Zawahiri, is a lengthy letter he received from Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on 10 April 2013. In the letter, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi recognized Zawahiri as “our leader, the very generous Sheikh,” and sought his guidance about the unfolding crisis in the Jihadist ranks in Bilad al-Sham.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi warned, as Zawahiri read, that the leader of Jabhat al-Nusra had been causing immense damage through fratricidal fighting. Instead of accepting the admonition and judgment of the Jihadist leaders in country, including Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Jabhat al-Nusra’s leader Abu-Muhammad al-Julani sought to establish a unique place for himself by pledging allegiance directly to Zawahiri. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi explained that Abu-Muhammad al-Julani was “doing this to protect himself and those with him against the repercussions of the sins and calamities he committed. This poor fellow, and the brothers with him here in Sham, believe that our Sheikhs in Khorasan [the Jihadist Grand Shurah in Pakistan] should announce a clear and an unequivocal position to bury this conspiracy before blood is spilled and we become the cause of a new disaster for the Islamic nation.”

Going over Baghdadi’s letter, Zawahiri seemed to have glossed over specific details Baghdadi provided regarding what he considered treasonous cooperation between Julani and both Iran - that is, the Quds Forces - and the Assad security services. Baghdadi warned, as Zawahiri read, of the dire consequences of tolerating this cooperation for the entire Jihadist movement. “We believe that any support for what this traitor has done, even if by insinuation, will lead to great sedition that would destroy the project for which the blood of Muslims was shed. Any delay in demonstrating the right position will seem that we are accepting the status quo that will ultimately divide the ranks of Muslims and lead to the collapse of the group’s prestige, which cannot be remedied afterward except by shedding more blood,” Baghdadi pleaded in April 2013 as read by Zawahiri.



The key to resolving the current crisis is in pragmatic and realistic assessment of the conditions in both Bilad al-Sham and Iraq, Zawahiri explained, and not in pure religious-theological judgments. Therefore, Zawahiri stressed, all Jihadist leaders should consider his message as “an order issued by a leader regarding a problem that emerged between his soldiers and not a verdict by a judge between two adversaries who presented before him a problem.”

Zawahiri accused the DI’ISH leaders of creating a political confusion that played into American and Assad’s hands. Zawahiri stated that “declaring the DI’ISH was a clear violation of orders of the Al-Qaidat al-Jihad leadership to not announce an official presence in Syria.” In retrospect, Zawahiri observed, “declaring the DI’ISH has caused a political catastrophe for the people of Sham” just as “they were coming out in numbers to support Jabhat al-Nusra.” The confusion thus “ignited a sharp dispute within the one group [of Jihadists]” that provoked the ongoing fratricidal fighting among Jihadists. “The creation of the organization provoked other Jihadist groups that believed that DI’ISH is trying to impose itself on them without the consent of, or consultation with, [the Jihadist Shurah Kabirah in Pakistan],” Zawahiri admonished.

Zawahiri then turned to Jabhat al-Nusra and the other al-Qaida-affiliated Jihadist entities. He issued “the appeal” for “Abu Muhammad al-Julani and the Jabhat al-Nusra mujahedin” and “all the Jihadist groups and communities in Syria to immediately stop any fighting that involves aggression against the lives and sanctity of the mujahedin and fellows Muslims, and to devote themselves to fighting the enemies of Islam including the Baathists, the Alawites, and their Shia allies.” Zawahiri then reached out to “the rest of the mujahedin throughout Sham.” Zawahiri reiterated that there has been “enough spilling the blood of fellow Muslims,” and that they must “stop killing the leaders and Sheikhs of Jihad.”

Zawahiri saw no role and place for the DI’ISH leadership in Bilad al-Sham. Zawahiri ordered Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his lieutenants “to go back to listening and obeying your leader [Zawahiri]. Go back to the reasoning of your Emirs and those who preceded you on the path of Jihad. Devote yourselves to Iraq which needs your efforts, devote yourselves to it even if you see yourselves as wronged or not getting your due to end this bloody massacre. Heed my words for the sake of sparing the blood of Muslims, unifying their ranks and achieving their victory over their enemy, even if you consider it an injustice.” Zawahiri’s parting words for the “venerable Sheikh” Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi were conciliatory. “Put your faith in Allah and make this decision and you will find all of the mujahedin and their supporters a source of help for you.”

\*

With its theological posture consolidated and clarified in mid-May 2014, the DI’ISH Shurah Kabirah ordered their forces to launch a decisive offensive aimed to consolidate their Emirate and remove Iran-sponsored Shiite threats. The DI’ISH now considers Baghdad’s determination to consolidate, with Iranian help, a Shiite-dominated Iraqi state a far greater threat than the ongoing fighting in Syria. The DI’ISH leaders concluded, and rightly so, that Assad’s Damascus is focused on winning in western Syria - from Aleppo to the Jordanian border - and thus has no interest in confronting the DI’ISH’s Emirate in central and eastern Syria. Moreover, Assad’s Damascus is inclined to let DI’ISH and a coalition of al-Qaida affiliates, including Iran-manipulated Jihadist forces, fight and exhaust each other in fratricidal fighting over the character of the Syrian Jihad. Hence, DI’ISH could focus its attention anew on delivering a strategic defeat to the hated and despised Maliki regime in Baghdad.



The ensuing collapse and effective dismemberment of Iraq at the hands of a resurgent DI'ISH need not surprise. Nor should the collapse of the traditional Jihadist forces in central and northern Syria at the hands of DI'ISH surprise. The strategic surge aimed to complete the consolidation of the Emirate in northern al-Jazira was announced in the clearest of terms in the context of the theological debate over the Khorasan Pledge. The ensuing joining in of the Takfiri ranks by Jihadist entities throughout the Middle East, as well as major strategic posturing by Turkey and Iran, left no doubt that all have been awaiting for the translation of the theological triumph surrounding the Khorasan Pledge into strategic surge and achievements on the ground.

Indeed, Ankara declared Jabhat al-Nusra - the main nemesis of DI'ISH - a terrorist organization although Turkish Intelligence continues to help Jabhat al-Nusra. Tehran publicly committed to the protection at all costs of the Shiite Holy Shrines in Najaf and Karbala, and not to preserving modern Iraq's territorial integrity. Significantly, the reaction by Turkey, Iran and the key Shiite entity of Iraq - the Sadrist Movement - clearly indicate that they have long been cognizant of the emergence of the Takfiris, considered their ascent irreversible, and are posturing to cope with this development. Both Tehran and its key Iraqi-Shiite protégés, including the Sadrist Movement, are interested in consolidating and protecting a Shiite mini-state in central and southern Iraq that will be an Iranian fiefdom, and not the restoration of the Iraqi modern state. The crucial issue to be decided is the sustenance of a live-and-let-live understanding between Tehran and the DI'ISH that currently overlooks the flow of Iranian convoys to western Syria and Lebanon.

Meanwhile, the mere fact that not one of the Western mainstream media reports of the upheaval citing "senior officials" mentioned the Khorasan Pledge aptly demonstrates the political West's profound ignorance of the dominant trends in the Greater Middle East.

\*

The climax of the theological dispute between DI'ISH and the Jihadist uppermost leadership took place on Sunday, 11 May 2014. DI'ISH responded to Ayman al-Zawahiri's criticism on its Takfiri Jihadism and presence in Bilad al-Sham. Abu-Muhammad al-Adnani, a DI'ISH senior who had raised the theological banner back in early April, posted an audio recording on Jihadist media. Adnani not only insisted that DI'ISH was pursuing the true Jihad, but accused Abu-Muhammad al-Julani, the leader of Jabhat al-Nusra, of treason and urged Zawahiri to remove him as a precondition for cooperation. Moreover, for the first time Adnani openly acknowledged that the crux of the dispute between DI'ISH and al-Qaida is over cooperation with Iran. Needless to say that DI'ISH has no intention of leaving Bilad al-Sham in order to focus on Iraq as instructed by Zawahiri.

Significantly, Adnani began by implying that Zawahiri had betrayed the tenets of Jihad as formulated by Osama bin Laden. "Sheikh Osama gathered all the mujahedin with one word, but you divided them and tore them apart," Adnani admonished. DI'ISH remains committed to bin Laden's original tenets of Jihad but would not become part of al-Qaida or be formally affiliated with al-Qaida. "DI'ISH is not a branch of al-Qaida and never was," Adnani stressed. Hence, Zawahiri has no reason to demand or expect that DI'ISH obeys him. Nevertheless, Adnani said, DI'ISH remains eager to have good relations with the Jihadist higher leadership and is still "extending its hands" to Zawahiri.

For the first time, Adnani openly acknowledged that the crux of the dispute between DI'ISH and al-Qaida is indeed over relations and cooperation with Iran. He accused the supreme leadership of al-Qaida of shielding Iran from Takfiri attacks for the last several years. The Jihadist Shurah Kabirah in Pakistan instructed all Jihadist forces in Bilad al-Sham and Iraq not to attack Iran and its interests for fear of harming al-Qaida's own interests



in Iran. Consequently, both the D'I and its reincarnation the D'ISH did not follow their own Takfiri Jihadist convictions to fight Shiite Iran out of respect and consideration to the higher interests of the Jihadist movement.

"The D'ISH has kept abiding by the advices and directives of the Sheikhs and figures of Jihad. This is why the D'ISH has not attacked the Rawafid [derogatory term for Shiites] in Iran since its establishment. It has left the Rawafid safe in Iran, held back the outrage of its soldiers, despite its ability, then, to turn Iran into lakes of blood. It has kept its anger all these years and endured accusations of collaboration with its worst enemy, Iran, for refraining from targeting it, leaving the Rawafid there to live in safety, acting upon the orders of al-Qaida to safeguard its interests and supply lines in Iran. Yes, [the D'ISH] has held back the outrage of its soldiers and its own anger for years to maintain the unity of the mujahedin in opinion and action. Let history record that Iran owes al-Qaida invaluablely," Adnani declared.

The price paid by D'ISH in Bilad al-Sham has been very high, Adnani noted. The present situation is intolerable particularly in view of Zawahiri's demonization of the D'ISH despite the enduring commitment to the Jihadist cause. Adnani addressed Zawahiri pointing out that even though the D'ISH "complied with your [Zawahiri's] request not to target them [the Shiites] outside Iraq, in Iran and elsewhere," Zawahiri continues to lead the anti-D'ISH and anti-Takfiri Jihad campaign.

Adnani then focused on the current dispute with Jabhat al-Nusra over the Jihad in Bilad al-Sham. He warned that Zawahiri's faith in, and commitment to, Abu-Muhammad al-Julani was dividing and weakening the ranks of the mujahedin to the detriment of the Jihadist cause. He urged Zawahiri to take the right action for the sake of Jihad. "Either you continue with your mistake and remain stubborn, and the division and fighting among the mujahedin will continue, or you confess to your mistake and correct it," Adnani read. "You make the mujahedin sad, and make the enemy of the mujahedin gloat because you support the traitor [Julani], and you make the heart bleed - you are the one who instigated the strife, and you have to extinguish it. Review yourself and stand in front of Allah to correct what you have ruined."

As for Zawahiri's repeated ordering of D'ISH to withdraw from Bilad al-Sham and focus of the Jihad in Iraq, Adnani stated that leaving Bilad al-Sham is "impossible because it is unreasonable, unrealistic and illegitimate." At the same time, he stressed, the D'ISH has no intention of neglecting its commitment to Iraq.

With the D'ISH forces consolidating their hold over the Deir ez-Zor province and surging in Iraq starting late May 2014 - a growing number of Jihadist forces started pledging allegiance to the D'ISH. At first, these were mostly locally based "battalions" and "brigades" that found themselves isolated from their patrons in southern Turkey and who dreaded direct confrontation with the assertive D'ISH. By mid-June, with D'ISH-led forces completing the controlling of Sunni Iraq - major al-Qaida-affiliated units in eastern Syria started changing sides and joining the D'ISH-led Jihadist Takfiri camp. On 24 June, Abu Yusuf al-Masri, the commander of the largest unit of Jabhat al-Nusra in eastern Syria, swore allegiance in the name of his force to local D'ISH senior commanders led by Umar al-Shishani. The unit was based in the Albu Kamal area and is controlling large swaths of the Syrian-Iraqi border area including one of the main roads from Syria to Mosul (which D'ISH forces captured on June 10). Hence, this wave of allegiances to D'ISH significantly expedited the consolidation and expansion of the Emirate of the Euphrates in both Bilad al-Sham and Iraq.

\*



The main development, though, is that the message of the “Khorasan Pledge” - that is, the preeminence of Takfiri Jihadism - is spreading beyond the confines of Bilad al-Sham and al-Jazira. Most important are the initial organization of cells and networks formally influenced by, and associated with, the DI’ISH. Of these, the most important is the first official joining in of a major unit of mujahedin from the former Soviet Union - a group long a bulwark of the al-Qaida affiliated Jihadist forces world-wide.

In mid-May 2014, Takfiri Jihadism started the formal advance from Bilad al-Sham into the ex-Soviet Muslim milieu of the Caucasus, Central Asia and into the soft underbelly of Russia. A major Jihadist unit - Sabiri’s Jamaat - comprised of “Uzbeks, Tajiks, Chechens and Dagestanis” that operates in Syria “has sworn allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham.” The swearing in took place after a couple of months of theological deliberations and consultations among ex-Soviet Jihadist luminaries. This makes the switch so important.

The Sabiri’s Jamaat has long been the second most important ex-Soviet Jihadist unit in Bilad al-Sham - second only to the Jaish al-Muhajireen w’al-Ansar. However, while the Jaish had only mujahedin from the Northern Caucasus and Crimea, the Jamaat had a large contingent from Central Asia as well. The unit’s founder and first Emir was Abdullo Tashkenti from Uzbekistan. He was killed in early 2014. He was succeeded by Khalid ad-Dagestani, a Jihadist from the Republic of Dagestan who arrived in Syria with a stellar combat record against Russian forces. Sabiri’s Jamaat currently has close to a thousand mujahedin.

Significantly, Khalid ad-Dagestani is known to be a close friend and ally of the two leaders of the Jaish al-Muhajireen wa’l-Ansar (the Army of the Emigrants and Helpers) - Salahuddin al-Shishani (a Chechen) and Abdul Karim Krymsky (a Crimean Tatar from Ukraine). They have adamantly refused to take side in the inner-Jihadist theological disputes. Jaish al-Muhajireen wa’l-Ansar fought alongside the DI’ISH, Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham, the Islamic Front and other Jihadist entities against the Syrian military.

The growing deliberations within the North Caucasus Jihadist forces in Bilad al-Sham alarmed the Jihadist higher Shurahs in both the North Caucasus and Pakistan-Afghanistan. In mid-June, Sheikh Ali Abu Muhammad, the Emir of the Caucasus Emirate, issued an appeal regarding the role of Chechen-led factions in the Jihadist disputes. He was most alarmed when one of the most popular combat leaders - Umar al-Shishani - crossed over to DI’ISH with all the forces under his command. Indeed, DI’ISH considers Umar al-Shishani one of the most senior commanders in eastern Bilad al-Sham and western Iraq as reflected in his acceptance on behalf of DI’ISH the bay’ah from Abu Yusuf al-Masri and the largest unit of Jabhat al-Nusra in eastern Syria.

Abu Muhammad stressed that the mujahedin from the Caucasus were in Bilad al-Sham to fight a Jihad and not participate in fratricidal feuds. He highlighted the theological complexity of the disputes among the Jihadist camps in Bilad al-Sham and concluded that “we instructed our brothers not to take sides either with Baghdadi or Julani. ... We demand that our brothers continue in this position and that they direct all their forces against the infidel - that is, Bashar al-Assad - and did not take sides.” Abu Muhammad urged the unity of Jihadist forces toward the establishment of Islamist regimes. He decreed that regarding “the territories they [all Jihadists] conquer - they should control those territories and install Sharia law and share out trophies, and those territories will be under the control of our brothers, because in al-Sham today there are scores of brigades and each has its territories and leaders and that situation will continue until the fitna ends.”

Abu Muhammad concluded by reiterating how crucial it was for the leaders of the Caucasus Emirate to become involved in the theological dispute concerning the Takfiri Jihadism. “We suffer for our Community, for our Jihad,” Abu Muhammad declared. “We are part of the global Jihad and we do not want to stand on the sidelines.”



Abu Muhammad was target killed by Russian Special Forces on 19 April 2015 in Dagestan.

By mid-2014, there were other Takfiri Jihadist movements at various levels of theological deliberations. These ranged from the vicious Takfiri networks in Pakistan that focused mainly on senseless killing of Shiites in mosques and businesses to the Boko Haram in Nigeria that increasingly used Takfiri rhetoric. These and other similar movements were fertile ground for the spread and institutionalization of Takfiri Jihadism as codified by the Khorasan Pledge. The spectacular successes of the DI'ISH forces in both Iraq and Bilad al-Sham made joining the Takfiri Jihad immensely alluring.

\*

On 29 June 2014, DI'ISH announced the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate on the territories under their control as the first step in restoring the glory of all Muslims and the liberation of all lands ever ruled by Muslims. A few days beforehand DI'ISH explained that one of their priorities is to smash the "partitioning of Muslim lands by Crusader powers" in the aftermath of the First World War in order to create a new Middle East. Only the abolishment of modern Arab states and the creation of an Islamic Caliphate in their stead will permit the restoration of Muslim glory and dignity. DI'ISH noted that the last Caliphate - the Ottoman Caliphate or Empire - had been abolished at the behest of the Western powers a century ago. (Kemal Ataturk formally abolished the Caliphate on 3 March 1924.)

The 29 June communique announced the establishment of a new Caliphate. "The Jihadist Imam al-Baghdadi was designated the Caliph of the Muslims," Muhammad al-Adnani noted, and he would be henceforth referred to as "Khalifah Ibrahim." Adnani elaborated that al-Baghdadi "has accepted this allegiance, and has thus become the leader for Muslims everywhere." Adnani alluded to the commitment to abolish the modern state. "The words 'Iraq' and 'Sham' have been removed from the name of the Islamic State in official papers and documents," Adnani stated. He concluded by defining the Caliphate as "the dream in all the Muslims' hearts" and "the hope of all Jihadists."

On 1 July, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi released a communique commemorating the start of Ramadan. He discussed the implications of the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham becoming a Caliph and sent a message to his fellow Sunni supporters to commemorate the Muslim holiday of Ramadan. He perceives the establishment of the Caliphate as the first step toward the inevitable triumph of Islam over the rest of the world. "Soon, by Allah's permission, a day will come when the Muslim will walk everywhere as a master, having honor, being revered, with his head raised high and his dignity preserved. Anyone who dares to offend him will be disciplined, and any hand that reaches out to harm him will be cut off." This triumph will come in the aftermath of a fateful apocalyptic clash resulting from the bi-polar division of the world as created by the Jews. "O Ummah of Islam, indeed the world today has been divided into two camps and two trenches, with no third camp present: The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of Kufr [disbelief] and hypocrisy - the camp of the Muslims and the mujahedin everywhere, and the camp of the Jews, the Crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of Kufr, all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilized by the Jews." Only a relentless and uncompromising Jihad as waged by the Caliphate is capable of delivering historic victory for Islam. "This is my advice to you. If you hold to [Jihad], you will conquer Rome and own the world, if Allah wills," Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi concluded.

On 4 July, Caliph Ibrahim, that is Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Qurashi, delivered the Friday Sermon at the Grand Mosque in Mosul and publicly reiterated the tenets of the Islamic Caliphate. He stressed the dominance of



Jihad, of the implementation of a strict interpretation of Sharia, and of the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate as a duty for all Muslims. He stressed the significance of Ramadan for Jihad according to Prophet Muhammad. "It is a month in which for Allah we are protected from hell, and this is every night - nights during which the marketplace of Jihad is opened. The Messenger, Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, would hold in it the brigades and arm the armies to fight the enemies of Allah to do Jihad against the polytheists. So take advantage of this good month in obeying Allah, for in it the rewards are multiplied, and let the competitors compete."

Caliph Ibrahim emphasized that the Muslim world was undergoing a historic turnaround as a result of the fighting of Jihad in al-Jazira. "As for your mujahedin brothers, Allah has bestowed upon them the grace of victory and conquest, and enabled them, after many years of Jihad, patience, and fighting the enemies of Allah, and granted them success and empowered them to achieve their goal. Therefore, they hastened to declare the Caliphate and place an Imam, and this is a duty upon the Muslims - a duty that has been lost for centuries and absent from the reality of the world and so many Muslims were ignorant of it. The Muslims sin by losing it, and they must always seek to establish it, and they have done so, and all praise is due to Allah." He urged all Muslims to participate in Jihad and admonished that "if you knew about the reward and dignity in this world and the hereafter through Jihad, then none of you would delay in doing it."

Caliph Ibrahim concluded by discussing his own role as a Caliph. He insisted that he was a reluctant leader who considered the responsibility of his leadership position to be "a plague". He urged his followers to hold him responsible and accountable to spread the message of Allah. "I was placed as your caretaker, and I am not better than you. So if you found me to be right then help me, and if you found me to be wrong then advise me and make me right and obey me in what I obey Allah through you. If I disobey Him then there is no obedience to me from you. I do not promise you, as the kings and rulers promise their followers and congregation, of luxury, security, and relaxation; instead, I promise you what Allah promised His faithful worshipers."

\*

The extent of the impact of the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate was best reflected in the Maghreb, the Sahel, and ultimately the areas controlled by the Boko Haram.

Back in mid-June 2014, a group of Libyan mujahedin, including veterans of the Syrian Jihad, announced the formation of a Takfiri Jihadist group in eastern Libya called the al-Battar Brigade. The Brigade is modeled after the DI'ISH and is formally affiliated with it through Libyan mujahedin in both Libya and Syria-Iraq. "We will cut off heads, slit stomachs and fill Libya with graves" in order to attain these objectives, the al-Battar communique said. At the same time, al-Battar Brigade continues to cooperate with al-Qaida's Ansar al-Sharia - the Jihadist primary entity expediting the movement of Jihadists and weapons between the Syria-Iraq theater and local centers such as Libya.

In Summer 2014, the Boko Haram of Nigeria emerged as the best reflection of the brewing schism between the traditional Jihadism represented by the al-Qaida Shurah Kabirah and the ascent of Takfiri Jihadism spear-headed by the Khorasan Pledge scholars and implemented by the DI'ISH and subsequently the KHI in al-Jazira. In this dispute, Boko Haram leaders followed closely the decisions of senior partners such as AQIM that both demonstrated sympathies for Takfiri Jihadism but also sought to minimize the crisis with al-Qaida. Indeed, the Boko Haram initially blurred the separation between internal and regional operation and stressed the rejection of the modern state in favor of an all-encompassing Caliphate. On May 5, 2014, Shekau stated that "we don't



know Cameroon or Chad... I don't have a country. Islamiyya is what I have."

In the second half of June, AQIM leaders sought to reconcile between al-Qaida and DI'ISH leaders. In a June 22 communique, AQIM recognized Ayman al-Zawahiri's preeminence as "our Sheikh and Emir" and urged DI'ISH to reconcile. However, when AQIM's appeals were rejected by the al-Qaida supreme leaders, AQIM announced its support for the DI'ISH. On 1 July, Sheikh Abdullah Othman al-Assimi posted a video-message in the name of al-Qaidat Jihad in the Maghreb and Trans-Saharan Regions. Assimi, whose real name is unknown, is the organization's leader and a prominent Islamist jurist. His home base is in the mountains and forests of Boumerdes and Tizi-Ouzou in Algeria. "My group wants to build friendly ties with DI'ISH. You are dearer to us than our tribe and family, and you will always have our support," Assimi said. "We are still waiting for al-Qaida branches across the world to reveal their stance and declare their support for [DI'ISH]." Assimi alluded to his support for the Takfiri interpretations of the laws of Jihad. "After the silence of the people concerned, we wanted to show our stance for the sake of justice so that the DI'ISH Jihadists know that we will not fail them. We tell all Muslims that we have seen justice in the DI'ISH approach and they are among the most obedient of Allah's people and the most dedicated to the Prophet." This was a very important endorsement of the tenets articulated in the Khorasan Pledge. Assimi also criticized the support provided by AQIM and its leader Abdelmalek Droukdel with African Jihadist groups. Droukdel's ties with Boko Haram, Assimi specified, "are limited to provision of [material] support".

Meanwhile, on July 13, Abubakar Shekau delivered an address focusing on the definition of the theological positioning of Boko Haram between al-Qaida and the rising Islamic Caliphate. Shekau explained that several Jihadist leaders were his "brethren" and asked Allah to protect them and their Jihad. The list included al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, Taliban leader Mullah Omar, and their arch nemesis Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Emir of the Islamic Caliphate. Shekau then repeated Takfiri Jihadism's complete rejection of the modern state in order to stress that there can be no reconciliation with Abuja. "May God's wrath befall the name Nigeria; all we know is the land of God. We are doing the religion of God and no one will stop us from practicing the religion of Allah, even if it is going to be only for a few people of millions of people." Shekau explained that the source of this quintessential schism is the different canons guiding governance. "I am reading the Quran, and you are reading the constitution; I am reading the rules and regulations of the Quran, and you are doing that of the constitution," he explained.

On August 24, the Boko Haram posted a video in which Abubakar Shekau announced the establishment of an independent Islamic Caliphate throughout northeastern Nigeria. Shekau declared that Gwoza was the capital of the Islamic Caliphate. He reiterated anew the complete rejection of the modern state by the Boko Haram. "We don't believe in the name Nigeria. We are in [an] Islamic Caliphate. We have nothing to do with Nigeria," Shekau explained. "Thanks be to Allah, who gave victory to our brethren in Gwoza and made it part of the Islamic Caliphate. By the grace of Allah, we will not leave the town. We have come to stay."

Meanwhile, back in late-July, regional Jihadist leaders met in southern Libya in order to better coordinate operations, examine the possible unification of Maghreb and Sahel groups, and agree on a common position regarding the theological dispute between Zawahiri and Baghdadi. The gathering included senior commanders from AQIM, Ansar al-Sharia (Tunisia and Libya), Ansar Bait al-Maqdis (Egypt), El Mourabitounes and Ansar al-Din (northern Mali). By mid-August, the presence of Takfiri Jihadists affiliated with the KHI throughout the Maghreb and the Sahel was palpable. Led by Algerian commander Luqman Abu Sakhr, the Tunisia-based Uqba Ibn Nafi Brigade formally joined the KHI.



In mid-September, senior commander Khaled Abu Suleiman (real name Gouri Abdelmalek) noted that since “the Maghreb has deviated from the true path [of Jihad]” he was pulling his men from affiliation with AQIM. He announced the establishment of the Caliphate Soldiers in Algeria (Jound al-Khilafa fi Ard al-Jazayer) and swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic Caliphate. The Caliphate Soldiers kidnapped and beheaded a French national to demonstrate their adherence to the Takfiri doctrine of Baghdadi’s Caliphate. Subsequently, both Abu Ayaz, the leader of Ansar al-Sharia of Tunisia, and Muhammad al-Zahawi, the leader of Ansar al-Sharia of Libya, gravitated toward Takfiri Jihadism as a result of deep theological discussions with Luqman Abu Sakhr, the leader of the Uqba Ibn Nafi Brigade.

Consequently, the main regional commanders joined the preparations for the establishment of an Islamic State in the Islamic Maghreb (ISIM). Mokhtar Belmokhtar, currently the leader of the al-Murabitun in southern Libya, is the leading candidate for the post of Emir of the ISIM. Mokhtar Belmokhtar has long been a sponsor of Boko Haram’s Khalid al-Barnawi. Moreover, Ansaru commander Abu Ali al-Nigeriai has long been a senior member of Belmokhtar’s Shurah. In September-October, Belmokhtar oversaw the organizing of the so-called “Salvador Triangle” in the no-man’s land formed by the borders of Libya, Algeria and Niger. Cadres of al-Murabitun, al-Battar and foreign expert Jihadist established three secret training camps in southern Libya. These camps serve as the center of Takfiri Jihadism throughout the Maghreb and the Sahel - providing expert training, organizing and equipping for several hundred Jihadists at any given time.

On November 9, Abubakar Shekau ushered in the new era of the Boko Haram Caliphate in a message aimed at Middle Eastern audiences and particularly the Takfiri Jihadist leadership. Unlike his usual appearance in military fatigues in front a line of parked combat vehicles, this time Shekau was photographed delivering a sermon during Friday prayers. Shekau was dressed in clothes typically worn by regional Imams. Shekau’s video was choreographed to resemble the July declaration of the Islamic Caliphate by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi during a sermon in the Mosul mosque. Shekau delivered his sermon in the main mosque of Gwoza, Borno State. Gwoza, Shekau explained, is now called Darul Hikma (the Abode of Wisdom) and serves as the capital of the Caliphate.

Shekau made special effort to convey his own personal and the Boko Haram’s adherence of the tenets of Baghdadi’s Takfiri teachings. He stressed the enduring stability of the territorial entity known as the Caliphate. “To all Muslims and all devout mujahedin, my esteemed brethren, Allah has bestowed on us Islamic victory, and we pray to Allah to give us the opportunity to fight infidels on the face of the earth. We fight and kill whoever opposes what the Prophet brought. My brethren in Islam, we are living in Islamic Caliphate. We send our greetings to our brethren living in the Islamic caliphates - the Caliphate in Iraq and Syria. My brethren in Islam, wherever you may be, in Afghanistan, in Pakistan, in Azerbaijan, in Shishan [Chechnya], in blessed Yemen, in Somalia - to everyone living in Islamic caliphates, we convey our greetings at this moment. Look at this Nigeria, liars. Look at these tyrants. They are sabotaging Islam. We have indeed established an Islamic Caliphate. This is an amazing thing. Victory from Allah!”

He reiterated to the Takfiri Jihadist leaders that the Caliphate in Nigeria is part of the Arab-dominated milieu and not a distinctly African undertaking. “We don’t call ourselves Boko Haram. We are Jama’tu Ahlus Sunna Lidda’awati wal Jihad” (Community of the People Committed to the Propagation of [the Prophet’s] Teachings and Jihad), Shekau declared. He also emphasized anew his “firm authority” over the Caliphate. Shekau concluded that the Caliphate was well consolidated as an entity and was no longer beholden to his own leadership. “If Allah decides I die today, by Allah I will die.”



Significantly, unlike previous sermons, Shekau did not mention al-Qaida, Ayman al-Zawahiri, or any other al-Qaida affiliates.

Nevertheless, the African Takfiri Jihadists who by early-2015 swore allegiance to the Islamic Caliphate also considered themselves devotees of the original teachings and leadership of Osama bin Laden. This distinction was made clear when the Caliphate in eastern Libya was ready to surge into the Jihadist center stage. On February 15, the Libyan Caliphate posted a graphic five-minute video titled “A Message Signed With Blood To The Nation Of The Cross.” The video began with the marching of 21 Egyptian Copts who had been recently kidnapped in Libya.

A Jihadist commander dressed in military fatigues delivered the message in American-accented English. “All praise is due to Allah the strong and mighty,” he declared at the start of the video. “And may blessings and peace be upon the ones sent by the sword as a mercy to all the worlds.” He connected the End-of-Time Battle in al-Jazira with both the Jihadist revenge over the killing of Osama bin Laden by the West and the decisive surge against Christendom to be launched from Libya.

“Oh people, recently you have seen us on the hills of ash-Sham and Dabiq’s plain, chopping off the heads that have been carrying the cross for a long time, and today, we are on the south of Rome, on the land of Islam, Libya, sending another message.

“All Crusaders: safety for you will be only wishes especially if you are fighting us all together. Therefore we will fight you all together. The sea [that] you have hidden Sheikh Osama bin Laden’s body in - we swear to Allah, we will mix it with your blood.”

After the Jihadist leader finished his statement, the line of black-dressed mujahedin commenced the beheading of the 21 Copts dressed in Guantanamo-like orange jump suits kneeling in front of them. The camera then focused of the sea water red with blood. Once the slaughter was over, the commander stepped forward for a final statement. “And we will conquer Rome, by Allah’s permission, the promise of our Prophet, peace be upon him,” he declared.

The realignment of western African Jihadism with the Islamic Caliphate in al-Jazira was completed in mid-March 2015. On 8 March, Abubakar Shekau brought the evolutionary process of the Boko Haram to its logical conclusion and declared his allegiance to al-Baghdadi and the Caliphate. “We announce our allegiance to the Caliph of the Muslims, Ibrahim ibn Awad ibn Ibrahim al-Husseini al-Qurashi and will hear and obey in times of difficulty and prosperity, in hardship and ease, and to endure being discriminated against, and not to dispute about rule with those in power, except in case of evident infidelity regarding that which there is a proof from Allah,” Shekau declared. “We call on Muslims everywhere to pledge allegiance to the Caliph and support him, as obedience to Allah and as their application of the absent duty of the era.” Shekau stressed that he pledges allegiance to Baghdadi “because there is no cure [for] the dissimilarity” in the Ummah “except in the Caliphate.” He urged all Muslims to pledge allegiance to Baghdadi if only to “enrage the enemy of Allah.”

In the Sahel, Mokhtar Belmokhtar did not go that far - but violated the tacit understanding with the local Francophone governments and struck out at the heart of Bamakao and intentionally killed Westerners. In his claim of responsibility in the name of Katibat al-Murabitun, Belmokhtar first claimed that the attacks were in reprisal for the French killing of Ahmed al-Tilemsi back in December 2014. In 2013, Tilemsi, a founding member of the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), merged MUJWA with Belmokhtar’s forces and



formed Katibat al-Murabitun. Belmokhtar also claimed that the Bamakao attacks also avenged “the Prophet who has been mocked and insulted by the infidel West” through the French *Charlie Hebdo* magazine.

On March 12, in response to all recent developments and initiatives, the Caliphate’s leadership acknowledged the significance of Shekau’s pledge of allegiance and the centrality of the confrontation with France as announced by Belmokhtar. Adnani delivered the Caliphate’s message in a major statement titled “So They Kill And Are Killed” covering the Caliphate’s world view. “We give you glad tidings today about the expansion of the Caliphate to western Africa, for the Caliph, may Allah preserve him, accepted the pledge of allegiance of our brothers in Jama’at Ahl al-Sunnah Lil Dawa Wal Jihad,” Adnani announced. “So we congratulate the Muslims and our mujahedin brothers in western Africa for their pledge of allegiance, and we congratulate them for their joining the march of the Caliphate.” Adnani urged all Muslims who are “unable to immigrate to Iraq, Sham, Yemen, al-Jazira, and Khorasan,” to ascertain whether they are not “unable [to go to] Africa. We are calling you up for Jihad. Go!”

Adnani highlighted the unique virtues of the Caliphate that now covers the Middle East and western Africa. “O Muslims, come to your [Islamic] State, we urge you to [join the] Jihad, and urge you and call upon you to make hijra [emigration] to your brothers in western Africa. ... Come, O Muslims, to the land of the Caliphate, for it is better for you to be a shepherd in Dar al-Islam [Abode of Islam] than an obeyed master in Dar al-Kufr [Abode of Unbelief].” In the lands of the Caliphate, “monotheism is achieved” because “Jihad in the cause of Allah” is the norm. Adnani noted that there “is no polytheism or paganism or nationalism or patriotism or polytheist democracy or disbelieving secularism” throughout the Caliphate. “There is no difference between an Arab and a non-Arab, nor between black and white. Here, the American fraternizes with the Arab, and the African with the European, and the Eastern with the Western.” Adnani emphasized that only in the lands of the Caliphate Muslims can live under the Sharia.

“We took you by surprise,” Adnani gloated when addressing the Caliphate’s enemies in Muslim lands. Adnani delivered the ultimatum to the region’s Jews and Crusaders that they must either “convert to Islam or pay the ultimate price when your armies are expelled from Muhammad’s Peninsula, from al-Quds [Jerusalem], and all Muslim lands.” Adnani emphasized that the Sharia will soon be strictly imposed upon the remaining non-Muslims throughout the Caliphate. “What you [will] be paying to us in Jizya [humiliating poll tax] will not account for [even] tenth of a tenth of a tenth of a percent of what you pay to finance your doomed war [against Islam].” The ascent of the Caliphate is recognized by all, Adnani stress, and therefore “the Jews and the Crusaders are scared and weak.”

In his conclusion, Adnani stressed that the recent victories throughout the Middle East made the historic triumph of the Caliphate irreversible. “We won the day Europe and the US dreamt of reclaiming Tal Hamis, Mosul, Sinjar, Tikrit, Qaim, Derna, Tall Abyad, and more,” he stated. The next step, according to Adnani is the avenging surge into the heart of the West. “We, with Allah’s help, want Paris, before Rome and Islamic Iberia and after we blow up the White House, Big Ben, and the Eiffel Tower before Paris, and Rome, Allah willing,” Adnani warned. “We want Kabul, Karachi, the Caucasus, Qom, Riyadh, and Tehran. We want Baghdad, Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo, Sana, Doha, Abu Dhabi, and Amman. And the Muslims shall return to power and ruling, to be the vanguard and leadership in every place. ... The Islamic Caliphate will remain, and it is only getting stronger and achieving more victories,” Adnani concluded. Thus, the most recent Jihadist developments in western Africa are genuinely important facets of an increasingly unified and coherent Takfiri Jihad.



In early-April 2015, the Caliphate elaborated on the historic significance and overall Takfiri Islamist context of the oath of allegiance by the Boko Haram. The analysis in Issue 8 of the Caliphate's on-line magazine Dabiq set the tone. The cover story of the issue was called "Sharia alone will rule Africa". The Dabiq Editorial articulated the reasons behind the growth and expansion of the Caliphate throughout the Muslim World. "It was the rejection of nationalism that drove the Islamic State to expand from Iraq into Sham and thereafter to other lands: West Africa, Algeria, Libya, Khorasan, Sinai, Yemen, and the Arabian Peninsula. And it is the rejection of nationalism that will drive the Khilafah to continue expanding until it takes Constantinople and Rome from the Crusaders and their allies by Allah's permission," the editorial asserted.

The Dabiq main article analyzed the significance and consequences of the oath of allegiance - bay'ah - by Shekau on behalf of the Boko Haram. "The [Shekau] bay'ah, which came on the heels of a widely successful campaign being waged by the mujahedin across Nigeria and into neighboring regions, was a tremendous cause of celebration for the Muslims and yet another source of gloom for the kuffar." Still, the supreme leadership of the Caliphate closely studied the qualifications of Shekau and the Boko Haram before accepting them into the fold of the Takfiri Jihadist trend. "Their bay'ah was [ultimately] acknowledged by the Islamic State, and the mujahedin of West Africa now guard yet another frontier of the Khilafah."

The Dabiq stressed that the expansion of the Caliphate into the Heart of Africa alarmed the governments of both western Africa and the West that they launched a major multinational offensive against the Boko Haram in order to contain the spread of Jihad. This offensive could not contain the Jihadist ascent. "They [the Boko Haram] continue upon this path today under the banner of the Khilafah, even as the forces of kufr redouble their efforts to stop their advance across West Africa, for no sooner had they declared their bay'ah than they were faced with a combined and aggressive air and ground offensive launched by the murtadd forces of Chad and Niger. This is in addition to the troops recently deployed from Cameroon, as well as mercenaries, and even the French crusaders based in Chad, all attempting to stop the mujahedin's liberation of West Africa." The KHI's supreme leadership had no doubt that their African allies would soon prevail and continue the expansion of the Boko Haram Caliphate.

In late-April, the Caliphate supreme leadership announced the further integration of the Boko Haram into the global Jihadist system. On April 24, the KHI released a new video praising the Boko Haram and highlighting the increasingly close relations between them and the Jihadist forces in al-Jazira. The video and related communiques referred to the Boko Haram as "The Islamic State's West Africa Province." One of the communiques explained that Baghdadi's Caliphate was becoming a global movement encompassing provinces all over the Muslim World. The West Africa Province was one of the most important building blocks of the Caliphate. Indeed, 24 and 26 April also saw the first internal communications from northeastern Nigeria to the supreme leadership where the local commanders identified themselves as being part of the "Islamic State in West Africa."

By now, the personal standing of Abubakar Shekau, who was last seen in mid-March, in the global Jihadist leadership might improve markedly. Back in mid-April, rumors began to spread within the Jihadist upper echelons that Mokhtar Belmokhtar was assassinated by poisoning by one of his closest confidants-turned-rivals. According to these reports, Belmokhtar had recently developed a major feud with Ahmed Ould Mohammed al-Khayiri, his second-in-command in Katibat al-Murabitun, over their relations with the Caliphate. Reportedly, al-Khayiri urged Belmokhtar to swear a bay'ah to Baghdadi, but Belmokhtar was reluctant to break all ties with Zawahiri and the Shurah Kabirah. The Jihadist sources assert that this insistence cost Belmokhtar



his life. The actual perpetrator who administered the poison was one of the commanders of the al-Muaqiu bi-Dam (Those Who Sign in Blood) - an elite splinter group that Belmokhtar had established in 2012 to serve as his personal bodyguards and strike force. Significantly, Algerian Intelligence is still awaiting confirmation of Belmokhtar's death but claims to be confident that these rumors were true.

The Belmokhtar mystery deepened in mid-May 2015 when al-Murabitun announced allegiance to the Caliphate. "In obedience to the command of Allah ... Jama'at al-Murabitun declares its pledge of allegiance to the Emir of the Believers and the Caliph of the Muslims, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, thereby banishing divisions and dissent within the Nation." The communique urged "all Jihadi movements to pledge allegiance [to al-Baghdadi] in order to speak with one voice." Significantly, the announcement was read by Adnan Abou Walid Sahraoui and did not mention who was the al-Murabitun leader who actually swore the bay'ah to Baghdadi. Sahraoui is not part of the central Shurah. In the past, he issued several claims of responsibility for Jihadist operations and kidnappings in northern Mali - Azawad - in the name of both the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and al-Murabitun. He has never been associated with regional and theological issues.

The next day, the Jihadist media published a written statement from Belmokhtar in which he rejected and denied the pledge of allegiance to Baghdadi and the Caliphate. "After the message addressed in the name of al-Murabitun which dealt with the bay'ah to Baghdadi, we announce, this does not abide by the terms and covenants of the Shurah of the organization." Sahraoui's claim "clearly violates the founding statement, which identified the approach and behavior of the organization. As such, this does not represent the Shurah of al-Murabitun." Belmokhtar's statement then reaffirmed his allegiance to Ayman al-Zawahri.

Belmokhtar's statement as published was a printed text over the name of Khalid Abu al-Abbas, a nom de guerre of Belmokhtar. The statement was computer generated and lacked even the most basic signature. Hence, it is hard to verify the authenticity of the statement. The statement cannot, therefore, constitute a confirmation that Belmokhtar is still alive.

Mokhtar Belmokhtar has been the most prominent leader of the Jihadist trend in the Maghreb, the Sahel and the entire western Africa. If he was indeed assassinated, Shekau is the most likely regional candidate to assume Belmokhtar's standing as the most prominent Jihadist leader and commander in western Africa.

\*

At the onset of Ramadan 2015, Emir Khamzat (Aslan Byutukayev), the leader of the Caucasus Emirate's Chechnya Province - the most important Jihadist entity outside Afghanistan-Pakistan - announced "the oaths of allegiance of the Emirs of Chechnya and Ingushetia" to Baghdadi and the Islamic Caliphate. The oath of allegiance covers the 15,000 mujahedin under his command. The announcement came in the wake of a general "Bay'ah of the Mujahedin in the Caucasus Provinces (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Kabika) to the Caliph of the Muslims Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and [their] joining the Islamic State" a couple of days beforehand. Emir Khamzat indicated that one of the reasons he was committing to Baghdadi was mounting pressure from the commanders and mujahedin throughout the Emirate to join the Caliphate. At the same time, Emir Khamzat explained, he was initially reluctant to break his allegiance to then leader of the Caucasus Emirate Ali Abu Muhammad (who was target-killed in April 2015) for fear of dire consequences of an internal dispute and possible fratricidal fighting. Hence, Emir Khamzat explained, he "stayed with [the] bay'ah [to Abu Muhammad], knowing that the Muslims suffer when we disagree - especially the mujahedin who are in a difficult position." Recently, however, circumstances have changed profoundly and all Jihadists "need to hurry



up and unite so that we can cut off the heads of the infidels,” Emir Khamzat concluded.

This is a significant statement. Starting Autumn 2014, the Russian-language Jihadist media has been running a campaign urging the Islamic Caliphate to hurry up to liberate the North Caucasus from Russia. Hands were shown holding hand-written signs such as “Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, this town awaits your holy army!” and “I swear by Allah, we are waiting for you in Chechnya!” In response, Chechen, Dagestani and other commanders from the North Caucasus with the Islamic Caliphate sent a barrage of reassuring messages. “Be patient, O brothers and sisters,” read a message from a very senior commander. “The day is not far off when the banner of Islam will hang and Sharia law will be on the streets. Heads will fly from those who tear off the hijabs of the sisters and pluck the beards of the brothers.” In Winter 2014/15, at least three Chechen and three Dagestani senior commanders, as well as numerous lower-rank commanders, pledged their bay’ah to al-Baghdadi. At the time, the al-Qaida affiliated leadership focused on Emir Khamzat to refute what they called “groundless accusations” against Abu Muhammad by a growing pro-Caliphate faction. Significantly, the ensuing focusing of Emir Khamzat on the Takfiri Jihadist teachings of the Caliphate made him change his mind profoundly and give his bay’ah to Baghdadi. Moreover, the announcement of the bay’ah by Emir Khamzat should also be construed as a response to the Caliphate’s assurances they were coming to help their brethren in the Caucasus.

On 23 June, Adnani announced that Baghdadi accepted the bay’ah of the commanders in the Caucasus, congratulated their joining the forces of the Islamic State, and authorized the establishment of “Wilayat al-Qawqaz” (Wilayat Kavkaz or the Caucasus Province) covering the entire area claimed by the Caucasus Emirate. Baghdadi nominated “Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Qadari as Wali over al-Qawqaz.” Abu Muhammad al-Qadari (Abu-Mukhammad Kadarsky, real name Rustam Aselderov or Asildarov) is a veteran Jihadist from Dagestan. Kadarsky is the most important senior commander among the six that pledged allegiance back in Winter 2014/15. He was born in Kalmykia and joined the Jihad in Dagestan in 2007. Kadarsky was a protégé of the then al-Qaida-affiliated Emir of the Caucasus Dokka Umarov (target killed by the Russians in September 2013) who nominated him in Summer 2012 the Emir of the Jihad in Dagestan. However, when Kadarsky offered his bay’ah to Baghdadi, his forces were suffering immense setbacks in the hands of the Russian security forces so that his bay’ah was only of symbolic importance. In contrast, Emir Khamzat brought with him the main forces of the Caucasus Emirate.

Significantly, the announcements of the establishment of the Caucasus Province in the Jihadist media were followed immediately by reports that the Shurah Kabirah of the Caliphate banned all mujahedin in the North Caucasus from the leaving their wilayah and traveling to the Jihad in the Middle East. The reports did not address the issue of enforcement of this travel ban. The Jihadist authorities concur that “waging Jihad in the Caucasus is 1000 times more difficult than anywhere else.” The implication of these reports is that all Jihadists will be needed for the forthcoming marked escalation of the Jihad against Russia both in the North Caucasus and in the Heart of Russia.

\*

By early Summer 2015, even the most stalwart supporters of al-Qaida in the Middle East were acknowledging that Zawahiri’s al-Qaida was becoming irrelevant to the regional turmoil. The Islamic Caliphate has taken over the Jihad previously identified with bin Laden. The well-established cooperation between al-Qaida and Iran is hurting al-Qaida’s standing in a region succumbing to the primacy of the historic Sunni-Shiite cataclysmic fighting. Therefore, al-Qaida started studying a new initiative to prioritize the establishment of a modern state even if through a coalition government. The driving force behind the initiative is a prominent al-Qaida



ideologue going by the name Abdallah bin Muhammad. He calls for waging “political guerilla wars” in order to infiltrate existing State governments and gain Islamist influence and power from within. In contrast, Abdallah bin Muhammad stresses, small Jihadist emirates of the kind advocated by the Caliphate are unsustainable in the modern world. This al-Qaida doctrine is a stretch of the teachings of Said Qutb in the early-1960's.

Dr. Munif Samara, a veteran Jihadist doctor now involved with the Syrian Jihad, warned that the Jihadist youth would not tolerate the contrast between al-Qaida and the Caliphate for long - and will opt for the battle and glory offered by Baghdadi's message at the expense of Zawahiri. “At this moment, we do believe there is a coup d'etat under way within al-Qaida itself,” he opines. Al-Qaida's call for involvement in Islamist politics instead of fighting the Jihad is untenable. The younger generation of mujahedin “want action, they want blood, they want explosions. They are sitting in their countries, and either they will be in jail or something like this, and they are waiting for al-Qaida [to do something], and al-Qaida is doing nothing.” These radicalized youth gravitate to the Jihadist message of the Caliphate.

Little wonder that the leading al-Qaida-affiliated Jihadist theologians in the Middle East worry that the decline of Zawahiri's standing and influence in the region is a reflection of the overall decay of al-Qaida. Now ensconced in Jordan, Abu Qatada (real name Omar Mahmoud Othman) contrasts between the hubris in the ascent of the Caliphate and the decline of al-Qaida. “DI'ISH don't respect anyone. They are ruining the wider Jihadi movement and are against the whole Ummah,” Abu Qatada declared. In contrast, traditional al-Qaida is being marginalized by its own inaction and disconnect with the upheaval throughout the Muslim World. From the moment he replaced bin Laden, Zawahiri lacked “direct military or operational control,” Abu Qatada observed. “He has become accustomed to operating in this decentralized way - he is isolated.” Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, one of the most influential Jihadist scholars alive, concurs. Al-Qaida's organizational structure has “collapsed”. Zawahiri, he noted, “operates solely based on allegiance. There is no organizational structure. There is only communication channels, and loyalty.” The abandonment of the Jihadist message of al-Qaida cuts very close. Although Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi is loath to acknowledge this - his brother Abdulaziz al-Maqdisi is one of the original authors of the “Khorasan Pledge”.

\*

On May 14, 2015, the Caliphate released a sermon by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi titled “March Forth Whether Light or Heavy” that provided an up-to-date articulation of the role of the Caliphate in the worldwide Muslim and Jihadist trends. It was a call for Jihad and action all over the world.

The fortunes, victories and setbacks in the struggles of Islam are but divine tests for the believers as individuals and communities - a yardstick for the devotion of Muslims, Baghdadi argues. “Allah (the Glorified) tested His slaves with this conflict in order to distinguish the wicked from the good, the liar from the truthful one, and the believer from the hypocrite.” The participation in Jihad is the most important divine testing of the individual. Baghdadi implored all Believers that “your Lord has made Jihad for the cause of Allah obligatory upon you and has commanded you to fight His enemies so that He may forgive your sins, raise you in rank, take from among you martyrs, purify the believers, and destroy the disbelievers.”

There can be no conciliation between the Believers and the rest of the world, starting with the Jews and Crusaders, even for Muslims living in the midst of foreign societies. For Muslims living in the West there are only the options of either emigrating to Muslim lands or fighting Allah's enemies at home. Baghdadi emphasizes that “fighting the disbelievers, Hijrah (emigration), and Jihad will remain until the establishment of the



Hour." The Caliphate as the leading Islamic State is but the guide and beacon for this all-Islamic struggle.

"O Muslims! Do not think the war that we are waging is the Islamic State's war alone. Rather, it is the Muslims' war altogether. It is the war of every Muslim in every place, and the Islamic State is merely the spearhead in this war. It is but the war of the people of faith against the people of disbelief, so march forth to your war O Muslims. March forth everywhere, for it is an obligation upon every Muslim who is accountable before Allah. And whoever stays behind or flees, Allah (the Mighty and Majestic) will be angry with him and will punish him with a painful torment. ... So there is no excuse for any Muslim who is capable of performing Hijrah to the Islamic State, or capable of carrying a weapon where he is, for Allah (the Blessed and Exalted) has commanded him with Hijrah and Jihad, and has made fighting obligatory upon him."

Baghdadi repeatedly emphasized that it is the obligation of all Muslims to wage the Jihad. He stressed that "every Muslim in every place [has] to perform Hijrah to the Islamic State or fight in his land wherever that may be." The quintessence of Islam, Baghdadi explains, has always been fighting the Jihad for the dominance of the world. "O Muslims, Islam was never for a day the religion of peace. Islam is the religion of war. Your Prophet ... was dispatched with the sword as a mercy to the creation. He was ordered with war until Allah is worshipped alone. ... His companions after him and their followers carried on similarly. They did not soften and abandon war, until they possessed the Earth, conquered the East and the West, the nations submitted to them, and the lands yielded to them, by the edge of the sword. And similarly, this will remain the condition of those who follow them until the Day of Recompense." It is therefore the sacred obligation of the current generation of Believers to persevere and continue fighting the sacred Jihad.

For the Muslims living in the West, Baghdadi specifies, there is no hope or prospect for acceptance by the Jewish and Christian societies. He warns the Muslims in the West that "the Jews, the Christians, and the rest of the disbelievers will not approve of you nor abandon waging war against you until you follow their religion and apostatize from yours." The same dire future also awaits the Believers living in modern Arab-Muslim states. Baghdadi warns the Muslims living in modern states that "the apostate tyrannical rulers who rule your lands in the lands of the Two Holy Sanctuaries (Mecca and Medina), Yemen, Sham (the Levant), Iraq, Egypt, North Africa, Khorasan, the Caucasus, the Indian Subcontinent, Africa, and elsewhere, are the allies of the Jews and Crusaders. Rather, they are their slaves, servants, and guard dogs, and nothing else. The armies that they prepare and arm and which the Jews and Crusaders train are only to crush you, weaken you, enslave you to the Jews and Crusaders, turn you away from your religion and the path of Allah, plunder the goods of your lands, and rob you of your wealth. This reality has become as obvious as the sun in the middle of the day."

Thus, the entire world is heading toward fateful clash - a war between good and evil, between Islam and disbelief, Baghdadi declares. He urges all Muslims wherever they are to wake up and realize the immensity of the struggle they are in. "O Muslims everywhere, has the time not come for you to realize the truth of the conflict and that it is between disbelief and faith? See on which front the rulers of your lands stand and to which camp they belong. Has the time not come O Ahlus-Sunnah for you to know that you alone are the targets? This war is only against you and against your religion. Has the time not come for you to return to your religion and your Jihad and thereby bring back your glory, honor, rights, and leadership? Has the time not come for you to know that there is no might nor honor nor safety nor rights for you except in the shade of the Caliphate?" Hence, there is no alternative to joining and waging the Jihad all over the world.



Baghdadi concluded his sermon by pleading with Allah to help the Caliphate realize its sacred objectives in fighting the Jihad.

“O Revealer of the Book, O He who is swift to account, O Allah, defeat the parties, defeat them and make them tremble. O Allah, deal with America and its allies from the Jews, the Crusaders, the Rafidah, the apostates, and the atheists. Our Lord, obliterate their wealth and harden their hearts so that they do not believe until they see the painful torment. Our Lord, forgive us our sins and the excess committed in our affairs and plant firmly our feet and give us victory over the disbelieving people. And the last of our call is: Praise be to Allah, Lord of the creation.”

Within days, the Islamic Caliphate elaborated on the possible implementation of Baghdadi’s anticipated fateful clash. The prospects for, and character of, the coming clash were depicted in mid-May in Issue 9 of Dabiq, the on-line magazine of the Islamic Caliphate. The lead article, called “The Perfect Storm”, addresses the evolution and prospects of the Caliphate and Takfiri Jihadism in global context.

The swift ascent and spread of the Jihadist Trend as spearheaded by the Caliphate is threatening Western world order to such an extent that a fateful clash with the West is all but inevitable and imminent, the Dabiq argues. “The pledges of allegiance that are now being announced on a seemingly monthly basis from Islamic groups around the world to the Islamic State are ... a nightmare scenario for the military and political leaders of the democratic world. The incredible growth of the Caliphate and the fact that it is a living, breathing entity with thousands of square miles of territory has given Muslims around the Middle East, Asia, and Africa the belief and confidence to take up arms, pledge their loyalty, and launch operations with a unity and strength of purpose that has simply not been seen before.” The Caliphate’s ability to transform into an Islamic State controlling territory worldwide makes it a new and unprecedented threat to the West. “What started as the most explosive Islamic ‘group’ in the modern world has rapidly evolved into the most explosive Islamic movement the modern world has ever seen. ... Huge swathes of Pakistan, Nigeria, Libya, Yemen, and the Sinai Peninsula are all now united under the black flag of Tawhid, gelled together as one by the Islamic State.”

Sooner rather than later, the Dabiq predicts, the US-led West will strive to contain and destroy the Caliphate and the Message of Jihad. There will then emerge the need to strike unprecedented fear at the heart of the entire Western world through the use of apocalyptic weapons. The detonation of a nuclear bomb at the heart of America is the preferable strike. The Dabiq author pontificates:

“Let me throw a hypothetical operation onto the table. The Islamic State has billions of dollars in the bank, so they call on their wilayah [province] in Pakistan to purchase a nuclear device through weapons dealers with links to corrupt officials in the region. The weapon is then transported overland until it makes it to Libya, where the mujahedin move it south to Nigeria. Drug shipments from Columbia bound for Europe pass through West Africa, so moving other types of contraband from East to West is just as possible. The nuke and accompanying mujahedin arrive on the shorelines of South America and are transported through the porous borders of Central America before arriving in Mexico and up to the border with the United States. From there it’s just a quick hop through a smuggling tunnel and hey presto, they’re mingling with another 12 million ‘illegal’ aliens in America with a nuclear bomb in the trunk of their car.

“Perhaps such a scenario is far-fetched but it’s the sum of all fears for Western intelligence agencies and it’s infinitely more possible today than it was just one year ago. And if not a nuke, what about a



few thousand tons of ammonium nitrate explosive? That's easy enough to make. The Islamic State make no secret of the fact they have every intention of attacking America on its home soil and they're not going to mince about with two mujahedin taking down a dozen casualties if it originates from the Caliphate. They'll be looking to do something big, something that would make any past operation look like a squirrel shoot, and the more groups that pledge allegiance the more possible it becomes to pull off something truly epic. ... Perhaps once there was a chance that an attack inside the West or on Western borders by the Islamic State could be averted through negotiations, but no longer. As the territory of the Islamic State crosses from one border to another like a wildfire that is burning out of control, it'll be only a matter of time before the Islamic State reaches the Western world."

Highly authoritative Jihadist sources continue to study and elaborate on the advisability of, and prospects for, a spectacular strike at the heart of the West by a few Jihadists. On June 23, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani ash-Shami issued a statement called "O Our People Respond to the Caller of Allah" on the occasion of the start of Ramadan and the first anniversary to the declaration of the Caliphate. Adnani made important assertions regarding Jihad and martyrdom under contemporary conditions particularly during the month of Ramadan. "No acts of worship are equal to Jihad. And Jihad in Ramadan is not matched by Jihad in other months. ... So, O Muslims embark and hasten towards Jihad. And O mujahedin everywhere, rush and move to make Ramadan a month of disasters for the kuffar." The consolidation and expansion of the Caliphate throughout Islamdom is the first priority, Adnani explained. Outside the greater Muslim World, the Caliphate's Jihad is focused on confronting and striking the US-led West. Adnani both denigrated and threatened the US. "As for the mule of the Jews, the failing Obama, his incapable party, his weak coalition, and his defeated army, then we say: Throughout history we have never heard of tactical setbacks. But we promise you in the future with more and more setbacks, Insha'Allah, and with surprises followed by surprises. So watch, we are also watching."

Adnani delved on the growing and expanding global arm of the Caliphate. As before, the first objective is to expand and enlarge the Jihadist forces fighting in the Caliphate. All true believers should aspire to join the Jihad in the ranks of the Caliphate. Adnani urged all Muslims "to abandon discord, the discord of the factions, parties, and groups, for the Khilafah gathers all the Muslims, the Shami, the Iraqi, the Yemeni, the Egyptian, the European, the American, and the African. It gathers the Arabs and the non-Arabs. It gathers the Hanafi, the Shafi'i, the Maliki, and the Hanbali. So come to your Khilafah, for you have fought for long years to revive it and to implement the Sharia of Allah. Here it is now, revived." However, Adnani and all Jihadist leaders are cognizant that many ardent supporters cannot travel to the Middle East or Africa for objective reasons - from economic hardships to constraints by local security services.

Therefore, Adnani asserted, those true believers who cannot reach the lands of Jihad should stay home and wage the Jihad against the immediate foes of Allah and against all odds. "O soldiers of the Islamic State everywhere. These are the battlefields before you, these are your arms, and here is Ramadan. Renew your intention before Allah," Adnani admonished. He stressed that with the divine victory ascertained at the "End-of-Time Battle", the real Jihad is a trial of the resolve of the believers and their ability to endure hardships. Adnani reminded that Allah "did not promise to give the mujahedin victory in every event. Rather, the established way of Allah ... is to alternate the days of victory and defeat and to make war have its ups and downs. ... So the mujahedin fi sabilillah might lose a battle or battles. Rather, turns of misfortune might overtake them and thus they lose cities and areas, but they are never defeated at all, for Allah ... made the final outcome and ultimate victory for them if they fear Him and are patient. But before so, it is necessary for tests and tribulations. So if



you lose land, then you will regain it and more, Insha'Allah, even if after some time. This is because the final outcome and consolidation, by Allah's permission, is for you. And the enemies of Allah are in front of you. Attack them everywhere. Make the earth shake beneath them. And be patient and firm, for Allah is with you."

The statement of Adnani gives credence to and reinforces the messages and lessons conveyed by the Caliphate in the aftermath of the May 2015 Texas attack. The original Jihadist messages strove to present the attack as a precedent to be emulated by everybody in the West and other hardship theaters of Jihad. The Caliphate quickly claimed responsibility for the Texas attack. The attackers were "two soldiers of the Caliphate" who endeavored to avenge the "portraying [of] negative images of the Prophet Muhammad" at all cost. Their defiant if futile attempt was only the beginning, the Caliphate warned. "We tell America that what is coming is more bitter and harder and you will see from the soldiers of the Caliphate what harms you."

Jihadist commanders reiterate that ultimately it takes only very few tightly knit aspirant Jihadists to strike out effectively. The subsequent Jihadist analysis of the Texas attack in May 2015, where the two terrorists were killed before they could do any harm, stresses and hails the noble intentions of all Jihadists irrespective of their ultimate success or failure. The two martyrs "took it upon themselves to remind the enemies of Allah and His Messenger ... that as long as they choose to wage war on Islam, they would have no peace," a Caliphate commentary explained. "Their determination to support the cause of Allah and punish those who insult the Prophet ... should serve as inspiration to those residing in the lands of the Crusaders who are still hesitant to perform their duty." It is only a question of time until more American and European Jihadists will attempt to embrace martyrdom in pursuit of the Jihad as advocated by Baghdadi and Adnani in the name of the Caliphate. Sooner, rather than later, some of these Jihadists will succeed to inflict immense harm. Sooner, rather than later, some of them will be provided with weapons of mass destruction.

Thus, as Jihadist leaders articulate, the Islamic Caliphate is committed to delivering an epic spectacular strike at the heart of the US and the West. This apocalyptic strike will start the demise of the West and the unstoppable ascent of Islam to global dominance. The *raison d'être* for this strike is not different from that of Osama bin Laden a decade beforehand - in the mid-2000's. For bin Laden, the paramount challenge was coercing the US-led West into abandoning the pro-Western leaders and administrations in Muslim lands. "The focus should be on killing and fighting the American people and their representatives," he wrote. The only way to force such a change in US policy, bin Laden stressed, is to "start striking America to force it to abandon these [pro-US] rulers and leave the Muslims alone." Bin Laden argued then, as Baghdadi does now, that only a spectacular apocalyptic strike and horrific punishment can coerce the West into withdrawing from and abandoning Islamdom. Given Baghdadi's resolve to consolidate a region-wide Islamic Caliphate and then put the Jihadist Trend on an irreversible path to global dominance - a Jihadist attempt to launch an epic spectacular strike is only a question of time.

\*\*\*

**Remarks:** Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.