EBSCO HOST

Editorial Note

The Middle East Focus

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The Arab Spring protests that swept across many parts of the world since 2011 have radically reshaped the social, political and economic environments of the countries in the concerned regions. There has also been a significant increase in radicalisation and extremism, emergence of new groups or transformation of existing groups and new battlefields, which have enhanced terrorist violence affecting various regions and the world at large. The articles in this issue provide a survey of post-Arab Spring events and developments and projections for the future from a range of perspectives.

Mekki Uludag provides a factsheet on the developments in Syria, which arguably, has become the epicentre of the current phase of extremism and terrorism that radiates across the world.

Jennifer Ogbogu traces the emergence or the metamorphosis of terrorist groups and the resultant instability in the North African region. She also highlights how terrorist violence in North Africa has posed significant economic and infrastructural, along with security challenges, for the countries in the region.

Abu Amin examines the crisis in Yemen following the initiation of air strikes by the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthi insurgents. These trends include the competing rivalries involving the tribal groups in Yemen for power, and the tussle between regional stakeholders such as Saudi Arabia and Iran for greater influence in the country and in the region.

Drawing upon his experience in Iraq and in Afghanistan, **Paul Lushenko** addresses five fallacies associated with the current discourse on high value targeting from both operational and conceptual perspectives. He argues that the tactic must remain an integral part of the overall fight against terrorism, together with other measures like countering radicalisation and extremism.

Aida Arosoaie explores how the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) and Al Qaeda interpret and implement key concepts in Salafi ideology, which include *al-wala' wa al-bara', takfir and jihad.* She makes a case for policy makers to consider divergences in the jihadi-Salafi principles and practices of ISIS and Al Qaeda, so as to counter the threats from these groups and to blunt their support bases more effectively.

Syrian Civil War: Important Players and Key Implications – A Factsheet

Mekki Uludag

Years of the Syrian civil war has seen multiple players fighting each other and competing for influence. The four major players are the Bashar al Assad government and his allies; the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS); the Islamic front, including Jabhat al Nusra; and the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). The dynamics of the competition among the four key players and its implication for Syria, is the focus of this article.

Major Players in the Syrian Civil War

The first major player in the Syrian civil war is the ruling coalition led by Bashar al Assad. Assad is an Alawite, a splinter sect of Shiite Islam. The Alawites, which make up 10% to 15% of the Syrian population, have been supporting Assad since the start of the civil war. Druzes are another minority tribe in Syria that are believed to have been providing significant support in the form of manpower to Assad until recently when Druze leaders announced that they would cease support for the Assad regime and protect themselves against any assault by the rebels (Hassan 2015). Assad is also supported by Iran, which provided weapons and sent some of its top military personnel including General Qassim Suleimani, to Syria's battlegrounds (Filkins 2013). The Assad regime is also backed by the Lebanese Hezbollah led by Hasan Nasrallah. The Lebanese Hezbollah provides fighters to Assad, due to a shared sectorial identity (the fact that Alawites are a sub-sect of the Shiites) and due to Assad's support to Hezbollah in the past, especially during the Israel-Lebanon conflict in 2006.

The second major player in the Syrian civil war is the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS). ISIS wants to establish Sharia (Islamic law) in Syria after having enforced Islamic jurisprudence in Raqqa which it claims as the capital of the Islamic State (Aarja 2013). Due to offensives carried out by the U.S.-led coalition, ISIS' advance has been in the doldrums and it is now in a defensive mode. ISIS has lost some territory in northern Syria although it still controls important swaths, including the most important oil reserves in the Deir ez-Zur province of Syria, al Raqqah and the ancient city of Palmyra. The U.S.-led coalition have launched airstrikes targeting ISIS positions both in Syria and Iraq, and the expansion of the group seems very difficult for now.

The third major player in the civil war is the Islamic Front, comprising Al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al Nusra (JN), as well as Islamic groups like Liwa al Tawheed (The Unity Brigade), Ahrar al Sham (Islamic Movement of the Free Men of the Levant), Jaysh al Islam (The Army of Islam), Jund al Aqsa (The Soldiers of al Aqsa) and Ansar al Sham (The Supporters of Syria). This new coalition, also known as the Army of Conquest, have announced that their first goal is to topple Assad, put an end to his regime in Syria, and replace it with Islamic rule (Vice News 2015). Qatar, Turkey and Saudi Arabia reportedly support this front against the Assad regime which is not aligned with ISIS due to doctrinal differences in their ideologies (Porter 2015). The coalition has also captured strategic places in the Idlib province of Syria from the Assad Regime.

The fourth major player involved in the conflict is the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), the objective of which is to establish self-rule in Kurdish dominated areas by dividing their settlements into cantons and ruling them under a secular regime. YPG claims that this system of democratic autonomy is not only the best solution to Syria but also to the whole of the Middle East (Peace in Kurdistan Campaign 2014). It has the support of some Free Syrian Army (FSA) elements and Sunni Arabs in northern Syria. In July 2015, they captured the important cities of Tal Abyad, Sere Kaniye and al -Hasakah from ISIS. This group has the air support of the U.S.-led coalition which may potentially be a very important game changer in the civil war.

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However, none of the groups mentioned above are capable of winning the fight. The flow of thousands of foreign fighters into Syria, mainly through the porous Turkish border, continues to sustain the manpower mostly to Jabhat al Nusra and ISIS. The estimated figure of more than 20,000 foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq (Neumann 2015) reflects the severity of the situation. Nevertheless, the flow of foreign fighters could be of less consequence as they do not have weapons or ammunition to make a visible impact against Bashar al Assad's stockpile of aircrafts or heavy weapons which are believed to have been supplied by Iran. Many are also being killed by airstrikes by the U.S. and its allies, including Turkey.

When the civil war first erupted in Syria, eliminating Bashar al Assad and his regime was the top priority for most Western powers including the U.S. and Sunni-ruled countries in the Arab world. Assad was seen as a tyrant who persecuted his own people. However, at present, the main threat is seen to be ISIS and JN as both groups have been responsible for many atrocities, including beheadings of journalists and humanitarian workers, mass killings of civilians, enslavement of women and issuing threats to attack countries that are opposed to them.

The U.S.-led coalition and other countries are particularly worried about their activities and atrocities and have shifted their focus from removing Assad from power to disrupting first ISIS' and then JN's ease of movement in Syria and eventually destroying the groups altogether (Tisdall 2015).

Current Situation

After years of intensive fighting and significant casualties involving both civilians and the fighters, forcing many to become displaced and creating a refugee crisis, there is still no end in sight to the Syrian conflict. Despite assumptions that Bashar al Assad would not be able to continue to remain in power for long, the regime continues to maintain control over the most important parts of Syria (Hurriyet Daily News 2012). Alawites have managed to establish a powerful military and a strong bureaucracy. The official Syrian army appears to be fiercely loyal to Bashar al Assad, fighting to prevent rebel groups from seizing control of their territory and resources (Stewart 2015).

At present, ISIS' advance has been temporarily stalled on two fronts. The first is due to the U.S.-led offensives and the second, due to a decline in the flow of foreign fighters as a result of a tightening of security measures in countries worldwide, especially by Turkey. Additionally ISIS has been trapped between Assad's forces, the Kurdish YPG and the other rebel groups in Syria. ISIS made important gains in eastern Syria but in 2015, ISIS lost vast areas due to the U.S. and Arab coalition-led drone attacks and ground offensives by YPG, Peshmerga and Syrian rebel forces mainly the FSA (Newsmax 2015).

An important turning point in Syria for ISIS was a failed attack on the Kurdish city of Kobane in September 2014. Following airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition which successfully removed ISIS from Kobane, ISIS started to change its strategy from assault to defence. ISIS turned to procuring logistics and fighters using Tal Abyad, a town on the Turkish border as a supply route. The town also provided a direct connection to ISIS' de-facto capital Raqqa. With the fall of Tal Abyad to the Euphrates of Volcanoes (which was a joint operations team formed by the YPG and the FSA) at the end of June 2015, ISIS lost its lifeline to Turkey (Alarabiya 2015). ISIS now has to use a route from Azez to Jarablus, cities in Syria that are further away from Raqqa. This has made it

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much more difficult for ISIS to procure logistics and fighters. In May 2015, ISIS captured the city of Palmyra. However, the group is now under some threat from the Assad regime in and around the city of Aleppo and the Islamic Front and other rebel groups, and in northern Syria, from Kurdish YPG and some elements of FSA.

The Army of Conquest made some gains in the Idlib province of Syria against Assad but currently their advance has been cut short and there are heavy clashes taking place between the two sides. The Islamic Front allegedly has the support of Qatar, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan in terms of supply of weapons and ammunition (The Independent 2015). Yet, there is no evidence of unity among these groups and despite the overlaps in many instances; each group differs in its own vision and ideology which could explain the fact that there may not be any decisive winner in the civil war.

In the northern part of Syria, Kurdish forces, along with some elements of the FSA are advancing against ISIS with the cooperation of the U.S.-led coalition. Airstrikes by the coalition have helped YPG and its allies to reclaim territory from ISIS and secure settlements. The biggest gain of this front was preventing the fall

of Kobane to ISIS.

For now, Kurdish forces, together with some fragments of FSA are progressing towards Raqqa with the support of the U.S.-led coalition. The biggest challenge of this front is surprisingly Turkey which is not inclined to let any kind of Kurdish dominance in northern Syria (Middle East Eye 2015). ISIS' mass killings of civilians in Kobane, the suicide attack on a Kurdish gathering in the Turkish town of Suruc on 20 July 2015 and the Turkish government's action against the mourners of this incident demonstrates this recalcitrance on the part of Ankara. It was alleged that Turkey could have prevented all abovementioned incidents but did not do so due to its proclaimed concerns about YPG and the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), which has been waging a separatist war against Turkey (Khodr 2015).

After the July 2015 Suruc massacre by Seyh Abdurrahman Alagoz, which saw 32 youth activists killed in a suicide bombing attack, Turkey announced that it will join the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS.

Shortly after this announcement, reports emerged that Turkey's real target was PKK and not ISIS (Ianccino 2015). PKK however, has significant support from countries like the U.S., due to their frontline role in fighting ISIS in Iraq. At present, Turkey is trying to create a no-fly zone over northern Syria to protect people fleeing from ISIS and the Assad regime. It is still keeping ground invasion as an option, though it prefers to arm the more moderate groups (BBC 2015).

Turkey has now allowed its airbases for use by other countries, especially the U.S., which could change the dynamics of the overall fight against ISIS. On 14 August 2015, the Pentagon announced the first wave of U.S. airstrikes on ISIS and other rebel groups from Incirlik Air Base in Southern Turkey. Washington has already sent a fleet of combat aircrafts and started air strikes on ISIS positions with better outcome than before due to the shorter distance and availability of more time to remain on the air to seek and destroy ISIS targets (CNN 2015).

There are a number of moderate groups in Syria whose aim is to replace the Assad regime with a secular democratic system. However, at present these moderate groups do not have that much support inside Syria. Moreover, as foreign

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countries are reluctant or inhibited to provide substantive support, the moderate groups in Syria have almost collapsed and seemingly forced to cooperate with any of the abovementioned fronts, including ISIS, the Islamic Front or YPG in order to resume a visible presence in the civil war.

Road Ahead

Under present conditions, the fight in Syria is expected to continue for years. The fall of Assad continues to be illusive and unfortunately it is not an immediate priority as ISIS is seen as the most dangerous threat in Syria and to the rest of the world. Nevertheless, the continued use of barrel bombs, chlorine gas, and collective punishment by Assad against rebels is still a matter of serious concern for the international community. The support of the U.S.-led coalition is the most important factor for defeating ISIS. Aerial and ammunition support by the U.S.-led coalition to YPG and its allies has yielded important gains, including the retaking of territories and oil resources, and the cutting off of ISIS' supply lines in the last few months.

If this support continues, the front could be able to prevent ISIS' advances by destroying its military machines, slowing down its mobilisation, exterminating its convoys of ammunition and keeping it on the defensive. At the same time, urgent action is required to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the region due to the prolonged civil war.

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Impact of Middle East Terrorism on North Africa

Jennifer Ogbogu

The growth and expansion of terrorist groups beyond the Middle East and across the North African region has given rise to economic, infrastructural as well as security threats for the African sub-continent. Given the unstable political situation in several North African countries which has served to intensify the spread of terrorist activities and networks in the region, sustained efforts by security forces are recommended to combat terrorist groups there.

Introduction

Although terrorism is not new to the region, North Africa is increasingly being threatened by the emergence and spread of transnational Islamist movements (MEI 2015). This is due in large part, to the post-Arab spring instability which radically reshaped the political and security environment of countries in the Arab world.

By the end of February 2012, longstanding regimes in Egypt and Tunisia fell as their rulers had been forced out of power due to decades of autocratic rule and due to underlying socio-economic issues which were deeply rooted. In spite of that, the political orders that underpinned these regimes remained largely intact (Gartenstein-Ross et al. 2015). In Libya, the violent overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi's government upended the political situation and forced post-revolutionary leaders to attempt to rebuild political institutions from the regime's ashes. Morocco and Algeria have largely avoided the political turmoil that enveloped their neighbours, although major protests had prompted them to adopt political and economic reforms that addressed issues of corruption, limited political freedom and uneven economic growth (Gartenstein-Ross et al. 2015).

This relatively more peaceful situation was due to the presence of recognised and entrenched Islamist opposition parties prior to the Arab spring (Tawil 2013). This is in stark contrast to the Islamist parties that rose to power during the Arab Spring protests in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt had created its political arm, the "Freedom and Justice party" after the Arab spring. Similarly the Ennahda movement in Tunisia emerged after the revolution. Amid the upheaval across North African countries, there are existential concerns that terrorist groups could capitalise on the weakened political institutions of these countries as they transition to democratic governance.

North African Countries Affected by Terrorist Activity

A number of countries in North Africa, which include Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt, were seriously affected by terrorism and resultant instability. In Libya, the movement of weapons across state borders by former fighters who were either members of the Libyan army or mercenaries participating in the Libyan conflict has led to the proliferation of arms across the country. This has benefitted arms traffickers, terrorists and other armed groups operating in the region (IDSA 2015). According to a 2013 U.N report, a number of countries – including in West Africa, the Levant and the Horn of Africa, have been impacted by the proliferation of weapons from Libya. The report further highlighted how the illicit flows from Libya have led to magnification of existing conflicts in Africa and the Levant, and enriched the arsenals of a range of non-state actors, including terrorist groups in the region (AP 2013).

Minor conflicts in the form of civil resistance have occurred in Tunisia in the post-Arab spring scenario, largely due to the unstable political situation in the country. The lack of state control has led to an increase in the terrorist activities ranging from assassinations to kidnappings as well as suicide bombings. In 2013, two prominent opposition politicians, Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi were assassinated. Their assassinations were attributed to supporters of Ansar Al Sharia Tunisia (AST) or 'Partisans in Islamic law,' a group affiliated with its namesake in Libya, Ansar al Sharia in Libya (ASL). ASL's members were allegedly responsible for the 2012 killing of U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher

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Stevens in the Libyan city of Benghazi (RUSI 2015).

There has also been an ongoing insurgency in the west of Tunisia along the Chaambi Mountain spearheaded by the Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Oqba ibn Nafaa Brigade. As recently as February 2015, four policemen were killed in Kasserine (RUSI 2015). On 26 June 2015, there was an attack on tourists, many of whom were British, on the Sousse beach in Tunisia resulting in 38 deaths. The Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) had claimed responsibility for the attack (Reuters 2015). Tunisia's large supply of fighters to the conflict in Syria constitutes one of the largest numbers among the Arab countries. The failure of Tunisia's present political regime to address unemployment issues has largely contributed to the growing footprint of terrorist activities in the country as well as to the outflow of its citizens to fight outside. There is a concern that the return of Tunisian fighters from Syria would destabilise the process of democratic transition in the country (RUSI 2015).

A number of historical developments have influenced the emergence of terrorism-related activities in Algeria – mostly perpetrated by AQIM and the Al Mulathamun Battalion (AMB) – which has made the country a major terrorism hotspot in Africa.

These include urbanisation, deteriorating socio-economic conditions, adoption of a single party system, as well as unification of the entire population without social, economic and cultural distinction in the quest for a homogenous Algerian identity (Botha 2008). Furthermore, Algerian Islamists have contributed to transnational terrorism with their growing calls for a return to Islam and their outright rejection of the state's monopoly on religion (Botha 2008).

In Egypt, there are fears of the return of a militant insurgency that plagued the country in the 1980s, in light of recent attacks on the military and the police as well as the potential instability in the country following the 2013 overthrow of the Mohammed Morsi regime. Egypt's Sinai Peninsula continues to suffer from the highest number of terrorist attacks. The Ansar Bayat al Maqdis (ABM), a Sinai based militant group formed in 2011 has publicly claimed responsibility for the cascade of bombings in Egypt (Roussellier 2014).

ABM has carried out attacks on Israel as well as security services and tourists in Egypt. The group has been responsible for killing hundreds of Egyptian soldiers and police in recent years. ABM is believed to be an Al Qaeda (AQ) inspired group that started its operations immediately after the January 2011 uprising, the events of which eventually led to the fall of Hosni Mubarak. However, ABM is not formally affiliated to AQ and generally maintains a local focus. In 2014, ABM pledged allegiance to ISIS. The rate of its attacks on Egypt, as well as the level of sophistication of these attacks, suggests that Egypt is entering uncharted waters in its fight against terrorism (Roussellier 2014).

Transnational Militant Groups in North Africa

Al Qaeda

Al Qaeda, which initially began as a hierarchical movement became decentralised after the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan resulted in the overthrow of the Taliban. This, by extension, saw the Taliban sanctuaries in Afghanistan eliminated (Blanchard et al., 2015). Affiliate groups, many of which had existed in some form prior to 9/11, but without formal ties to AQ, gradually began to formally align themselves with Al Qaeda. AQIM evolved from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), a group violently opposed to Algiers' secular leadership in the 1990s. AQIM's terrorist related

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activities are well documented. More recently in 2013, terrorists took about 800 hostages and disrupted output at an Algerian gas facility in Amenas (Katiri et al., 2014). In 2014, AQIM and its affiliates staged large scale attacks against Algerian and Tunisian security forces near the group's stronghold in the Chaambi Mountain region (Country Report 2014).

Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS)

Over the past year, attention has shifted from Al Qaeda to ISIS. The influence of ISIS has gradually spread beyond the Middle East, and reached North Africa. Militants in several North African countries, including Libya, Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia, have pledged allegiance to ISIS' leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi (Straits Times 2015). In Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, ABM recently declared itself the Sinai Province of the Islamic State and carried out an attack on the Italian consulate in Cairo on 11 July, 2015 (New York Times 2015). The attack is the first major bombing of a foreign diplomatic mission since the start of the new wave of terrorism in Egypt (Al Arabiya news 2015). In addition, the Oqba ibn Nafaa brigade in Tunisia and the Jund Khalifa in Algeria have also spoken out in support of ISIS (Straits Times 2015).

In March 2015 there was a terrorist attack on the Bardo National Museum in Tunis that killed 21 foreign tourists and a policeman (Stephen et al., 2015). The attack on the Sousse beach in Tunisia, which was claimed by ISIS, can be attributed to poor intelligence gathering networks (BBC 2015). AST and ASL also pledged allegiance to ISIS and was blamed for an attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi in 2012 (Stephen 2013). The calibre of attacks the group successfully executed indicates that their activities could be further strengthened, in light of their alliance with ISIS.

Implications of Terrorism in North Africa

The Sahel region (taken loosely to refer to the area between the Sahara desert and the Sudanian Savana) faces poor social, economic and political conditions. In addition, the region suffers from unstable oil prices as well as an under-developed agricultural sector and food supplies.

Though most of its autocratic regimes have been ousted, governance in Sahel remains unstable and volatile which has made it a fertile ground for the penetration and consolidation of terrorist groups as well as other armed groups that seek to profit from the chaotic conditions in the region (George 2015). A direct impact of this on the Western Sahel would be an increase in instances of organised crimes, human and drug trafficking and an intensification of extremist activities (George 2015).

The worsening security situation in North Africa has also affected the development of new businesses and infrastructure due to diminishing foreign investments, thereby increasing unemployment rates. The attacks and the threat of future attacks have partially created a negative and inhospitable landscape for foreign firms to invest in the region (Cordana 2014).

For example, concerns that militant groups like ISIS and AQIM may target oil facilities have delayed the development of the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline (TSGP, also known as the NIGAL or the Trans-African gas pipeline) intended to run from Nigeria through the Republic of Niger to Algeria. The TSGP was conceived to meet gas demands from Europe due to the depletion of European gas fields and the need to provide an alternative to the Russian gas.

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The development of the pipeline was also initiated to enable the African economies access to a new market for their gas reserves, thereby serving a source for increased incomes and employment for young working adults and university graduates. However, given attacks by ISIS and AQIM on oil facilities, there could be an increase in cost of oil production and export should oil companies spend more on securing their facilities. Oil producing countries in the region will nevertheless be forced to trade below the cost of production, which will lead to a budget deficit as budgets are set based on an estimated cost per barrel of oil. All of these will adversely affect the infrastructural development plans of the regional countries (Wharton 2015).

The crisis in North Africa has prevailed, partly due to the failure of the intelligence network across concerned security agencies and neighbouring countries. This was reflected in the attack on civilians at the Sousse beach in Tunisia which also suggests a new focus on soft targets by terrorist groups. This shift in focus on soft targets will have a negative impact on Tunisia's struggling economy.

As tourism is the mainstay of Tunisia's economy, the current security situation could scare tourists away from the country diminishing its revenue. The destruction of historic sites will also affect tourism as they are the main attraction to the country. This also applies to countries like Algeria and Egypt and other countries in Africa which generate substantial revenue from tourism.

The Museum of Antiquities in Algeria and the Abu Simbel in Egypt could be attacked by terrorists, resulting in a negative impact on the respective country's economy.

Conclusion

Overall, the effect of terrorism in the Middle East on North Africa is likely to continue in the future. Events over the last decade have shown that terrorism poses a global risk due to groups that have sprouted from the Middle East and spread over to other vulnerable continents, including Africa. Terrorist activities have thrived in North Africa due to its proximity to the Middle East, porosity of borders, as well as weaknesses in the economic, social and political environments there. The effects of terrorism on the economy of these countries has hindered development and prevented major grievances from being comprehensively addressed.

While addressing these structural issues, there is also a need for sustained efforts in areas of intelligence gathering as well as effective responses to terrorism. It is also important to secure key and vulnerable points, including tourist sites and oil facilities. The adoption and implementation of appropriate terrorism laws, strengthening of existing laws, as well as regular training programmes for elite forces to tackle emerging terrorist threats are also recommended. This requires significant contribution from developed and richer countries for building capacity of the region's security agencies to counter the rising threat of terrorism and criminality.

As terrorist groups continue to plan and execute attacks, the security and intelligence community in North African countries need to increase the strength of their security forces, conduct periodic sweep operations, as Algeria does in the Kabylie region southeast of Algiers to capture AQIM fighters, disrupt terrorist funding sources, as well as to increase regional and international cooperation (The Sundaily 2015).

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Crisis in Yemen and Countering Violence

Abu Amin

The crisis in Yemen has worsened after the air strikes by the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis. The collapse of President Hadi's government has led to a volatile political situation as tribal groups in Yemen and regional stakeholders compete for influence. This could result in significant challenges to the security and stability of the country and the region.

Introduction

The current crisis in Yemen caught global attention when the Saudi-led coalition initiated air strikes against the Houthis. Concerned about a pro-Shiite takeover in Yemen, Saudi Arabia moved against the Iranian backed Houthi rebels. Saudi Arabia considers Iran as an abettor to the current situation in Yemen, and is concerned about Tehran's growing influence (Tisdall 2015).

The events in Yemen are likely to lead to a severe humanitarian crisis and security challenges not only for the country itself, but also for other countries in the region, including, more specifically Libya, Iraq, Syria, Tunisia, and Egypt. It will also affect counter-terrorism efforts in the region as terrorist organisations will find safe havens and open spaces in Yemen and in other countries. This warrants appropriate responses by the concerned countries. Ultimately, this would have serious ramifications leading to a rise of more clan based inter-tribal and inter-sect rivalry, anarchy, and a failed state scenario, the effects of which could engulf the region and the world at large.

Matrix of Crisis in Yemen

The Yemeni crisis began with the revolution against President Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011 to 2012. He led Yemen for 33 years, but had to abdicate power after the withdrawal of support from Saudi Arabia, which led to a U.S.-mediated transfer of power deal. As a consequence of the Arab Spring, there was a surge in uprisings in countries where leaders had been unseated, including in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. After President Saleh was unseated from power, the government, led by his former Vice President, Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, struggled to unite the fractious political landscape of the country and fend off threats arising both from Al Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Houthi militants who are waging a protracted insurgency in the north for years.

In 2014, Houthi fighters swept into the capital Sana'a and forced President Hadi to negotiate a unity government with other political factions. It is however believed that without Ali Abdullah Saleh's help, it is unlikely that the Houthis would have been able to achieve their ascent in the past two years (Salisbury 2015). Following this, the Houthis declared themselves in control of the government, dissolved parliament and installed an interim Revolutionary Committee led by Mohammed Ali Al-Houthi, a cousin of Houthi leader Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi. On 27 March 2015, President Hadi escaped to Aden by relinquishing the authority. During these years, Yemen has slowly been reduced to a state of anarchy, which has made it a new breeding ground for faction-led violence and terrorism.

The operation 'Decisive Storm' against Houthi rebels initiated on 25 March 2015 by Saudi Arabia, on the request of the ousted President Hadi, came as a surprise to many including its close allies who were not taken into confidence during the initial stages of planning.

Weeks have passed after the air raids interspersed with cease-fire initiatives. However, there is no improvement; in fact, the Scud attack by the Houthis in June 2015 directed at King Khalid Air Base at Khamis worsened the situation. It is believed that the attack, in which a Saudi Air Force Commander Lieutenant General Muhammad Bin Ahmed Al Shaalan was killed, was based on a tip off by the Iranian intelligence agency (Pakistan Defence 2015). Moreover, contrary to previous understanding, President Hadi has limited control over Yemen's military

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apparatus. This is evident from the fact that approximately 80,000 regular forces of Yemen under the command of President Ali Abdullah Saleh's son Brigadier General Ahmed Ali Saleh are also fighting on the side of the Houthis. In fact, the Saleh camp now flexes more power and control in Sana, Al Hudaydah, Dhamar, and Taizz (Madabish 2015), whereas President Hadi's influence is restricted to Aden and its surrounding areas (Zimmerman 2015).

The Saudi-Iran Equation in the Yemen Conflict

The role of Iran will be interesting to observe. The isolation of Iran over years has not only afforded her with the self-sustainability, but also the resiliency to go about conducting their business. With the Iran Nuclear Deal, Iran is on a reconciliation path with the United States. This has however exasperated the Saudis who fear Iran's growing influence in the region. Iran has

consistently taken advantage of the geopolitical situation that is thought to have paralysed U.S. policy in the Middle East by creating a coherent sphere of influence. Iran has also employed a nuclear programme strategy, maintained its support to Hamas, Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Mehdi Army (JAM), and Shiite Militia (Friedman 2012).

Iran has also received the benefit of a decaying Egypt and Saudi Arabian influence, making the country the *de facto* regional power (Mohammed 2015). It is widely believed that Iran supports Houthis in Yemen as a continuum of its regional hegemony. From a Saudi perspective, an escalation of violence would pose potential terrorist threats by sub-state actors from digressed jihadi groups settled in Yemen, not discounting the possibility of Iran taking advantage by availing tacit support from the Shiite population in the bordering areas between Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Given the nature of relations at tribal and clan level, and presence of a large community of Yemenis in Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia will continue to strive to maintain its leverage in Yemen as it has been doing in the last 40 years. The Saudi-led airstrike in Yemen, as well as its support to Sunni regimes and militant groups in the region are a message to Iran to stop meddling in Arab Affairs.

Consequences of Instability and Violence in Yemen

The deteriorating condition in Yemen may stretch beyond its borders with severe implications to regional security as terrorist violence in Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Tunisia and Libya continue to rage in the region. Recent incidents of bombing at the Shiite mosques in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, where the perpetrators are Saudi nationals, are equally alarming.

Organisations like AQAP, Al Nusra, Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS), Houthis, Boko Haram, Al-Shabab, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, Haqqani Network, Ansar al-Sharia, and Hezbollah are capable of exploiting and taking advantage of turbulence from the Yemeni crisis and threaten the security of countries where they are operating and the overall stability of the Middle East region.

" With the Iran Nuclear Deal, Iran is on a reconciliation path with the United States... Iran has consistently taken advantage of the geopolitical situation that is thought to have paralysed U.S. policy in the Middle East by creating a coherent sphere of influence... "

The strategic mistakes may have been made when the Yemeni authority, instead of dealing with the intra-party and tribal group's challenges and associated conflicts, failed to distinguish between insurgency and terrorism. The latter is perpetrated by groups like AQAP. In failing to unearth grass root level needs, both the Yemeni government and international partners alienated local tribal groups through drone attacks. The death of civilians provided a source for stirring up empathy for AQAP.

As the nexus of these terrorist organisations have grown larger, so has the ambition to destabilise the governments in the region. These groups have mostly paralysed local governments, imposed their own laws and enactments, and often committed resources including recruits in support of other groups and threatened peace and stability among various segments of the society. Moreover, ISIS has introduced a new concept in unconventional warfare. Its impetus has not only met with success but has enabled it to hold territories, have access to huge resources and have streams of volunteers joining the organisation. All these obviously have serious consequences in terms of counter-terrorism efforts, requiring deployment of additional security forces and counter-terrorism engagements.

Conclusion

The situation in Yemen and the greater Middle East is unlikely to improve soon. Given the ground conditions, airstrikes and scud attacks, there will unlikely be any shift in the balance of power both for Yemen and regional power blocs. The decapitation exercise is unlikely to have long term benefits without physically holding the ground gains or taking into confidence all pro-Yemeni tribes in the areas which are free from Houthis' influence (Global Security Organisations 2015). On the other hand, these measures could intensify internal conflicts and political turmoil and lead to shifts of allegiance within Yemeni leadership. It is also important to mention that the role of Houthis as a political force cannot be underestimated as they also enjoy some level of support among the public. Any dilution in their role would only degrade the political process in the country. Significantly, a number of Houthi forces are Shiites with closer ties to Hezbollah and any overexposure of Sunni-Shiite friction would lead to political anarchy not only in the area but could also add to the existing tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Under these circumstances, more country-to-country security partnership is important to prevent the derailment and dysfunction of the Yemeni state apparatus. Additionally, a long-term, sustained forward partnering strategy brokered by international community, especially taking Gulf Regional Council and Iran as stakeholders, would have more lasting impact than current aerial operations and drone strikes.

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Reconsidering the Theory and Practice of High Value Targeting

Paul Lushenko

As a counter-terrorism practice, high value targeting (HVT) has routinely been misunderstood and mischaracterised. This article examines five fallacies associated with the discourse and argues that, given the kinetic and inspirational momentum of the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS), HVT must remain an integral part of an overall counter-terrorism strategy together with initiatives against extremist narratives.

Introduction

High value targeting, or HVT, is a counter-terrorism practice that includes lethal strikes, direct action raids, and cyber operations designed to capture or kill adversarial personnel or assets (Harris 2014). The practice of high value targeting is predicated on the belief that the loss of key personnel or assets is capable of degrading a terrorist group's capabilities, leading to its eventual demise (Hardy and Lushenko 2012).

Scholarly literature is replete with pithy labels aimed at capturing the supposed essence of HVT. They include: assassination, intentional slaying, and extrajudicial killing. At the same time, critics argue that the practice of HVT is itself dubious and that it lacks moral and ethical purchase (Dershowitz 2002, 120). A counterpoint to this argument is necessary, which this article aims to do by providing a practitioner's perspective on the efficacy of counter-terrorism operations, particularly HVT. Based on operations conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2007 to 2013, this article argues that the discourse concerning HVT is mired with misunderstandings and mischaracterisations. Used properly, HVT could serve as an effective tool to pressure, leverage, or to desynchronise terrorist organisations and networks (Hardy and Lushenko 2012).

These effects provide security in hostile environments required for long-term counter-violent extremism (CVE) programmes designed to prevent continued radicalisation and recruitment of especially impressionable youth into terrorist groups (Gunaratna 2015, 4).

Defining the Threat

Following the 11 September 2001 (9/11) attacks, experts identified a new brand of terrorists that are arguably more violent, indiscriminate and transnational. They are also said to be better financed, better trained, more interested in acquiring and using weapons of mass destruction and more difficult to pre-empt (Howard 2003, 75-85). The idea of so-called 'new' terrorism helped propel the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq in 2003. Amid the expanded violence and chaos, coalition forces witnessed the emergence of a new breed of violent organisations. These included 'Al Qaeda in Iraq' (AQI), previously called Tawhid al Jihad, and the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), now referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) (Napoleoni 2014).

In the aftermath of U.S.-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) strikes in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda Central (AQC) and its regional affiliates, the Mullah Omar-led Afghan Taliban, staged themselves within Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) to attack coalition forces and Pakistan's military and police.

The Haqqani Network, a subsidiary of the Afghan Taliban, is the most lethal organisation in eastern Afghanistan. It operates in Khost, Paktia, and Paktika provinces to generate attacks against Kabul, the country's capital city (Rassler and Brown 2011). Given its knowledge of the terrain, the Haqqani also guides foreign fighters throughout eastern and northern Afghanistan. While remnants of AQC have operated throughout the north, these elements have sought the area's relative isolation more in the interest of consolidating and reorganising themselves rather than in the interest of establishing a new front (Lushenko 2010).

Also an outgrowth of the Afghan Taliban, the 'neo-Taliban' constituted a formidable threat within southern Afghanistan. Unlike the Afghan Taliban it is a composite of 'self-styled but poorly trained, fed, and clothed jihadists' and contains

> **" Used properly, HVT could serve as an effective tool to pressure, leverage, or to desynchronise terrorist organisations and networks. "**

very few ideologues, but innumerable criminals (Saikal 2011, 22). When combined, these traits enhanced the ISAF's ability to capture or kill insurgents through high value targeting.

Threats across Iraq and Afghanistan shared three characteristics. Firstly, the threat was generally ideologically motivated and ascribed to radical Salafism, designed to overthrow pro-western governments (Napoleoni 2014). Secondly, the threat was transnational. Thirdly, the threat maimed and killed for the sake of generating a psychological dividend which, surprisingly, remained at odds with the implementation of a more legitimate political authority. In this respect, ISIS' terrorism, which the group conceptualises as a state-building project, is unprecedented (Napoleoni 2014). Such relational hierarchy reverses common explanations of a terrorist network's calculation of the 'security-efficiency' trade-off and a coalition's attendant (in) ability to conduct counter-terrorism operations, including HVT. On the one hand, terrorist networks including ISIS often decentralise planning and operations in time and space to survive (Schmitt and Hubbard 2015). On the other hand, their dependence on the internet marks an area of vulnerability that counter-terrorists have exploited to find and fix their location to facilitate and mount lethal strikes, raids, or cyber operations (Harris 2014).

HVT and its Discontents

Critics contend that the decentralised nature of the threat accords resiliency to HVT (Jordan 2014; Cronin 2015). They also question the effectiveness and moral-ethical implications of particularly lethal strikes launched from Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPAs) or drones. David Kilcullen

postulates that drones create more enemies than they kill, given collateral damage, particularly civilian causalities (Kilcullen and Exum 2009). Likewise, Audrey Cronin argues counter-terrorism operations, including lethal strikes, threaten to substitute means for ends, a factor which results in the prolonging of a conflict. Selective killing of terrorists merely neutralises the symptoms but will not eliminate the causes of terrorism which might include political, economic, and social grievances arising from ineffective and unaccountable governance (Cronin 2013). At the same time, Christian Enemark contends that drone strikes have resulted in post-heroic warfare by providing pilots greater distance from, and therefore protection against, battlefield dangers not afforded in equal measure to the targets (Enemark 2013).

When combined, these critiques are thought to countermand the principles of *jus in bello* (justice in war) in just war theory that conditions how militaries should prosecute war (Nicolet 2015). They beg the question of whether drone operators are capable of differentiating between targets while safeguarding civilians.

Meanwhile, some proponents have reframed the debate about the merits of high value targeting by pointing to at least five fallacies associated with the current discourse.

Firstly, analyses regarding this counter-terrorism practice are often deterministic. This results from an over-reliance on theory that especially scholars demonstrate while interrogating the costs and benefits of HVT and from a surprising lack of knowledge regarding the art and science of managed violence. For example, Martin van Creveld argues that "when you fight terrorism, you become a terrorist" (Creveld 1998, 19). J. Paul de B. Taillon adds "one must use those same weapons and tactics belonging to the terrorists' inventory – psychology, stealth, speed, surprise, and cunning – against the terrorists themselves" (J. Paul de B. Taillon 2001, xiv). This view ignores the fact that these 'tactics' should be strictly a reflection of the principles of war that military leaders use.

Secondly, scholars often confuse HVT with strategy. Dubbing this 'Zero Dark 30,' (an allusion to the 2011 military raid on Al Qaeda leader, Osama bin Laden's compound in Pakistan that resulted in his death) Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster writes that the fallacy of confusing HVT with strategy "elevates an

> **" ...some proponents have reframed the debate about the merits of high value targeting by pointing to at least five fallacies associated with the current discourse. "**

important military capability, raiding, to the level of strategy" (McMaster 2015, 13). Policymakers and scholars must not confuse the relative ease of conducting especially lethal strikes and cyber operations for what these operations actually represent: tactics (Strachan 2013; Simpson 2012).

Thirdly, the current discourse overlooks that the application of HVT may cut across the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. As HVT is often equated with strategy, it is assumed that the practice only applies to the strategic level of war. Yet, the use of HVT in fact requires a commander to carefully calibrate his or her objectives and intended outcomes at the onset, given the circumstances, which indicates a dissonance between theory and practice.

Fourthly, HVT is seen as a practice that works only on a kinetic level. While a much cited 2008 RAND Corporation study acknowledged that military force was four times more likely to defeat terrorist groups as opposed to merely law enforcement efforts, it also emphasised policing as a necessary component of a successful counter-terrorism strategy (Lim 2014, 4). This means that disincentivising radicalisation and financial support to terrorists, as well as conducting cyber operations, also constitute HVT.

Finally, scholars often conflate decapitation with HVT. The former is routinely defined through analogy whereby removing the head of a snake from its body is akin to capturing or killing a terrorist group's senior leadership (Mahmood 2015, 25). The tendency to use both the terms – decapitation and HVT – interchangeably results from the assumption that the leadership represents the terrorist organisation's centre-of-

gravity (Johnston 2012, 53). In reality, HVT is more nuanced. Rather than being employed to simply pick-off terrorist leaders, HVT is designed to disrupt, destroy, or defeat a terrorist organisation through targeting its core functions that can include recruitment, fundraising, logistics, and attack wings.

Without greater operationally-informed study, scholars will continue to misunderstand and mischaracterise HVT as haphazard and aimless. The U.S. Army employs a sophisticated HVT model to pressure, leverage, or desynchronise enemy networks (Figure 1).

This model provides a common vocabulary and framework for calibrating the intended objectives and outcomes of HVT. It also enables commanders to operationalise HVT (Hardy and Lushenko 2012, 427).

> " ... **HVT is designed to disrupt, destroy, or defeat a terrorist organisation through targeting its core functions that can include recruitment, fundraising, logistics, and attack wings.** "

Figure 1: The HVT Model (Hardy and Lushenko 2012)

HVT in Practice: Iraq and Afghanistan

According to the HVT model in the previous page, the pressure method involves harassing the organisation and its members. The purpose is to complicate operations, force errors, and delay communications (Hardy and Lushenko 2012, 420). It is intended to disrupt the enemy through interrupting its operational capacity and tempo, formation or initiative.

The leverage method involves the capture or kill of facilitators, financiers or couriers. It enables coalition forces to destroy a network's functionality or damage it entirely. The goal is to cause maximum destruction so much so that the network can no longer perform any function or be restored to a usable condition without being rebuilt (Hardy and Lushenko 2012, 421).

The desynchronisation method, often referred to as decapitation, is the most visible and examined one. It involves capturing or killing a network's key leaders to disrupt or destroy the network. In some cases, it can defeat a network. The above forms the background to examine the degree of success with which the coalition forces implemented this framework in Iraq and Afghanistan, from 2007 to 2013.

In 2008, the author deployed to northern Iraq as a member of a Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF), where he served as a Targeting Officer charged with locating terrorists. He observed the JSOTF's implementation of the leverage and desynchronisation methodologies that enabled a direct action raid resulting in the death of Abu Qaswarah. Qaswarah was the second-in-command of AQI, and the senior leader in Northern Iraq (Hardy and Lushenko 2012, 422). Much like the death of Osama bin Laden, the task force identified Qaswarah's whereabouts by gaining a better understanding of the daily routine of his courier through intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance practices. Qaswarah died in a building in Mosul during a shootout with U.S. troops on 5 October, 2008. His death momentarily destroyed the network and imparted a sense of security that helped to consolidate the 'Anbar Awakening,' an alliance formed by 30 tribes in the Anbar Province to fight AQI militants (Londoño 2008). Spearheaded by the U.S. Army's 1st Armored Division in Ramadi, the seat of the insurgency, the awakening coincided with the counter-insurgency strategy instituted by the U.S.-led coalition's surge of troops. Some argue that this 'strategy' ultimately precipitated the end of the

> " The debate surrounding the (de) merits of HVT as a practice is misinformed. When employed to achieve objectives that are subordinate to and dictated by a strategy, HVT can disrupt, destroy, or defeat a terrorist organisation. "

ongoing insurgency in Iraq at the time (Nagl 2014).

In 2012, the author was deployed to the Panjwai District of southern Afghanistan as a member of a Combined Task Force. He served as the unit's Intelligence Officer responsible for finding the enemy to facilitate the commander's counter-insurgency campaign. The author observed that the unit implemented the pressure methodology that set the conditions for the 'Panjwai Awakening,' which lasted from February 2013 until April 2013. The neo-Taliban's wanton beating of a *mirab* (water purveyor) central to the agrarian economy catalysed the uprising. By employing 30,000 pounds of ordnance that killed 65 commanders, fighters, and facilitators, wounded 19 more, and resulted in no civilian causalities, the task force disrupted the neo-Taliban. This created a perception of safety and stability that empowered Afghans to reject the neo-Taliban. The lack of civilian causalities also countermands analysis that postulates the U.S. Army considers "civilian deaths as incidental damage – the unfortunate, accidental effects of war" (Suhrke 2015, 1).

Although the HVT model presents the methods discretely, the reality involves utilising all three and often simultaneously. The author observed the task force forge a partnership with a JSOTF in Panjwai. The former conducted lethal strikes to pressure the enemy while the latter executed

direct action raids to leverage and desynchronise the enemy. Such unity-of-effort resulted in the death of the neo-Taliban's Shadow District Governor and detention of his successor. This stalled the neo-Taliban's summer fighting plan entitled, "Sword of Allah."

Conclusion

The debate surrounding the (de) merits of HVT as a practice is misinformed. When employed to achieve objectives that are subordinate to and dictated by a strategy, HVT can disrupt, destroy, or defeat a terrorist organisation. Rather than discounting the utility of force against terrorist networks, research should address how force can be adapted to changing security environments to neutralise operational and tactical innovations by terrorist groups. The U.S. Army's identification of a new cyber domain of operations is expected to see novel HVT practices across all levels of warfare (Harris 2014).

HVT is also relevant with respect to the latest incarnation of new terrorism, ISIS. Given its impressive territorial gains and broadening appeal, Stephen Walt argues that international society is best served by conditioning itself to "live with" ISIS (Walt 2015). And yet, the stature and centrality of ISIS' supreme leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi – both a recognised theologian and radical – informs us that his removal is capable of at least disrupting the organisation. In the final analysis, destruction or defeat of ISIS will only be possible through the application of HVT in tandem with long-term CVE initiatives designed to address the core grievances of radicalised members. Policymakers and scholars should reconsider how to integrate high value targeting and counter-violent extremism programmes into an overall counter-terrorism strategy to arrest ISIS' kinetic and inspirational momentum (Wesley 2015).

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or Government.

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Doctrinal Differences between ISIS and Al Qaeda: An Account of Ideologues

Aida Arosoaie

Despite sharing a common religious orientation grounded in Salafi ideology, Al Qaeda and ISIS have different approaches when it comes to interpreting and implementing key concepts such as al-wala' wa al-bara', takfir and jihad. This article explores how Al Qaeda and ISIS use the doctrines through an examination of the works of four key ideologues: al Maqdisi, Abu Bakr Naji, Abu Musab al Suri and Ayman al Zawahiri.

Introduction

Ever since declaring the establishment of the Islamic State, the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) has made rapid strides to upstage Al Qaeda from the leadership position in the global jihadist movement. ISIS has frequently been described as more dangerous than Al Qaeda in terms of the threat it posits to a number of countries in the world. Although the group's strength, appeal and longevity have often been intensely debated, ISIS continues to be at the forefront of the jihadist movement.

Mainstream discourse attributes the resiliency of ISIS and its threat potential to the group's control of territory, its resources and its astute use of propaganda, especially through social media, which attracts a large number of fighters from diverse countries. While such strategies are different from Al-Qaeda's, experts and policymakers continue to neglect the divergences between the jihadi-Salafi principles of ISIS and Al Qaeda. This might lead to inadequate policies that deal with ISIS as a continuum of the threat from Al Qaeda, and would prolong rather than weaken, ISIS' momentum.

Based on a critical examination of jihadi-Salafi principles, this article seeks to unravel the factors that give ISIS the edge over Al Qaeda among its

community of supporters. The main argument of this article is based on the hypothesis that while ISIS shares the same jihadi-Salafi ideology the two groups differ in terms of its application (Wiktorowicz 2006). This is most evident in respect of key Islamic concepts, namely, al-wala' wa al-bara', takfir and jihad.

The concept of al-wala' wa al-bara', translated as loyalty and disavowal, focuses on enhancing the solidarity among the individuals of a specific group, while at the same time setting a clear distinction between members of another group. Essentially, the concept tends to disavow individuals on the basis of whether they are good or bad. The jihadi-Salafi can then excommunicate the individual through takfir (excommunication) and label them kufar (non-believers), which then legalises the spilling of their blood.

Purpose of Jihad

Jihad from the Perspective of ISIS

For jihadi-Salafis, jihad is a contentious concept in itself focusing predominantly on the physical dimension of struggle. In this regard, both ISIS and Al Qaeda differ in their views on jihad. More specifically, in an audio statement issued in May 2014, Abu Muhammad al Adnani, ISIS' spokesperson, denounced Al Qaeda Central (AQC) as a deceiving organisation. Most importantly, he criticised AQC based on the latter's lack of a coherent purpose and the unwillingness of the group to establish an Islamic state. Moreover, al Adnani challenged the legitimacy of AQC based on the fact that it does not possess territory (Gartenstein-Ross and Jocelyn 2015). This is an important point of contention in the jihadi-Salafi world, as territory is perceived, by some, to be the most important means of gaining legitimacy. Arguments around this issue have best been captured in the work of some ideologues who grew to prominence in the post-70s period.

A key thinker useful for understanding ISIS' doctrinal application is al Maqdisi, whose real name is Abu Muhammad 'Asim b. Muhammad b. Tahir al Barqawi. He was born in a small village on the West Bank, Barqa, and later moved to Kuwait. Al Maqdisi fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan but finally settled in Jordan as an ideologue, where he became the mentor of Abu Musab al Zarqawi – the founder of Al Qaeda in

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Iraq (AQI). Writing on the issue of jihad, Al Maqdisi explained that jihad takes two main forms according to the purpose of the fighting: *qital al-nikaya* and *qital al-tamkin* (Wagemakers 2012, p. 83). The former is carried out with the sole purpose of hurting the enemy and his interests, while the latter is concerned with consolidating one's presence within a territory.

At the time of his writings, back in the 1980s and 1990s, al Maqdisi was deploring the lack of mujahideen seeking to carry out *qital al-tamkin*. According to Joas Wagemaker's reading of al Maqdisi's perspective, al Maqdisi felt that there were far too many fighters hurting the enemy, but there was a severe dearth of those who would grab and consolidate their power with the purpose of establishing an Islamic State (Wagemakers 2012, p. 84). As such, al Maqdisi's preferred form of jihad is one akin to the traditional conceptions of jihad, which was organised and state-centric. Although his relationship with Abu Musab al Zarqawi in the Jordanian prison was short and tumultuous, the latter seemed to have been inspired by al Maqdisi's thoughts. Moreover, the reorganisation of ISIS in 2010 by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi seemed to indicate an increased focus on the practice of *qital al-tamkin.* Although uncertain whether he did so based on al Maqdisi's writings or not, al Baghdadi started focusing more on consolidating his power and his expanding influence. ISIS' focus on power consolidation and expansion of influence distinguishes ISIS' and AQC's main strategy. AQC's main strategy, according to Lia Brynjar's reading, is focused mainly on hurting the enemy (Lia 2008).

Another important ideologue whose ideas seem to have influenced ISIS strategists is Abu Bakr Naji. There is very little information regarding him, with some people even saying that "Naji" is an appellation referring to a committee (Polk 2013). According to Polk, the most renowned account of Abu Bakr Naji can be surmised in his book, *The Management of Savagery* (*Idarah at-Tawhish*) (MacCants 2006). In his writing, Abu Bakr Naji advocated, among others, that jihad must be fought with the purpose of establishing a state and he envisaged a three stage-approach to this end.

Abu Bakr Naji emphasised the importance of seizing an area which would be fairly isolated from the enemy state's authoritative capacity so as to give the mujahideen a stronghold and a potential legitimation link on which they can capitalise and expand (Polk 2013). Regarding the management of savagery, the first stage conceived by Abu Bakr Naji was the one of *vexation*. During this stage, the mujahideen were meant to conduct simultaneous and small-scale attacks resulting in a weakening of the enemy's strength. This would ideally result in a complete disruption of governing activities and legitimation links between the population of that specific territory and the state's structures.

The second stage was the *spread of savagery* which resembles guerrilla warfare and serves the purpose of expanding the mujahideen's sphere of influence.

The third stage, namely the *administration of the savagery*, comprises establishing the foundations for the administrative and governing institutions. Simply put, the third stage was directly related to both the setting up of the physical infrastructure and the governing superstructure of an Islamic state, while creating the legitimacy to facilitate the tapping of physical and human resources (Polk 2013, p. 7).

Abu Bakr Naji's ideas are seen to have an influence on ISIS, as evidenced by the manner in which ISIS capitalised on the conflict in Syria by gradually building up its stronghold in Raqqa.

Jihad from the Perspective of Al Qaeda

Al Qaeda's strategy on jihad has been articulated most prominently by Abu Musab al Suri. Abu Musad al Suri participated in the Islamist uprising against the Syrian regime in the 1980s as a

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member of Al Taliah al-Muqatilah. Al Taliah al Muqatilah was a breakaway group of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. The group was formed following the massive crackdown on the latter in the aftermath of the 1982 Hama Uprising. In 1987, he met with Abdullah Azzam, one of the co-founders of Al Qaeda al Sulhah, which later became Al Qaeda. According to Lia Brynjar, Abu Musab al-Suri's most renowned book, *Call to Global Islamic Resistance* (*Da'wat al-muqawamah al-islamiyyah al-'alamiyyah*) spells out the guideline for a decentralised jihad, which is believed to have influenced Al Qaeda's strategy.

As articulated by Lia Brynjar, al Suri perceived that the typical jihadi organisation, such as the one he was a part of during the Syrian uprising, was an Achilles heel for the jihadi movement due to its inherently hierarchical structure (Lia 2008). This was the basis for al Suri's calls for jihad carried out individually and without a specific battlefield. Abu Musab al Suri advocated for jihad waged throughout two schools – the one of Individual and Small-Cell jihad and the one of Open Fronts. More explicitly, jihad must be carried out by self-contained autonomous cells and there should be no specific battlefield, but it should rather be fought openly. By extension, he argued that the difficulty of openly waging jihad without a battlefield required that jihad be carried out as individual acts of terrorism. This has been coined as Abu Musab al Suri's most important idea, rooted in his famous phrase *nizam, la tanzim* (system, not organisation) (Lia 2008). Abu Musab al Suri argued that the leadership of a group should only provide basic guidance, while the small, individual cells should be linked by a "common aim, a doctrinal program and a very

comprehensive (self-) educational program" (Lia 2008). This is reflected in Al Qaeda's loose terrorist networks which are spread out across the globe under a broadly unifying ideology.

Near Enemy versus Far Enemy

The distinction between near and far enemy, popularised by Fawaz Gerges, implies the transition of jihadi-Salafis' focus from waging jihad against Muslim apostate governments (the near enemy) to fighting occupying powers such as the Soviet Union and the U.S. (the far enemy) (Gerges 2005). In the case of ISIS, defining the enemy is directly related to their goal, namely, the consolidation of power and the creation of an Islamic state. As such, the focus of its jihad is on vexing and defeating any enemy that impedes its objective, be it the near or far enemy. Looking all the way back to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's period, in addition to the U.S. troops – considered as the near enemy due to their direct occupation of Iraq – the Shiites were also targeted as the most important enemy due – from ISIS' perspective - to their seizure of the governmental apparatus in Iraq.

Identifying the enemy for ISIS runs along the same lines put forward by al Maqdisi in his book Millat Ibrahim. He argued that the apostasy of Muslim rulers is considered worse than the "original unbelief" of, for example, Jews in Israel. In support of his argument, Maqdisi interpreted a verse from the Quran (*O you who have believed, fight those adjacent to you of the disbelievers and let them find in you harshness. And know that Allah is with the righteous* - 9:123) to mean that the nearest enemy is the first to be attacked (Wagemakers 2012, p. 71). Complementing al-Maqdisi's identification of the enemy was Abu Bakr Naji's own interpretation. Although he did not specifically address this issue, this could be discerned from his idea that jihad should be waged in order for the consolidation of power. However, Abu Bakr Naji did specifically indicate the vexing of the U.S. due to its direct occupation of Iraq. He advocated for vexing the U.S. in such a way that its collapse would emerge from within. Specifically, he mentioned that the democratic nature of the U.S. makes it susceptible to internal conflicts over its inherent foreign policy inconsistencies and its interference in the Middle East, with the illegitimate intervention and occupation of Iraq being one example (Fishman 2008).

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The ideas put forward by Ayman al Zawahiri and Abu Musab al Suri stand in direct contrast with the arguments of Al-Maqdisi. According to Fawaz Gerges, it was Ayman al Zawahiri himself, under the influence of bin Laden, who strongly urged the mujahideen worldwide to abandon religious nationalist camps and refocus their attention towards fighting the far enemy instead of the near enemy (Gerges 2005, p. 120). Initially, as a member of Tanzeem al-Jihad in Egypt in 1970s – a Salafi offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood – Ayman al-Zawahiri was fully focused on the removal of the then President of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, and in its place the installation of an Islamic regime. However, following his trip to Afghanistan and his participation in the Afghan jihad, Ayman al Zawahiri refocused on fighting the occupying powers, which reflected a shift in his perspective (Gerges 2005).

Similarly, Abu Musab al Suri's arguments in his Call to Global Islamic Resistance were based on the idea that the mujahideen and jihadi groups must adapt to the new post-Cold War conflict environment. This new environment, according to him, was defined by the increasing international anti- and counter-terrorism cooperation and the transition from indirect occupation, understood as imperialistic influence – to direct occupation of Muslim lands (Lia 2008).

Under such circumstances, Abu Musab al Suri argued that the purpose of consolidating power and waging an Islamic revolution in one single country must be postponed until the far enemy, namely the U.S. and its allies, had been defeated. The core priority of the mujahideen became "repelling the invading intruders and assailants" (Lia 2008). Although a core principle of Al Qaeda's strategy, attacking the far enemy does not come out as a priority for ISIS.

Al-wala' wa al-bara' and Winning Hearts and Minds

Both groups agree on the necessity of implementing al-wala' wa al-bara' (loyalty and disavowal), but they diverge on how is it to be done. Moreover, from a strategic point of view, the looser the implementation of al-wala's wa-l-bara' the less successful will the group be in winning the hearts and minds of the people. The most relevant example is the excommunication of Shiites practiced by ISIS and its predecessor, AQI which, according to AQC, was detrimental to winning the hearts and minds of Iraqis. Abu Musab al Zarqawi put forward a strategy of directly targeting Shiites, justifying his actions by means of theological arguments. He cited a number of Sunni ideologues, including Ibn Taymiyyah, to portray the Shiites as un-Islamic. He also offered historical arguments which depicted the Safavid dynasty as a "dagger that stabbed Islam and the Muslims in the back" and the Shiites as traitors due to the role they played in the Mongol invasion of Baghdad in 1258 (Bunzel 2015). Based on these arguments, Zarqawi concluded that the Shiites were the primary enemies of Sunni Islam, much worse than the U.S.

Abu Musab al Zarqawi's choice of doctrines, and by extension ISIS', did not correspond with Al Qaeda's strategy. Initially his mentor, al Maqdisi, in 2004 sent a letter to Abu Musab al Zarqawi criticising his extreme tactical brutality and his inconsiderate practice of takfir. The main argument al Maqdisi provided was that his practice of takfir alienated fellow Sunnis and caused hurt to the image of Islam (Wagemakers 2012, p. 47). Similarly critical of Abu Musab al Zarqawi's actions was Ayman al Zawahiri, who also emphasised the need to win the hearts and minds of the Sunni population. In a letter he wrote to Abu Musab al Zarqawi in 2005, he mentioned that "Muslim admirers amongst the common folk are wondering about [Zarqawi's]

> **" ISIS strategically capitalises on the lack of a universally-agreed Islamic eschatological document… and has resorted to marketing its own End of Time narrative in order to garner support from the Muslim masses. "**

attacks on the Shia, and do not understand what could drive Al Qaeda in Iraq to perform beheadings, destroy mosques and other such acts of inhumanity" (Roggio 2005). Ayman al Zawahiri specifically mentioned in his letter that he considered the support of the Muslim masses, i.e., the legitimacy of the Sunni population, the most important asset for a mujahideen in carrying out jihad (Al-Zawahiri 2005). Nevertheless, the indiscriminate brutality and unfounded targeting of Shiites carried out by Abu Musab al Zarqawi and nowadays ISIS, run contrary to the arguments of Ayman al Zawahiri. Such tactics are perceived to have reduced the support of the Muslim masses.

However, ISIS also actively sought to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim people. In contrast with Al-Qaeda's strategy of prudent rhetoric and considerate targeting, ISIS strategically capitalises on the lack of a universally-agreed Islamic eschatological document (in comparison to the Christian Book of Revelations, which projects an End of Time narrative) and has resorted to marketing its own End of Time narrative in order to garner support from the Muslim masses (Fromson et al. 2015). In this sense, the choice to name its magazine Dabiq is not a coincidence. Dabiq, a city near the Syrian-Turkish border, is mentioned in the Hadith as the site of the end of time battle when a Mahdi (the guided one) will be sent to fight the dajjal (the Islamic equivalent of the anti-Christ). In fact, constructing its discourse around the End of Time battle serves as one of the group's most

successful recruiting tools, serving as a source for consolidating the group's legitimacy in the eyes of Muslims (Saman 2015).

Conclusion

The accounts of four key ideologues, al Maqdisi, Abu Bakr Naji, Abu Musab al Suri and Ayman al Zawahiri have provided revealing information on differences in how the two groups implement the aqida (creed). The term aqida refers to the beliefs and doctrines which Salafis subscribe to (Wagemakers 2012, p. 8).

In summary, three important differences between Al Qaeda's and ISIS' doctrines stand out. The first is the divergent purposes that the two groups attach to jihad. While ISIS prioritises the consolidation of power, Al Qaeda places more emphasis on hurting the enemy. The second difference is related to identifying the enemy. While for Al Qaeda, the focus is on the far enemy, for ISIS the distinction is rather blurred, with the group focusing more on the near enemy. The third difference is related to the groups' strategies of practicing al-wala' wa al-bara' and winning the hearts and minds of the people. Al Qaeda prefers to remain more prudent and diligent, while ISIS advocates a more violent behaviour, capitalising on the eschatological narratives in order to gain the support of Muslim masses.

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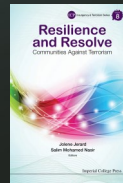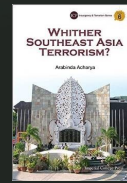
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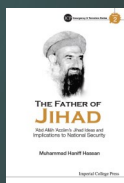Rohan Gunaratna and Douglas Woodall (eds) (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015)
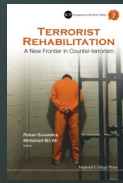
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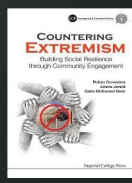
Resilience and Resolve
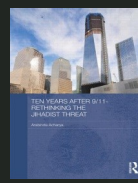Jolene Jerard and Salim Mohamed Nasir (Imperial College Press, 2015)

Whither Southeast Asia Terrorism
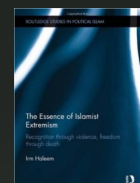Arabinda Acharya (Imperial College Press, 2015)

The Father of Jihad
Muhammad Haniff Hassan (Imperial College Press, 2014)

Countering Extremism
Rohan Gunaratna, Salim Mohamed Nasir and Jolene Jerard (Imperial College Press, 2013)

Ten Years After 9/11: Rethinking the Jihadist Threat
Arabinda Acharya (Routledge, 2013)

The Essence of Islamist Extremism
Irm Haleem (Routledge, 2011)

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Global Pathfinder is a one-stop repository for information on current and emerging terrorist threats from the major terrorism affected regions of the world. It is an integrated database containing comprehensive profiles of terrorist groups, terrorist personalities, terrorist and counter-terrorist incidents as well as terrorist training camps. This includes profiles from emerging hubs of global terrorism affecting the security of the world, as well as the deadliest threat groups in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Caucasus. The database also contains analyses of significant terrorist attacks in the form of terrorist attack profiles. For further inquiries regarding subscription and access to Global Pathfinder, please contact Ng Suat Peng at isngsp@ntu.edu.sg.