



Global Salafi-Jihadism Ideology: The “Soft Power” of the Enemy

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Introduction: What is the Current Terrorist Threat?

Members of the military and national security apparatus focused on combating terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State must understand the driving force behind the networks: the global Salafi-Jihadist ideology. From a grand strategy perspective, China, Russia, Iran, and a nuclear-capable North Korea can pose greater, long-term existential threats to the United States and its interests abroad. While it should never lose sight of these threats, the national security apparatus must also continue to address the current threat destabilizing most of the Middle East and North Africa, spilling over into Europe, and finding its way onto American soil. Its magnetic appeal stems from an inspirational and deeply resonant message which attracts a specific, yet substantial portion of the international Muslim population.

In December 2014, the Special Operations Command-Central (SOCCENT), published a report providing a threat assessment of the Islamic State, also known as ISIL, ISIS, or DA'ISH. The report made a problematic claim in the preface that the U.S. had already started to solve the problem before it even understood what the problem was or where it came from.¹ Despite being five years later, there are many in the military and intelligence community focused on counterterrorism who still do not understand the ideology behind the threat.

Joseph Nye, the creator of the term “soft power,” defines it as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies.”² America can measure the “tangible” capabilities and power of the Islamic State and other global Salafi-Jihadist organizations including manpower, finances, equipment, and territorial control. But the U.S. and its allies have yet to fully grasp and address the “intangible soft power” of the Islamic State, a demonstrably significant weakness and vulnerability in its strategy to confront this enemy.³

Defining the ideology behind the threat is foundational to understanding its two primary modern, militant manifestations: Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. While both seek the establishment of a global Islamic caliphate, their vision for the caliphate and the means through which it is realized vary. Al-Qaeda derives much of its inspiration from Sayyid Qutb and the Muslim

¹ “Multi-Method Assessment of ISIL,” *Social Science Assessment*, December 2014, published December 2014, accessed 02 May 2017, http://socialscience.net/docs/SMA_SOCCENT_White.Paper_Final_Dec2014.pdf, 1.

² Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2004), x.

³ “Multi-Method Assessment of ISIL,” 1.

Brotherhood and remains focused on the “far enemy” of the United States, arguably making it a more long-term threat to the homeland. The Islamic State derives its inspiration from Ibn Taymiyya and the Wahhabist tradition of the original 18th-century Saudi state based on the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792). It holds a stricter interpretation of religious texts and a deeper desire to emulate early Muslim ancestors, making their tactics and methods appear more medieval than Al-Qaeda. While maintaining an external attack network, their primary focus remains on the “near enemy” of Middle East regimes, targets proven vulnerable due to populations susceptible to its effective messaging, often taking place online. Though their methods and targets vary, their organizations are both rooted in Salafist ideology.

To counter the entire global Salafi-Jihad movement, one must understand the ideology guiding the organizations before deciding how to properly address the threat. The ideology provides long-term structure and justification for the global jihadi movement, something not easily countered with military action, especially when carried out by external, Western forces. **The Salafi-Jihadist ideology is the intangible “soft power” of the adversary, which violently contests globalization and the international system, and fuels the continued expansion of the global jihadist movement through selective citation of Islamic texts, sensationally coercive methods of jihadist groups, and dissemination of ideas on the Internet.**

Defining Salafism and Its Importance

Foundational to understanding the threat is knowing the meaning behind key terms associated with the global Salafi-Jihadist ideology. Salafism is often conflated or misinterpreted in texts and publications. Literally, the word *Salafis* means “pious forefathers,” which is most often understood to mean “the first three generations of Muslims.”⁴ The foundation for this statement can be found in *Sahih* al-Bukhari’s compilation, which quotes the Prophet Muhammad as saying, “The best of my community [i.e. Muslims] are my generation, then those who come after them and then those who follow them.”⁵ Proximity to the Prophet Muhammad in the temporal sense matters in that the saying and actions of the early companions of Muhammad carry greater relevance and authority. Of course, the *hadiths* (a written collection of traditions based on the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), and principally the compilations of al-Bukhari and Muslim are

⁴ Graeme Wood, *The Way of the Strangers: Encounters with the Islamic State*, (New York, NY: Random House, 2017), 6.

⁵ Bernard Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,” in *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009), 34.

held in highest regard.⁶ And how these hadiths were understood by the early community of Muslims and acted upon matters greatly. This is essential to understand because Muslims, including Salafis, do not derive their religious beliefs and practices exclusively from the Quran, but also from the *hadith*, making its contents just as important for Islamic theology and law. The *hadiths* are also the locus from which Salafi-Jihadists derive many of the violent scriptural references which they use as justification for their methodology and behavior.

Its religious backing is one of the main appeals of Salafism for its adherents, including the Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Their legitimacy is strictly reliant upon the “revealed texts” of the Quran and *hadith*.⁷ The highly canonical and textual foundations upon which Salafists define themselves makes the claims of those who argue that the Islamic State and al-Qaeda are “un-Islamic” both misleading and inaccurate. What principally defines Salafi-Jihadist groups is theology not politics. Salafis are “religious and social reformers who are engaged in creating and reproducing particular forms of authority and identity, both personal and communal . . . [and who] define [their] reformist project first and foremost through creedal tenets (i.e., a theology).”⁸ Professor Bernard Haykel, in a written testimony prepared for the U.S. Senate stated, “to ignore the Islamic background and content of the Islamic State’s ideology or the material factors that led to its rise is to fail in the scholarly enterprise and to fall short in providing the policy maker, the student, *and* the public with an adequate understanding of the global phenomenon of jihadism.”⁹ Their ideology undeniably affects the politics and the economy of a state or region they control, but for them, it is a positive externality tied to their primary, religious mission.

Salafis seek to purify their faith and bring back their idea of a true version of Islam which is both literal and strict.¹⁰ They claim to be part of an exclusive group mentioned in another *hadith* and which is referred to as *al-ta’ifa al-mansura* (the victorious group) and *al-firqa al-najiya* (the saved sect).¹¹ The Salafist ideology upholds certain claims which drive their behavior and practices including: returning the faith to the image of the first generations of Muslims, a strong emphasis

⁶ Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,” 34.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸ Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,” 34-35.

⁹ Bernard Haykel, “The History and Ideology of the Islamic State,” prepared for U.S. Senate hearing titled “Inside the Mind of ISIS: Understanding Its Goals and Ideology to Better Protect the Homeland,” *U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs*, January 20, 2016, accessed 03 May 2017, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/hearings/inside-the-mind-of-isis-understanding-its-goals-and-ideology-to-better-protect-the-homeland>.

¹⁰ Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,” 34-35.

¹¹ Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.

on *tawhid* (oneness of God), fighting *shirk* (polytheism) and *kuffar* (infidels), claiming the Quran and *hadith* as the only true sources of deriving authority, purifying the faith by eliminating *bida`* (reprehensible innovations), and advocating that the Quran and *sunna* (teachings, deeds, and behavior of the Prophet Muhammad who is deemed to be the perfect Muslim) are sufficient enough to guide the life of any Muslim, anywhere, anytime.¹² By drawing literal guidance from religious text and the Prophet Muhammad's example, Salafists attempt to proliferate a revivalist lifestyle through a redemptive philosophy of "progression through regression . . . based around an idealised version of Islam that enshrines both authenticity and purity."¹³ While all Salafists believe in this philosophy, there are different *manhaj* (methods) to realize the vision, which vary greatly on the spectrum of action, from quietist non-violence to extreme medieval brutality.¹⁴

Salafists as Purists and Quietists

Salafis, while united in the tenets which make up their ideology, are often divided on the execution of their vision. In a 2006 article in *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Quintan Wiktorowicz argues the division of Salafists consists of three camps: "purists, politics, and jihadis."¹⁵ While the three groups share a religious creed, their community of adherents span the spectrum of methods to propagate and enforce the creed and pure form of Islam. The breadth of adherents is wide enough "to include such diverse figures as Osama bin Laden and the Mufti of Saudi Arabia."¹⁶ More broadly, Professor Bernard Haykel argues there are only two types of Salafis, the quietist, apolitical types who are obedient to the state rulers of their country and their authority, and do not directly engage in politics or even political discussion. The other type, the activist, incorporates both the non-violent political activists of the Muslim Brotherhood and Sahwa and the violent militants, or jihadis, who view jihad merely as another form of *da`wa* (propagation of the faith).¹⁷

The first group, known as the "purists," devote their time to "nonviolent methods of propagation, purification, and education . . . [viewing] politics as a diversion that encourages

¹² Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," 38-39.

¹³ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵ Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 29, (2006), 208.

¹⁶ Wiktorowicz, 207.

¹⁷ Professor Bernard Haykel, interview by author, Princeton, NJ, May 03, 2017.

deviancy.”¹⁸ Critics of Wiktorowicz object to the term “purists,” arguing all Salafists view themselves as such, and instead, prefer to call the first group as “quietists.”¹⁹ These typically non-violent Salafists focus their efforts on the religious matters of their beliefs pertaining to the individual, society, and culture, modeling themselves after the *ulama* (religious clerics) in Saudi Arabia, who rarely involve themselves in politics.²⁰ Instead, the quietists, especially the *ulama* in Saudi Arabia, serve as advisors to the royal family but are rarely directly involved in politics themselves.²¹ And when they are, it tends to be to rubber stamp the policies of the government. They see themselves as “the exclusive guardians of the traditions inherited from *al-salaf al-salih* (first generations of Muslims),” and believe the “authenticity and power of this tradition were guaranteed by an uninterrupted chain of transmission,” of which they claim to be currently holding the mantle.²²

Rather than be directly involved in politics, they focus their efforts on the prevention of *fitna* (great discord), or “the source of chaos and destruction and the main obstacle to salvation.”²³ The *ulama* issue *fatwas* (non-binding opinions) providing guidance on topics involving social, cultural, and in rare circumstances, political issues under the guise of preventing chaos and division within their country. While they attempt to remain “strictly religious actors,” it is important to note the *ulama* see their work of “preserving the unity and power of the royal house [as a] religious duty.”²⁴ Therefore, while not intervening often in a direct manner, the religious clerics provide government with religious backing and legitimacy.

The union of Wahhabi-Salafist clerics and the Saudi government is often what the extremists on the opposite end of the Salafist spectrum criticize as being corrupt. Jihadis and politicians paint the clerics and quietists as being “lackeys” for the House of Sa’ud rather than an independent and authoritative religious body. Conversely, Salafis in this category disagree with the politicians, mainly in the politicization of their practices, which as participants in politics stemming from the

¹⁸ Wiktorowicz, 208.

¹⁹ Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone, eds., *Salafism After the Arab Awakening: Contending with People’s Power*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 11.

²⁰ Professor Bernard Haykel, interview by author, Princeton, NJ, May 03, 2017.

²¹ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 10.

²² Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 4.

²³ Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 124.

²⁴ Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 125.

Westphalian system and European influence, are viewed as illegitimate in their practices.²⁵ Like Sayyid Qutb's writings, their involvement in fighting for social justice and participating in elections makes them misguided in their means since these ideas are man-made and not derived from God and Islamic texts—they are therefore illegitimate.

Politicos: Islamist Activism and the Muslim Brotherhood

The second group, the *politicos*, also known as *al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Awakening) in Saudi Arabia, are mostly a manifestation of the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist activist group started in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna in Egypt as a response to the fall of the Ottoman Empire, its caliphate, and increased Western influence in the Muslim world.²⁶ The reformists of the Muslim Brotherhood under al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, sought to achieve two ends through their organization: "to fight against foreign occupation and to work for the establishment of an Islamic state that would apply *sharia* (Islamic law)."²⁷ Under the banner of Islamism, or Islamic activism, the *politicos* are also known as *harakis* (activists) in the region. They differentiate themselves from the quietists by being rejectionists of the local and national rulers who do not subscribe to their version of Islam, including the methods and practices of Salafism. The Islamists resist their rulers and attempt to undermine their authority.²⁸ The political activists are "more directly engaged with the political process, lobbying and campaigning for organic change in accordance with Islamic precepts."²⁹ In the mid 20th century, dictators and authoritarian regimes across the region persecuted the different factions of the Muslim Brotherhood for their resistance. Many fled their countries and wound up in Saudi Arabia where the activists flourished from the mid 1950s to the early 1990s.

The competing ideologies of Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism came to define much of the conflict of the "Arab Cold War" in the region beginning in 1957.³⁰ As the members of the

²⁵ David Commins, "From Wahhabi to Salafi," in *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic, and Religious Change*, eds. Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer, and Stephane Lacroix, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 164-165.

²⁶ Stephane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, trans. George Holoch, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 38.

²⁷ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 38.

²⁸ Cavatorta and Merone, *Salafism After the Arab Awakening*, 13.

²⁹ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 10.

³⁰ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 40.

Brotherhood sought refuge in Saudi Arabia, the government recruited them to combat their former governments and the Pan-Arab nationalist movement. The Saudi government and *ulama* viewed it as a larger threat to their survival than Islamic activism. King Faysal realized the need to establish deliberate infrastructure to combat ideologies and radical groups that espoused nationalist and socialist agendas. Significant investments from Saudi petrodollars went to the Saudi education system. Islamic organizations including the Muslim World League and *dawa* (Islamic propagation) infrastructure such as charities, camps, and *jama'at* (social networks) focused on the development of Saudi youth.³¹

Islamist activists from the Muslim Brotherhood filled the expanding ranks of the faculty of universities, summer camps, extracurricular organizations, and the *jama'at*, including Muhammad Qutb, the younger brother of Sayyid Qutb. Since the establishment of Riyadh University in 1957, the Brotherhood utilized the faculty on campuses to establish a “stronghold” in the Kingdom and strategically placed themselves, aside from the religious establishment of Saudi Arabia, in the most directly influential positions to conduct “Islamic modernization” with the next generation of Saudis.³² While the *ulama* still controlled the teaching of the Salafi creed and tradition, the Brothers took upon themselves the responsibility of indoctrinating the new generation with an “Islamic culture” defined by the Muslim Brotherhood ideology, under the guise of the Sahwa.

Members of this generation of Sahwa tutelage later became some of the staunchest opponents to the religious and political establishments in the Kingdom and left the politico camp to either join or found jihadist organizations. For example, a faculty member of the King Abd al-Aziz University in 1981 was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood from Palestine, Abdullah Azzam.³³ He would later go on to lead the Services Bureau in the fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan and lay the groundwork for the jihadi terrorist organization, Al-Qaeda. It was during Azzam’s time as a professor in Saudi Arabia where he would first cross paths with Osama bin Laden, a student influenced by Azzam and Muhammad Qutb’s teachings during a required Islamic culture course.³⁴ The relationship between Azzam and bin Laden shows how adherents of Salafism do not always peg themselves to a specific location on the Salafi spectrum, rather serving as a sliding scale for

³¹ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 42-43.

³² *Ibid.*, 43.

³³ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁴ The last three paragraphs were adapted from a reflection paper written by the author, “Importing the Muslim Brotherhood: Creation of the ‘Sahwa’ in Saudi Arabia” (NES 552: History and Society of Modern Arabia, Princeton University, 2017) and published on *The Havok Journal* website, 27 April 2017, <http://havokjournal.com/world/middle-east/importing-muslim-brotherhood-creation-sahwa-saudi-arabia/>.

opportunists and those seeking to tailor the ideology to legitimize the means to fit their own political goals and desired end state.³⁵

Politicos have a history of resorting to violence when their activism and non-violent resistance fails to yield desired results. The Muslim Brotherhood is a classic example. What started as political activism evolved into a hybrid terrorist organization with both a political and military wing participating in political violence against its opponents. Splinters of the Muslim Brotherhood, including Palestinian Hamas and Egyptian Takfir wal Hijra, were often those who believed the original organization was not extreme enough or too soft in their action, becoming adherents of the more militant/violent, third category: global Salafi-Jihadist

Global Salafi-Jihadists: Current and Future Threat

The Salafi-Jihadist ideology began its modern global proliferation during the decade of the Soviet-Afghan War from 1979-1989. Affectionately calling themselves *mujahedeen* (freedom fighters), jihadis came from around the Muslim world to fight in Afghanistan. This conflict “functioned as a dangerous incubator by exposing Saudi Salafis (and others) to the radical and politicized teachings of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and related splinter groups . . . in a context of military training and warfare . . . [receiving] their political training on the battlefield.”³⁶ The confluence of jihadis conducting “on the job training” not only gave them experience and increased knowledge in their tradecraft, but legitimacy and a robust network of connections moving forward. Claiming to be a *mujahedeen* veteran in the victorious struggle repelling the Soviet *kuffar* (infidels) from Muslim territory garnered a respected status in jihadi circles. More importantly, they believed their efforts unilaterally defeated a great power, validated their ideology, and thought future victories could be replicated.

As far as how they deviate from the quietists and activists, Salafi-Jihadists, are “violent-rejectionists [who] are irreconcilably estranged from the state, regarding it as a heretical and artificial unit.”³⁷ Salafi-Jihadists do not typically disagree with the purists or quietists on religious piety and knowledge of Islam. However, they do view them as misleading in their messaging and hypocritical for supporting the Saudi government, specifically its decision to allow U.S. forces into

³⁵ Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” 216.

³⁶ Ibid., 225.

³⁷ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 11.

the Arabian Peninsula to defend against Saddam Hussein after he invaded Kuwait in 1990. This was one of the main issues which drove Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda out of the realm of the politicians and into the spotlight as the leader of the Salafi-Jihadist ideology in the 1990s. Bin Laden's "Declaration of War" against the United States in 1996 drew absolute "red lines" for their cause and justified future violence against their targets, including U.S. embassies, USS Cole, World Trade Center and the Pentagon.³⁸ He later elaborated on their methods and goals with the publication of the "Al-Qaeda Creed and Path" in 2003.³⁹ While Al-Qaeda arguably did much for the global Salafi-Jihadist movement, other organizations followed in its wake and built on its methods and creed in scope and scale, including Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and the Islamic State.

Global Salafi-Jihadists view the entire Westphalian system of international relations as a "heterodox affront to Islam whereby temporal legislation usurps God's sovereignty . . . therefore [the system] needs radical overhaul and reordering while its agents must be confronted."⁴⁰ Sayyid Qutb, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, became a principal ideologue of the narrative painting Muslims as victims of a corrupt, materialistic, secular society created by the West and steeped in ignorance of divine guidance (*hidaya*), and as such having lapsed into a state of *jahiliyyah* (ignorant of God and idolatrous).⁴¹ The exclusive ideology of the Salafi-Jihadist cannot coexist within the current global political framework which they believe to be illegitimate. Sayyid Qutb viewed the United States as the embodiment of Satan, where he is "neither an imperialist nor an exploiter. He is a seducer, 'the insidious tempter who whispers in the hearts of men.'"⁴² Qutb saw the influence of the U.S. as the root cause of the problem deserving of jihadi aggression, which is echoed by groups that follow his teachings. These jihadi terrorist organizations within the Salafist ideology currently pose the greatest threat to the stability of the Middle East and to U.S. interests in the region.

Qutb's declarations in *Milestones* renders liberalism, democracy, and any government adhering to these ideologies *haram* (forbidden). He stated, the jihadi's "foremost objective is to change the practices of this [*jahili*] society . . . which is fundamentally at variance with Islam."⁴³ Qutb believed "no political system or material power should put hindrances in the way of preaching Islam . . . If someone does this, then it is the duty of Islam to fight him until either he is killed or until he

³⁸ Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 226.

³⁹ Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," 51-56.

⁴⁰ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 11.

⁴¹ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, (New Dehli: Islamic Book Service, 2002), 10-11.

⁴² Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*, (New York: Random House, 2004), 78-81.

⁴³ Qutb, *Milestones*, 21.

declares submission.”⁴⁴ They have no desire to assimilate, rather, their ideology believes in deconstructing nation-states and the current international order, and reconstructing it under the single banner of Islam.⁴⁵ Echoing these beliefs, the Islamic State’s magazine, *Dabiq*, declared the arrival of a new era and stated they will “cause the world to hear and understand the meaning of terrorism, and boots that will trample the idol of nationalism, destroy the idol of democracy, and uncover its deviant nature.”⁴⁶

The Salafi-Jihadist ideology is an exclusive and totalitarian mindset which utilizes medieval violence to forcibly manifest their vision into reality, and they do so with the backing of scripture. Salafi leader Sayyid Qutb’s words mirror Islamic texts, including the famous “sword verse” of the Quran, which states, “fight the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and pay Zakat then open the way for them.”⁴⁷ Salafi-Jihadism’s selective justification and structure lies within the pages of their religion, and is a powerful message resonating with many Muslims, specifically the youth. This is especially true in the past few years with the Islamic State, which vastly expanded the reach of their ideology via the Internet and social media, attracting over 30,000 recruits to the self-declared caliphate in its first three years in existence.⁴⁸ The Islamic State continues to leverage social media to plan, inspire, and direct terror attacks around the globe.

To appreciate the violent behavior of the global Salafi-Jihadis, one must understand their ultimate goal: “to make Muslims as powerful as they once were, before the relatively recent dominance of the West over the globe. To do this . . . one must engage in acts of violence, both individual and collective, against the enemies. Only by terrorizing the enemy . . . can victory be attained.”⁴⁹ The Salafi-Jihadists see violence as the method to alter the current system and return

⁴⁴ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁵ The last two paragraphs on Sayyid Qutb is adapted from a previous research paper written by the author, “False Hope of Coexistence: Why Conflict Will Persist Because of Global Jihadists,” (Term Paper for WWS 712: Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and the Global Jihad, Princeton University, 2016), published by *International Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, 31 July 2016, <https://www.ict.org.il/Article/1742/the-false-hope-of-coexistence>, 4-6.

⁴⁶ *Dabiq Magazine*, [Islamic State translated English edition], issue no. 1, 2014, accessed 10 May 2016, <https://halummu.wordpress.com/category/dabiq-magazine/>, 5.

⁴⁷ *The Holy Qur’an*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al Furqan), Sura 9:5.

⁴⁸ The Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*, published December 2015, accessed 14 May 2017, http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf, 4.

⁴⁹ Bernard Haykel, “The Seventh Annual Ernest May Memorial Lecture: The History and Ideology of the Islamic State,” *Blind Spot: America’s Response to Radicalism in the Middle East*, eds. Nicholas Burns and Jonathon Price, (Washington, DC: Aspen Institute, 2015), 24.

the Muslims world back to the pure version of their religion. Salafi-Jihadi terror organizations, including Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, are part of a “movement, which . . . privilege armed struggle (*jihad*) as a means for implementing their austere, intolerant, and muscular vision of Islam.”⁵⁰ In their eyes, the ends justify the means, backed by scripture, and accompanied by the Islamic State’s slogan “remaining and expanding.”⁵¹ While the U.S. and its allies proved this claim to be more of a short-term idea than an enduring reality for their physical caliphate, it still holds true for its ideology, which continues to inspire attacks globally, including in the U.S.

In his book, *Salafi-Jihadism*, Shiraz Maher claims there are five essential elements that define the ideology. They include: “*tawhid*, *hakimiyya*, *al-wala’ wa-l-bara*, *jihad*, and *takfir*.”⁵² These five elements of the movement are not derived from Maher’s opinion, rather, they are themes that “exist within normative Islamic traditions . . . [that] have undergone significant ideational mutation in Salafi-Jihadi understanding.”⁵³ These elements continually come up in Salafi-Jihadist writings, mainly because of “their importance to the movement, the centrality of those ideas to their aims, and objectives, and the extent to which those ideas were sufficiently cultivated in a particularly unique or different way to inform the Salafi-Jihadi worldview.”⁵⁴ Because of their importance to the ideology, jihadi terrorist organizations’ creeds and publications routinely incorporate these characteristics, including those from the senior leadership of Al-Qaeda, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and the Islamic State.

More specifically, these five characteristics describe how the “doctrine of *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* establishes lines of loyalty and disavowal; *takfir* delineates Islam against everything else and protects it against insidious corruption from within; *tawhid* and *hakimiyya* explain what legitimate authority looks like and whom it should serve; and *jihad* prescribes the method for this particular revolution.”⁵⁵ The essential ideological ingredients are “principally concerned with two things—protection and promotion. Protection of the faith comes from *jihad*, *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’*, and *takfir*; while its promotion is linked to *tawhid* and *hakimiyya*. It is the first part of this equation that

⁵⁰ Haykel, *Blind Spot*, 22.

⁵¹ *Dabiq Magazine*, [Islamic State translated English edition], issue no. 5, 2014, accessed 10 May 2016, <https://halummu.wordpress.com/category/dabiq-magazine/>, 22.

⁵² Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 14.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁵ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 15-16.

interests Salafi-Jihadis the most because it is battlefield-related, providing the *raison d'être* for their *modus operandi*.”⁵⁶ Jihad specifically serves as their method for terrorism.

Jihad, Protectionism, and Violent Propagation of Islam⁵⁷

The term *global jihadism* is defined as “a synonym for [worldwide] ‘militant Sunni Islamism,’ while Islamism [of the politico strain] is defined broadly as ‘Islamic activism.’”⁵⁸ Another definition for global jihadism, which identifies the threat and its method includes, “the peripheral current of extremist Islamic thought whose adherents demand the use of violence in order to oust non-Islamic influence from traditionally Muslim lands en route to establishing true Islamic governance in accordance with *Sharia*, or God’s law.”⁵⁹ The term “global jihadism” has become a part of the counterterrorism community’s lexicon, mainly “because it is a quick, albeit problematic, way to refer to Sunni Muslims who use violence in order to pursue their universalistic political agendas.”⁶⁰ Those who oppose the term see the use of “jihadism” as a perversion of the true meaning of *jihad*. However, the counterterrorist should be less concerned with the critics’ concern for the word usage and focus more on those using the term to legitimize their cause and actions. Likewise, the term *salafiyya jihadiyya*, or Salafi-Jihadi, is not a phrase or term assigned to this group of terrorists by outsiders, rather, it is a self-subscribed honorific used in their own correspondence and publications.⁶¹

Under this ideology, Islamic radicals use *jihad* more as it “refers to literal warfare, to the use of force against the infidel.”⁶² Gilles Kepel, in his book *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, defines the concept of *jihad* as an “effort to propagate Islam within society or in the world by any means; lawful

⁵⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁷ The section on *jihad* is adapted from a previous research paper written by the author, “False Hope of Coexistence: Why Conflict Will Persist Because of Global Jihadists,” (Term Paper for WWS 712: Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and the Global Jihad, Princeton University, 2016), 16-19 (on jihad) & 22-24 (on Azzam).

⁵⁸ Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.

⁵⁹ Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 4.

⁶⁰ Brachman, *Global Jihadism*, 5.

⁶¹ Cole Bunzel, Princeton Near East Studies PhD candidate and contributing author of *Jihadica.com*, interview by author, Princeton, NJ, April 03, 2017.

⁶² Dr. Sebastian Gorka, *Defeating Jihad: The Winnable War*, (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2016), 59.

war or holy war, prescribed by the *sharia* against the infidels.”⁶³ Jihadists justify violence by describing it as fighting a “‘just war’ . . . meant to free other people from falsehood and lead them to truth.”⁶⁴ To appreciate the absolute ideology of the global jihadist, one must understand the concept and methods of their struggle.

Islamic extremists believe they will achieve the objectives of their strategy through *jihad*. Examining the hermeneutics of the word *jihad*, one can see it is “derived from the Arabic root for ‘struggle’ and not from the usual word for war. This gives a clue to the significance that the Qur’an and the *hadith* assign to it, for *jihad* was never meant to be warfare for the sake of national or personal gain, but rather struggle for the sake of God.”⁶⁵ However, this is only a half-truth reserved for apologists or those of the religion trying to deny its violent tendencies based in its religious text and the prophet Muhammad’s example.

The term *jihad* has two primary definitions: “the first deals with the internal struggle to follow God and do all that He has commanded. The second is to engage in an external struggle (fighting) with others to bring the Truth (Islam) to mankind.”⁶⁶ Jihad doctrine highlights four different varieties of *jihad* including “jihad of the heart, mind, tongue and sword.”⁶⁷ While some argue the “greater struggle” is the “jihad of the heart” consisting of an inner struggle to be a righteous follower of God, it is the external, “lesser struggle” the global jihadist ideology embraces known as “jihad by the sword.”⁶⁸ Though some pundits claim this is a recent perverse interpretation of the meaning, historical accounts suggest otherwise.

The 14th century Islamic scholar, Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, in *Reliance of the Traveller*, a manual on *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) from the Shafi’i school of law, defined *jihad* as the “means to war against non-Muslims, and is etymologically derived from the word *mujahada*, signifying warfare to establish the religion. And it is the lesser jihad. As for the greater jihad, it is spiritual warfare against the lower self, which is why the Prophet said as he was returning from jihad, ‘We

⁶³ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, Anthony F. Roberts, trans., (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 432.

⁶⁴ Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 21.

⁶⁵ Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy*, 20.

⁶⁶ Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy*, 20.

⁶⁷ Gorka, *Defeating Jihad*, 60.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad.”⁶⁹ An additional passage from the *hadiths* of Bukhari and Muslim support the concept of an armed struggle against the *kuffar* (infidels), stating “I have been commanded to fight people until they testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and perform the prayer, and pay zakat. If they say it, they have saved their blood and possessions from me, except for the rights of Islam over them.”⁷⁰ A passage from a *hadith* by *Sahih* Muslim states, “Details concerning jihad are found in the accounts of the military expeditions of the Prophet including his own martial forays and those on which he dispatched others.”⁷¹ These passages provide the textual justification for the intentions behind the global jihad movement.

“Jihad by the sword,” is most important when examining the enemy because in recent decades, it has become “the foundation of the global jihadist ideology that threatens America.”⁷² *Jihad* as an armed struggle is derived from verses within the Qur’an and expounded upon in the *hadith*. Like al-Misri’s *Reliance of the Traveller*, modern Salafi-Jihadists derive their marching orders from carefully chosen and strategically selected Islamic texts. Brigadier General S. K. Malik, a leader in the Pakistani Army in the late 1970s, stated in his book, *The Quranic Concept of War*, “the Holy Qur’an has given a comprehensive treatment to its concept of war . . . [and] the Quranic philosophy of war is infinitely supreme and effective.”⁷³ “Jihad by the sword” is the foundation by which the global Salafi-Jihadists derive their strategy and methods, and is viewed by their ranks as an obligatory duty, complementing the five pillars of the Islamic faith.

Abdullah Yusuf Mustafa Azzam, described by some Western analysts as “the godfather of jihad,” was an Islamic cleric who ran an organization called the Services Bureau in Pakistan, providing support for the Afghan *mujahedeen*. Azzam played a central role in the development of the global jihadist movement during the Soviet-Afghan War, along with his protégé, Osama bin Laden. Azzam conceptualized *jihad* as a battle cry by rebranding it as the individual duty of all Muslims, usurping the formal requirement to be declared by a caliph.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller: The Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law*, Rev. Ed., edited and translated by Nuh Ha Mim Keller, (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 1994), 599.

⁷⁰ al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller*, 599.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 599.

⁷² Gorka, 60.

⁷³ Brigadier General S.K. Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War*, accessed 07 May 2016, <http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/Articles/Quranic%20Concept%20of%20War.pdf>, 1.

⁷⁴ Gorka, 66-67.

In 1984, he wrote the book, *Defense of the Muslim Lands*, which cemented his stances that became the foundation of al-Qaeda's global jihad ideology. Beginning with the first chapter, his vision connects with previous jihadi scholars, starting with a quote from Ibn Taymiyya stating, "The first obligation after Iman is the repulsion of the enemy aggressor who assaults the religion and the worldly affairs."⁷⁵ Azzam outlined jihad as *fard* (compulsory, obligatory duty), of which there are two kinds: *fard `ayn* which holds the "greatest degree of obligation" because it is an individual duty incumbent on all Muslims, and *fard kifaya* which is a collective duty, "initially compulsory, but voluntary upon fulfillment of specific conditions."⁷⁶ Adding to Ibn Taymiyya, he stated, "Neglecting the jihad is like abandoning fasting and praying, more than that, neglecting the jihad is worse in these days . . . [and in the circumstance of *Fard Ayn*, even] takes precedence over the *Fard* of Hajj."⁷⁷ Aside from one's declaration of their faith, nothing is more sacred to the militant Islamist than jihad. Azzam believed later generations following the original Salafis neglected the rules laid out in the Qur'an and *hadith* by Allah. Of the backsliding taking place in the Muslim world, none was more serious than "the forgotten obligation of fighting."⁷⁸

Azzam postulated Allah sent his messenger Muhammad as the last prophet who was supposed to bring the religion of Islam "victory by the sword and spear."⁷⁹ He backed up his claim by citing a quote from the Prophet Muhammad in a *hadith* narrated by Ahmad and Tabarani stating, "I have been raised between the hands of the Hour with the sword, until Allah the Exalted is worshipped alone with no associates."⁸⁰ In waging jihad against the *kuffar*, Azzam divided the struggle into two types: offensive and defensive jihad. The defensive jihad involves the invasion of the *kuffar* on Muslim soil, as was the case in Afghanistan, as well as Palestine. Under these circumstances, *jihad* becomes an obligatory mandate every Muslim member of the community (*fard `ayn*), with the goal of expelling the infidels from the Muslim territory. *Fard `ayn* under defensive jihad circumstances require the *ummah* (international Muslim community) to immediately come to the aid of their fellow Muslims, requiring "children [to] march forth without the permission of the parents, the wife without the permission of her husband and the debtor without the permission of

⁷⁵ Dr. Abdullah Azzam, *Defense of the Muslim Lands: The First Obligation After Iman*, 1984, accessed 15 April 2016, <http://the.gorkabriefing.com/book-defense-of-the-muslim-lands-by-dr-abdullah-azzam/>, chapter 1.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, glossary.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, chapter 3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, chapter 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, chapter 1.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

the creditor.”⁸¹ Under the defensive struggle, the obligation “spreads in the shape of a circle from the nearest to the next nearest . . . until it becomes *Fard Ayn* upon the entire world.”⁸² Abdullah Azzam’s writings not only describe *jihad* in the mindset of the jihadi terrorist, but also their global ambitions fueled by their Salafist ideology, and will not stop until the entire world is brought under submission of Islam.

Salafi-Jihadism Ideology as “Soft Power” of the Enemy

In terms of power parity, there is no argument the U.S. military is more powerful and outperforms any other state’s military, let alone a terrorist organization’s capabilities such as the Islamic State’s forces in Syria, Iraq, and the Khorasan. With time, and in partnership with indigenous forces, the U.S. military has and will continue to disrupt the Islamic State’s territorial caliphate and degrade their operational capabilities. It is relatively simple to account for their military wing’s ground forces. Destroying an Islamic State vehicle or Al-Qaeda leader in a precision strike is a routine mission for the U.S. military. However, killing an ideology is proving much more difficult.

The “soft power” of radical Islamic terror organizations is the Salafi-Jihadist ideology, and it is much harder to combat. Their ideology, along with its creed and claims, is foundational to their culture, economy, politics, and society. The Salafi-Jihadist ideology is what attracts Muslims from the *ummah*, including well-educated and tech savvy youth. It is the Salafi-Jihadist narrative and appeal which drives its ability to recruit both locals and foreign fighters, and accumulate strength in manpower and resources.⁸³ Viewing the ideology in this light makes it easier to understand how the Islamic State’s geographic caliphate can continue to lose territory, yet its message remains relevant as it continues to expand its influence through other organizations and leaders. Like Al-Qaeda’s adaptation, the Islamic State, at least in part, exists as a “system rather than an organization,”⁸⁴ and will continue to do so in the future.

In 2004, Abu Musab al-Suri, known as the “architect of the global jihad,” wrote his 1,600-page manifesto, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, which he published online in early 2005. Al-Suri deduced if Al-Qaeda was to continue to exist in what he called a “Post-September 2001 World,”

⁸¹ Azzam, chapter 1.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Professor Bernard Haykel, interview by author, Princeton, NJ, May 03, 2017.

⁸⁴ Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus’ab al-Suri*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 7.

against a new order largely led by the United States, it needed to change its strategy and move away from being a hierarchical organization focused on highly orchestrated attacks.⁸⁵ He understood the importance of Al-Qaeda's ability to coalesce a movement under the banner of the global Salafi-Jihadist ideology rather than as a functional organization. Al-Suri managed to capture all these tactics and concepts in a singular slogan, which would help morph Al-Qaeda and its affiliates from a hierarchical organization into a social movement and decentralized yet global "leaderless jihad."⁸⁶

The most important aspect of Abu Musab al-Suri's visionary writings was his slogan of *nizam la tanzim*, which in English means a "system, not organization."⁸⁷ Beginning in 1991 with his first publication, "A Global Islamic Resistance," he advocated for "a global terrorist campaign against the West that would rely on diffuse, decentralized, and non-hierarchical networks."⁸⁸ He later elaborated on his vision for the global jihad, stating "Al-Qaeda is not an organization, it is not a group, nor do we want it to be . . . It is a call, a reference, a methodology."⁸⁹ His strategy proved to be prophetic and to have been adopted by jihadi terrorist organizations worldwide. Al-Suri believed turning to his decentralized model and its affiliated tactics would create chaos and overwhelm the western world's security apparatus, causing them to overreact and create a cycle of instability pitting Muslims against non-Muslim governments. He believed these actions would inspire the international body of Islam to coalesce around their ideology and the goal of creating a global Islamic caliphate, living under Islamic jurisprudence and the eventual submission of their opponents.⁹⁰

For globalization and the 21st century, there is no better way for the message to spread than through "electronic jihad."⁹¹ Ironically, by harnessing the power of the Internet, the Salafi-Jihadist organizations combat globalization through one of its greatest mediums. Al-Qaeda began this venture in the early 2000s with simple web sites and chat rooms. The Islamic State globally expanded its base and spread its message by using the latest invention of the digital age, a complex

⁸⁵ Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*, 363-367.

⁸⁶ Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 143.

⁸⁷ Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*, 7.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁹ Lawrence Wright, "The Master Plan: For the new theorists of jihad, Al Qaeda is just the beginning," *The New Yorker*, published 11 September 2006, accessed 10 January 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/09/11/the-master-plan>.

⁹⁰ The two paragraphs on Abu Musab al-Suri is adapted from a previous research paper written by the author, "Internet Propaganda and Planners Inspiring Individual Jihad: Threats to the United States Homeland," (Term Paper for WWS 555B: Terrorism, Civil War, and Non-State Actors, Princeton University, 2017), 21-24.

⁹¹ Dr. Eitan Azani, Lecture on "Cyberspace in the Modern Terrorism Strategy," Herzliyya, Israel, July 18, 2016.

web of social media platforms of the Internet. Originally created and developed by the U.S. military, global jihadists turned the Internet into their primary weapon system in the war of ideas. To fight this battle of wills, the U.S. government must cooperate with the private tech industry. To reduce the enemy's presence online, the U.S. national security apparatus and Silicon Valley must be proactive in preventing the proliferation of their ideology online, rather than be reactive, as it has in the past.

Conclusion

Despite America fighting its eighteenth year in the “Global War on Terror,” since 2001, the battle against the extreme ideology of global Salafi-Jihadism is far from over and will take years, if not generations, to defeat. If this were the Cold War and the U.S. was fighting communism, it would only be 1964, still decades from victory. Yet, even in the Cold War, there were no markers to reassure the country how far it had progressed in the struggle against a totalitarian ideology. Eventually the Berlin wall fell, communism failed, and the U.S. prevailed; but it did so without mileposts such as a “halfway point.” In fact, most analysts and academics did not predict the downfall of the USSR and were still studying Sovietology in 1989 as if the Communist empire had decades left in it. America achieved its objective by believing in its values and strategy. While there were adjustments, the country's leadership devised a grand strategy incorporating all instruments of national power and held fast to its execution for decades. What the U.S. requires to defeat the global Salafi-Jihadist ideology is to accept the reality that the time horizon to execute an effective counterterrorism strategy will take much longer than the American public has previously been led to believe. The strategy must be conditions-based and not tied to timelines which embolden the enemy and signals a lack of resolve.

In 2017, an example of U.S. hubris in the current state of affairs includes the Obama Administration's September 2014 announcement of a “three-year counter-ISIL strategy” which showed both a lack of understanding of the threat and appreciation for the resilience of the enemy. To set such an audacious timeline for ISIL's demise is naïve if not misguided.⁹² Not only did the time horizon seem lofty, the message lacked clarity on the composition of the enemy targeted by declaring the Islamic State, as “neither Islamic nor a state. It is a terrorist organization that has

⁹² *The White House*, “ISIL STRATEGY: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat ISIL and Combat the Terrorist Threat,” accessed 14 May 2017, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/isil-strategy>.

perverted a religion into a dangerous ideology.”⁹³ The announcement of the counter-ISIL strategy not only mischaracterized the enemy and the roots upon which it derives its inspiration, but also miscalculated the time required to defeat the Islamic State and the global Salafi-Jihadist ideology guiding its actions. Major General Nagata’s SOCCENT white paper called for a long-term strategy to deal with the threat less than three months after the administration’s announcement.

Unlike communism, the battle of ideas and reform against the Salafi-Jihadist ideology is largely out of America’s hands, a tough fact to admit in a country with vast amounts of hard and soft power to direct towards the threat. While the U.S. can continue to focus on the operational capabilities of the Islamic State as the movement’s current manifestation, its Muslim, regional allies must focus on dismantling the soft power behind the movement. This requires its allies to practice effective governance, while the U.S. assists in three dimensions: an upgrade in how the U.S. handles messaging of current events, developing positive strategic themes including clearly communicating the intentions of its foreign policy, and a long-term investment in a “strategy of cultural and educational exchanges that develop a richer and more open civil society in Middle Eastern countries.”⁹⁴ In addition to its military might, America must deploy its soft power to work with its partners to counter the ideology. While hard to believe in a culture of fast food drive-through windows and demand for instant gratification, if done correctly, this endeavor would take years to establish and decades before it achieves the desired results. The U.S. and its allies must reframe the threat they face and realize the fight against the global Salafi-Jihadist ideology must focus on the next generation to break its chain of inspiring violence through jihad.

The best the U.S. can do to combat the global Salafi-Jihadist ideology is empower its allies in the region and ensure the collective efforts address both the motivation and operational capability of terrorists in its counterterrorism efforts.⁹⁵ The U.S. can militarily lead the fight against the enemy’s operational capabilities, but due to cultural, linguistic, and even religious barriers, it can only manage the fight against the ideology and its motivations. It must solidify a long-term strategy tied to commitments from its allies against this global threat, and empower those in the gravest danger within the region to fight for themselves. Only then can the U.S. and its allies make progress towards eventually defeating the global Salafi-Jihadist ideology, keeping in mind other forms of extremism are bound to manifest themselves in the future, Islamic and otherwise.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Nye, 121-122.

⁹⁵ Dr. Boaz Ganor, Lecture on “CT & Security Dilemmas,” Herzliyya, Israel, July 11, 2016.

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