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THE ORIGINS AND EVOLUTIONS OF AL QAEDA AND ISIS: UNDERSTANDING THE RISE OF RADICAL ISLAMIC TERRORISM

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ABSTRACT

Having emerged only in the last century, radical Islamic terrorism is a relatively new phenomenon. This especially holds true in the world of academia where the study is far too often emotionally driven, sensationalistic, reliant on secondary sources, or focused on organizations only at their operational peak. As a result, radical Islamic terrorism has remained difficult to genuinely understand. This work seeks to further a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon through an analysis of the origins and evolutions of both Al Qaeda and ISIS – two of the most salient terror organizations to arise in the modern era. Specific attention is paid to the development of each organization's operational objectives throughout their foundational years. After examining the environments in which they arose, the various leaders who oriented them, and the circumstances that shaped their enemies and objectives, a number of findings come to light. Radical Islamic terror organizations are not monolithic. They often vary in the most fundamental ways, a fact exemplified well through a dual analysis of Al Qaeda and ISIS. Nonetheless, a number of overarching trends can be identified. Both of these organizations proved to be leadership-driven, reactionary, and territorial (among other characteristics) throughout their developmental years. With evidence ranging from secondary to primary sources that have only recently been uncovered or presented, this work aims to contribute to the growing field of objective research on radical Islamic terrorism.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

For many Americans in the late 20th century, the United States' interaction with the Middle East was limited to diplomatic relations with Israel, distant proxy wars with the Soviet Union, or increasingly turbulent exchanges with the leadership in Iran and Iraq. Radical Islamic terrorism did not become a salient phenomenon before the century's last decade – a report from the University of Pennsylvania Law School notes that the term, "radical Islamic terrorism," was used sparingly before then, perhaps only a handful of times.[1]

The American public's awareness of this phenomenon was fundamentally altered after a group of Islamic fundamentalists detonated a truck bomb beneath the World Trade Center's North Tower in New York City on February 26th, 1993. It killed six, wounded 1,042 others, and became the first of many terror attacks inspired by foreign, radical Islam that were launched against the United States of America on its own soil.[2] As of October 2018, more than three thousand Americans have been killed and several thousand more have been wounded by Islamic terrorists on the U.S. mainland alone.[3] This statistic excludes the vast number of individuals killed overseas since this terrorism began – a number including multiple thousand more.[4]

Over the past three decades, two groups have come to the forefront of radical Islam's war with the west: Al Qaeda and ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). During their respective peaks (Al Qaeda in 2001 and the Islamic State in 2014), each has proven itself capable of destabilizing an entire region, reaping fear throughout the strongest of countries, and withstanding multinational military coalitions aimed at their destruction. Defeating these groups

has been a matter of upmost importance since the war on terrorism began.[*] Yet in December of 2014, Major General Michael K. Nagata, commander of American Special Operations in the Middle East, said of radical Islam, "We have not defeated the idea. We do not even understand the idea."[5*]

In one of the earliest treatises on military strategy, Sun Tzu's *The Art of War,* it is written, "If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat." But "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles."[6] Understanding Islamic fundamentalism and how it has manifested itself militantly is imperative in working to end the war on terror and in working to prevent another. It may be even more important to understand how Islamic fundamentalism has historically lead to the creation of multinational terroristic organizations and how those organizations have evolved to develop their ultimate goals. Despite this importance, however, the study has often fallen victim to rampant mischaracterization due to emotionally driven research. Fear and anger have caused many scholars to hastily jump to conclusions and to analyze only the readily accessible information.

This work will examine the phenomenon of radical Islamic terrorism and its origination through a dual analysis of Al Qaeda and ISIS. Together, the two groups are capable of offering an excellent lens through which the broader issue can be examined; vastly different in both character and motive, one is able to see that radical Islam can originate in many shapes and evolve into many forms through just an examination of these two examples alone. The phenomenon is not monolithic. Even its two Middle Eastern "flagship" organizations (Al Qaeda

[*] The United States alone has spent more than 2.8 trillion dollars in the fight against terrorism since the attacks on September 11th, 2001, according to a 2018 study by the Washington-based Stimson Center.

[*] Major General Michael K. Nagata's comments came an astonishing twenty-one years after the first Islamic terror attack on the United States homeland.

and ISIS), are littered with irreconcilable differences – so much so that they vehemently denounced one another in 2014.[7] Yet this analysis also reveals some overarching trends. Both organizations, for example, are leadership-driven, territorial, reactionary, and often only quasi-religious in nature throughout the pursuit of their ultimate objectives.

Understanding these groups – who each group views as the primary enemy, what each group ultimately desires, and so on – is crucial in understanding the nuanced nature of radical Islamic terrorism as a whole. After doing so, one is able to view radical Islamic organizations such as Al Qaeda and ISIS for what they truly are: political and militant non-state actors with generally legitimate grievances against entities stronger than themselves, who analyze their situations and rationalize their strategically chosen actions with radical interpretations of religious material. From there, one can understand how each group originated and how each group's objectives evolved over time; this knowledge can ultimately be employed in suppressing similar organizations and stunting the spawn of others. With these overarching goals in mind, this study will focus primarily on the developmental years of both Al Qaeda and ISIS.

Existing Scholarship

The subject of Islamic terrorism, compared alongside many other contemporary fields of research, is young and underdeveloped. In many respects, it did not become a widely studied topic until after the September 11th, 2001 attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. Before then, only a relatively small number of individuals were conducting research on what was to become one of America's most pressing issues in the 21st century.[8] The quality of that research suffered from a general lack of rigor. A review of data, methods, and other aspects of the era's terrorism studies conducted by Bart Schurrman (a Professor of Terrorism at Leiden

University in the Netherlands) found that many scholars considered it to be insubstantial at best. He found that a 1982 work by Alex P. Schmid, a Research Fellow of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, called much of the study's material to be "impressionistic, anecdotal, and superficial." Ted R. Gurr, one of the first scholars of the phenomenon, said that there was a "disturbing lack of good empirically-grounded research on terrorism." Martha Crenshaw (a Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies) noted that the study was prone to "overgeneralizations and simplistic explanations."[9] According to Schurrman, a review by Andrew Silke (the Program Director for Terrorism Studies at the University of East London) found that an astonishing *80%* of all research published in the field's two leading journals between 1995 and 1999 was derived from secondary sources. Furthermore, consistently more than 70% of that research "did not use any kind of statistical analysis."[10]

Even as terrorist attacks carried out by radical Islamic groups grew in number in throughout the 1990s, terrorism scholarship as a whole struggled to acquire funding, methods, and conclusions to advance an understanding of the motives, strategies, and rationales behind the violence.

However, after 9/11, the field of terrorism research garnered far more attention than ever before. As an indicative example, roughly 150 books were published on terrorism in 2000 while *more than 1,100* were published just a year later in 2001.[11] The field experienced a massive influx of both funding and researchers following the September 11th attacks.

Yet the immediate post-9/11 research was largely conducted by journalists eager to present answers to the public as quickly as possible: the faster one was capable of presenting material to an audience, the more one was considered an analyst or an expert in the field. Meaningful analysis and quality of research was not highly prioritized.[12] Consequently, much of

the research presented in 2001 and shortly thereafter largely consisted of hastily assembled and emotionally infused material. Schurrman further notes that terrorism research continued to lack "methodological complexity," with "a dearth of primary data, and few dedicated scholars."[13]

Christina Hellmich, a lecturer in International Relations at the University of Reading, UK, claims that there is little reason to believe that this trend changed even in the post-9/11 years. She writes, "In the absence of quality control to which academic literature is normally subject, the quest for answers has provided a fertile breeding ground for pseudo-academics and at times outright fraudsters claiming to be experts."[14] For many years, this initial journalistic research has disproportionately shaped our understanding of Al Qaeda and other groups.[15]

Though initial media and journalistic responses can be reliable, they are often ailed by factual accuracy and editorial bias. These issues continue to persist today due to the very nature of terrorism academia – no matter how far along it progresses, journalists will often continue to be the first to report on terroristic events.[16] Other issues with terrorism research continue to include "an overreliance on secondary sources…a scarcity of statistical analyses, a tendency for authors to work alone rather than collaborate with colleagues, and [a] large number of one-time contributors to the field."[17]

Academic terrorism research has certainly improved over time. More committed researchers have entered the subject field overtime and have since engaged in more collaborative studies.[18] Additionally, more primary source material has been utilized, better standards of scholarship have been implemented, and diverse methodological approaches to the study have been undertaken. Yet the very nature of terrorism itself makes the subject difficult to study. Most (if not all) organizations operate as clandestine as possible – the only information made public is often that which is *chosen* to be made public, such as idealized propaganda or statements

intended to induce certain effects. Furthermore, a large part of inter-organizational communication goes unheard and unread. What can be obtained is often incomplete, irrelevant, in need of translation, or classified by governments. First hand accounts can often be unreliable and difficult to prove because of the aforementioned difficulties.

Aside from the trouble in obtaining steadfastly reliable information, difficulty also arises in identifying areas of consensus throughout the academic community. The most striking example includes the very definition of terrorism alone: the Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Army, U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Federal Criminal Code, U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. National Counterterrorism Center, United Kingdom, United Nations, and European Union all hold different definitions of terrorism.[19] The same problem persists amongst scholars. For clarity's sake, this research will use the 2010 definition of terrorism provided by the U.S. Department of Defense per Joint Pub 3-07.2, Antiterrorism: "The unlawful use of violence or threat of violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies. Terrorism is often motivated by religious, political, or other ideological beliefs and committed in the pursuit of goals that are usually political."

None of these difficulties render the study of terrorism impossible. Rather, they just demand to be understood and acknowledged before any genuine analyses can be undertaken. This holds true when examining Al Qaeda and ISIS (and especially so in examining their origins, evolutions, and the orientation of their objectives), as generalizations and misinformation have hampered a genuine understanding of each.

This work does not pretend to be immune to such difficulties. In some areas, it remains impossible to speak with absolute confidence and certainty. Despite using the best and most widespread evidence available where the most consensus exists, it is still often imperfect

evidence and can seldom be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. This especially holds true regarding the nuances since we remain unsure in many instances of specific dates, timelines of travel, interactions between select individuals, and the exact reasoning behind certain actions taken by certain figures. In painting a holistic picture of the rise of these radical Islamic organizations, some speculation simply cannot be avoided. One sees that this is increasingly necessary regarding the more recent events and more recent organizations, like ISIS, whose study is comparatively young and underdeveloped. However, it is still based on both evidence and logic. The difficulties of conducting this study consequently should not negate the broader academic assertions being advanced.

The Origins of Radical Islamic Thought: An Overview

One cannot understand the origins of Al Qaeda and ISIS without first understanding the very roots of radical Islam itself. While terrorism may not be an intrinsically new phenomenon (having been dated as far back as the 1st century), religiously-motivated terrorism appears to have been scarce before the late 1900s.* In fact, it may have been equally scarce even as late as 1980; Bruce Hoffman, a Senior Fellow for Counterterrorism and Homeland Security at the Council of Foreign Relations, points out that only two of sixty-four terrorist groups examined in that year were considered "largely religious in motivation."[20] As of the present day, however, the U.S. Department of State recognizes more than fifty currently in existence as of October 25th, 2018 – a number that has obviously grown to be more than twenty-five times its initial size.[21] Resultantly, it seems merely intuitive to assume that a number of factors contributed to this sudden expansion of religious terrorism (and the eventual development of Al Qaeda and ISIS).

*Many scholars trace the beginnings of terrorism back to the Sicarri, a group of Jewish Zealots who fought against the Roman occupation of Judea.

Those which gave rise to radical Islam as a whole can be divided into two categories: ideologies and events. The former includes the resurfacing of ideologies such as Salafism, spread through the Wahhabist movement, while the latter includes the events of the Arab Oil Embargo, Iranian Revolution, and Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan. These factors would ultimately contribute to an environment that allowed radical Islam to ferment, then flourish.

The Ideology of Salafism

In the 21st century, the goals of many militant Islamic movements are considered to be grounded in the Sunni ideology of Salafism. This especially holds true for both Al Qaeda and ISIS, the primary subjects of this study. Their members, in turn, self-identify as Salafi or Salafist, a term which translates to "like the salaf."[22] In the Islamic community, the salaf refers to the first three generations of Islam or the "pious ancestors," *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*.[23] The Prophet Muhammad is reported in multiple renowned hadiths to have said, "The best people are those of my generation, and then those who will come after them, an then those who will come after them."[24] Salafists, in seeking to be "like the salaf," strive to imitate the Prophet Muhammad and the first three generations of Islam as thoroughly as possible. Religious innovation after this third generation, which existed in the 7th/8th century, is therefore admonished. There is only one correct interpretation of Islam. And there is absolutely no role available for human reason, logic, and desire in adapting or changing the faith.[25] For Salafists, this belief is further strengthened by the Prophet Muhammad's quote:

> Those of you who live long after me will see a lot of differences, so hold fast to my Sunnah and to the Sunnah of the Rightly Guided Khallefahs after me. Cling to it tightly and beware newly-invented matters, for every newly-invented matter is an innovation, and every innovation, and all misguidance, is in the fire.[26]

Resultantly, Salafism demands extensive religious education. Oneness with God can only be achieved through a complete and total understanding of Islam, without any interpretive or rationalistic approach. Such views are based on the premise that although time may go by, technology may advance, society may change, intellectual processes of thought may evolve, but the Qur'an and its studies should remain static.

Shiraz Maher, Director at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalism and Political Violence at King's College London, notes that Salafists who eventually engaged in violence in the name of religion are often characterized by five essential beliefs. The first is the absolute importance of monotheism (tawhid). The second emphasizes the authority of God over all else, which may sometimes entail the rejection of manmade laws. The third is known as al-wala wa-l-bara, which entails Muslim loyalty to one another yet hostility to outsiders or "non-believers." The fourth highlights the need for jihad, or "holy war for Allah's sake," while the fifth is the necessity of takfir, the act when one Muslim declares another to be an apostate.[27]

The Salafist ideology that would ultimately be exhibited in so many jihadist movements began taking shape more than one thousand years ago, circa 800, in the life of Abū ʿAbdullāh Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī. One of the four great imams of the religion, Al-Shafi'I paved the way for the establishment of both the Qur'an (Islam's sacred text) and the Sunna (the recorded words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad) at the center of the Islamic legal system. Yet a group of traditionalists known as Ahl al-hadith took this a step further, arguing that the only basis for any law and any ensuing action was that which could be found in either the Qu'ran or Sunna. Ahl al-hadith never found a significant foothold in the Sunni Islamic tradition, but its fundamental focus of a reliance on two Islamic traditional texts *above all else* "always seems to have found individual adherents throughout the Muslim world."[28]

Although the exact interpretations shift over time, Islamic scholars of each era share their emphasis on strict adherence to this text hundreds, even thousands, of years later. Rather than unreasonably conforming to the Islamic research and teachings of "earthly" individuals (an act known by Sunnis as taqlid), Muslim scholars in the 13th and 14th centuries such as Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya and Muhammad Qayyim al-Jawziyya advocated for scholars to refer *directly* to the Qur'an and Sunna.

Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya was a particularly influential Sunni Muslim theologian, especially in the realm of radical Islam. His fundamentalist views provide an ideological basis common for most Salafists and, ultimately, various extremist sects as well. One of his most significant operative beliefs was that the world could be split simply into either the land of Islam, known as *dar al Islam*, or the land of unbelief, known as *dar al-kufr*. The world's population could subsequently be divided as well: Muslims would be part of the former while non-Muslims, or unbelievers, would be part of the latter. The relationship between these two groups and two worlds was "necessarily hostile."[29] But simply calling oneself a Muslim – or generally believing in Islamic principles – was not enough for one to enjoy the world of Islam according to Ibn Taymiyya. Muslims who did not explicitly apply or conform to Sharia law (Islamic Law), or more generally adopt the fundamentalist principles of Islam, were no better than apostates or unbelievers. Consequently, they were deserving of death just as those apostates and unbelievers were. Ibn Taymiyya regarded the waging of jihad against such individuals as a religious duty.[30] If Salafism can be considered the single most influential ideology in spawning Islamic extremism, Ibn Taymiyya can likely be considered the most influential ideologist. Hellmich notes that Guy Sorman, a notable economist and philosopher, concluded that Ibn Taymiyya

ultimately "inaugurated a theological and political revolution: there is no fundamentalist Islamic movement that does not refer back to it."[31]

The core principals of Salafism insisted upon rejecting all interpretations and modernizations of Islamic texts. Generally, such a philosophy was not broadly accepted in the Muslim world or by the Islamic states. Ibn Taymiyya himself was ultimately imprisoned for heresy by medieval Islamic regimes. Yet he continued preaching what would evolve into Salafism, beginning to frame the ideology as a struggle "against the rationalists and human desire."[32] In the 18th century, Shah Wali Allah continue adding to the claims of Ibn Taymiyya and al-Jawziyya, claiming that excessively referring to sources of reinterpretation was "a cause of Muslim's straying from Islam's original message" and from the salaf as well.[33]

The Wahhabist movement that eventually followed in the 18th century is considered to have been the first truly Salafist movement. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, alongside Sunni tribal leader Muhammad Sa'ud, would conquer a large area of the Arabian Peninsula.[*] Christina Hellmich writes that their campaigns against the Sufi and Shiites on the peninsula were ruthless, as they labeled those with different views as "heretics and apostates and effectively [legitimized] the use of violence against them."[34] Throughout their conquest, Muhammad Sa'ud would focus on providing military and political order to the occupied territory while Abd al-Wahhab sought to unite the varying tribes under their own rule. Under the belief that "the overwhelming majority of Muslims…had fallen into a state of religious ignorance," Abd al-Wahhab would utilize the eventual Wahhabist ideology to unite them together.[35]

According to Joas Wagemakers, a Professor of Islamic and Arab with specialties in Salafism at Utrecht University, Wahhabists held many views held by Salafist scholars such as

[*] Abd al-Wahhab is often considered as equally impactful as Ibn Taymiyya in regards to providing the basis for radical Islam for his leading of this movement.

Ibn Taymiyya, making one of their foremost goals on the Arabian Peninsula to restore the absolute purity of Islam. Rather than focusing on the intrinsically legal realm like the Salafism that had been developing in the years before, Wahhabists focused largely on "theology and 'cleansing' the creed of Islam from deviant influences that it had acquired throughout the centuries."[36] Just as the United States has operated on the general basis of "classical liberalism" since its inception, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia would come to grow and function on the basis of the aforementioned Salafist/Wahhabist ideology since the 1800s, albeit to varying degrees.

Salafism's aggressive resurgence in the latter half of the 20th century is particularly relevant to the origination of both Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. Joas Wagemakers' work suggests three events between 1950 and 1980 that may have contributed to the resurfacing of Salafism and Wahhabism throughout the Middle East: the rise of the Gulf's oil industry, rising insecurity throughout the Saudi regime, and the 1967 Six Day War in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

According to Wagemakers, the flourish of Middle Eastern oil companies that began in the 1950s encouraged a large movement of peoples to the Arabian Peninsula and other states throughout the Gulf in search of employment. This collaterally exposed them to the existing Salafist ideas. When they returned back to their original locations, those laborers brought with them not just their earnings, but a Salafist ideology as well.[37] Mamoun Fandy adds that this occasionally even resulted in the establishment of actual Salafist organizations.[38] As time progressed onward, this phenomenon spread taking on various shapes and emphasizing slightly different variants of the ideology across the Middle East.

The oil boom would also result in an influx of money to the Saudi Arabian government – one of the biggest proponents of Sunni Salafism since the 1800s. Furthermore, the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the 1950s-60s socialist movement in Egypt spurred a striking amount of anti-

monarchial rhetoric to begin circulating throughout the Middle Eastern region. As a result – in a strategic and defensive reaction – the Saudi Arabian monarchy utilized its newfound riches to spread the Salafist ideology "as a conservative counter-narrative."[39] And third, Wagemakers states that the Six Day War (otherwise known as the 1967 Arab-Israeli War) ultimately resulted in the failure of Arab socialist movements. It was into this political vacuum that Salafism ultimately arose to replace the socialist and communist discourse that had once enjoyed primacy in the region.

Come the 1980s, the ideological and religious atmosphere throughout many areas of the Middle East was beginning to witness the widespread emergence of puritanical interpretations of Islam. The ideas of fundamentalist Muslims from hundreds of years in the past, such as Ibn Taymiyya and Abd al-Wahhab, had done anything but fade into history. Yet their existence and sporadic adoption by many individuals throughout the Middle East did not staunchly equivocate to the undertaking of absolute radical Islam or jihad.

As a cautionary note to understanding this phenomenon and ideology: Though Salafism demands a uniform, singular interpretation of Islam, it has proven *not* to be a uniform, singular ideology amongst Salafists themselves. Many consider themselves to be Salafi in the sense that they subscribe to the belief that there is only one accurate interpretation of Islam (through the Qu'ran and Sunna) and that they should seek to emulate the actions of the Prophet Muhammad and the first three generations of Islam. However, many reject radical "acts of violence and often insist on not begin associated with the perpetrators."[40] Claiming oneself to be a Salafi, therefore, does not necessarily entail a commitment to militant radical Islam and its aims. Nor is their absolute uniformity among all groups self-identified, or even labeled by scholars, as Salafi.

Additionally, many view the title of "Salafi" or "Salafist" as desirable, believing that it entails an impression of superior religious understanding, purity, authenticity, and so on.

Simply adopting the title of Salafist does not necessarily entail the adoption of the aforementioned radical beliefs or practices. Furthermore, scholars such as Quinan Wiktorowicz claim that "the Salafi movement (often referred to as the Wahhabis) represents a diverse community…and reflects a broad array of regarding issues related to politics and violence." Wiktorowicz breaks down the movement into various sects such as "neo-traditional Salafis" and "conservative reformists" and "radical secularists," while Joas Wagemakers adds that there are others such as Quietist Salafis, Political Salafis, and (the most relevant and discussed in this research), Jihadi-Salafis.[41] All of these groupings differ in varying matters, to varying degrees, regarding theology and implementation of their beliefs. As will be discussed in the primary focus of this research, radical Islam is *not* monolithic. This fact reveals first reveals itself in the aforementioned discussion of Salafism, the fundamental ideological basis of Islamic radicalism.

The wide variances and lack of uniformity in Salafism does not mean that radical Islam does not have its common roots implanted in the ideology. It just means that the topic, the ideology, and the overall phenomenon itself are immensely complex. At no point in the study would it be fitting to dilute or generalize a key aspect of Al Qaeda's or ISIS's origins. One could say that both are radical Islamist organizations and that radical Islamist organizations are Salafist and that Salafists believe in jihad to ensure a puritanical commitment to Islam. Yet this simplification for the sake of understanding would be a mere illusion, for although it would certainly make an explanation easier, Salafism is a complex and controversial term itself. Understanding the phenomenon of radical Islam absolutely demands the understanding that ideologies cannot be comprehensively and concisely defined.

It is the *overarching* traits amongst the varying Salafist ideologies that this study requires, as they clearly played a significant role in the development of radical Islam and two of its "flagship" organizations (Al Qaeda and ISIS). As far as present scholarship has been able to unearth, no movements or ideologies have been more impactful in establishing a staunchly puritanical sect of Islam.[42]

Arab Oil and its Contribution to the Rise of Radical Islam

Regardless of how puritanical of a view it may have inspired, and regardless of how prone its believers may have been to commit jihad, the Salafist ideology would have few implications concerning *anything* if it remained geographically isolated. To truly impact the Middle East and to truly spur the emergence of radical Islam, Salafism needed to become widespread throughout the region. It needed to reach a vast audience so it could establish solid ideological footholds in a variety of Middle Eastern societies. Only then, with a relatively stable foundation, could the ideology flourish and become available for radical interpretation – an ideology ripe for exploitation by jihadists. As briefly mentioned, events surrounding Arab oil would become the perfect vehicle for such a transport of Salafism come the 1970s. If Abd al-Wahhab successfully spread Salafism throughout Saudi Arabia, Arab oil successfully spread it throughout the Middle East – the region would consequently become fertile for the establishment of radical Islamic organizations nearing the close of the 20th century.

Arab oil became a tool for the spread of Salafism largely in 1973. To understand how, one must first turn to the events of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War (also known as the Yom Kippur War, Ramadan War, or October War).[43] In short: an Arab coalition consisting of Syria and Egypt – supported by states such Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Tunisia – sought to reclaim

territory lost to Israel during the 1967 Six Day War.[44] On the night of October 6th – the day of Yom Kippur for the Jewish and the holy month of Ramadan for Muslims – the Arab coalition launched a surprise attack on Israeli forces on both the Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights. [45] A war broke out amongst the Middle Eastern countries during the height of the Cold War, much to the dismay of both the Soviet Union and United States of America.

The Soviet Union, though reluctant to become directly engaged in a proxy war with American forces, nonetheless feared the defeat of their Arab allies. They consequently began supplying Egypt and Syria with weaponry. The United States initially resisted aiding its Israeli allies. But on the ninth of October, "following a failed IDF [Israel Defense Forces] counter-attack against Egypt's forces, the Israelis requested that America do the same."[46] At the height of the Cold War, the U.S. was compelled to comply; loads of war material began arriving in Israel on October 14th, 1973. The conflict quickly turned against the Arab coalition. After a tense exchange of nuclear threats between the U.S. and USSR on October 25th, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution calling for a ceasefire in the Middle East. It was accepted and the "1973 war thus ended in an Israeli victory," unfortunately for the Syrian state who subsequently lost more territory in the Golan Heights.[47]

The significance of this event in the regard to the origination of radical Islamic terrorism, however, rests in the U.S. military airlift to Israel. As a result of the actions carried out by the United States and its allies, many of the states that constituted the Arab coalition in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War also happened to constitute OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.[*] Once the U.S. military aid to Israel began on October 14th, OPEC retaliated by

[*]OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, was founded by Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Kuwait, Iraq, and Iran in 1960. Come 1973, member states also included Algeria Qatar, Nigeria, Libya, and the United Arab Emirates.

imposing an oil embargo against America and other Western allies.* Saudi Arabia spearheaded the effort, announcing an official ban on petroleum exports to the United States. Alongside it, others cohesively reduced oil production by 5% and vowed to continue doing so for every month that Israel remained in Egypt and continued denying the rights of Palestinians via UN Resolution 242. Any state could receive its share of oil by supporting the aforementioned cause and abandoning its support for Israel.

The United States did not comply. Dependent on Middle Eastern oil, however, the American economy suffered. The price of a barrel of oil "first doubled, then quadrupled," and the overall long-term stability of the country's economy was rattled as a whole. Amongst other effects, fuel rationing and lower speed limits were imposed by the U.S. government to minimize the consumption of what was becoming an increasingly limited supply of oil.[48] A global recession ensued.[49] According to author and oil analyst Daniel Yergin, "The oil crisis set off an upheaval in global politics and the world economy [and] also challenged America's position in the world, polarized its politics at home and shook the country's confidence."[50]

For the countries of the Middle East, the effect was inversed. Many experienced a windfall gain from their embargo and received an ensuing influx of wealth into their countries. According to Bernard Haykel, a professor at Princeton University, the 1973 Arab Oil Embargo "transformed the monarchial and religiously conservative states of the Arabian Peninsula into financial powerhouses."[51] Of the many oil exporting countries throughout the Middle East, none benefited more than Saudi Arabia. It accrued enormous amounts of wealth and revenue from the embargo.[52] To reiterate: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was the state in which Salafism had previously found its most genuine foothold. Following the conquests of Abd al-Wahhab in the

*Another notable recipient of the 1973 Arab Oil Embargo was the Netherlands, who also supported Israel during the war.

18th century, Saudi Arabia consistently favored this conservative and puritanical interpretation of Sunni Islam. Come the massive revenue influx following the Arab oil embargo, Saudi Arabia used its wealth to undertake what has since been considered "the largest worldwide propaganda campaign ever mounted…[even] dwarfing the Soviet's propaganda efforts at the height of the Cold War."[53] The subject of such propaganda was Salafism.

The House of Saud had a long held policy of exporting the Salafist ideology. Adopting the puritanical title of "Salafist" often came hand in hand with an illusion of religious superiority/authority. Consequently, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had much to gain in devoting immense quantities of resources to fervently proselytizing Salafism throughout the Islamic world. Jason Burke, a journalist and author with focuses on the rise of radical Islam, writes that their aim was to "reinforce their own religious credentials at home while increasing their influence overseas, allowing them to reassert their claim to both religious and political leadership in the Islamic world."[54]According to the Hudson Institute, it is estimated that that Saudi Arabia contributed more than 70 billion dollars to their Salafist campaign.[55]

With this vast quantity of money, Saudi Arabia built more than 1,500 mosques, 210 Islamic centers, 202 colleges, and more than 2,000 schools even in states that were not predominantly Muslim.[56] The country also provided hundreds of thousands of scholarships, paid stipends to Salafist preachers, and printed millions upon millions of conservative/puritanical Islamic texts for distribution.[57] As an indicative example, one publishing center in Medina, established by a Saudi Arabian King, had printed more than 138 million copies of the Qu'ran, some of which were accompanied by Salafist interpretations of the text.[58] As Joas Wagemakers noted, it is important to remember that Salafism would also spread unintentionally without the help of financial exportation. The booming oil industry throughout many Gulf States brought

thousands and thousands of Arabs to the region in search of employment who ultimately found their beliefs impacted by Salafism. Many would return to their home countries and spread the ideology further.

As an ideology, or a sort of derivative of Sunni Islam, Salafism had existed for hundreds of years. Puritanical, conservative, or generally intolerant interpretations of Islam may have existed even further still into the past, just without the specific identifying title of Salafism or Wahhabism. However, the 1973 Arab Oil Embargo and subsequent economic boom fundamentally altered its nature. It was no longer an ideology sporadically found throughout the Middle East that periodically reemerged throughout history. Instead, it became an ideology propagandized and exported.[59] The impact of such a massive campaign distributing such puritanical material has been immense, so much so that current Saudi leaders are attempting to curtail its effects. However, as stated by journalists Geneive Abdo and Abdallah Hendawy of the Washington Post, "the horses have since left the barn."[60]

In many areas, conservative Islam thus found an opportunity to become puritanical Islam. It was thus the case that puritanical Islam could become more fundamental, and fundamental Islam could devolve and spiral into radicalism. The Arab Oil Embargo of 1973 and ensuing spread of Salafism helped to create an environment in the Middle East that was ripe for the fermentation of radical Islam. At the very least, it helped to create an environment that was permissive of it.

However, although radical Islam may have developed spiritually and ideologically from the basis of Salafism spread by oil wealth, it would take another event to prompt many of its believers to mobilize their political beliefs on a grand scale.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution and its Contribution to the Rise of Radical Islam

If the 1973 Arab Oil Embargo contributed to the spread of the Salafist ideology, the 1979 Iranian Revolution provided a model for revolutionary and political Islam. It demonstrated that the religion could be utilized to fundamentally restructure a state's culture and society. It also exhibited how Islam could serve as a vehicle for the diminishment of foreign influences over Middle Eastern countries – in this case, the United States in particular.[61] Examining the events of the yearlong revolution can help one to understand how it has since become a model for Islamist groups throughout the Middle East.

The closing years of the 1970s Iranians became increasingly discontent with the state of their country. The common concern for most Iranians stemmed from economic issues. The back end of the oil boom was anything but profitable for Iranians, as monetary inflation rates increased, GDP per capita plummeted, and their buying power stagnated.[62] Inequality was rampant, and a desperate need for land reform pervaded rural areas.[63]

As the country's economy stagnated, the ruling Pahlavi dynasty in Iran benefited. The revenues from the oil boom allowed the Iranian central government – no longer reliant on its people for tax revenue – to increase its capabilities as it pleased. No longer reliant on tax revenue, the rulers failed to offer any economic relief and, more concerned about social stability, instituted increasingly strict controls on society. The permissibility of opposing political parties was minimal. Political participation was restricted. Tools of "censorship, surveillance, or harassment, and illegal detention and torture were common."[64] The authoritarian policies of the Iranian Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, resulted in growing animosity towards the regime. The most relevant aspect to the realm of radical Islam's origination: Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had

been installed as a result of a coup backed by Western forces – the United States' CIA and British MI6 in particular. This was a fact well understood by the Iranian people.

Beginning in 1978, hundreds of thousands of Iranian people took to the streets in protest of the Shah's regime. The number soon increased to more than one million. Government atrocities in repressing the protests only fanned the flames of revolt, and the Shah of Iran soon fled the country with his family in tow just one year later. Although debate exists regarding the true role of religion in ushering in the revolution, the outward appearance was certainly that it had facilitated the overthrow of the corrupt puppet that was Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The revolt was dubbed the "Islamic Revolution." Its rally cry was "Allāhu akbar," or "God is great." And its trademark results included the ousting of a Westernized secular leader followed by the installment of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who created the Islamic Republic of Iran – a state that intertwined the religion *heavily* within its government. It set forth many principles of Sharia law with an Islamic jurist presiding over judicial rulings within the country.[*] Citizens were expected to conform to the standards of Islamic law; women were required to wear the veil, alcohol consumption was banned, and traditional punishments according to Sharia law were reinstated. The Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership also adopted and exhibited an increasing hostility toward the West, going so far as to ban its music.[65] Regardless of the nuances, the outward appearance was straightforward for many Middle Eastern Muslims in other countries: Islam was used to overthrow an oppressive government that had originally been empowered by the secular Western powers of the U.S. and U.K. "The revival of the Islamic movement," writes humanitarian consult Hafizullah Emadi, "was fundamentally a response to the political domination of Iran by the US."[66]

[*] This is based on the doctrine/concept of Velayat-e faqih.

Throughout the aforementioned revolution, the Ayatollah Khomeini held an extremely exportable worldview. He believed that the states of the world could generally be divided into two categories: the oppressive, arrogant powers and the oppressed nations. This was similar to Ibn Taymiyya's view of the world divided into the land of Islam and the land of unbelief. Iran, like much of the Middle East, fell into the latter category. Its final Shah was a mere extension of the oppressive superpowers. Thus, for oppressed Muslim states, overthrowing corrupt, puppet-like regimes and installing Islamic governments equivocated to overthrowing the oppressive regimes themselves.

The circumstances that spurred this revolution were common throughout the Middle East. Muslim populations in various countries faced economic hardship and oppressive, often unaccountable apostate regimes (some of which were propped up or supported by Western states). The Iranian Revolution could therefore be seen as a sort of model or template for other Muslim societies and groups that sought to found a fundamentalist Islamic state – many of whom were becoming increasingly radicalized by Salafist hardliners. Despite the fact that the Iranian Revolution was Shia-based, this still held true for various radical Sunni groups that would emerge, such as Al Qaeda and ISIS which will be examined in this work. According to Shireen T. Hunter in the Third World Quarterly, "There is no doubt that Iran's Revolution has been a source of inspiration and encouragement to Islamic groups, particularly the more militant among them."[67] Professor of Security Studies Rohan Gunaratna adds to this statement, claiming that the enduring impact of the Iranian Revolution would contribute to the rise of more than one hundred radical Islamist movements. [68]

The inspiration provided to many fundamental and political Islamists was more than indirect and more than solely what they were able to derive themselves – the Islamic Republic of

Iran that was founded in 1979 also *actively* sought to export their model of revolution as well. According to the CIA, "One year after the fall of the Shah, Iran's leaders [appeared] more determined than ever to export their Islamic revolution."[69] The Ayatollah Komeini himself said, "I hope that [Iran] will become a model for all the meek and Muslim nations in the world and that this will become the century for smashing great idols." Iranian President Bani-Sadr said, "Our revolution will not win unless it is exported. We are going to create a new order…As long as our brothers [in the Islamic world] have not been liberated, we Iranians will not put down our arms."[70] One such means of exporting the revolution was inciting discontent amongst radical Islamist groups throughout the Middle East in states such as Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. In some cases, inciting equivocated to directly funding and aiding – Iran would eventually be accused of providing financial assistance toward the creation of radical groups such as Hezbollah.[71]

Overall, the 1978-1979 Iranian Revolution played a large role in politicizing Islam. Although the Islamic Republic was Shia with a vastly Shi'ite majority, it still served as a model even for Sunni Muslims across the region. Increasingly radical Muslims saw the revolution as proof that Islam could be utilized as a vehicle in the ousting of an undesirable regime, especially one backed by the West. They also saw it as proof that a state could effectively operate on Islamic/Sharia law.

While Iran actively continued exporting the aforementioned mindset, the ideology of Salafism continued to spread – especially so now that the Saudi Arabian monarchy felt compelled to maintain its legitimacy with revolutionary zeal in the air. As a result, Salafism continued to influence significant quantities of Islam with intolerant and puritanical views. A zeal for political Islam achieved by any means necessary also became prominent. One other component was necessary to combine the aforementioned forces to create the phenomenon that

is known as radical Islamic terrorism: a successful display of jihadist, militant action. By the end of the 1980s, this would be provided in full view of the entire world via the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 would serve as a third significant factor in spawning the radical Islamist movements that would ultimately become Al Qaeda and ISIS. Though many fundamentalist groups had already begun taking shape, provided ideological foundation via Salafism and political motivation via the Iranian Revolution, it was the Russian invasion that truly provided radical Islam with a militaristic element.

The Soviet Union had interest in Afghanistan for more than one hundred years before the '79 invasion; even as early as the mid-1920s, "most Afghans suspected the Soviets….of being fundamentally interested in annexing Afghan territory."[72] Over the next forty years the Soviets made multiple incursions and interventions for a variety of economic and political purposes. The 1979 invasion, however, was predominantly driven by two motivations according to Bruce J. Amstutz, an author and Career Foreign Service Officer. First, the USSR wanted to ensure the continuity of Afghanistan's Marxist regime. If the communist government in Kabul were to collapse, they believed, the Soviets would lose a "strategic foothold" in the region causing their international prestige and legitimacy to be diminished. A Russian newspaper at the time read, "We had either to bring in troops or let the Afghan revolution be defeated and the country turned into a kind of the Shah's Iran."[73] Second, the Soviets also distrusted Afghanistan's president, Hafizullah Amin. His policies were brutal and oppressive, many of which were inept as well. Because he was operating under the guise of Soviet support, this began turning many Afghans

away from the USSR. Furthermore, Amin eventually began taking measures to purge his government of staunch pro-Soviet supporters and to free it from dependence on the USSR. [74] Consequently, the USSR felt it necessary to remove Amin from office in order to maintain a dominant presence in the region. After several failed assassination attempts, the Soviet Union opted to invade on December 25th, 1979.[75]

Amin was eventually overthrown and replaced in leadership by Babak Kamal. Yet for all the Amin's brutality, the Afghan people were "incensed over their country's occupation by a foreign power and insulted by the imposition of a puppet regime" in the form of Kamal.[76] Although Kamal was still not a fitting alternative, the empowered communist government attempted to use its power to begin modeling Afghanistan after the Soviet Union. Soviet-style "five-year plans" were undertaken across the countryside that reversed many principles deeply held by the Afghan people, such as introducing new education campaigns empowering women, changing the Afghan flag green (a color symbolizing Islam) to red (a color that symbolized Communism), redistributing land, and altering traditional marriage practices.[77] Such stark changes, although fronted by the Kamal regime, only accentuated that it was the Soviets who were truly controlling the government. The Afghan government quickly began to lose its legitimacy and the state system began disintegrate.[78]

It was not long until the countryside arose in total revolt of the communist regime altogether. Rebels, known as "ashrars," began attacking communist forces, burning and pillaging their government institutions across the countryside. Local rebel leaders (such as khans and mullahs) led their followers into the mountains where they would stage spontaneous attacks against communist government forces, many of which were in close geographic proximity (such as police stations). For better or worse, this rebel movement was highly decentralized in nature –

the character and capabilities of the rebel forces were largely dependent on the area and/or tribal region in which they fought. Yet as chaotic as it may have been, the government's communist agenda was greatly stunted by the fighting. Afghanistan's government forces responded to the uprising brutally – thousands of Afghans suspected of being rebels or rebel-sympathizers were arrested. Others were tortured and killed.[79]

The Soviet Union had not initially planned to engage in direct fighting against these rebels – they merely intended to provide security for the communist government's empowerment. However, as Afghanistan's communist and government forces continually proved themselves incapable of committing to the cause and beating back any rebel forces that arose, the USSR was compelled to intervene directly. Placing troops throughout the country, the Soviets aimed to guard strategic objectives to allow the Afghan Communist Army to successfully retake the rural areas (while still leaving the bulk of the work in Afghan hands). Some in the Kremlin believed this limited support would still allow the war to be won in less than two years.[80] However, they were quickly proven wrong.

Afghanistan's communist forces continued suffering defeat at the hands of the rebels. The Kremlin found it necessary to engage directly, "soon launching massive sweep offensives" throughout the countryside and mountainous regions.[81] The Soviet forces, however, had not been prepared for this; at the height of the Cold War, they had been trained to fight on the farmlands and flat expanses of Eastern Europe's countryside. But Afghanistan – with its jagged mountains, high altitude, winding valleys, and treacherous/rocky terrain – was entirely different. Afghan rebel ambushes inflicted more than 25,000 Russian casualties in the first five years of their entrance, according to a 1985 CIA report.[82]

In response to such ambushes, the Soviets "thought nothing of bombing surrounding villages in retaliation…driven more by the concept of collective punishment."[83] Realizing that civilian support for the rebels came from the countryside, the Soviets resultantly sought to depopulate it altogether.[84] A rebel survivor of the Afghan war claimed that Soviet objectives were "meant to empty the villages."[85] It may come as no surprise that a variety of atrocities ensued; that which has since been uncovered and reported include orders by Russians to take "no captives" and the murder of civilians followed by the subsequent burning of their bodies.[86] In one instance, Soviet forces found themselves incapable of taking a village so "they just bombed that village clean down to the ground."[87] Afghan survivors of the war also speak of atrocities in which 105 men and boys were burnt to death during a raid of their village when they were found hiding in an irrigation canal. Farida Ahmadi, an Afghan student, provided detailed accounts of her torture at the hands of the Russians, where she witnessed "how a young man's eyes were torn out."[88] Numerous accounts are available, but the point is clear: as the 1979 Afghan invasion/war descended into a quagmire, Soviet brutality increased.

The anti-communist, anti-Soviet rebels suddenly found that the struggle was no longer one of mere revolt or rebellion. With such atrocities being committed on such a widespread basis across the country, and committed by an avowedly atheist super power at that, many Afghans felt that it was far more than their political system that was under attack – it was their religion and their god, too. Thus, many Muslims in the region subsequently looked to their holy texts for guidance. A number of verses from the Qu'ran – including 22:39, 22:40, 4:75, and 4:76 – enabled and encouraged holy war in the name of defense and protection.[89*] Furthermore, the

[*] Qu'ran 22:39: "Permission [to fight] has been given to those who are being fought, because they were wronged. And indeed, Allah is competent to give them victory."

concept of dar al Islam (the land of Islam) and dar al-kufr (the land of unbelief) came into play – as the former came under attack from the latter, all Muslims were required to take up arms in defense of the religion according to Islamic jurists like Ibn Tamiyya. This obligation may have been recalled by those who adopted his beliefs. In addition, a cultural or religious memory of other successful cases of defensive jihad by Islamic communities in the past may have been recalled; it had previously been utilized to fight the Mongol, Turkic, and Tartar powers in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It was also redeployed in the 18th century, as Islamic communities found it necessary to physically and violently resist the European colonizers that pushed into their land in North Africa, the Middle East, and Indian subcontinent.[90] With all of these factors in mind, compiled with the others mentioned throughout this study, the struggle in Afghanistan soon became one of holy war, one of jihad. [91]

The rebels, mainly located in the countryside, began calling themselves the mujahedeen, meaning "those engaged in jihad."[92] And, having sacrificed their lifestyle and their work to fight against the nation's oppressors, the mujahedeen were held to "high moral standards and [considered them] holy warriors in the finest of Islamic traditions."[93] Many individuals across the Afghan countryside were thus willing to provide the mujahedeen resources and shelter. However, as hundreds of thousands of Afghans continued to be displaced as the war drug on and

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Qu'ran 22:40: "[They are] those who have been evicted from their homes without right only because they say, 'our Lord is Allah.' And were it not that Allah checks the people, some by means of others, there would have been demolished monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of Allah is much mentioned. And Allah will surely support those who support him. Indeed, Allah is Powerful and Exalted in Might."
Qu'ran 4:75: "And what is [the matter] with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and [for] the oppressed among men, women, and children who say, 'Our Lord, take us out of this city of oppressive people and appoint for us from Yourself a protector and appoint for us from Yourself a helper?'
Quran 4:76: "Those who believe fight in the way of Allah, and those who disbelieve fight in the way of the Shaitan."

as the rebels adopted an increasingly religious persona, the nature of the mujahedeen began to change dramatically.

According to Brian Glyn Williams (a professor of Islamic history), religious groups and parties – two of which were Jamiat i Islam and Hezb i Islam – arose "to run trans-regional mujahedeen operations from across the border in Pakistan."[94] The party leaders of these religious groups would overtake the position that local leaders once held. They would recruit individuals loyal to their own Islamist party, rather than individuals loyal to the local region they originally fought for. The indoctrination process into such Islamic parties was often riddled with fundamentalist overtures and teachings – according to Williams, "the rebellion thus led to the radicalization of many of the mujahedeen rebels."[95]

In numbers growing by the hundreds of thousands, the mujahedeen controlled almost all of the countryside throughout Afghanistan, continuing guerilla warfare the communist and Soviet forces by "incessantly [sniping] at them, [planting] mines, [attacking] exposed bases, and [overrunning] distant garrisons."[96] The United States CIA, vehemently anti-Communist, stepped in to aid the mujahedeen forces with Stinger missiles. These heat-seeking anti-aircraft rockets allowed the mujahedeen and rebel forces to deny Soviets the air power that they had once used to their extreme advantage – Russian ground forces became more susceptible to ambush and slower to transport. Come 1986, foreign sympathetic Islamic Arab volunteers began flocking to Afghanistan to assist their fellow Muslims in the battle against an atheist power (recall the supposed religious obligation for all Muslims to come to the aid of others if they came under attack by non-believers). Men such as Abdullah Azzam arose to facilitate the recruitment and transfer of fighters to Afghanistan. Like many others in Peshawar, Pakistan, Azzam utilized his extensive Islamic education "to effectively mobilize foreign fighters against the Soviets" by

citing the duty of all capable Muslims to aid their "brothers in Afghanistan."[97] Religious schools throughout Pakistan began encouraging many to join the anti-Soviet jihad.[98] The Saudi Arabian government facilitated travel to Pakistan, where individuals could be recruited into radical Islamic groups and funneled into Afghanistan to fight alongside the mujahedeen. Others traveled elsewhere from the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Europe, and even the United States to contribute to the defensive jihadist efforts. No consensus exists on the exact number of volunteers, but most estimates generally range from 10,000 to 35,000.[99] Personal bonds and networks eventually arose between these international religiously-motivated volunteers and the local Afghans.

Although many of the aforementioned volunteers would not arrive until the war was coming to a close, the mujahedeen were nonetheless unrelenting in their defensive jihad against the Soviets. They were seemingly impossible to repress. As the war drug on, the Soviets incurred more than 2,000 casualties a year due to the mujahedeen's guerilla warfare. Soviet veterans returned home with psychological damage. The Russian economy began suffering due to war expenditures. The public became discontented. Mikhail Gorbachev finally withdrew Russian troops from Afghanistan by February of 1989, admitting defeat in the country, and the Soviet Union was formally dissolved less than three years later on December 25th, 1991. [100] A number of difficulties affected the country's economy, independence and revolutionary movements were sparked across what was once the Soviet bloc, the younger members of society lost their enthusiasm for the communist vision, and a number of other factors played a role in the Soviet Union's collapse.[101] The defeat in Afghanistan played no small role. But for much of the mujahedeen and for many Afghans and jihadists, the USSR's defeat in Afghanistan due to jihad

was the sole reason for the collapse of the Soviet Union…once the second most powerful country on the planet.

Rohan Gunaratna wrote that this third event was the catalyst in sparking a "new wave…which precipitated the creation of over one hundred contemporary Islamist movements."[102] Bernard Haykel also wrote that the invasion galvanized "Islamists to go to the aid of fellow Muslims against a non-Muslim invader."[103] A wide consensus exists amongst the academic community: the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the late 1970s played an immense role in the origination of the radical Islamic terrorism that would become all to prevalent in the decades to come.

A number of reasons prompt such a conclusion. One such reason may be the resurfacing of radical Islamic interpretations, as these were often useful in aiding the anti-Soviet recruitment process. If Salafism and its ideas had not already begun racing across the Middle East following the Arab oil boom, the fight against the USSR certainly expedited such an ideological diffusion. The thoughts and writings of Ibn Taymiyya, including his radical perception of a necessarily violent world divided between Muslims and non-Muslims, were heavily employed during the war in an effort to attract Muslims from all over the world. The exposure to radical and conservative interpretations increased once again in a direct effort to reach as many members of the umma, or the global Islamic community, as possible.

Across the Muslim world, Islamist groups that were already radical in nature found themselves empowered by the conflict. Because the Afghan resistance movement was initially localized and spontaneous in nature (and, in fact, largely based on a rejection of centralized governmental authority), a regional and/or political entity was not the most fitting to take the lead in organizing the forces. Instead, religious groups proved optimal – especially those that had

spent the majority of their existence spinning appealing radical interpretations of Islam, developing recruitment tactics, and becoming increasingly resistant to the Middle Eastern status quo. The needs of the Afghans upon the Soviet invasion fit perfectly with the capabilities of Islamic movements that already existed, such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Many of those movements became donors, recruiters, and organizers for rebel militants. Thus, many obtained an air of authority. At the very least, many of those movements obtained widespread recognition throughout the Islamic world.

On a similar note, thousands of Arabs and other Muslims were recruited to Afghanistan to join the fight. Although many arrived as the Soviets began its withdrawal – too late to make an impact on the battlefield – they interacted with Muslims throughout Afghanistan and consequently formed interpersonal relationships and eventually, vast networks. Whether they had engaged in combat or not, a number of Afghans and Arabs found themselves in the same geographic region with a similar objective bound by a similar ideology. These connections would prove integral to the development of multinational terrorist networks that would develop in the following years.

Al Qaeda would come into existence directly because of the tumultuous environment and surplus jihadists that came to fruition. And the ISIS would evolve from Al Qaeda. Overall, however, both of these radical Islamist groups were derived from the Salafist ideology, its spread following the Arab oil boom, the example set by the Iranian Revolution for instilling political Islam via uprising, and the many effects of the successful jihad that was waged against the Soviets upon their invasion of Afghanistan.

More elaborate research is needed (on the psychological level) to identify what compelled the first individuals of the 20th century to wage jihad. Surely, they did not do so by

explicitly recalling the events of history – for the foot soldiers of these movements, there was likely no laundry list of events that culminated in a single eureka movement that led to the conclusion that jihad was necessary. Of course, numerous other factors must have contributed to the rise of radical Islam as a whole – the aforementioned are just the most blatant and frequently cited by scholars. The general environment produced by the cumulative effects of these ideologies and events – the oil boom, the Iranian Revolution, the Soviet invasion, and so on – that allowed radical Islam to materialize effectively.

Chapter 2
The Rise of Al Qaeda

Of every radical Islamic terror organization that took shape as a direct result of the aforementioned events – particularly the rise in Saudi wealth and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan – absolutely none has been more prolific than Al Qaeda. Without a doubt, Al Qaeda and its leaders can uncontroversially be considered the "poster child" of radical Islamic terror in the minds of the west for at least two decades. According to Stanford University's Center for International Security and Cooperation and Freeman Spogli Institute, Al Qaeda is "one of the longest-operating and largest jihadist militant organizations in the world."[104] It has claimed responsibility for the costliest and deadliest terror attack in human history.[105] A report from the United States Central Intelligence Agency estimated that Al Qaeda operated on an annual budget of *at least* $30 million dollars a year before the 9/11 terror attacks.[106] It has garnered supporters and has generated affiliates all throughout the world.[107] And it shows no sign of stopping – Al Qaeda continues to operate even as of 2019 under some of its original leadership. Resultantly, as one of the most prolific, most networked, oldest, wealthiest, and largest organizations ever to exist, Al Qaeda serves as a tremendous lens through which one can examine the phenomenon of radical Islamic terror – the origins of the radical Islamic groups it has spawned and the objectives they adopt.

This chapter will examine the origin and evolution of Al Qaeda. It will identify its most influential leadership, the individuals quintessential in elevating the organization to its peak. It will also examine the suspected radicalization process of those individuals in hopes of providing insight regarding the organization's origination, evolution, and character even today. Afterward, the chapter will analyze Al Qaeda's evolving operational objectives to identify its reasoning for

choosing the United States as its ultimate enemy. All of this will paint an accurate picture of what Al Qaeda truly was in its early years: a reactionary, leadership-reliant organization that repurposed an opportunity to begin working toward relatively rational long-term religious objectives.

Al Qaeda's Organizational Precursor: The Maktab al-Khidamat

Al Qaeda was formally established in August of 1988.[108] However, it was not conceived over the course of just one night or just one month. It was years in the making, if not decades; with the benefit of hindsight, the founding of Al Qaeda should consequently come as anything but a surprise. The ideological conditions had been fermenting for quite some time, and all of the pieces to Al Qaeda's establishment had been present – and slowly moving toward one another – up to a minimum of ten years before they finally and fatefully intertwined on August 1988. In fact, Al Qaeda was essentially present as a functioning organization years before 1988, albeit with undeveloped goals and an underdeveloped organizational structure. Its forerunner was known as Makhtab al-Khidamat (MAK), otherwise known as or translated into the Afghan Service Bureau, and was headquartered in Peshawar, Pakistan.[109] To understand the creation of this forerunning organization, the Maktab al-Khidamat, one must return to examine the previously discussed Soviet-Afghan conflict of the 1980s.

As the Afghan rebel movement against the communist forces began to increase in both size and legitimacy, it was increasingly presented with organizational challenges (as is any organization or movement when flooded with an immense amount of incoming capital). The Maktab al-Khidamat was one such organization that arose to meet the rebel movement's increasing need for bureaucratization.

The Maktab al-Khidamat was primarily directed toward the growing Arab involvement in the conflict whose volunteers logically needed inspired, recruited, transported, assimilated, fed, housed, trained, armed, oriented, and sent into battle – hardly a process that could be effectively carried out on an individual level or case by case basis. Founded around 1984, the Maktab al-Khidamat was established to "facilitate the arrival of Arab volunteers and to coordinate the distribution of recruits to various battlefields, training camps, or support activities for the jihad in Afghanistan," according to Jean-Pierre Milelli, a graduate from the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations and a professor at the Institute of Political Studies of Paris.[110] Milelli notes that the Maktab al-Khidamat was headquartered in the Pakistani city of Peshawar, located less than 30 miles from the Afghan border and less than 150 from the Afghan capital. There, anti-Soviet volunteers received housing via a number of hostels operated by the organization. They were free to stay as long as necessary before traveling into Afghanistan. As a result of the MAK's headquartered operation in Peshawar, the city soon experienced an influx of individuals who believed in *at least* the basic concept of jihad. With these volunteers waiting to enter Afghanistan, Peshawar soon became an "ideological and political melting pot" where jihadist ideas and ambitions were free to ferment and circulate freely.[111] Meanwhile, the Maktab al-Khidamat worked to provide these recruits with some degree of military training.

As it continued to prepare individuals for war in Afghanistan in the early 1980s, the MAK became increasingly complex as an operational entity. It developed a heavily organized and bureaucratized structure, bearing resemblance to a modern-day corporation in many ways. Beneath one official director were various assistants who worked to head subcommittees, four of which included a committee responsible for training, another responsible for military affairs, a third responsible for health services, and another responsible for logistics.[112] The Maktab al-

Khidamat, however, did not only serve as a "funnel service" of recruits to the Afghan jihad. It also played a role in garnering sympathy and finances for the mujahedeen as a propaganda machine.

The Maktab al-Khidamat opened branch offices all throughout the world for the purpose of fundraising, even going so far as opening offices in over thirty U.S. cities according to investigative reporter Peter Lance.[113] It further published *al-Jihad* magazine and distributed it throughout the Middle East hoping to encourage volunteers and fundraising for the fight against the USSR.[114] The list of donors to the MAK, the Afghan mujahedeen, and/or the Arab volunteers came to be expansive and diverse. Individuals of various nationalities and incomes contributed, as did wealthy families and private organizations. Charity in this form is estimated to have amounted to millions.[115] Even more official (and interesting) is the amount that was received from official agencies. The United States of America's CIA is claimed to have discreetly channeled somewhere between $600 million to $3 billion worth of support.[116] The Saudi intelligence agency, the Saudi Red Crescent, and Muslim World League also contributed an unknown but substantial amount of money according to journalist Ahmed Rashid.[117] Other official donors allegedly included Pakistan's state security service, the Inter-Services Intelligence Agency.[118] Of course, little can be said with absolute certainty, as all parties allegedly involved fear losing their credibility by releasing such information. Nonetheless, it is clear that the Afghan/Arab mujahedeen received a large degree of support from various members of the international community, particularly regarding finance.

It is important to restate that the MAK never constituted a fighting force in and of itself at any point in the Afghan jihad. And it had little, if anything, to do with the orchestration of combat operations or objectives amongst the mujahedeen. Even the overall impact and

significance of its Arab recruits on the outcome of the war is highly questionable. Abdullah Anas, previously a member of the Maktab al-Khidamat and fighter in the Afghan war, said that "the Arab participation in the Afghani jihad was like a drop in the ocean in terms of significance."[119] Though Arab involvement would increase in the years following his observation, the numbers of those actually participating in combat remained comparatively low – author Lawrence Wright notes that only about 2,000 Arabs were actively involved alongside a quarter of a million Afghan fighters (though tens of thousands of Arabs were physically present in the region inherently willing to take up arms).[120] As a result, it is safe to consider the Maktab al-Khidamat a solely bureaucratic/administrative entity. To use the analogy of a sports team, this organization would *not* have fallen into the category of the players, the coaching staff, or even the athletic department. Rather, one could liken it to a team's booster club – meant to support the team by fundraising, coordinating publicity events, and providing resources and information. For the most part, though, its ability to impact the outcome of a contest was limited.

In spite of this, the Maktab al-Khidamat was indeed working to make a meaningful impact on the conflict. During its early years, the MAK was *entirely* focused on aiding the Afghan struggle against the Soviet Union. It was limited to this objective both operationally and ideologically. Come the 1980's latter half, however, the character and goals of the organization began to take on a radically different form.

Its focus on administration increasingly moved toward a focus on *action*, its defensive goals of jihad increasingly moved toward *offensive* jihad, its intentions of assimilating Arab fighters alongside the Afghan mujahedeen increasingly became intentions of establishing an *independent* Arab fighting force, and so on…even as it became blatantly apparent that the Soviet Union had been beaten and intended to withdraw. The blame for this increasingly drastic

evolution – and consequently, the eventual creation of Al Qaeda – can solely be placed on the Maktab al-Khidamat's leadership. Thus, before delving into the transformation of the MAK into a terrorist organization, it is necessary to examine the men behind the organization.

Abdullah Yusuf Azzam: A Founder of Al Qaeda

Of the Maktab al-Khidamat's thirteen original founders, Abdullah Yusuf Azzam was the most influential in founding and legitimizing the organization.[121] Azzam served as the MAK's official director from its inception in 1984 and can certainly be viewed as the "father" of the Maktab al-Khidamat. Aside from his formal leadership position, Milelli states that, "he served as the principal theoretician, inspirational figure, and organizer of Arab participation in the war in Afghanistan during the 1980s."[122] But forty-three years before the MAK's founding on his day of birth in 1941, there were few indicators that Azzam would lead anything far from an ordinary life.

His father was a grocer. His family was religious, but not to an extraordinary extent. As an individual, he was described as being smart, and he liked to read and even took up an interest in studying agriculture at one point.[123] Similar to many other Jordanians, Azzam received a religious education in his youth. His education eventually led him to cross paths with a man named Shafiq Asad Abd al-Hadi, a local teacher and member of the Muslim Brotherhood (a political organization with Salafist-like religious objectives, generally aiming to reorient Islamic society around holy texts such as the Qu'ran and Hadiths).[124] Azzam soon took a deep interest in the beliefs of the Muslim Brotherhood, reading its publications and even being introduced to the organization's General Supervisor by Shafiq Asad al-Hadi.[125] Shafiq Asad al-Hadi continued to foster Azzam's religious education.

Yet religion still remained on the backburner for Abdullah Azzam as he graduated school and enrolled in an agricultural college located in Tulkarm, a Palestinian city in the West Bank. There, Azzam received good grades and graduated to begin teaching, first in central-Jordan then later in the West Bank. His behaviors remained un-noteworthy. His colleagues, however, did note that Azzam was "conspicuously more religious than they were" – rather than enjoying coffee, food, and conversation with his colleagues during breaks throughout the day, Abdullah Azzam retreated to reading the Quran.[126]

His piousness intensified in 1964 when Shafiq Asad, the religious mentor from his childhood, passed away. Milelli notes that Shafiq Asad al-Hadi's death greatly affected Azzam, "strengthening his determination to keep working for the Islamic cause."[127] Shortly thereafter, Azzam stepped away from agriculture and traveled to Damascus University where he undertook Sharia studies. His educational experience in Syria put him in contact with a number of individuals who would go on to become notable authorities and figures in Islamic establishments.[128] After graduating in 1966, Azzam once again returned to the West Bank. There, he taught in elementary schools, lectured in mosques, and delivered sermons in nearby villages.[129] At this point, Azzam's religiosity does not yet seem to have made the jump from conservatism to radicalism. The 1967 Arab-Israeli War changed that. At minimum, it began to expose any radical tendencies he may have discreetly held.

The war displaced Azzam and his family – who had already been indirectly affected by the 1948 Arab-Israeli War beforehand – to a refugee camp in the Jordanian city of Zarqa.[*] While with his family one evening, the chants of young men began filling the streets of Zarqa "calling

[*] According to Jean-Pierre Milelli and Gilles Kepel, the city of Zarqa was quickly becoming a center for radical Islamist ideas.

people to arms for Palestine" against Israel. Azzam is reported to have said, "Is not it shameful that young people should be leaving for the battlefield before me?"[130]

Accordingly, Azzam likely left for the battlefield. He worked alongside Jordanian Islamic movements to launch guerilla operations against Israeli forces. However, the timeline on Azzam's life becomes somewhat blurred during his involvement with the Palestinian jihad. As does the genuine nature of such involvement – Milelli and Kepel point out that Azzam did not abandon his teaching positions or his own educational endeavors. His involvement, then, may "not [have been] as significant as his biographers claim."[131] At the very least, his experience in an increasingly radical environment exposed Azzam to the militant potential of radical Islamism and allowed him to witness a jihadist endeavor take shape before his own eyes. At the most, his experience with the Palestinian militancy was Azzam's first physical experience actually undertaking jihad.

Azzam would continued his religious education in Cairo, the "capital of the Islamist movement."[132] By the time he graduated from Al-Azhar University with high honors and left the city with a doctorate in Islamic law, Azzam had accrued tremendous religious credentials and established a plethora of connections throughout various Islamic circles.

Abdullah Yusuf Azzam proceeded to return to Jordan where he began teaching Islamic law. His popularity skyrocketed and he quickly garnered a great reputation – students from all over the university began enrolling in his classes, regardless of major. Cassette tapes of his recordings circulated throughout the region. Milelli asserts that Azzam "taught an entire generation of students and left his mark on Islamists"[133] Bolstered with confidence due to his widespread popularity, Azzam's lectures adopted increasingly political overtures. He did not shy away from criticizing the Jordanian government for a variety of reasons. By the end of the 1970s,

his lectures were laden with radical, political, and highly critical rhetoric, ultimately prompting his dismissal from the university. When it became clear that the Jordanian authorities would prevent Azzam from teaching again, he left the country. First, he tried joining the Palestinian struggle. After doing so unsuccessfully, he ventured to Saudi Arabia, "then the favorite haven of Islamist intellectuals."[134] There, he obtained another teaching post. But his tenure there did not last long either. During one of his journeys to Mecca, Abdullah Azzam was informed of the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union.

Less than two years later he relocated once again, this time to Islamabad, Pakistan. Seemingly hoping to aid the Afghan jihadist cause, Azzam's activities there during the early 1980s are harder to pin down. It is reported that Azzam taught at an Islamabad university while frequently traveling to Afghanistan and meeting with mujahedeen leaders. Yet Azzam saw himself more as an intellectual than a fighter. "If he considered that he was a mujahid…his field was more the propagation of the faith than it was armed action," Milelli and Kepel write.[135] Azzam consequently worked to generate international support for the Afghan cause, an endeavor that was originally met with little success. Hoping to stimulate Arab travel to the region, Azzam penned one of his most influential works, *Defense of the Muslim Lands: The First Obligation After Iman.*

Defense of the Muslim Lands highlighted the importance of defensive jihad to the Muslim community, especially in expelling nonbelievers from traditionally Islamic territory. Even with several (?) highly regarded university colleagues writing the book's preface, it never garnered much attention for the Afghan mujahedeen's fight against the Soviets in the early 1980s. Azzam moved to Peshawar in order to be closer to the battlefront. There he reemphasized his efforts at fundraising, propagandizing, recruiting, and networking. In this regard, Azzam was incredibly

influential. Azzam's continued efforts to aid the mujahedeen through these four avenues – fundraising, propaganda, recruitment, and networking – are ultimately what led him to founding the Afghan Service Bureau, the Maktab al-Khidamat (MAK). But he could not have done it as successfully as he did without the support of the organization's principle financier: a man named Usāmah ibn Lādin, or, as it has been spelled in the west, Osama Bin Laden.[136]

Osama Bin Laden: A Founder of Al Qaeda

Born on 1957 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Osama Bin Laden was the seventeenth of no fewer than twenty sons born to his father. A billionaire construction tycoon and highly respected man in the country, his father's wealth and prestige came largely as a result of his construction of palaces for the Saudi royal family.[137] Bin Laden's father also received several government contracts to work on the renowned mosques at Mecca, Medina, and Al-Aqsa, and even paid "all civil servants' wages for the entire kingdom for a six-month period" when it experienced an economic depression.[138]

While Osama Bin Laden may have been one of some fifty children overall, he was the only child birthed by his father's tenth wife.[139] In a newly published August 2018 interview, Osama Bin Laden's mother referred to him as "a shy boy who was academically capable." Continuing on, she added, "He was very straight. Very good at school. He really liked to study." One of his brothers also recalled, "Everyone who met him in the early days respected him. At the start, we were very proud of him. Even the Saudi government would treat him in a very noble, respectful way."[140]

In his extremely privileged youth, Osama Bin Laden spent a good deal of time walking in the footsteps of his father.[141] This often entailed visits to construction cites or business

dealings.[142] Investigations into his background have not revealed anything particularly spectacular or dramatic in his childhood – for this most part, it can be considered generally "lackluster."[143] He received a strict education and was undeniably influenced by conservative Salafist ideas, but so were most other Saudi Arabians.[144] He was also considered very stubborn, but so are most children.

Bin Laden's devout religiousness began to display itself following his father's death in a 1967 airplane crash though it may not have been a matter of causation. In school, he occasionally clashed with classmates who exhibited "anti-Islamic" viewpoints. And following the late 1960s and early 1970s Arab oil boom, Bin Laden was disconcerted by the influx of Western lifestyles, particularly by the negative effects it could first have on the religion of his classmates and then the negative effects it could have on the rest of his country.[145]

It was his enrollment at King Abdul Aziz University in Jidda, Saudi Arabia, that exposed his increased religiosity to increasingly radical ideas. There, Osama Bin Laden studied economics and management half-heartedly but never would complete his coursework. This was likely no matter to him – he had quickly found his calling elsewhere as a result of his social interactions at the university. Bin Laden's mother asserted that,

> The people at the university changed him. He became a different man…He was a very good child until he met some people who pretty much brainwashed him in his early 20s. You can call it a cult … I would always tell him to stay away from them.[146]

Bin Laden did not heed his mother's warning. He became increasingly captivated by radical-leaning ideologues in the university. His idealistic and romanticized perception of jihad – of the struggle for the Islamic umma – began to take shape. If Bin Laden needed one final push to spiral into the world of militant radical Islam while at the university, he was given an immense shove: by 1980, Abdullah Azzam began teaching at King Abdul Aziz University.

The Counter Extremism Project – a nonprofit NGO – states that Bin Laden enrolled in Abdullah Azzam's classes as the university.[147] The Brookings Institution reports that it did not take long for Bin Laden to fall "under his spell" and become infatuated with his radical views on Sunni Islam.[148] While the details and nuances of their interactions may be unknown, one fact is blatantly clear: Azzam quickly became the ideological mentor of Osama Bin Laden, cementing his involvement in radical Islam. Together the two would become one of the most influential duos ever to exist in the world of radicalism, perhaps only behind Mohammed bin Saud and Muhammed ibn Abdul Wahhab (the founders of Saudi Arabia and its Wahhabist creed).

There may have been thirteen individuals present at the establishment of the Maktab al-Khidamat, but Abdullah Yusuf Azzam and Osama Bin Laden were its two most quintessential founders. Azzam brought supreme religious credentials to the table, providing the Maktab al-Khidamat with the ideological framework that it so desperately needed to recruit Arabs to join the Afghan jihad. In retrospect, he has rightly come to be regarded as the "godfather of jihad," the "imam of jihad," and "the father of modern Islamic terrorism" to cite a few titles.[149] John Rollins, a Specialist in Terrorism and National Security for the Congressional Research Service, went so far as to say that Azzam the "intellectual architect of the jihad against the 1979-1989 Soviet occupation of Afghanistan" itself.[150] Milelli and Kepel note that his stature amongst radicals could only be matched by Osama Bin Laden's, who brought financing, management, and communication expertise to the newly-founded Maktab al-Khidamat. The immense supply of wealth that Bin Laden could reliably and continuously offer was unrivaled and his charisma unmatched. However, although Azzam was the MAK's official director and its chief ideologue with hundreds of books, articles, and records published, Bin Laden nonetheless provided a much-needed complimentary element. He could communicate with individuals of varying

socioeconomic and religious backgrounds. Osama Bin Laden's background and family name and the wealth known to be attached to it allowed a reputation of legitimacy to precede him (and the MAK as well). Peter Bergen, from the National Security Studies Program in Washington D.C., and Paul Cruickshank, from NYU's Center on Law and Security, further add that his charisma helped to prevent factionalism within the Maktab al-Khidamat.[151]

Regarding their physical role in supporting jihad during the Maktab al-Khidamat's operational years (roughly 1984-1988), Bin Laden and Azzam are reported to have had little involvement with actual combat against the Soviets. Sources do vary but most suggest that they were almost exclusively focused on the aforementioned administrative and bureaucratic functioning such as recruitment and financing.

For the most part, Azzam, Bin Laden, and their Arab recruits lived apart from the mujahedeen.[152] Only a 1986 battle in Jalalabad and 1987 battle elsewhere in Afghanistan seem to bear legitimate exceptions, where Bin Laden's battlefield antics vary heavily from source to source. Milelli states that Bin Laden only fought in one battle and was almost killed.[153] Rollins, however, writes that Bin Laden fought in at least two battles, one of which involved a full frontal assault against Soviet tanks. He adds that some experts claim Bin Laden was later injured in a Soviet chemical attack as well.[154] Prince Turki al-Faisal, once head of Saudi intelligence, adds that Bin Laden was not much of a fighter but did have combat experience. "By [Bin Laden's] own admission," al-Faisal said, "he fainted during a battle, and when he woke the Soviet assault on his position had been defeated."[155] By all accounts, however, Bin Laden's direct experience in combat of the Afghan jihad adorned him with a heroic profile all throughout the Middle East. He was no longer just a millionaire, but a pious one with suicidal bravery in combat.[156] His peers

spoke highly of his performance, boosting his reputation to near legendary status heavily across the region.

Bin Laden's primary role, however, rested outside of the combat zone. Working with Abdullah Azzam in the Mektab al-Khidamat, Bin Laden continued traveling throughout the Middle East during the mid-1980s to fundraise for the war. His access to the Saudi royal family allowed him to recruit effectively and gave him tremendous access to media outlets, an avenue he would come to perfect over the next two decades.[157] Private donations to the mujahedeen, even aside from those contributed by Bin Laden himself, increased tremendously over the latter half of the 1980s.[*] Together in the Maktab al-Khidamat, Abdullah Azzam continued leading these efforts in his position as official director where he "acted as an ambassador for the jihad throughout the Muslim world and worked tirelessly to spread knowledge of the situation that mujahedeen faced worldwide." He also traveled to establish MAK branch offices all throughout the world in hopes of accumulating the maximum amount of financial and humanitarian aid possible – as stated, the quantity is assumed to have been hundreds of millions of dollars worth.[158] Bin Laden continued attending Azzam's religious sermons when possible.[159]

Azzam continued building his legacy within the Maktab al-Khidamat. More importantly, though, Azzam continued fundamentally altering the ideological landscape of radical Islam. Milelli and Kepel that his views on the religion had five effects that stand out above the rest. First, in what was a radical break from his mentors in the Egyptian Brotherhood, Azzam advocated for the reorientation of jihad to being against *foreign* nonbelievers, rather than local regimes of the same religion. This was directly a result of the Russian invasion but would serve as a sort of ideological template for justifying conflicts in the future especially in the case of Al

[*] As stated, the CIA and other state intelligence agencies had no small role in this either.

Qaeda. The foreign aggressor was the primary enemy. Second, Azzam introduced *territory* as the global Islamic community's foremost concern – the particular political system of that territory would become a secondary issue. Land became more important than the state system, an ideology that would go on to inspire movements in Bosnia, Chechnya, Mindanao, and more. Third, Azzam heavily emphasized the importance of militancy in the defense and reconquest for Islam. Fourth, Azzam worked to heavily diminish the idea of borders and states within the Muslim community. The umma should feel and act as if they are one, the importance of individual nations set aside. Afghanistan, in his eyes, was just the beginning of Muslims reclaiming "their" land – Palestine, Bukhara, Lebanon, Chad, Eritrea, Somali, the Philippines, Burma, and so on were all lands that needed to be reclaimed after the expulsion of Russia. This belief would become so entrenched in radical Islam that even ISIS would adamantly espouse it decades later. Finally, Azzam emphasized the importance of martyrdom in jihad as the ultimate form of sacrifice, a tactic that has since become the trademark of militant radical Sunni Islam.[160] However, for all of his groundbreaking and widespread influence, Azzam and Bin Laden had their differences.

Both agreed that the primary purpose of the Maktab al-Khidamat was to aid the Afghan jihad. But while Azzam wanted to continue gathering, preparing, and sending MAK recruits to fight *alongside* the Afghan mujahedeen, Bin Laden wanted to use the Maktab al-Khidamat to create a *standalone* Arab fighting force. This desire likely began to surface as early as late 1985. Mismanagement, subpar treatment of Arabs, and increasing infighting within the group may have contributed to this desire.[161] But, Abdullah Azzam disagreed with the direction Bin Laden sought to take the group causing a rift to form and formed a separate training camp in October of 1986 just two years later, known as Al Masadah or "The Lion's Den."[162] There, Bin Laden

trained exclusively Arab units. Leadership at this camp largely consisted of Egyptians, many of which were radicals from the Muslim Brotherhood.[163] This is not to say that Azzam and Bin Laden broke off their relationship – they did not. The two continued working closely alongside one another to facilitate the Afghan jihad via the Maktab al-Khidamat. Sometime in the following year, 1987, Osama Bin Laden was introduced to a man named Ayman al-Zawahiri – the man who fundamentally altered the MAK's ideological objectives and the terrorist organization to branch from it, the man who leads Al Qaeda today.[164]

Ayman al-Zawahiri: A Founder of Al Qaeda

Ayman al-Zawahiri was born in Cairo, Egypt in 1951 to a prestigious family. Many members of his immediate family were renowned professors at nearby universities (such as Al-Azhar University, Ayn Shams University, Cairo University, and King Saud University).[165] Milelli and Kepel note that both sides of his family traced their lineage back to the scared Arabian Peninsula, with one side even claiming lineage directly back to the Prophet Muhammad.[166] Unlike Azzam and Bin Laden, Zawahiri seems to have held radical views from an incredibly early age. It has been reported that he founded his first clandestine, politically-oriented Islamic group when he was *fifteen years old*…its primary goal was to oust the Egyptian regime in favor of an Islamic government.[167] It may not have been a legitimate organization in any regard, but it caused him to form his extremist ideology and begin to physically act on his views. Over the next two decades he perfected his intellectual thought process regarding religion and regarding jihad before ever joining the Maktab al-Khidamat with Azzam and Bin Laden.

It is difficult to think that Zawahiri could have been radicalized as such a young age without familial influence. After all, most of his family consisted of intellectuals from Cairo –

again, considered the capital of the Islamist movement – making it only logical that they may have espoused and spread radical (or at least heavily conservative) views of political Islam. Later in his life, however, Ayman al-Zawahiri would receive additional and possibly more impactful influence from a man named Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian author and lead theologian of the Muslim Brotherhood.[168]

Sayyid Qutb was a staunchly anti-Western radical, having adopted such views after briefly schooling in what he considered the "morally bankrupt" United States. In 1954, Qutb was sentenced to prison after his Muslim Brotherhood attempted to assassinate Egypt's president, Gamal Abdel Nasser. It was there that Qutb wrote one of the works that would become incredibly influential in Zawahiri's life: *Milestones.* This work reintroduced the concept of takfir, where "Muslims serving a secular ruler are rendered apostates and thus legitimate targets of execution." He also wrote about the world existing in a state of jahiliyya, where Muslims were acting as incorrectly as pagans. Offensive jihad and the implementation of Sharia law, according to Qutb, was the only way the state of jahiliyya could be alleviated.[169]

Ayman al-Zawahiri's life before joining the Maktab al-Khidamat and interacting with Bin Laden eerily paralleled that of Sayyid Qutb. The end of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War – and the peace treaty signed by Egypt's president – greatly angered much of the country's Muslim population. As did Egypt's repeated loss to Israel in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and the peace treaty that followed once again. These incidents especially angered Ayman al-Zawahiri and especially angered his radical organization, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ). Consequently, EIJ extremists posing as soldiers shot the Egyptian President to death at a parade on October 6th, 1981.[170]

An immense wave of arrests followed the assassination.[171] Many EIJ leaders were imprisoned. Zawahiri was no exception. Sentenced to prison, Zawahiri was tortured, beaten, and humiliated. During that time he is reported to have felt as though he was "reliving the martyrdom of Sayyid Qutb."[172] In prison, Ayman al-Zawahiri emerged as one of the EIJ's principal leaders before being released around 1984. Less than a year later, he departed for Peshawar to join the Afghan jihad. Perhaps news of the jihad reached hi in prison as a result of the already active Maktab al-Khidamat's propaganda efforts. Having received a medical education in his youth, it is likely that he hoped to tend to wounded mujahedeen fighters.

Coming into contact with the MAK, or perhaps even being recruited by it, Zawahiri "did not bother paying allegiance to Abdullah Azzam," his reputation as the orchestrator of the Afghan jihad, or his position as the principal theologian of the conflict when he finally arrived in Peshawar around 1984 or 1985. Rather, the notable EIJ leader instead looked toward the charismatic, intelligent, and well-spoken Osama Bin Laden. Zawahiri had dramatically referred to Bin Laden as a "heaven-sent man," clearly displaying his interest in Bin Laden's leadership.[173]

Intensifying the rift that had already begun forming between Bin Laden and Azzam, Zawahiri worked to "pull Bin Laden away" from his once-mentor. Milelli notes that Bin Laden soon "became the object of fierce competition between Zawahiri and Azzam."[174] When Azzam protested Bin Laden's suggested all-Arab training camp, Zawahiri took Bin Laden's side. When Azzam did not back down from protesting the independent camp, Zawahiri reportedly went so far as spreading rumors that Azzam was an American spy.[175] Around this point, circa 1986, Azzam is reported to have lamented to his son-in-law, "They are talking against the mujahedeen….[and trying] to create [discord] between me and these volunteers."[176] But the debate over an all-Arab fighting force was not the only difference between Zawahiri and Azzam

– more principally, Zawahiri did not prioritize unity amongst all Muslims. His primary concern was the corrupt Arab regimes that oppressed Muslims in the Middle East (recall Qutb's teachings regarding takfir), not foreign aggressors or nonbelievers.[177] Perhaps this was the greatest point of conflict between Azzam and Zawahiri. Both competed to disembark their opinions onto Osama Bin Laden, who each clearly saw tremendous leadership potential in.

Nonetheless, these three individuals continued working alongside one another within the Maktab al-Khidamat to assist in the anti-Soviet Afghan jihad. Each may have begun to harbor different overall views of jihad's ultimate purpose, resulting in different overall views regarding the role of Arab fighters in the Afghan conflict. The short-term overarching goal of the MAK remained unanimous amongst its leadership: to expel the atheistic Soviets from Muslim territory in Afghanistan.

By the late 1980s, it became evident that they were going to achieve their goal. In April of 1988, Mikhail Gorbachev signed a peace accord with the country. Just under a year later, in February of 1989, the USSR had removed its last soldier from Afghanistan.[178] The Afghan-Arab holy war against infidel leaders had been successful.[179*] The Soviet-Afghan conflict had fundamentally altered the ideological world of Islam for decades to come. It also intermixed thousands of Afghan and Arab volunteers, many of which now had no job or home to return to. Perhaps William Rosenau and Alexander Powell, two analysts for the CNA's Center for Strategic Studies, said it best when they wrote that a "militant brotherhood without borders had been forged" in the wake of the Russian invasion.[180]

The three leading figures emerging out of this war – Abdullah Azzam, Osama Bin Laden, and Ayman al-Zawahiri – possessed far too grandiose ideologies to let such an established

[*] The Arab involvement was less-than-decisive in the Soviet decision to withdraw

structure with such present manpower disintegrate into the past. An organized and structured system was on hand. Thousands of jihadist recruits lingered without purpose. Thus, these three alongside other MAK leaders looked to repurpose the organization, "contemplating how, and to what end, the Islamist volunteer network they had organized could be utilized."[181]

In August of 1988, in a suburb of Peshawar, Pakistan where they had previously coordinated jihadist recruitment/fundraising efforts for the Afghan war, they founded a new organization "from the fighters, financial resources, and training and recruiting structures left over from the anti-Soviet war."[182] This organization would become known as *Al Qaeda.*

Establishing a Purpose: Al Qaeda's Developmental Years (1988-1989)

As Abdullah Azzam, Osama Bin Laden, and Ayman al-Zawahiri honed their leadership and committed their lives to conducting jihad for nearly a decade, it is not difficult to envision the group calculating how to maintain their militant Islamic organization after the USSR's withdrawal. What may be perplexing, however, is how this militant Islamist organization came to focus almost *exclusively* on the United States as its primary enemy.

After all, the United States was allegedly one of the Maktab al-Khidamat's principle sources of support; it is said to have donated millions (if not billions) worth of both money and arms to the movement in the 1980s undeniably bolstering the mujahedeen's ability to repel the Soviet invaders. Yet Al Qaeda came to view the United States as one of the Islamic umma's principle enemies.

Furthermore, at least up to Al Qaeda's establishment, the United States had never blatantly and physically invaded and occupied an Islamic country with the hope of ousting or

supporting an undesirable government as the Soviet Union had.* The United States had never been the focal point of widespread Arabic or Islamic jihad. Yet Al Qaeda evolved to commit disproportionately more attacks on the United States than post-Soviet Russia.

Even regressing all the way to the leading causes of Middle Eastern destabilization – 19th and 20th century European imperialism – the United States is not readily implicit. The 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement between France and Britain ultimately led to mandates which divided the Middle East into what can be known as "spheres of influence." The French received control over Syria and Lebanon while the British gained control over Palestine and several Mesopotamian provinces through which they carved out the modern-day country of Iraq, combining multiple religious and ethnic groups such as Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds into a single state.[183] Outside of these mandates, both Britain and France were heavily involved as colonial powers elsewhere (such as the British in Egypt and the French in Algeria). Both powers retained control via force and violent methods, and only truly began to cease their involvement following the end of World War II… just decades before the founding of Al Qaeda. And Britain was directly complicit in the founding of Israel as a Jewish state and homeland, as well as the migration that flooded to Palestine to facilitate its eventual creation.[184] Meanwhile, however, the United States remained uninvolved and isolationist at the least and supportive of the oppressed Middle Eastern peoples at best, often seen as an anti-colonial source of hope for a decent amount of time as evidenced in Erez Manela's *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism.*[185] Yet Al Qaeda would go on to address the America as its ultimate archenemy with Britain as merely one of America's allies.

* The most readily apparent objection to this may have been the United States empowerment of the Iranian Shah before the '79 Revolution. Yet this was a Shia government, not Sunni, and the United States never forcefully occupied the country nor conducted prolonged military operations.

None of the aforementioned is to suggest that one state is more deserving of Al Qaeda's jihad than another. Nor is it to suggest that states such as Britain, France, Russia, and others are directly responsible for any "plight of the umma" or Al Qaeda's establishment. The aforementioned simply raises the question: With all of this foreign antagonism, how did Al Qaeda become vehemently fixated on the United States as its primary enemy? The remainder of this chapter will attempt to answer the question in examining the evolution of Al Qaeda's operational objectives.

At its founding, Al Qaeda was intended to serve as a "vanguard" for the Islamic people – a relatively small group of elite individuals who could guide the Muslim community throughout a world which had fallen into a state of disbelief and a state of disrepair. With Al Qaeda at the helm, the "glory of the umma" could be restored via the emplacement of Islamic governance throughout the globe. Its general strategy, according to Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, was to inspire masses of Muslims to eventually rise up and overthrow the existing "corrupt and impious" international system. Afterward, an Islamic caliphate could be emplaced.[186] The minutes supposedly taken during Al Qaeda's founding meeting reveal very little regarding its original intentions and do not provide much in terms of supporting or negating the aforementioned, aside from the fact that its overarching goal was to make Islam "victorious."[187] But the writings of Abdullah Azzam, the chief ideologue of the MAK and then Al Qaeda, manage to shed further insight on Al Qaeda's overall goal. Published in a 1988 copy of al-Jihad magazine, Azzam wrote,

"For every intention there must be a vanguard to carry it forward and, while forcing its way into society, endure enormous expenses and costly sacrifices. There is no ideology, neither earthly nor heavenly, that does not require such a vanguard that gives everything it possesses in

order to achieve victory for this ideology. It carries the flag all along the sheer endless and difficult path until it reaches its destination in the reality of life, since Allah has destined that it should manifest itself."[188]

This sentiment clearly reflected the teachings of Sayyid Qutb, one of the most influential ideologues amongst Al Qaeda leadership (especially for Ayman al-Zawahiri).[*] Years earlier, Qutb had written:

> It is necessary that there should be a vanguard which sets out and then keeps walking on the path, marching through the vast ocean of jahiliyya which has encompassed the entire world.[189]

Yet this was Al Qaeda's very broad, very general, and very long-term goal. Its immediate, more realistic, more tangible objective was to liberate the communities of oppressed Muslims in various locations throughout the world. After all, this is where the veteran experience of its leadership rested: Azzam with Palestine, Zawahiri with Egypt, and all of the founders with Afghanistan. This was also where their tactics could continue to be most effective. A former member of early Al Qaeda said,

> Osama believed he could set up an army of young men responding to the jihad call. When he presented the idea to us, he did not speak of jihad…but of helping Muslims against the infidel governments oppressing them, as was the case in Palestine, the Philippines, and Kashmir, especially Central Asia, which was under Soviet rule then.[190]

Compounding onto this issue is a quote recalled by Hasan Abd-Rabbuh al-Surayhi, once an Arab recruit to the Afghan jihad. He was approached by a number of Al Qaeda's original leadership who attempted to persuade him into joining the organization. Al-Surayhi recalls them as saying:

> You are aware of brother Osama Bin Laden's generosity. He has spent a lot of money to buy arms for the young mujahedeen as well as in training them and paying for their travel tickets. Now that the jihad has ended, we should not waste this. We should invest in these young men and we should mobilize them under his umbrella. We should form an Islamic army for jihad that will be called Al Qaeda. This army will be one of the fruits of what

[*] Abdullah Azzam adopting and writing about a view that so closely resembled that of Sayyid Qutb, Zawahiri's principle influence, may demonstrate the increasing sway of Zawahiri over Al Qaeda.

> Bin Laden has spent on the Afghan jihad…The members of this army should be organized and highly trained…We should train these young men and equip them to be ready to uphold Islam and defend Muslims in any part of the world.[191]

Additionally, an internal document recovered from Al Qaeda operatives provides further insight regarding the organization's original goals. Though undated, its intentions align with the aforementioned quotes and other sentiment expressed by Al Qaeda leadership. The general goals of Al Qaeda in its first few years were:

1. Spread the sentiment of jihad in the Islamic nation.
2. Preparation of the Islamic cadre through training and participation in fighting operations.
3. Backing and supporting the jihad movements in the world according to ability.
4. Coordination between jihad movements in the world according to ability.[192]

The founders of Al Qaeda identified an extremely general long-term goal accompanied by an extremely general immediate course of action. While its long-term goal may have been the establishment of a global Islamic caliphate to end the worldwide oppression of Muslims, its short-term and immediate objective was to "train Muslims in the art of warfare" to liberate them where possible and ultimately prepare the umma for battle against the un-Islamic world order which could enable the eventual creation of a caliphate.[193] Again, these objectives were extremely general and extremely vague – different individuals may have consequently held varying opinions regarding Al Qaeda's original purpose.

Further insight regarding a more narrowed objective and clearer goal can be derived by looking at the composition of its founding leadership. Ayman al-Zawahiri, one of the organization's foremost ideologues (often considered its "deputy head") was also a member of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ).[194] His growing influence over Osama Bin Laden has been made clear. Other significant members of Al Qaeda at its founding and later "advisors" for the organization were also Egyptian radicals: Mohammed Atef al-Masri, Abu-Ubaidah al Banjshiri

and Abu Walid al-Misri. Their ideological influence on the organization is evident. Even in one of the Al Qaeda's early founding documents it is written, "this future project is in the interest of the Egyptian brothers."[195] Another man, Hasan Abd-Rabbuh, said, "I was one of those who witnessed the birth of Al Qaeda. The idea of Al Qaeda is an Egyptian one by the Islamic Jihad group."[196]

A thorough examination of the ideological objectives and orientation of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and other Egyptian radical Islamist groups would be far too extensive to include in this study. But one theme of such organizations is clear: many were diametrically opposed to the leadership in their own country. Many fully supported overthrowing their own ruling governments. In fact, this was their utmost priority.

It is only logical to assume that a similar sentiment may have permeated Al Qaeda's core leadership and influenced the organization's operational objectives at an early date. The evidence indeed suggests that Al Qaeda's original intention may have been to overthrow the corrupt, oppressive, secular, and generally "un-Islamic" (apostate) governments of the Middle East.[197] These Middle Eastern regimes have been dubbed "the near enemy" and were likely the recipients of Al Qaeda's focus in the first years of its founding.

As a supposed Islamic vanguard, Al Qaeda could work to overthrow apostate regimes all throughout the Muslim world. In doing so, the organization could pave the way for the reinstallation of Islamic governments, the reinstatement of Islamic law, and the restoration of the Islamic caliphate and all of its glory (though this end goal was many years down the road). Bergen and Cruickshank support this notion, writing, "the predominantly Egyptian militants who surrounded Bin Laden at the end of the 1980s advocated…the violent overthrow of governments

across the Muslim world they deemed 'apostate.'"[198] Even Osama Bin Laden is reported to have undertaken this view.

Abdullah Azzam staunchly rejected such a concept of fighting other Muslims. As did many of his followers.[199] He had three principle reasons for opposing the "near enemy" agenda. First, Azzam believed that Al Qaeda should have continued on the fight in Afghanistan until a truly Islamic government was empowered.[200] With the region critically destabilized after the Soviet Union's withdrawal, and with multiple organizations vying for power in Kabul, the opportunity for Al Qaeda to fill the void was high, particularly relative to elsewhere (Azzam had multiple contacts amongst the mujahedeen and other local warlords/leaders).[201] Second, Azzam held a very traditional view of jihad – he thought that Al Qaeda's focus should almost exclusively rest on retaking/reclaiming "*once*-Muslim lands from *non*-Muslim rule." In his scenario, after establishing an Islamic republic in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda's primary enemies would become countries such as Israel (with Muslim land that had been taken by Jews) and even Spain (with Muslim land that had been taken by Christians). How could Al Qaeda ever claim itself to be an Islamic vanguard for all Muslims everywhere if it took part in violence against certain Muslims? It could not in Azzam's eyes, especially not if the unity of the umma was to be maintained in the quest to eventually found the caliphate.[202]

By the latter half of 1989, Bin Laden – again, one of the organization's most promising leaders – made it known that he preferred a more international view of jihad. Afghanistan was not his focus, contrary to Azzam. Bin Laden drifted away from his previous mentor as "Azzam became increasingly convinced that [an Afgan commander] represented the future of Afghanistan."[203] All in all, it can be said that at least some degree of infighting broke out within the organization on its quest to adopt a primary enemy. Yet it is impossible to say what that

degree was with any definitive precision – the infighting could have ranged from generally polite, intellectual debate to extreme threats of violence.

Even in spite of this inner-strife or the lack of a unanimously agreed upon goal, Al Qaeda did successfully get off the ground as an organization. Within just six months of its founding date, Al Qaeda is reported to have accrued at least three hundred fighters.[204] And though it did not have a clear objective/identity, it did have a clear structure. Designed with the weaknesses of the Maktab al-Khidamat in mind, Al Qaeda is reported to have had a bureaucratic, hierarchal, rules-based organization even in its earliest of years. Similar to the MAK, it made use of committees once again, this time with even more specialization. For example, Al Qaeda's military committee was divided into four sections: general combat, special operations, nuclear weapons, and research. Its members were required to have had at least five years of military experience as well as a university degree. With the committee structure came an improved hierarchal design. That hierarchal design principally empowered one emir with strict authority over the organization. Yet it nonetheless fostered an entrepreneurial attitude amongst its members – even those at the bottom of the hierarchal chain were encouraged to "take initiative and shape the implementation of strategic plans."[205] Gartenstein-Ross and Barr referred to their mechanism as "centralization of decision and decentralization of execution."[206] As an example, an Al Qaeda recruit could approach his superior with plans for an attack. That recruit would come up with the idea and strategy himself, but the final decision on whether or not that attack could be carried out rested upon those above him in the hierarchy.

Al Qaeda worked to improve its organizational capabilities on a daily basis – it promoted members to become learned leaders, it encouraged loyalty and allegiance amongst its recruits, and generally fostered an environment where the group could learn and improve as a

organization to the point where it could recover in the event of leadership decapitation and evolve as quickly as necessary to avoid destruction.[207] Al Qaeda's network of training camps continued to expand and grow. One can assume that its leadership was increasingly pressed to identify a unanimous objective for the growing organization. Al Qaeda grew to the point where it *needed* an enemy to exist. It could not carry on operating without a principle objective.

It came a step closer to the cessation of internal ideological strife and a step closer to the adoption of a unanimous objective amongst its leadership on November 24th, 1989. On this date, Abdullah Yusuf Azzam was killed by a bomb planted on his way to preach at a mosque. His murder is universally considered an intentional assassination, but there is no consensus regarding the culprit.[*] Osama Bin Laden assumed unquestioned leadership of the organization.[208]

Even with one man firmly in control of the organization, however, Al Qaeda did not immediately adopt a clear objective as noted by Abu Musab al Suri (a Syrian jihadist who spent time with Bin Laden between 1988 and 1989): "At the time Al Qaeda did not have any operational plans outside of Afghanistan…Sheikh Osama did not have any special venture."[209] Osama Rushdi, a former Egyptian jihadist, also noted, "In Peshawar, in the early years, Osama [Bin Laden] had no ideology."[210] But now, with Azzam dead and his religious authority essentially extinguished, Al Qaeda's leadership faced tremendously less legitimate ideological obstruction. Focusing *strictly* on Afghanistan and focusing *strictly* on non-Muslim enemies (like

[*] A number of theories regarding who the culprit was have been floated around since Azzam's 1989 assassination. One theory suggests that it was Bin Laden due to a disagreement over the organization's future. A second suggests that it was Zawahiri due to a power struggle that may have existed been Azzam and the EIJ over Al Qaeda. A third says that it was one of the Afghan factions vying for power in the country, as Azzam may have hit a sore spot in his attempts to negotiate and mediate between the local warlords. A fourth suggests it was Pakistani intelligence while a fifth suggests that it was Israeli intelligence while a sixth suggests that it was the United States CIA. Even more theories exist. However, perhaps one could say that the most appealing of these theories is the second based off of the evidence that has been presented in this study; Zawahiri and Azzam each espoused fundamentally different views regarding the future of the organization so perhaps the most "bad blood" existed between these two, rather than the others. But again, it is absolutely impossible to say with any degree of certainty.

the aforementioned Israelis and Spanish) was a less attractive and legitimate path now that Azzam was dead. Yet more so than anything else, Osama Bin Laden assumed what appears to have been generally unrivaled and unquestioned control of the organization. Some scholars (such as psychiatrist Peter A. Olsson, journalist Matthew Chance, cult specialist Rick Alan Ross, professor/author Christina Hellmich, and plenty of others unmentioned) have even gone so far as to refer to Al Qaeda as the "cult of Osama." It is from Azzam's death on that the path and orientation of Al Qaeda seems to have been determined almost entirely and exclusively by Osama Bin Laden.[211]

Searching for an Enemy: Al Qaeda's Wavering Aspirations (1989-1992)

Soon after Azzam's death, Bin Laden left the Afghanistan/Pakistan region and retuned to his home in Saudi Arabia. While away, it appears that Abu Ubaidah al-Banjshiri (second or third in Al Qaeda's command) and Abu Hafs al-Masri (third or fourth in Al Qaeda's command) ran Al Qaeda's training camp system according to Bergen, Cruickshank, Gartenstein-Ross and Barr.[212] Generally, it seems that this was all Al Qaeda was for most of the time between 1989 and 1992: training camps. But this is not to suggest that the organization had grown dormant. Even while searching for a pronounced objective, the terrorist group was extremely organized and bureaucratic and continued growing by the month. It was also very cohesive and had developed an impressive operational capability. Rohan Gunaratna claimed that "Al Qaeda established ideological, political, financial, and military control over several Islamic groups."[213] While this may have been an exaggerated claim, Al Qaeda was indeed busy forging partnerships with other radical organizations (and growing an increasing air of legitimacy).

During this time in the early 1990s, one can deduce that Al Qaeda continued to advance with its "Islamic vanguard" agenda. With its Egyptian dominated leadership and the death of Azzam, one can also deduce that it trained soldiers and recruited individuals with the "toppling apostate dictatorship" – or the "near enemy" – agenda. But this does not seem to have been the solidified objective; Al Qaeda leadership may have tread lightly with this agenda to avoid alienating recruits and fighters who had once sided with Azzam were timid about waging jihad against other Muslims. And it does not seem to have advanced toward direct action regarding this agenda. Perhaps this is because the highest-ranking, physically present leadership of Al Qaeda was focused on simply training the recruits. Its ideological leaders were absent; Ayman al-Zawahiri is reported to have been away working with his Egyptian Islamic Jihad organization while Bin Laden was in Saudi Arabia, as aforementioned. Bin Laden continued working to identify a solidified enemy while there, but to little avail – he may have been hesitant to totally adopt the Egyptian agenda, perhaps displayed by his lack of attendance at Zawahiri's EIJ seminars.[214]

Al Qaeda's operational objective seems to have changed from training jihadists to exporting jihad and jihadist fighters around 1991 when the organization was forced to relocate from the Afghanistan-Pakistan region to Sudan as a result of Bin Laden's expulsion from Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan's increasing destabilization, and Pakistan's ousting of Arab militants.[215]

For a substantial period of time, Sudan offered the perfect safe haven for Al Qaeda. In exchange for the services that Bin Laden provided – such as financing construction sites, investing heavily in infrastructure, donating to farming projects, etc. – the regime in Khartoum, Sudan seemed willing to turn a blind eye to Al Qaeda's growing operations and training camps

in its own country.* Because of Sudan's extremely poor economic situation at the time, it is likely that Bin Laden became one of its principle investors.[216*]

Although Al Qaeda was weakened somewhat by its move – having lost recruits, a physical base, money, and so on – it was quick to reestablish itself there in Sudan. Bin Laden worked to connect the organization throughout various Muslim countries. He developed contacts in Somalia and Yemen that were able to gather weapons and technical equipment for the organization. He also grew a network of businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and private donors to "grow the AQ arsenal and covertly support terrorist activities."[217] Stanford University's Mapping Militants project further notes that Bin Laden "also forged connections with extremist Islamist groups from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Oman, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco…Eritrea, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia."[218] The move to Sudan thus strengthened Al Qaeda by increasing its involvement in the licit economy, solidifying relationships with other terror organizations, and allowing it to network internationally.[219]

In Sudan, Bin Laden worked to achieve his vision of global jihad. The organization still did not develop a primary enemy that it could work against in the years immediately after its move there, but Bin Laden pursued the global jihadist objective that he had so idealistically envisioned nonetheless. From 1991 to 1992, Al Qaeda exported trained fighters and equipment to other terrorist organizations. It also provided funds to terrorist networks in East Asia, Africa, Soviet occupied territories, and the Balkans.[220] Other sources note that it sent mass amounts of funds to radical allies in Jordan and Eritrea, sent fighters to Bosnia and Somalia, opened a

* Whether or not Al Qaeda operated a significant training camp (or number of training camps) in Sudan is debated.
* Many sources report that a key Islamist leader and figure in the National Islamic Front regime in Sudan, Hassan al-Turabi, actually extended a direct invitation to Osama Bin Laden and his organization.

satellite office in Azerbaijan, and sent a number of its members to train with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines.[221] Furthermore, the testimony of Jamal al-Fadl (a government informant from Al Qaeda) reveals that the organization helped to smuggle weapons and recruits into Chechnya. Jamal al-Fadl also noted that Al Qaeda supplied propaganda material, weaponry, and financial support for families of soldiers in jihadist movements in Bosnia, too.[222] And this is just what has been discovered – a number of other physical or monetary transactions may have occurred between Al Qaeda and other radical Islamic organizations, but it is impossible to know. One thing can be said with near certainty, however: During its first two or three years in Sudan, Al Qaeda became the "'general headquarters for international terrorism,' with a complex global web of connections relationships, and allies" all over the world.[223] It was behaving almost like the Maktab al-Khidamat had, but in facilitating global jihad rather than Afghan jihad.

From its founding to this point around 1992 or 1993, Al Qaeda had already become an incredibly unique organization. Its ideology, leadership, purpose, structure, location, and funding was incredibly fluid. In many ways, it actually had become that "Islamic vanguard" meant to defend Muslims everywhere – Al Qaeda was not operationally bogged down in any one dispute or fixated on any one single enemy, so it easily sought involvement in a broad array of conflicts.

Yet this is certainly not to overstate the power of Al Qaeda. It is difficult to speak of the organization's actual impact on other conflicts; academia may never see a genuinely accurate analysis of Al Qaeda's contributions to other jihadist movements. One may never know how effective it was as that "Islamic vanguard." But given the research available, Al Qaeda's impact seems to have been relatively insignificant. Rather than viewing Bin Laden's pre-1993 Al Qaeda as a hegemonic terrorist network that directed the movements of other organizations and served

as a bank of limitless money and fighters to be withdrawn by other jihadists, it may be more accurate to view Bin Laden's pre-1993 Al Qaeda as an overextended organization trying to make an impact in far too many conflicts to the point that its contributions were merely many different drops in many different buckets. After all, radical Islamic terror organizations *on the whole* did exist in the 1990s (more so than any other time in history) and did actively affect the world's political situation, but they were *not* massive movements engulfing entire populations or states or conquering territories like a force such as communism. So at best, one can assume that Al Qaeda's donations at the time merely allowed a radical organization to keep its footing, fund some more recruitment activities, buy some more weapons, stage some more attacks, and last longer against a government power. It was not the wave of Islamic revolutions sweeping across the world to set the stage for a new global caliphate that Al Qaeda originally hoped to bring about.

This may have been the reason that Al Qaeda's leadership continued searching for an individual enemy. Noman Benotman, a former Libyan jihadist who spent time with Bin Laden during his years in Sudan, noted that those years were frequently difficult. This was often due to the continued disagreements within the organization's leadership. Perhaps Osama Bin Laden was the source of conflict. Come the years in Sudan, with Azzam dead and Zawahiri focused on the EIJ, Bin Laden was the unrivaled emir of Al Qaeda (as aforementioned). Although he had once feuded with Azzam and stood alongside Zawahiri on the issue, many sources note that Bin Laden was reluctant to actually engage in conflict against Muslim regimes, the "near enemy," when it came time to actually do so.

The closest Al Qaeda came to carrying out jihad against the "near enemy" seems to have been in Yemen around 1990. There, particularly in Yemen's southern region, Bin Laden believed

that Muslim people were being oppressed by the communist/socialist regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh in the Northern region – Bin Laden saw this as an even more important objective than toppling the Egyptian government (despite the EIJ's insistence otherwise) and certainly as more important than attacking the United States (which had only begun to enter his radar). Abu Musab al Suri reaffirmed this in saying, "Sheikh Osama's fundamental and special jihad plan was to create a jihad movement in Southern Yemen."[224] Taking it a massive step further, Abu Walid al Masri, an Egyptian jihadist, said,

> Bin Laden talked freely about the need to liberate South Yemen from Communist rule, after the Afghan example, so as to have a massive Muslim presence in Yemen similar to the one in Afghanistan. All his moves and preparations were within that framework. To him the Afghanistan arena was just one for training, or preparing the decisive confrontation on the land of Yemen. It is for this reason he established the Al Qaeda organization to internationalize the jihad.[225]

Noman Benotman adds that, "The main focus of Bin Laden is Yemen. Even when he was in Afghanistan he would spend a lot of money on the jihad in Yemen."[226] Even a survey allegedly completed by Bin Laden himself regarding his objectives confirms this, as he wanted "deep participation in the battles in accordance with the political and strategic vision of the leadership in Peshawar, with the long-term goal being the liberation of South Yemen from communism."[227]

Al Qaeda Identifying the United States as the Primary Enemy

Bin Laden may have been interested the Yemeni situation because it so closely resembled what happened in Afghanistan. He may have felt his jihadist strategy may have been easily adaptable. He additionally had familial ties to the region. Some sources, such as Bergen and Cruickshank, claim that he even began to lay groundwork for the jihad in Yemen. Yet Bin Laden's hesitancy to hurriedly engage an Arab, Muslim regime caused Al Qaeda to miss its

window of opportunity when peace accords were signed formally uniting Yemen's two regions. Bin Laden may have briefly considered declaring jihad on the united government as a whole, but ultimately did not (likely because it was now a non-Communist, Arab government).[228]

By December of 1992, however, Al Qaeda had the enemy it was searching for: the United States of America. From this date onward, Al Qaeda fundamentally and dramatically changed as a terroristic organization. Nearly all of its operations, ideological objectives, propaganda, recruitment tactics – nearly every aspect of the organization – shifted almost *entirely* to focusing on the United States of America.

Al Qaeda operatives began carrying out direct attacks against U.S. forces. First in December of 1992 via the Yemen Hotel Bombings. Then again in 1993 when it claimed responsibility for a World Trade Center bombing. Then in 1995 when a car bomb exploded in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia near a U.S. military training exercise. And again in 1998 when it killed 224 and injured more than 5,000 in embassy bombings, in 2000 when it bombed the USS Cole killing seventeen, and on September 11th, 2001 when it carried out the most devastating terror attack in the history of the world.

Al Qaeda would focus on the United States until it peaked as a terror organization. It would focus on the United States until it declined as a terror organization. Understanding why Al Qaeda adopted the United States as its principle enemy in 1992 can help one to better understand the implications of its particular radical Islamist ideology, the development of a terror organization's ultimate operational objectives, and the complex phenomenon of radical Islamic terrorism as a whole.

Al Qaeda's Grievances Against Its Principle Enemy: The United States of America

Al Qaeda's shift toward the United States occurred because of two categories of reasons. In the first category rests Al Qaeda's actual grievances against the United States and its actions in the Middle East and Muslim world. These include but are not limited to the United States military's presence on the Arabian Peninsula following the Gulf War, the United States' sanctions and embargo on Hussein's Iraq, and the United States' continued support for the state of Israel. In the second category rest the strategic and logical reasons for the shift that benefited Al Qaeda as an organization. These include but are not limited to the U.S. serving as a force that radical Muslims could unite against, the United States' position as the global hegemon and perceived "puppet-master" of apostate Islamic regimes, the United States' supposed weakness, and the United States' plentiful media outlets. Generally, it seems as though the former category (the United States' perceived missteps in the Muslim world) placed the country on Al Qaeda's list of potential candidates, while the second category (the tactical advantages offered by choosing it as an enemy) made it a seemingly obvious choice to rally against. Over time, each category was filled with more and more reasons; by the late 1990s, the two categories had spilled over and Al Qaeda formally declared complete jihad against the country. Osama Bin Laden eventually wrote, "We…call on every Muslim…to kill the Americans and plunder them of their possessions wherever and whenever you find them," adding, "Unless you go forth, [God] will punish you with a grievous penalty, and put others in your place."[229] Zawahiri, as well, later urged Muslims, to "be sure to inflict maximum casualties on [the United States], kill the greatest number of people, for this is the language understood by the West."[230*] Chronologically, Al Qaeda's unrivaled hatred for the United States seems to have truly begun with the country's presence in Saudi Arabia during the First Gulf War.

[*] A great deal of threats were ultimately made against the United States – enough to fill many pages. These were but two.

Al Qaeda's Primary Grievance: The United States' Military Presence on the Arabian Peninsula

On August 2nd of 1990, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein ordered a military invasion of Kuwait – an oil-rich neighboring country – likely to expand Iraqi power, eliminate a debt that it owed to the country, and finally annex the region as an Iraqi province.[231] Kuwait quickly fell to Iraqi power. Despite immediate UN condemnation and sanctions, Hussein nonetheless appeared poised to continue Iraqi conquest. Further aggression seemed imminent as Iraq amassed more than 100,000 troops in Kuwait (and less than fifty miles from the Saudi Arabian border) within days of the invasion.[232*] The number of soldiers readily available in its military was reported to have been more than one million.[233]

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia greatly feared invasion. The House of Saud scrambled to ensure its defense. At some point between August 2nd and August 7th, Osama Bin Laden offered the Saudi Arabian Minister of Defense an "Arab legion" of over 100,000 Afghan/Arab jihadi troops to defend the Kingdom.[234*] Though there is no record of him referring to this "Arab legion" as "Al Qaeda" or even the "Maktab al-Khidamat," it is extremely likely that is where he planned to derive such volunteers. What Bin Laden was suggesting in this proposal was that he be placed in charge of the Kingdom's defense. He took it a step further when he volunteered to use those same fighters to liberate Kuwait as well.

In what was allegedly a difficult decision for the Saudi authorities to make (according to Milelli and Kepel), Bin Laden's offer was rejected. He was given the explanation that the terrain in need of defense was nothing like what had been experienced in Afghanistan and the warfare

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* The number of Iraqi troops in Kuwait may have been as high as 300,000.

* This number of volunteers was certainly exaggerated.

that would be experienced was nothing like the guerilla-warfare that Bin Laden and his soldiers knew.[235]

On August 7th of 1990, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia requested that the United States enter the country to provide defense against Hussein's Iraqi forces.[236] Just two days later, hundreds of thousands of U.S. military forces began stationing in Saudi Arabia.[237*] The United States and other coalition forces defended Saudi Arabia from potential Iraqi aggression. The United States and other coalition forces liberated Kuwait. The United States and other coalition forces defeated Iraq. A source close to Osama Bin Laden indicates that:

> Bin Laden told me that the Saudi government's decision to invite US troops to defend the Kingdom and liberate Kuwait was the biggest shock of his entire life. He could not believe that the House of Al Saud would welcome the deployment of 'infidel' forces on Arabian Peninsula soil, within the proximity of Holy Places, for the first time since the inception of Islam.[238]

Christina Hellmich wrote that "this caused an irreconcilable rift between Bin Laden and the Kingdom."[239] Bin Laden would never again look at the Kingdom or the United States in a favorable manner, especially after his scathing and public criticisms of the Saudi government would lead to his expulsion from the country (prompting his aforementioned move to Sudan). Yet this was not enough for Bin Laden to immediately begin focusing on the United States as Al Qaeda's enemy – after all, this occurred in 1990. Al Qaeda would not informally adopt the United States as its principle focus until at least December 1992 (when it attempted to bomb United States soldiers in a Yemeni hotel) and would not formally adopt it until 1996.

Al Qaeda's declaration of jihad against the Americans was based on the United States' continued military presence in Saudi Arabia. Though most U.S. troops withdrew after the defeat Iraq's defeat in February of 1991, a number of troops remained to contain any further aggression

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* Other Western forces, such as the United Kingdom, would arrive shortly thereafter.

from Saddam Hussein. Some sources report that approximately 5,000 soldiers remained working from approximately seven military bases.[240] Milelli and Kepel note that Bin Laden interpreted this as "occupation of the land of the two holy sanctuaries" of Islam, despite it having been requested and approved by the Saudi Arabian government.[241] Perhaps this was because he had come to view the Saudi Arabian government as an apostate regime itself.

Bin Laden gradually began to view the situation in Saudi Arabia as one similar to the 1979 situation in Afghanistan: as Muslim lands occupied by an unbelieving enemy. Yet this was more severe, as the Arabian Peninsula held the most holy locations in all of Islam. Ibn Taymiyya's words likely replayed themselves in the minds of Bin Laden and other radical Islamists. "If enemies enter Muslim territory, it is absolutely necessary to push them farther and farther back, because Muslim lands are like a single territory…nothing, after faith, is more necessary to repel hostile enemies who corrupt religion and life."[242] Even Azzam had reiterated the principle in his *Defense of the Muslim Territories* text. Bin Laden thus detested the military presence in Saudi Arabia with Ayman al-Zawahiri later asking:

> What would Tabari, Ibn Hazm, and Ibn Taymiyya say if they saw the forces of the Americans and their allies striking Muslims in Iraq from their bases in the Gulf…What would they say if they saw American and Western ships and planes, armed and supplied by the gulf states, Yemen, and Egypt on their way to Iraq to impose the embargo there [and] occupy the Arabian Peninsula?"[243]

Another Al Qaeda ideologue, Mamdouh Salim, called for violent strikes against the United States and its civilians because of this ongoing military presence.[244] In an interview, Bin Laden referred to the U.S. military presence as "the greatest disaster to befall Muslims since the death of the Prophet," as Saudi Arabia was the "cornerstone of the Islamic world, place of revelation, source of Prophetic mission, and home of the noble Ka'ba where Muslims direct their prayers."[245] The longer troops remained on the peninsula, the more frustrated many became – the

reasoning and quantity for the troops' stationing seemed irrelevant. At one point, it was claimed amongst radicals that the Americans had come only to control oil wells (a claim that would stick up to and after the 9/11 terror attacks).[246]

As Bin Laden became more anti-American and more active in committing terror attacks against the country, international pressure caused Sudan to expel him in 1996. Forced to relocate with his organization back to Afghanistan under the Taliban's protection, Bin Laden elaborated heavily upon his grievances against the United States in his August 1996 "Declaration of Jihad against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holiest Sites."[*] Other translations/interpretations of the message's title read "A Message from Osama Bin Laden to his Muslim Brothers Worldwide, and in the Arabian Peninsula in particular" or "Expel the Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula" or "Expel the Pagans from the Arabian Peninsula."[247] Its principle focus, needless to say, concerned the United States' ongoing presence on the peninsula.

Though the declaration was critical of the Saudi government, it focused its calls for jihad entirely on the United States, the "foreign occupier." Bin Laden wrote that Muslims from all walks of life were struck by the U.S. military's entrance, so much so that the "situation in the land of the two holy places became like a gigantic volcano ready to erupt, so it can annihilate the infidelity and corruption no matter where the source comes from."[248]

Given the situation, Bin Laden reflected the sentiments of Ibn Taymiyya in saying, "Clearly after belief there is no more important duty than pushing the American enemy out of the Holy Land." He further added,

> Terrorizing you, while you are carrying arms on our land, is legitimate, reasonable, and morally demanded duty. It is also a rightful act well known to all humans and all

[*] This August date was no coincidence – it was exactly four years from the United States military's arrival on the country.

> creatures. Your example and our example are like a snake that entered into a house of a man and got killed by him.[249]

In this document, Bin Laden repeatedly called for jihad against the Americans to end this military presence,

> Your brothers in Saudi Arabia…are calling for your help and asking you to share with them in the jihad against the enemies of God, your enemies…the Americans. They are asking you to defy them in whatever way you possibly can, so as to expel them in defeat and humiliation from the holy places of Islam.[250]

In 1998, it was still being discussed in even more vicious rhetoric (this time by both Bin Laden and his radical Islamist colleagues). In the February 1998 document, "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders," signed by Bin Laden representing Al Qaeda, Zawahiri representing EIJ, and three other radical Islamist leaders, Bin Laden and his associates wrote,

> For seven years America has occupied the holiest parts of the Islamic lands…turning its bases into a spearhead with which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples…The Arabian Peninsula has never – since God made it flat, created its desert, encircled it with seas – been stormed by any forces like the crusader armies spreading in it like locusts. For over seven years the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam, the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors…"[251]

They further added, in a document signed by various radical Islamists,

> To kill the Americans and their allies – civilian and military – is an individual duty incumbent upon every Muslim in all countries, in order to liberate the…Holy Mosque from their grip, so that the armies leave all the territory of Islam, defeated, broken and unable to threaten any Muslim.[252]

Bin Laden's criticisms of the United States' "occupation" of Saudi Arabia are numerous. Many documents and interviews focus on this subject alone; there is likely enough material on this grievance to fill many pages. But the point is clear. One of the principle reasons for Al Qaeda's reorientation against the United States was its military presence in the Islamic holy land. Bin Laden's constant reiteration of this provides a great deal of insight regarding both Al Qaeda, the rhetoric that appealed to radical Islamists, and the attitudes of Middle Eastern Muslims. But despite its plentiful presence in Al Qaeda material, this was certainly not the only reason that the organization claimed in turning against the United States.

Al Qaeda's Second Grievance: The United States' Embargo/Sanctions on Iraq

Another heavily cited grievance was the United States' actions against Iraq during the same Gulf War that led to its stationing in Saudi Arabia.* Particularly referenced was the United States led, UN Security Council sponsored sanction against Iraq. Four days after the country invaded Kuwait, a near total economic sanction was placed on Iraq – the purpose was to force its withdrawal. It is also very possible that the sanctions were intended to prompt an Iraqi uprising that would ultimately overthrow Saddam Hussein.[253] Iraq did not willingly withdraw. Its people did not rebel. Yet the sanctions remained.*

The resulting effect on the country was incredibly negative, especially as time carried on. Iraq's economy was quickly destroyed. Inflation became rampant. Personal income fell to the lowest of anywhere on earth. And unemployment hit a record high.[254] Jason Burke is quick to site this as a principle reason for Al Qaeda's hostility toward both Americans and the West.[255] As is Christina Hellmich, who highlights the "well-documented death of 500,000 children as a consequence of economic sanctions imposed on Iraq."[256]

Bin Laden, speaking on behalf of Al Qaeda, expressed his disgust with this almost as much as he had with Saudi Arabia's "occupation." He referred to it as "the greatest mass slaughter of children ever."[257] Again in his 1996 "Declaration of Jihad Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holiest Sites," Bin Laden briefly mentions Muslim blood that Americans had spilled in Iraq. He further adds, "The truth is….that we are attacking them

* This appears somewhat contradictory and hypocritical, as Bin Laden had offered to fight the same battle against Iraqi aggression in 1990. He had also once declared the regime in Baghdad as atheist.

* The sanctions remained on Iraq until the United States invaded and forced Saddam Hussein from power in 2003.

because of their injustice toward the Muslim world, and especially…Iraq."[258] He elaborated on this statement in his 1997 interview with CNN, when he said to the journalist,

> "We declared jihad against the United States government because the US government is unjust, criminal, and tyrannical. It has committed acts that are extremely unjust, hideous and criminal…We believe that the US is directly responsible for those who were killed in…Iraq.[259]

And in the scathing 1998 "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders" – the document signed alongside other radical Islamist leaders and organizations – Bin Laden wrote,

> Despite the terrible number of Iraq deaths – over one million…they are not satisfied with the long period of sanctions…There is no better proof [of their opposition to Muslims] than their eagerness to destroy Iraq…. Despite the great devastation inflicted on the Iraqi people by the crusader Zionist alliance, and despite the huge number of those killed, which is approaching a million, the Americans are once again trying to repeat the horrific measures. As though they are not content with the protracted blockade imposed after the ferocious war, or the fragmentation and devastation, here they come to annihilate what is left of this people and to humiliate their Muslim neighbors."[260]

Reflecting an ideological consolidation within Al Qaeda's leadership and the "near enemy" focus giving way to the "far enemy" focus, Ayman al-Zawahiri contributed to the literature criticizing the U.S. presence in Saudi Arabia and the U.S. embargo on Iraq as well. He cited the death of children, the air embargo, the Kurdish independence in the north, and the "crusader" presence in Saudi Arabia. What has been listed is but a small number quotes from Al Qaeda leadership relative to the true quantity of criticism regarding the topic.

Al Qaeda's Third Grievance: The United States' Continued Support for Israel

A third grievance against the United States may have been the most unifying amongst all radical Islamic terror organizations. It may also have received the most unanimous and most widespread disdain amongst both Al Qaeda's leadership cadre and its lower ranks. This was the United States' continued support for the state of Israel.

The United States supported Israel from its official founding, when the U.S. voted in favor of a 1947 UN resolution splitting Palestine between Jews and Arabs. President Harry Truman was one of the first to recognize Israel as an official state. The administration of Lyndon B. Johnson supported Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War. The administration of Richard Nixon supported them further during the 1973 Arab-Israeli Conflict. This trend would continue into and through Al Qaeda's early lifetime, but only generally – U.S. support for Israel was not unconditional.[261*] However, radical Islamists certainly did not see it this way. Many saw it as a mere continuation of the United States' and the West's continued war on Islam. "At the core of his message is a pan-Islamist worldview," Christina Hellmich wrote of Osama Bin Laden, "according to which God's favored community is facing an existential threat from the modern arch-enemies of Islam: the United States and Israel, also referred to as the Zionist-Crusader alliance."[262] Osama Bin Laden confirmed this statement when he said,

> Given the kind of aggression to which Muslim countries have been subjected…and the ongoing aggression of the Judeo-Crusader alliance, led by America and Israel…we are trying to incite the world Muslim community to free our land and undertake a jihad for God.[263]

Osama Bin Laden claimed that his first grievance against the United States, aside from its supposedly immoral and anti-Islamic characteristic, actually stemmed from its support for Israel. This became evident to him as early as 1982 during the first Lebanon War, where Bin Laden claims that America gave Israel the "green light" to invade Lebanon and even supported it in doing so with the United States Sixth Fleet.

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[*] President Eisenhower threatened to withdraw financial aid from Israel unless it withdrew from Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip after capturing it in the 1950s. An Israeli attack on a U.S. spy ship in 1967 clouded relations with the Johnson administration. The Ford administration threatened to renounce ties with Israel if it did not withdraw from the Sinai Peninsula again in 1967. The United States condemned Israel's bombing of an Iraq nuclear reactor in 1981. President Reagan was reportedly outraged over Israeli bombing in Lebanon, and so on.

"The events that affected me personally began in 1982." Bin Laden said in his CNN interview. Continuing on to speak of Israeli air raids over the country during the Lebanon war, Bin Laden further said,

> When the bombardment began, many were killed and injured, and others were terrorized and displaced. I cannot forget those unbearable scenes of blood and severed limbs, the corpses of women and children strewn everywhere, houses destroyed along with their occupants and high-rise buildings burying their residents, rockets raining down on our land without mercy. It was as if a crocodile had seized a helpless child, who could do nothing but scream. Tell me: Does the crocodile understand any language other than that of force? The whole world watched this tragedy and did nothing…In those difficult moments many thoughts that are difficult to describe boiled up within me. They produced an intense rejection of tyranny, and a strong resolve to punish the oppressors… And as I looked at those demolished buildings in Lebanon, it entered my mind that we should punish the oppressor…and destroy the towers of America, so that they could experience some of what we had experienced, and so that they would stop killing our women and children.[264]

Ayman al-Zawahiri, increasingly becoming involved in Al Qaeda, had always vehemently opposed Israel (recall his family's displacement from Palestine). As aforementioned, he had developed his radical ideologies as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict and quite frequently resided in radical "hotbeds" alongside other Palestinian refugees. He had always wanted to destroy Israel, even if his immediate focus rested on the Egyptian regime for many years. "The road to Jerusalem passes through Cairo," he had said.[265] But as Bin Laden highlighted America's support for Israel, Zawahiri increasingly brought into the idea of the U.S. as the one maintaining a status quo that heavily favored Israel. One of his earliest grievances against the United States and the West, rather than against the nearby apostate regimes, read,

> The enemies of Islam forced [Arab] governments to accept the legal existence of the Zionist entity in Palestine through many official agreements and policies, from the 1949 armistice to the 1993 Oslo accords.[266]

On a very similar note, when asked to give a message to U.S. President Bill Clinton, Bin Laden said,

> Mentioning the name of Clinton or that of the American government provokes disgust and revulsion. That is because the names of American government…directly bring to our minds the

> pictures of one year old children with their heads cut off. It reflects the picture of children whose members have been amputated…the hands of the Israelis carrying weapons to destroy our children.[267]

Bin Laden thus referred to U.S. soldiers as the real terrorists – he said, "It is he who is a terrorist who pushed their sons into [the fight against Muslims] for the sake of the Israeli interest."[268]

Despite being mentioned third, after the Saudi Arabian "occupation" and Iraq embargo, this grievance may have carried the most weight. This especially holds true if one is to take terrorists' statements at face value, as Bin Laden claimed he never would have orchestrated an attack on New York's World Trade Centers if America refrained from forming an alliance with Israel.[269]

A plethora of other miscellaneous grievances (such as the U.S. involvement in Mogadishu in 1993, the expulsion of Al Qaeda leadership and Bin Laden from Pakistan, Sudan and Saudi Arabia, the abandonment of the mujahedeen by the CIA after Russia's withdrawal, the supposed moral decadence that the U.S. sponsored and exported, and so on) can be found throughout the literature and statements of Al Qaeda leaders. Any U.S. action that negatively affected the Muslim world in any way – no matter how indirect – was referenced as a case against it. The list of grievances thus became extensive; one cannot help but wonder how many were identified, tailored to fit the case, and added to the list even after the United States had already been chosen as Al Qaeda's principle enemy (even if the reason itself played no actual role in the initial reorientation of Al Qaeda against the United States).

Overall, however, one of the most general reasons that Al Qaeda turned against the United States as its principle enemy was likely because of the United States' status as the global hegemon. As the single strongest military and economic power in the world, the United States was seen as maintaining the global status quo. Any plight of any Muslim anywhere because of

the existing world order could thus be blamed on the United States – even those plights caused by alleged apostate regimes, the "near enemy."

Al Qaeda's Tactical Motivations Against its Principle Enemy: The United States of America

Al Qaeda developed a convincing – if not credible – argument for declaring jihad against the United States as its principle enemy. Yet this was also a tactically intelligent move. If Osama Bin Laden's goal as leader of Al Qaeda was more to develop a powerful and salient terror organization than it was to truly improve life for the global Islamist community, this shift may have been his most cunning action (if one can assign sole responsibility for it to Osama Bin Laden). As Jason Burke said in his work, *The New Threat*, "The emphasis on the US as an enemy and target was conscious, careful and deliberate. The Al Qaeda leaders were convinced it would resonate."[270]

Turning Against the United States as a Uniting Factor

First, the shift against the United States was an excellent way to unite radical Muslims of all types – Sunni radicals and Shia radicals, "near enemy" advocates and "far enemy" advocates – behind *one* Islamic vanguard. As mentioned, even Al Qaeda's core leadership previously could not come to a consensus regarding an enemy. Various candidates were floated about such as Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, to name just a few of many. Yet there was no consensus on where jihad should have been waged and no consensus on who should receive the brunt of Al Qaeda's actual aggression. The United States, though, was an enemy that all radicals could oppose with the rhetoric listed in this chapter.

Ironically, in focusing on the United States, the "far enemy" and "foreign occupier," Bin Laden was reverting to the views of Abdullah Azzam (a man he *may* have killed over the same stance just years before). What Bin Laden provided now, though, Jason Burke notes, "was a coherent argument for prioritizing the US as a target over local regimes."[271]

And perhaps Bin Laden was also reverting Al Qaeda to its most original purpose in providing that argument, now building "a coalition of groups around the world to overcome the disunity…" and weaving "together all the major strands of violent Islamic activism" to make them "intelligible as well as relevant."[272] Rohan Gunaratna highlighted this as especially peculiar, albeit a consistent trademark of Al Qaeda's character – "Ideologically, Al Qaeda differs markedly from groups of the past. It has taken the first steps to breaking the Shia-Sunni divide" that has traditionally disunited Muslims and terror organizations.[273] In framing the United States as the enemy, Al Qaeda was encouraging Muslims of not only different viewpoints regarding the enemy, but Muslims of different denominations, to shed their differences and bond together as one. This would allow them to focus on the "true" enemy.

While Al Qaeda's ability to mend the Shia-Sunni divide may have been limited (if existent at all), it certainly succeeded in mending the divide between radical Islamic Sunni groups. This is evidenced by Ayman al-Zawahiri's signature on the 1998 declaration of jihad against America on behalf of the EIJ – a "fundamental break" in his political and intellectual trajectory, as he had once been vehemently opposed to abandoning the fight against regional apostate regimes such as the Egyptian government (so much so that he also *may* have killed

Abdullah Azzam).[274] In signing the document, Zawahiri adopted and confirmed Bin Laden's jihadist view: the fight against the "far enemy" was of utmost importance.*

Turning Against the United States as "The Head of the Snake"

Second, if the United States truly was waging war on Muslims, and if it was indeed controlling the oppressive apostate Middle Eastern regimes, it would need expelled/defeated before radical Islamists could take the fight to the near enemy. Al Qaeda leaders repeatedly cited this as a principle reason for turning on the United States. In citing this as a first step before engaging the "near enemy," Bin Laden shored up those revolutionary radical Islamists who were fixated on attacking the regionally oppressive apostate regimes.

The foremost aim of declaring jihad against the United States, then, may not have been to actually defeat it or Israel. Instead, as Milelli and Kepel note, it may have been to "orient" the Muslim community.[275] Zawahiri, ever the strategist, began to think that the best way to incite a revolution amongst the Muslim masses against unbelievers was to strike at the U.S. via Al Qaeda. This would draw the Americans into a protracted battle or invasion. Subsequently, they would "personally wage the battle against Muslims, which means that the battle will turn into a clear-cut jihad against infidels."[276]

A war against the United States then was viewed as essential in causing the Middle Eastern revolutions that would lead to the recreation of the Islamic caliphate. Christopher Henzel – a Foreign Service officer, graduate of the National War College, and recently appointed ambassador to Yemen – said, "Highly visible attacks against external enemies, and the inevitable

* Some other factors may have played a role in Zawahiri's banding alongside Bin Laden, such as a lack of funding for his own organization, a various waves of arrests that imprisoned crucial EIJ leadership, and a growing initiative to halt violence on Egyptian territory.

retaliation, [according to Zawahiri], will rally ordinary Muslims to the radicals' cause, strengthening the main struggle, the one against the current regimes of the Muslim world."[277]

As Bin Laden referred to the United States as the "head of the snake," Zawahiri further elaborated on how this strategy would become more effective than attacking apostate regimes, the "tail of the snake": "We show the Muslim people that when [a] regime oppresses us, it does so to defend its American and Jewish masters. We thereby force it to uncover its ugly face, the face of a hired policeman who is faithfully serving the occupiers and enemies of the Muslim nation."[278] Zawahiri adds, "If we do not achieve this goal, our actions will be nothing more than small-scale harassment and will not bear fruit – the restoration of the caliphate and the departure of the invaders from the land of Islam." In his letter to the American people later on, Bin Laden would say, "Our fight against these [apostate, nearby] governments is not separate from our fight against you."[279] The United States was the hegemon. The United States was the puppet master. The United States needed defeated, first and foremost, so that Al Qaeda could pursue the ultimate reestablishment of an Islamic caliphate.

A Last Resort and Other Miscellaneous Tactical Reasons

Daniel Byman writes, "Although Al Qaeda would be loath to admit it, the shift to the United States also occurred because of failures elsewhere."[280] It was not simply that the terror organization had trouble identifying an enemy, but also that it had trouble garnering genuine support for the enemies that it had identified. Egypt, Communist Yemen, and even Saudi Arabia may have been appealing targets for the radical Islamist, but they were nothing like Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. The calls for jihad in these countries simply did not stick, regardless of the appeal to religion. Even when Al Qaeda was not trying to prompt jihad against one particular enemy, it had trouble garnering a mass amount of recruits for its purpose as a general Islamic

vanguard. Al Qaeda's goal to "defend Muslims everywhere" simply spread itself too thin – they were defending Muslims nowhere, in earnest. "Focusing on the United States," Byman wrote, "was a way to reinvigorate the movement."[281]

Bin Laden may also have perceived victory against the Americans – at least in terms of their withdrawal of troops and regime-support – as being more feasible than other objectives. Three examples are apparent here, each of which he readily sites. The first is the 1983 Beirut barracks bombing which occurred when Hezbollah militants detonated a truck bomb outside a complex hosting American soldiers. 241 U.S. Marines were killed and many more injured. Four months later, the United States withdrew from Lebanon.[282] The second is the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu where U.S. forces were ambushed by Somali men, women, and children (allegedly some of whom received Al Qaeda backing) on a mission to capture a known Somali warlord. Eighteen Americans were killed and eighty-four were wounded. Less than two months later, the United States ended its involvement in Somalia and quickly withdrew its forces.[283] And the third is Al Qaeda's 2000 bombing of the USS Cole the Yemeni port of Aden, which killed 17 and injured 39. The United States Navy stopped refueling and stationing in Yemen shortly thereafter. Al Qaeda had paid attention to both of these events. Bin Laden referenced both. "Where was this supposed bravery in Beirut after the attack of [1983], which turned your 241 Marines into scattered fragments and torn limbs?" he hypothetically asked Americans about Lebanon. "Where was this bravery in Aden, which you fled twenty-four hours after the two attacks had taken place?" he asked Americans about Yemen.[284] And regarding Somalia: "When Muslim lions among the Afghan Arabs leaped forth by the side of their brothers in [Somalia] and opposed the Americans, they were able to grind America's pride into the dust…one dark night, America and

its allies fled in panic." It is likely that Osama Bin Laden and other key members of Al Qaeda believed that it would be the same case when attacking the United States afterward.

A number of other tactical reasons may have influenced Al Qaeda's shift toward the United States. Perhaps one was the media capabilities of the country – its press was unlike anywhere else in the world. Al Qaeda greatly succeeded in dispersing its message this way. Jason Burke briefly wrote on this, saying "Bin Laden had succeeded, unequivocally…to capture the undivided attention of the entire planet – and in real time. For several years to come, every utterance he made would be broadcast, often in its entirety, by the world's media, then picked over, discussed, analyzed, and replayed too."[285] Christina Hellmich suggested the possibility that Zawahiri said to Bin Laden, "Let the Americans become your personal media agents – they've got the biggest PR machine in the whole world."[286] Additionally, it is also possible that Al Qaeda may have been operating under the prophetic assumption that engaging in a grand battle against the unbelievers – engaging in a sort of clash between civilizations – would usher in the end times and bring about the return of the Messiah.

Al Qaeda in Review

Under the leadership of Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al Qaeda would reach its peak around 2000. Come 2001, it would carry out the deadliest and costliest terror attack in human history when it flew three passenger airlines into different targets throughout the United States. It would become entrenched in a war against this principle enemy, committing multiple more attacks as the U.S. military entered Afghanistan to combat it directly. Al Qaeda would begin its decline soon after, at great cost to the coalition forces in the war on terror, and ultimately hand over its role as the "flagship" radical Islamic terror organization to the Islamic

State (ISIS) by the decade's end. Nonetheless, Al Qaeda had changed the world forever. It especially changed the world of radical Islamic terrorism, setting the stage for all that was and is to come.

Several key observations should be derived from these early organizational years. First and foremost, Al Qaeda seems to have been incredibly reactionary and opportunistic in its developmental years. Its leaders did not bring it into existence to pursue a predetermined goal. Rather, its leaders merely utilized a pre-existing organizational structure and avidly worked to give it a fitting objective that would stick with its current and future membership. Its only everlasting objective was incredibly broad: to serve as an Islamic vanguard to ultimately usher in global uprisings that would eventually restore the Islamic caliphate. The orientation against the United States was reactionary and convenient. Second, Al Qaeda's overall objective was in the long term and many years in the future. It knew that and did not seek to rush what may succeed as a gradual process. Third, Al Qaeda was not sectarian or denominationally motivated; it was the opposite in seeking to win the hearts and minds of all Muslims so that it could ultimately unify the global Islamic community once again. And fourth, it thrived (and possibly relied upon) the individual charisma, intellect, and wisdom of its leaders.

More meaningful insight, however, can surface when Al Qaeda's origin and developing evolution is compared alongside another organization. It is most pronounced when examined beside ISIS – a group that would evolve almost directly from Al Qaeda itself, though it would develop an immensely different overall character.

Chapter 3
The Rise of ISIS

By 2011, about two decades after the establishment of Al Qaeda, U.S. and U.S. coalition forces appeared to be prevailing in their fight against radical Islamic terrorism. Al Qaeda had scaled back its attacks against the West and failed in leading a jihad against the Saudi Arabian government. The Taliban forces that had offered Al Qaeda sanctuary in Afghanistan had been defeated. And perhaps most significantly, U.S. Navy Seals had killed Osama Bin Laden in his Pakistani compound, leaving the seemingly much less capable deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in charge of the organization.

An insurgency in Iraq following a U.S. and coalition invasion generally seemed to have settled as well – attacks decreased in frequency and government forces were deemed capable of carrying on the fight to suppress the small pockets of resistance that remained. U.S. troops had begun their withdrawal in 2007 and by December of 2011 had almost entirely exited the country. Iraq was left to its own devices. In the eyes of the exhausted American public, radical Islam had been "defeated enough" to withdraw and bring the troops home. Americans believed radical Islam's shocking and unprecedented violence against the West now could be considered a horrid thing of the past.

Yet in a matter of less than three years, Al Qaeda's infamous reputation was totally eclipsed by a new organization previously unknown in the eyes of the public: ISIS. By its eventual peak in 2014, ISIS had conquered a territory of more than 38,000 square miles with over twelve million citizens under its control.[287] It controlled territory in Libya, Nigeria, Egypt,

and Yemen with cells in Algeria, Pakistan, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and the Philippines.[288] At its height, the organization garnered an average of eighty-one million dollars in revenue a *month*.[289] Its fighters numbered by some estimates to be in the hundreds of thousands.[290] Its ranks were composed of recruits from 120 countries.[291]

It wreaked unprecedented violence across the Middle East. The organization coordinated the deaths of over 1,200 civilians outside its territory via shootings, suicide bombings, stabbings, beheadings, vehicular homicide, and even the downing of a passenger airliner.[292] Overall, it orchestrated some 143 attacks in 29 countries.[293] Within its own territory, the scale of its attacks was far greater. Over 20,000 Iraqi civilians were killed by ISIS forces with over 55,000 injured. Another 3,500 are estimated to have been held as captives, with another three million displaced from their homes.[294]

The brutality that accompanied this violence is even more striking than the numbers themselves. In one instance, members of the organization lined up six hundred prisoners above a mass grave and shot them to death before burning and burying their bodies. This is reported to have taken place in multiple locations.[295] Other mass grave killings may have included up to 1,935 individuals.[296] The organization resurrected punishments not seen for centuries, including executions by stoning, the amputation of the limbs of those accused of stealing, and even crucifixion.[297] Furthermore, ISIS reveled in their violence and posted dozens of videos online documenting graphic beheadings of those Syrian, Kurdish and Iraqi fighters who opposed ISIS. Soon, even American and French civilians, aid workers, journalists, and others also were captured and subjected to similar punishments. On multiple occasions, ISIS forced young children to carry out the executions either by shooting the prisoners in the head or cutting their throats in front of cameras. In one instance, a child as young as three years old was filmed

shooting a man tied up in a dusty ball pit while another video captured the organization's children chasing a man off the edge of a building where he ultimately falls to his death.[298]

On June 29th of 2014, occupying an area in both Iraq and Syria roughly the size of the United Kingdom, the group's leader declared the creation of a caliphate – the "governing body that claims dominion over all believers" with a caliph leading the government as "the shadow of God on earth" according to journalists Mark Tran and Matthew Weaver.[299] "Listen to your caliph and obey him," the leader and self-proclaimed caliph said, "Support your state, which grows every day."[300]

Having proclaimed a caliphate and called the umma back to it, the organization felt as though it had fulfilled a prophecy that would usher in the apocalypse. Musa Cerantonio, one of the organization's preachers and recruiters, said that the caliphate focused heavily on capturing the prophetic Syrian city of Dabiq. Afterward, the radical Islamists believed they would be confronted by a crusading army – the armies of "Rome" – in one final battle. They would emerge victorious, the prophecy foretold, and grow to encompass an area that at least covered Istanbul, if not the entire world. The success of the caliphate would allegedly spur the rise of an anti-Messiah, known as the Dujjal. According to Cerantonio, the Dujjal would emerge from eastern Iran and kill almost all of the caliphate's army. When only a few thousand remained and retreated for their last stand in Jerusalem, Jesus Christ would "return to Earth, spear Dajjal, and lead the Muslims to victory."[301]

This organization has gone by several names throughout the course of its evolution.[*] In the West, however, it has most commonly been referred to as ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.[*]

ISIS is the most significant, most salient organization to arise since Al Qaeda. It may even have become more well-known and arguably more successful in than its aforementioned predecessor. Yet it has become vastly and irreconcilably different – so much so that it has been publicly, scathingly, and repeatedly been denounced by Al Qaeda. It may even have warred with it. These pronounced differences began to develop over the course of its origin and evolution; this chapter will explore the creation of ISIS and the adoption of its apocalyptic, ultra-radical goal of establishing a worldwide Islamic caliphate from its humble beginnings with a mere Jordanian street thug seeking out the thrill of violence.[*]

It should first be noted that the dynamic of scholarship into ISIS and the literature that has emanated it is dramatically different from Al Qaeda. The leadership of ISIS was always much more clandestine and silent than any of those from Al Qaeda. Thus, less material is available for scholars to use to increase their understanding of the organization. It is also a much more recent phenomenon, having only fully declined in March of 2019. The time period of

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[*] Since its inception, it has held at least five different titles. This work will refer to it generally as ISIS, with exception arising when the group is discussed at different points in its evolution.

[*] In the Middle East, it is most commonly known as Daesh, the Arabic equivalent of the ISIS acronym. It can be considered a derogatory and disrespectful term.

[*] By nature, the analysis of ISIS's origins is quite different from that of Al Qaeda. As one point, it is a much more recent phenomenon than Al Qaeda; it only came to the public's attention largely in 2013, whereas Al Qaeda has been in the public eye at least since Bin Laden's first declaration of jihad in 1996. It also only recently on the decline, whereas Al Qaeda has been declining since the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, which alters the nature of analysis. The leaders of ISIS have also been much more reclusive and remained largely out of the public eye – where Bin Laden and his colleagues repeatedly released public statements, the leaders of ISIS have been extremely reclusive and only appeared a handful of times in undated videos. It is not even known if the leader of ISIS still lives. One can assume that a large amount of material on ISIS is still classified, as the hunt for its leaders is still active. It is also only logical that the nature of firsthand information may be more limited for ISIS, as well. This is likely because there are less ground operations conducted by U.S. and Western forces than there were during the peak of Al Qaeda. Finally, as will be discussed, it is an entirely nontraditional terrorist organization with objectives totally different from Bin Laden's Al Qaeda.

emotionally-charged scholarship has not yet passed. However, a significant amount of relevant information can nonetheless be derived regarding ISIS's evolution in the pages that follow.

Ahmad Fadil Nazzal al-Khalayla (Abu Musab al-Zarqawi): 1966 – 1999

All sources trace the origin of ISIS at least as far back as the birth of a man named Ahmad Fadil Nazzzal al-Khalayla, later and more popularly known as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.* Considered the key figure behind the emergence of ISIS, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was born sometime in October of 1966 in a small Jordanian town. Some sources, such as Michael W.S. Ryan of the Jamestown and Middle East Institute, suggest that he was born specifically in the town of Zarqa.[302*]

Despite being born from what is considered a prominent Bedouin tribe – Bani Hassan – Zarqawi was born into poverty.[303] If he was not impoverished, he was limited to modest means. With nine siblings, Zarqawi struggled to make it through his elementary schooling and was eventually forced (or found it optimal) to drop out and work "odd jobs."[304] This left Zarqawi only semi-literate, and eventually, spiraling into alcoholism. The remainder of his childhood was spent as a petty thief if not total gangster; he adjourned his arms with tattoos and quickly became a ne'er-do-well. The people of Zarqa remember him as merely "a bully, thug, and even a pimp." One account even states that Zarqawi participated in a violent robbery as young as fifteen years old – a violent robbery that resulted in the death of his own relative, at that.[305] Ironically for an individual who has since become known as the fonder of ISIS, Zarqawi's early years seem to

* This work will refer to Ahmad Fadil Nazzal al-Khalayla as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi because this is the title that he is most commonly referenced by.

* Recall that Zarqa was often a hotbed of militant Islamism, largely due to its position as a refugee camp during the varying Arab-Israeli conflicts. It was also the city where Al Qaeda's Abdullah Azzam was first inspired to begin jihad.

have been entirely devoid of religious influence. Yet this may even be an understatement – from the perspective of Islamic fundamentalism, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's early years were downright sacrilegious.

Zarqawi left Jordan for Pakistan in 1989. Some, like Milelli and Kepel, say he may have been influenced by religion or an imam. However, given Zarqawi's background, it seems far more likely that Zarqawi may have left Jordan as an escape from his impoverished situation or purely for the adventure.[306]

Zarqawi, like many other Arabs in the late 1980s, traveled to Peshawar as his destination in Pakistan. It is problematic to assume that he hoped to engage in the anti-Soviet jihad, however, as the USSR had announced its withdrawal a whole year beforehand. Nonetheless, Zarqawi reportedly stayed in the dormitories provided by the Maktab al-Khidamat (the MAK).[307] Reports on his activity vary; he may have gone to the front lines as early as 1989 and experienced a degree of anti-communist fighting against the remaining forces, or he may not have been involved until the Afghan civil war broke out following the Soviet withdrawal, or he may have experienced both frontline combat against the communists *and* frontline combat in the Afghan civil war. Regardless, it is clear that Zarqawi did experience combat at some point in time, for one of his colleagues remembered him as "an utterly fearless fighter who seemed to put himself in the midst of very dangerous situations."[308]

It is also possible that Zarqawi met the soon-to-be infamous leaders of Al Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam, during his time in Pakistan/Afghanistan.[*] The latter is more likely, as Zarqawi has personally claimed to have been heavily influenced by Abdullah Azzam's

[*] There is no evidence of Zarqawi and Bin Laden meeting in Afghanistan during 1989. Yet there is no evidence that they did not.

teachings.[309] Yet more influential than both Bin Laden and Azzam in Zarqawi's life was a man known as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.[310*]

Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi was one of the most influential Salafi jihadist ideologues of the 20th century. Maqdisi allegedly took Zarqawi under his wing, undoubtedly departing some degree of radical Islamist thought. If not from Maqdisi himself, it is more probable than not that Zarqawi began his process of radicalization at some point during his time in Peshawar, Pakistan and/or Afghanistan in the 1989 and 1990. Yet he likely did not "complete" the process there. One of Zarqawi's colleagues noted,

> He was not very religious during that time [in Peshawar/Afghanistan]. In fact, he had only 'returned' to Islam three months before coming to Afghanistan. It was the Tablighi Jamaat [a proselytizing missionary group spread across the Muslim world] who convinced him – he had thirty-seven criminal cases against him by then – that it was time to cleanse himself.[311]

Sometime in 1992, Zarqawi returned to Jordan. Having experienced radical Islam and the emergence of non-state militant religious organizations firsthand, he sought to create something similar in his own native country. And the environment was "ripe" for it, as Jordan was experiencing increased radical Islamic activity due to repercussions from the Arab-Israeli conflict, militants returning from Kuwait following the First Gulf War, and "fragile socioeconomic circumstances."[312] With the support of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and several other jihadists that he had met in Afghanistan, Zarqawi formed his first militant group in Jordan. It was originally focused on opposing Jordan's monarchial and democratic governance and called for the murder of Christians and Jews. The name of the group (or groups) may have been Tawhid, Bayat al-Imam, and/or Jund al-Sham.[*313]

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[*] It is very possible that Zarqawi did not meet Maqdisi in Pakistan or Afghanistan, but rather in a Jordanian prison (as discussed on the following page).

[*] It is possible that these were all separate organizations and Jund al-Sham was the name for the group of organizations all put together.

But the organization never had the chance to get seriously off the ground. Shortly after its creation, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was arrested for carrying firearms, false documents, and potentially for being a member of those named organizations as well.[314] He received a fifteen year sentence.[315]

The arresting authorities transferred Zarqawi (along with a number of other radical jihadists) to al-Jafr prison, a secluded ex-British fort "deep in the southern desert" of Jordan.[*] It was their hope that this isolated fort – reopened for the sole purpose of housing prisoners such as Zarqawi – would prevent radical Islamists from intermixing with general prison populations, thus preventing the infectious ideology from spreading any further than it already had. It would also allow for increased security.[316] The efforts of the Jordanian authorities backfired, as the prison was filled with Jordan's most dangerous and intelligent criminals: gang members, gunmen, bomb-makers, and other jihadists.[317]

Inside, criminals were intermixed and interacted heavily within the isolated prison. They formed bonds. Radicalization spread quickly and deeply throughout the inmate population. In fact, scholars such as Ben Fishman (a Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute and member of the Geduld Program on Arab Politics) and Corneliu Visoianu (Executive Vice President of the Strategikon Think Tank) claim that this prison may have alternatively where Zarqawi met his mentor Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.[318] It is even claimed that the two shared a cell together. Regardless of where the two met, however, two important points remain the same. First, Zarqawi began to develop his religious fundamentalism largely because of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. And second, Zarqawi's religious fundamentalism deepened during his time in Al-Jafr prison in the 1990s (as did it for a plethora of other inmates).

[*] The name of this fort is said to have been al-Jafr

With the fixed audience that Zarqawi was indirectly provided with, he used prison as a sort of school through which he was able to bolster his religious credibility and leadership capability. Over the years of his sentence, he evolved as a radical Islamic leader himself. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is said to have memorized the Quran during his imprisonment and even began denouncing certain individuals that disagreed with his philosophies without second thought, endowing him and his prison group the nickname of the "takfiris" or "those who excommunicate."[319] This is a characteristic that would remain with him throughout his entire life (and the organizations that proceeded him). At some point, Zarqawi must also have learned to read and write, as he wrote Ifadat Asir, "Deposition of a Prisoner," a text that broadly criticized the Jordanian judicial system and denounced any laws that were remotely un-Islamic.[320] Zarqawi also developed contacts and became a fearsome, violent leader.[321] According to Washington Post reporter Joby Warrick, Zarqawi responded to a fit of rage by hanging a prison guard from a nearby coat hook.[322] Without his experiences in Al-Jafr prison, it is difficult to say whether or not Abu Musab al-Zarqawi would have become radical enough or connected enough to become significant in the coming years.

On March 29th, 1999, the Jordanian King Abdullah II ascended to the throne after the death of his father and issued a general amnesty that ultimately released the seemingly insignificant Zarqawi and many of his newfound associates from prison.[323]

After being released, Zarqawi laid low before finding the opportunity to travel back to Pakistan/Afghanistan sometime that same year or early the next. His mentor, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, provided some context regarding Zarqawi's decision to return to the Pakistan/Afghanistan region when he wrote,

> He answered those who reproached him for leaving his country that he loved jihad, and did not have the patience to learn, teach, or preach. This is how he recruited a group of brothers who left

> with him for Afghanistan, where they were able to benefit from the situation in that country and its military camps.[324]

Zarqawi then moved into Afghanistan's Kandahar Province, a Taliban enclave since 1994. With the benefit of a letter of *tazkiyya* (essentially a letter of recommendation) from a Salafist cleric in London, Zarqawi was able to link with the region's growing Al Qaeda network.[325] He became involved with the Al Qaeda organization, nearing its operational peak at the time. A detailed account of his involvement is nonexistent.

Some scholars, such as author and Fullbright Fellow Gregory D. Johnsen, claim that he met Osama Bin Laden in early 2000 as part of his time with Al Qaeda.[326] Bin Laden allegedly did not think highly of Zarqawi, considering him a "crude brawler" who was "more talented with a knife than he was articulate."[327] This may have been due to his "prickly personality."[328] It may also have been due to Zarqawi's developing animosity toward Shia Muslims, even more so than corrupt Sunni regimes or the United States.[329] Bin Laden's mistrust and negative opinions may have also stemmed from the fact that Zarqawi was a Jordanian, and the Jordanian intelligence forces were growing in fame for their effectiveness – because of Zarqawi's insignificant background, he may have been suspected as being an agent or spy for Jordan. William McCants of the Brookings Institution even claimed that one of Al Qaeda's leaders consequently had Zarqawi followed and watched for suspicious activity.[330] Regardless, the point is that Zarqawi did interact with the Al Qaeda franchise. And while the quality of that relationship is generally unknown, academic consensus seems to suggest that it was inherently negative. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi never did directly pledge allegiance to Al Qaeda. He allegedly was never asked to join, and vice versa, never requested to join either.[331]

Nevertheless, Zarqawi was able to foster a relationship with Al Qaeda. In coordinating with its leadership, Zarqawi acquired a $200,000 loan and permission to found his own training

camp (though it would remain separate from Al Qaeda).[332] He established this camp in late 1999 or early 2000 in the west of Afghanistan, near Herat, less than one hundred miles from the Iranian border.[333] Its name was allegedly "Al Tawhid wal-Jihad" or "Monotheism and Jihad" and was utilized to continue bolstering Zarqawi's Jund al-Sham terror organization.[334] Within just a few months of its establishment, Zarqawi renamed this basecamp and his terror organization Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad (JTWJ).[335]

Jama'at al Tawhid wa al-Jihad: 1999 – 2004

The general ideology of Zarqawi's group begins to reveal itself through the group's name: Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad. The first half of the name emphasizes the single most fundamental and important concept of the Islamic faith: monotheism. Tawhid translates to the concept that "There is no god but God and Muhammad is his prophet."[336] The second half of the name, of course, emphasizes jihad and the importance of waging holy war against those deemed heretics.[337] It is difficult to understand exactly why Zarqawi founded this. Perhaps it was a result of his continued or increased disdain for the Jordanian monarchy. He may have justified his vengeful attacks with a religious motive, a reasoning that may have resonated with others more so than his own vengeant nature.

Allegedly receiving continued funding from the dominant Al Qaeda organization, Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad grew significantly as a terror network.[338] Zarqawi expanded his network of recruits and fighters to include those from a variety of different regions such as Palestinians, Jordanians, Iraqis, and Kurds.[339] Their traits frequently mirrored Zarqawi's own – "born into poverty, often radicalized in prison, and with low levels of education and shallow theological knowledge of the Quran."[340] Perhaps they were more easily influenced by his

rhetoric. In just one year, Zarqawi is estimated to have facilitated the training of nearly 3,000 jihadists.[341] As in prison, Zarqawi is said to have used this environment in Western Afghanistan – an environment largely out of international attention, especially compared to its Al Qaeda neighbor in the east – to improve his ability as a radical Islamic leader and militant.

He wasted no time in plotting attacks, however. According to Charles Lister, a Senior Fellow and Director of the Countering Terrorism and Extremism Project at the Middle East Institute, Zarqawi and his Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad organization played a large role in directing the Millennium Plot; on New Years Eve of 1999, he allegedly plotted a number of bombings throughout Jordan at a variety of tourist sites, the most notable being the planned explosion at the Radisson Hotel in Amman.[342] This further supports the contention that he was originally focused on Jordan. The attacks were foiled by Jordanian intelligence, however, as were a number of other attacks in other countries (such as the bombing at LAX airport and the bombing of the USS Sullivan) that *may* have been tangentially related to Zarqawi. As a result of increased international attention, Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad was driven back underground, forced to "lay low" in hopes of avoiding infiltration and/or destruction. For over a year after the organization's failed Millennium Plot, it does not seem to have been active in conducting attacks. There is little record regarding its activity. In general, it was largely an irrelevant terror organization. But Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, at just over thirty years old, had become a "full-blown jihadi leader with considerable battle experience and violent charisma."[343] This is true even if he was he remained relatively insignificant.

The 2001 U.S. Invasion of Afghanistan: Collapsing Zarqawi's Sanctuary

The terrorist attacks on September 11th of 2001 dramatically altered Zarqawi's organization. Nineteen Al Qaeda operatives hijacked four American commercial airplanes. Two were flown directly into New York's World Trade Center towers, one was flown into the Pentagon, and another crashed en route to the U.S. Capitol or White House due to the intervention of passengers on board. A total of 2,996 people were killed and more than 6,000 were injured.[344] Nine days later, before a joint session of congress, American President George W. Bush demanded that the Taliban hand over Al Qaeda leaders, release its hostages, and disband terror camps."[345] The Taliban – the "ultraconservative political and religious faction" ruling Afghanistan and providing sanctuary for Al Qaeda – did not act in accordance with George W. Bush's demands.[346]

A joint resolution authorizing the use of force against those responsible for attacking the United States was signed into law around the same time.[347] On October 7th of 2001, the United States military entered Afghanistan to topple the Taliban and eradicate Al Qaeda. The U.S. began Operation Enduring Freedom with the support of Britain, Canada, Australia, Germany, France, and others.[348]

A barrage of United States airstrikes began on Al Qaeda and Taliban forces. Roughly one thousand U.S. Special Forces deployed simultaneously as ground troops, working to mobilize anti-Taliban forces such Afghanistan's Northern Alliance and groups of Pashtun people in the fight against terrorism.[349] Come November of 2001, approximately two months after the 9/11 attacks, the Taliban regime was facing defeat. The Northern Alliance, with help and guidance from the United States, took Taloqan, Bamiyan, Herat, Kabul, and Jalalabad in less than one week.[350] On December 6th, less than two months after the war began, Kandahar fell and the Taliban retreat began in full.[351]

-Zarqawi and his Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad were certainly not the focus of U.S. combat operations. It is likely that they were not even on the radar. Nevertheless, the United States' invasion of Afghanistan totally collapsed Zarqawi's sanctuary in Western Afghanistan. When the Taliban retreated from Kandahar in December of 2001, the objectives of Zarqawi's organization were no longer focused on attacking the Jordanian monarchy or even waging jihad against the west. Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad's objectives seemed to boil down to mere survival. Consequently, Zarqawi fled Afghanistan in late 2001. He likely crossed the Iranian border, less than a hundred miles away from Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad's basecamp, with some of his men.[352] There in Iran, Zarqawi was reportedly provided with housing and other forms of assistance – essentially given another sanctuary, at least a place to remain hidden if not a place to continue building his organization.[353]

At some point at the very end of 2001 or the beginning of 2002, Zarqawi moved from Iran into northeastern Iraq.[354] This was probably due to the founding of a group named Ansar al-Islam (meaning "Partisans of Islam") that intended to bring together a number of radical Islamist groups – this largely Kurdish/Iraqi terror organization facilitated Zarqawi's travel into Iraq along with many of his cadre.[355] Zarqawi ultimately developed extensive ties with this organization.[356]

Despite Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's growing ability as a militant and radical Islamist leader, he still did not boast the ideological depth that many other jihadist leaders (like Bin Laden, Zawahiri, and Azzam) continuously exhibited even as of this 2001-2002 date. Murad Batal Shishani, an expert on the phenomenon of jihad from Zarqawi's hometown, confirms this in saying, "Zarqawi did not deviate from his jihadi peers, only through his character…he was more radical, he was a thug, and so on, but ideologically he was a lightweight." Rather than exhibiting and working toward an entrenched ideological vision, Zarqawi was more "influenced by what

was happening around him."[357] Nada Bakos, a former CIA analyst and author, said that Zarqawi "was a good tactician, not a strategic thinker," and was almost always "responding to the circumstances around him." Bakos also added that "People near him built the strategy of what he wanted to achieve."[358] This especially holds true during Zarqawi's ensuing time in Iraq.

During his time traveling through Iraq – and his time spent interacting with Ansar al-Islam militants – Zarqawi would meet a man named Abu Ali al-Anbari. Recent research conducted by Hassan Hassan (an author, journalist, and Senior Fellow at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy). Based on a recently discovered diary, Hassan reveals that Anbari may actually have even been a greater influence on Zarqawi than his supposed long-term mentor, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.

Abu Ali al-Anbari was born in northern Iraq sometime around 1959 to an extremely religious Sunni family. Like many radical Islamists, he studied Sharia extensively in his youth and in 1982 he graduated from the University of Baghdad with a degree in Islamic studies. Soon after, Anbari joined the Iraqi military where he would serve for seven years and see action in the Iran-Iraq war. By 1988, then, Anbari had both extensive military *and* extensive religious training, a "rare combination" according to Hassan. After leaving the military, Anbari would go on to teach Sharia classes in small villages throughout Iraq.

Anbari's religious radicalism – perhaps having fermented over the course of many years and many experiences – may have first exhibited itself during his time in a small Iraq town known as Mujama Barzan. There, a rich citizen of the town invited ghajars (Oghuz Turkic ethnic individuals) for a planned party that included music and dancing. Anbari felt as though the planned celebration was extremely un-Islamic in nature and protested the event profusely. He threatened to kill the ghajars, burn their tents, and delivered multiple sermons opposing the event

on religious grounds. The party was eventually cancelled. Yet even despite the party's cancellation, it got Anbari thinking that there was something wrong "with a government that would even consider allowing such an event to take place."[359]

Sometime in the 1990s, Anbari would move from Mujama Barzan to the city of Tal Afar, a diverse Iraqi city with a mixed population of both Sunni and Shia Muslims. He would obtain a teaching position here as well, this time in a school with a dense Shiite population (as opposed to his own Sunni religious denomination). He would also become an imam at a local mosque. In these two positions, Anbari would begin to turn staunchly against the Shia sect of Islam, or exhibit previously existing negative feelings against the Shia sect, if he had harbored them in the years beforehand. Anbari denounced other non-Sunni Muslims – especially these Shiites – as "deviant sects" due to their doctrinal differences.[360]

While Zarqawi had always vehemently denounced those who disagreed with him even on the slightest of points, he does not seem to have ever railed against the Shia sect in particular as early as the 2000s. It is worth noting that he would begin doing so shortly *after* meeting Abu Ali al-Anbari – a man with a comparatively longer history of discrimination against non-Sunni Muslims. Hassan Hassan writes, "Experts who closely tracked Zarqawi's early activism agree that the Jordanian had no clear sectarian vision before he arrived in Iraq, and his ideas before that did not depart from mainstream jihadist worldviews."[361]

Abu Ali al-Anbari would continue to become more radicalized during his time teaching in Iraq in the 1990s, likely a result of his coming into contact with jihadist materials (like recorded audio sermons) coming out of Chechnya and Afghanistan at the time.[362] Consequently, Anbari may have deepened or established Zarqawi's religious radicalization further upon meeting him.

However, Zarqawi was still totally insignificant in the world of jihad – this point should not be lost. His influence over others was average, at best. His Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad terror organization had accomplished little.* His relationship with the more notable Al Qaeda was weak and getting weaker. He produced no meaningful intellectual/ideological material. He did not even seem to have been operating his relatively weak Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad organization with a clear goal. Absolutely everything changed when the United States invaded Iraq in 2003.

The Lead-up to the 2003 U.S. Invasion of Iraq: Elevating Zarqawi

As aforementioned, the United States toppled the hostile Taliban regime in Afghanistan with ease. Bolstered by its success, the U.S. determined that the Taliban was not the only hostile Middle Eastern regime in need of ousting. By 2003, the United States government had deemed Iraq and its leader – Saddam Hussein – as another immediate threat to international security. This was made clear by the U.S. President, George W. Bush, and his repeated denunciations of Iraq: on January 29th of 2002 when he identified Iraq as part of an "axis of evil" during his State of the Union address, on September 12th of 2002 when he warned Iraq that it would be subject to military aggression if it did not comply with UN disarmament resolutions, and on November 8th of 2002 when the United States led the UN in giving Iraq one "final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations."[363]

The official case against Iraq was presented before the United Nations Security Council by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell a few months later on February 5th, 2003. In a speech

* The only successful attack even tangentially orchestrated by Zarqawi and his terror organization was the 2002 assassination of Laurence Foley, an American diplomat in Jordan. The Jordanian government claimed that the assassins were paid by Zarqawi to kill Foley, but the assassins later claimed that they were forced to say this and confess.

that lasted over an hour and fifteen minutes, Secretary Powell detailed three categories of crimes that were supposed to have been continuously perpetrated by Hussein's regime.[*] First in both chronology and emphasis was the accusation that Iraq possessed and manufactured weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in strict violation of international law. Already having been found in breech of its obligations in the past, Powell claimed that Iraq was still not being transparent enough with the United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors. Secretary Colin Powell, speaking on behalf of the United States, refined a picture that Iraq was a militant and expansionist state – the picture had been painted in the First Gulf War many years beforehand. It had already been established that Saddam Hussein was essentially an enemy to the international community; this speech simply worked to present evidence regarding the degree of the threat which he posed.

Second, and more briefly, Secretary Powell claimed that Saddam Hussein regularly committed human rights violations. He cited the Iraqi regime's two year campaign from 1987 to 1989 against the Kurds that involved mass summary executions, jailing, ethnic cleansing, and the total annihilation of select villages. He also cited its use of mustard and nerve gas against the Kurds in 1988 which killed approximately 5,000. Powell went on to discuss ethnic cleansing against Shia Iraqis and Marsh Arabs and the tens of thousands of forced disappearance cases well.

Third, the United States government asserted through Secretary Colin Powell that the Iraqi government was directly and knowingly harboring and aiding Islamic terror organizations. He touched upon Iraq's cooperation with Hamas, its conferences hosted with the Palestinian

[*] The speech was written by the CIA – Colin Powell read aloud what he had been given.

Islamic Jihad, and its interaction with the Palestinian and Arab Liberation Fronts. With the benefit of hindsight, these assertions are unsurprising. They were unsurprising at the time, too – Iraq's and Hussein's anti-Israeli attitudes and actions were no secret. But Secretary Powell's speech only dedicated a sentence or less to each of the aforementioned organizations and their relationship with Iraq. The bulk of Powell's assertions regarding Iraq's connection with terrorism, lasting over ten minutes in duration and absolutely dominating the amount of time spent on a subject other than WMDs (with nearly twenty paragraphs and three slides), was astonishingly spent discussing Zarqawi – the aspiring Islamic terrorist who had *never* committed a genuine terror attack, the aspiring Islamic terrorist who never espoused his own ideology, the aspiring Islamic terrorist who had never been genuinely significant throughout his lifetime.[364] The United States government portrayed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as a terroristic mastermind similar to Osama Bin Laden – something he most certainly was not in February of 2003 or any of the years beforehand.

The United States claimed that there was a "sinister nexus" between Iraq and Al Qaeda. He went on to claim that Al Qaeda had a franchise in Iraq and that it was headed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, "an associate and collaborator of Osama Bin Laden and his Al Qaeda lieutenants." This franchise, under Zarqawi's direction, had established a camp in Iraq that focused on the production of poisons and training in explosives according to Powell. He further cited Zarqawi's seemingly free movement throughout the country – like a trip to Baghdad for medical care – as evidence that he was given free reign by Hussein's regime. Additionally, the United States placed blame on Zarqawi for the assassination of an American diplomat, the attempted Millennium Plot attacks, and terror networks/plots in a variety of countries including France, Britain, Spain, Italy, Germany, Russia, and Georgia.

After falsely establishing Zarqawi's legitimacy as a terrorist and establishing his organization's threat to the world, Secretary Powell went on to make the case that Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda's leaders were allies. They had come to an understanding not to attack one another, Powell said. "Early Al Qaeda ties were forged by… secret Iraqi intelligence high-level contacts with Al Qaeda," Powell claimed, adding, "We know members of both organizations met repeatedly and have met at least eight times at very senior levels since the early 1990s."

He even claimed that "Saddam became more interested as he saw Al Qaeda's appalling attacks. A detained Al Qaeda member tells us that Saddam was more willing to assist Al Qaeda after the 1998 bombings of our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Saddam was also impressed by Al Qaeda's attacks on the USS Cole." Secretary Powell further asserted on behalf of the U.S. government that the Iraqi state helped Al Qaeda learn to make bombs, forge documents, and work toward acquiring weapons of mass destructions. Bin Laden may have been the overall leader of Al Qaeda, but Zarqawi was it leader in Iraq – a "deadly terrorist network" willingly harbored by Saddam Hussein.[365] Looking back on this speech to the UN over sixteen years later, one can see that the United States had gotten the facts completely wrong – *miserably* wrong in regards to Zarqawi.

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a once insignificant/obscure terrorist, had suddenly been "thrust into the limelight" overnight with Secretary Powell's UN speech.[366] Despite never having conducted a successful terror attack and despite never having truly established any sort of genuine relationship with Osama Bin Laden or any of Al Qaeda's top cadre, "Colin Powell gave [Zarqawi] popularity and notoriety…Now his fame would extend throughout the world…People were joining Al Qaeda because of him" (as said by one of Zarqawi's former Jordanian

associates).[367] With this newfound credibility and worldwide recognition thrust onto Zarqawi, aspiring jihadists near Iraq began flocking to his organization, Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad.

Meanwhile, any diplomatic de-escalation between Iraq and the United States began to seem hopeless. Despite the governments of France, Germany, and Russia claiming that Iraq seemed willing to cooperate with the inspection demands, the United States and United Kingdom continued to denounce Hussein's Iraqi regime. Come March 17th of 2003, the United States opted to abandon resolution through diplomatic means or through the United Nations, despite strong condemnation from the international community.[368] U.S. President George W. Bush proceeded to offer Saddam Hussein an ultimatum just as he had with the Taliban: "Saddam Hussein and his sons must leave Iraq within forty-eight hours. Their refusal to do so will result in military conflict commenced at a time of our choosing."[369] United Nations monitors on the Kuwait-Iraqi border fled their operation posts as a force of 225,000 Americans, 45,000 British soldiers, six aircraft carriers, and more than six hundred combat aircraft units began to amass.[370]

From the date of U.S. Secretary Colin Powell's speech (February 5th) to U.S. President George W. Bush's ultimatum (March 17th), Zarqawi ranks of his jihadist organization had surged. Thousands of aspiring or ex-jihadists poured into Iraq bound for the organization they believed could utilize them best, Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad – what the U.S. had falsely dubbed Al Qaeda's affiliate in Iraq.[371]

These jihadists traveling to Zarqawi's organization, especially the Iraqis, may have been groomed for such an occasion for quite some time. Hussein had always espoused anti-American and religiously fundamental rhetoric, evidenced by his state promotion of his "Islamic Faith Campaign" to promote religion in the public sphere. He had also mobilized a volunteer-based Jerusalem Army filled with Iraqis fixed on eventually retaking the holy city. Abu Maria al-

Qahtani, a founder of Al Qaeda in Syria, said that "Hussein's persistent anti-American rhetoric galvanized many to fight against U.S. influence before and after the invasion."[372] Thus, it should come as no surprise that thousands of jihadi recruits "flowed into [Zarqawi's organization in Iraq] with the desire to kill an American and die a hero's death."[373]

Thus, by the expiration of U.S. President George W Bush's forty-eight hour deadline, it is fair to assert that Zarqawi had finally established a full-fledged and legitimate terror organization – one that had not existed with a high degree of legitimacy less than a year beforehand. The United States had claimed that Zarqawhi had gone from mere street thug to terroristic mastermind with a powerful and violent organization at his finger tips. As a result, Zarqawi went from street thug to terroristic mastermind with a powerful and violent organization at his fingertips. Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad was respectably large and powerful. It now had a clear goal, too. Having moved on from the Jordanian monarchy for the time being, ever the reactionary leader that Zarqawi was, the organization reoriented itself: this time toward jihad against the threatening American invaders, should they enter Iraq. Zarqawi and his organization anticipated their arrival.

The 2003 U.S. Invasion of Iraq: Mobilizing Zarqawi and his Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad

On March 20th of 2003, the United States began its war in Iraq. In this field of terrorism research that has generated so little consensus, this action is unanimously and widely considered to have been the single greatest factor leading to the developement of ISIS. All scholars identify the U.S. invasion of Iraq as the greatest cause.

The 2003 Iraq War, dubbed at the time Operation Iraqi Freedom, opened with an aerial bombardment by U.S. forces. Aircraft and naval warships launched precision-guided rockets

toward a number of locations that withheld high profile targets. Airstrikes were simultaneously conducted against military installations.

A few days after this opening salvo, U.S. and coalition ground forces crossed the Kuwaiti border into Iraq. These forces stormed through the country at a rapid pace. Unexpectedly, they were met with remarkably little resistance – in most regions, they were met with none at all. Much of the Iraqi army had simply laid down its arms and chose not to fight. Exceptions arose in southern Iraq, where U.S. coalition ground forces were confronted by staunch supporters of Hussein, and central Iraq, where they were confronted by Hussein's ultra-loyal Republican Guard.[374*] Zarqawi, his organization, and his fighters did not engage in heavy resistance against the United States at this time – yet its "colleague" Ansar al-Islam suffered heavy losses early on due to aerial bombardments and a ground offensive launched by Kurdish secularists.[375]

Only issues with weather and the logistics of their own supply lines were enough to slow down the U.S. military.[376] By April 9th of 2003, less than a month after hostilities began, the United States had effectively pushed through all pockets of resistance and sacked Iraq's capital city of Baghdad.[377] In a matter of hours, Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq had collapsed.[378] Although Hussein had fled before the invasion and successfully evaded capture for sometime, the United States almost immediately began stripping the government of anything and anyone related to him; this process has since come to be known as "de-Ba'athification."

De-Ba'athification: Filling Zarqawi's Ranks

[*] Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard stood as his first and last defense, undeniably the best and most loyal soldiers in the Iraqi military. Many came from the same tribe as Hussein and were even from his hometown. They were further commanded by Hussein's own son, Qusay Hussein.

Before being toppled by the United States military, Saddam Hussein had ruled as a member of the Iraqi Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party – more simply known as the Ba'ath Party – since 1979. He served as the President, head of the Revolutionary Command Council, and Secretary General for Iraq, or, in other words, its dictator.[379] Under his rule, Ba'ath party members (who were largely of the Sunni denomination) enjoyed a superior status throughout the country. It quickly became a requirement to be capable of holding any government position; as a result, the party ultimately gained control in *every* public and military institution throughout Iraq, and thus, control in all parts of society as well.[380] With the party having infiltrated the ruling ranks of Iraq's political, economic, military, and social systems, the Ba'ath Party formally entrenched itself in power and obtained an "ironclad grip [over] the lives of government employees and military personnel."[381] Recently uncovered files reveal that it sought to maintain vigilant over virtually anything even remotely political, everything ranging from political rallies to the political preferences of high school students all the way to the varying rumors that were spread throughout Iraqi society.[382] Its powers – as detailed by the United States during its 2003 UN speech – were limitless.

The United States' victory over Iraq collapsed Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime. In its place, the United States and coalition forces empowered an entity known as the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) headed by an American diplomat, Paul Bremer. Under Bremer's direction, the CPA sought to maintain some degree of order and security while repairing Iraq's badly damaged institutions and infrastructure.[383] To improve that order and security to a condition greater than which they had been in before the 2003 war, Bremer and others believed it necessary to remove the Ba'athists from power. The CPA did so entirely.

In May of 2003, just a month after the United States proclaimed victory, Bremer issued three significant orders regarding the Iraqi ruling Ba'ath Party. The first outlawed it and removed its members from government positions.[384] This formally removed and banned existing government officials from work – nearly 85,000 people. It also affected mere school teachers who had become Ba'athists simply to obtain or keep their positions – nearly 40,000 of them.[385] The second order completely dissolved Iraq's military and intelligence services. The number of individuals working in these positions may have totaled anywhere between 500,000 (according to the Council on Foreign Relations) and 750,000 (according to James P. Pfiffner, a well-published author and professor from George Mason University).[386] Many were barred from ever returning to any sort of official duty.[387] Third, in November of 2003, Bremer created the Supreme National Deba'athification Commission to identify any significant party members that remained tucked away in the ranks of Iraq's government.*

Their personal conduct was irrelevant. Only their party affiliation mattered.[388] By the time this process had been considered completed, the CPA had committed a complete and total purge of Ba'athist Party members from the Iraqi government. Ba'athist Party members who had been running the country for years. They were now unemployed and irrelevant in an occupied, orderless country. A "bulge of angry, disenfranchised Sunni technocrats" poured into the population.[389] Bremer's orders almost exclusively effected Iraq's Sunni population. The power dynamic in Iraq resultantly shifted to Shia Muslims, who had been oppressed by Saddam Hussein for many years.[390] The CPA effectively pitted the two Islamic sects against one another in Iraq due to the "systematic discrimination, marginalization, and a series of broken promises"

* The same month that Paul Bremer issued his first two de-Ba'athification orders, U.S. President George W. Bush addressed the world regarding the situation in Iraq with a large "Mission Accomplished" banner hanging behind him.

inflicted upon the Sunni population during de-Ba'athification due to the powers that governed, according to the Hague Center for Strategic Studies.[391] The roots for a deep and long-lasting sectarian conflict had effectively been sowed.

While certainly achieving the ostensible goal of de-Ba'athizing Iraq, the United States had also, in the matter of just a few months, completely unraveled the regulating structure in Iraq. The previous system was *far* from perfect, but it had managed to provide a reasonable degree of order and stability not found since a time well before the 1917 Sykes-Picot Agreement that created Iraq in the first place. It was a house of cards, that had held "personal, tribal, [political, social, economic], and religious tensions in stasis since 1917."[392] Its plans for order had resulted in the opposite. A power vacuum emerged in Iraq. And any candidate – especially non-state actors – could emerge to contend for infiltration of that void of power that had infamously opened in 2003.[393]

For now, though, the mass amounts of disenfranchised, often Sunni Ba'ath party members needed a force to turn to, and the existing Iraqi government and coalition forces certainly were not it. Many joined the ranks of Zarqawi's radical Sunni terror organization (who was actively working to recruit these Sunnis, as no other forces heard or responded to their complaints).[394]

Soon after the Coalition Provisional Authority had been established and began issuing its reforms – and, ironically, soon after U.S. President George W Bush declared an end to the military phase in Iraq beneath a "Mission Accomplished" banner – Zarqawi's organization began its insurgency in Iraq. Five other organizations participated in the insurgency as well: Jaysh al-Ta'ifa al-Mansura, Saraya 'Ansar al-Tawhid, Saraya al-Jihad al-Islami, Saraya al- Ghuraba, and Kataib al-Ahwal.[395] Though the five likely did not yet coordinate or consider themselves

operating under a unanimous umbrella organization, many did function with a similar goal and similar recruits (radical Islamists, former Ba'athists, and nationalists, most of which harbored anti-United States and anti-Shia views).[396] One of the groups would be led by Abu Ali al-Anbari. It had been operating since the opening days of the coalition's invasion of Iraq and had particularly taken to attacking *anyone* it considered heretical during the unrest, including everyone ranging from local informants to Shiites to members of the Muslim Brotherhood.[397] Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's own insurgency would not take long to exhibit similar traits when it began in earnest.

Post-Hussein Iraq in 2003: Zarqawi's Insurgency Begins

On August 7th of 2003 a member of the Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad detonated a concealed bomb inside a minibus just outside of the Jordanian embassy. The blast killed seventeen including women and children and injured scores more. This event stands as one of the first major attacks by Zarqawi's organization since it became legitimately recognized. Perhaps this is why the Jordanian embassy was chosen as the "first" target – rather than immediately turning against the Americans and coalition forces with his Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad organization. It is likely that Zarqawi wanted his first attack to enact his vengeance against Jordan. Perhaps it was residual animosity, or a desire to finally emerge victorious over his homeland. After all, his other major attacks against it had failed.

Less than two weeks later, Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad debuted its attacks against its relatively newfound enemy: the international community and the west as a whole. On the afternoon of August 19th, a suicide bomber drove a flatbed truck to the Canal Hotel in Baghdad, a major site for United Nations operations. It is suspected that a five hundred pound aerial bomb

from Hussein's arsenal was on board.[398] The suicide bomber detonated the explosives and himself, killing 22 others and injuring over one hundred.[399] One of the victims included UN Secretary General to Iraq and a High Commissioner for Human Rights, Sergio Vieira de Mello. This attack would be followed a month later by yet another car bomb outside the same hotel. It killed the suicide bomber himself, an Iraqi policeman, and wounded nineteen others including United Nations workers. In an audio tape later released by Zarqawi, he said,

> We destroyed the UN building, the protectors of Jews, the friends of the oppressors and the aggressors. The UN has recognized the Americans as the masters of Iraq. Before that, they gave Palestine as a gift to the Jews so they can rape the land and humiliate our people..."[400]

The United Nations immediately withdrew a bulk of its representatives from Baghdad afterward.

On August 29th, Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad Jihad members committed a dual car bombing on the Imam Ali Mosque, one of Shia Islam's most sacred sites, during Friday prayer hours.[*] It killed ninety-five including a revered cleric, Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim. More than five hundred were injured.[401]This has widely been considered the "official" start of Zarqawi's insurgency.[402] Over the next decade, more than fifty thousand insurgents would flock into Iraq to participate in this fighting.[403]

Identifying the Principle Enemies of ISIS's Forerunning Organization

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's first three infamous attacks on the Jordanian embassy, the UN headquarters, and Shia Muslims are very indicative of the objectives of his evolving "campaign" overall. They are also very indicative of ISIS's objectives that would develop over the course of the years to come. The three attacks can be considered a microcosm for both organization's actions and objectives throughout the spans of their existences. One attack was against the

[*] Zarqawi's organization never officially claimed responsibility for the attack.

government of a Muslim, supposedly "apostate" country – in this case, it was against Jordan and its ambassadors. Another attack was against the international community in the name of Islam – in this case, it was the UN that allegedly facilitated the crusading armies' rule. And a third was against a religious group that failed to practice fundamental Sunni Islam – in this case, as in most to come, it was against the Shia. Zarqawi's August to September 2003 attacks would set the template for all that was to come and the template for the goals of ISIS that were steadily taking shape.

Zarqawi's reasoning for attacking the Jordanian embassy may have been limited to his longstanding desire for vengeance. He had been fixated against the monarchy for a majority of his life. Outside of that, however, his reasoning may have been similar to that of many other radical Islamist organizations: the target was allegedly a corrupt and oppressive country that should have been governing in the name of Islam, but was not. Zarqawi would utilize this line of reasoning to justify his developing and ongoing insurgency in Iraq. This was demonstrated in a quote of his in 2005: "We declare the Iraqi army as an apostate, agent army allied to the crusaders and came to destroy Islam and Muslims. We will fight it."[404] Upon its development, to be discussed later, ISIS would go on to conduct its operations against the governments of Iraq and Syria with similar claims.

Zarqawi's reasoning for attacking the United Nations headquarters (and consequently, all of the international community) rests in their alleged, if not seemingly demonstrated, conspiracies against the nation/territories of Islam. Although Zarqawi remained largely out of the public eye throughout the course of his jihadist activity, much to the opposite of other radical

figures such as Osama Bin Laden, a number of statements shed light on his disdain for the west.* Regarding the situation of the United States in Iraq in particular, Zarqawi has repeatedly suggested that,

> The mujahedeen will give America a taste of the degradation you have inflicted on the Iraqi people…We have declared a bitter war against the principle of democracy and all those who enact it…[Hurricane Katrina] was the result of every mother or father's prayer, or an orphaned son, or woman whose honor was taken away in Iraq or Afghanistan…[405]

He also asserted that the United States had entered Iraq on Israel's behalf,

> The Americans…entered Iraq on a contractual basis and to create the State of Greater Israel…this Zionized American administration believes that accelerating the creation of the State of [Greater] Israel will accelerate the coming of the Messiah.[406]

As a result, in a letter that he wrote to Bin Laden sometime between 2003 and 2006, Zarqawi wrote, "We ask God to enable us to kill and capture [Americans], in order to sow panic among those behind them, and to trade them for our sheikhs and brothers in jail."[407] Like an unwritten doctrine, this anti-Western policy engrained itself into Zarqawi's organization and all that were to follow during the evolution of ISIS.

The reasoning behind Zarqawi's first attack on the Shia community appears to have been two-fold. First, Zarqawi had become radicalized to the degree that he quite literally viewed the Shia sect of Islam as heretical. The reasons for his ideological resentment are presented best on two instances. One is a letter he sent to Bin Laden and Zawahiri that intercepted by U.S. forces in 2004. His criticisms of the Shia are far too numerous to list them all, even from this letter alone. Yet some of the most indicative can be restated. In the letter, Zarqawi referred to Shia Muslims as "rejectionists," "the dregs of humanity," and accused them of striking a deal with the invading armies of Iraq in saying, "the Shiites would get two-thirds of the booty for having stood

* Like many of the ISIS leaders to follow him, Zarqawi would not speak or release public statements with great frequency. He did not have the "charismatic," well-spoken personality that allowed Bin Laden to succeed. Unfortunately, this leaves scholars with comparatively little firsthand material.

by the crusaders against the mujahedeen."[408] He also referred to the Shia as an "insurmountable obstacle, a lurking snake, a crafty and malicious scorpion, a spying enemy, and a mortal venom."[409] Perhaps this was because, in his view, the Shia had "traversed the history of Islam and left indelible scars on its face…" Zarqawi's principle ideological aggression against Shia Muslims arose as a result of supposed historical transgressions.

> History's message, confirmed by the current situation, demonstrates most clearly that Shiism is a religion that has nothing in common with Islam except in the way that Jews have something in common with Christians as people of the book. From patent polytheism, tomb worship, and circumambulating shrines to calling the companions of the Prophet infidels and insulting the mothers of the believers and the best of the Muslim nation, they arrive at distorting the Quran as a logical means of defaming those who know it, in addition to claiming that the imams are infallible, that believing in them is a tenet of faith, that revelation came down to them, and other forms of unbelief and heresy that fill their favorite books and reference works – which they continue to churn about incessantly. The dreamers who think that a Shiite can forget this historical legacy and the old hatred of the nawasib, as they say, are deluded: this is like asking a Christian to renounce the idea of the crucifixion…[410]

Further calling on what he considers the lessons of history, Zarqawi writes,

> How long will it take for our community to learn history's lessons and listen to the testimony of centuries past? The Shiite Safavid dynasty was an insurmountable obstacle in the path of Islam – indeed, a dagger that stabbed the Muslims in the back.[411]

Zarqawi wrote that Islam could have taken over Europe and engaged in a holy war hundreds of years ago, but the Safavid dynasty – a Shia dynasty – had attacked Baghdad, thereby forcing the Ottomans to "turn back in order to defend Islam"[412] He also complained that the Shia "were the main reason for the arrival of Genghis Khan, Hulagu's arrival in Iraq, the taking of Aleppo, the pillage of Salihiyya, and other things."[413]

Summarizing all of his aforementioned points, Zarqawi wrote, "Throughout history and over the centuries, these people have been a treacherous and disloyal sect" who had always opposed Sunni Muslims – supposedly the only "true" Muslims.

His reasoning for gradually pivoting his organization against Shia Muslims is clear, however contorted it may have been. What is less clear, however, is exactly where and when Abu Musab al-Zarqawi turned against these alleged heretics. While he may always have viciously feuded with those who disagreed with him on even the smallest of points, he does not always seem to have opposed the Shiites. After all, he had not been a religious man most of his life. He had never practiced fundamental Islam either. His turn against the Shiites may actually cast doubt on the idea that Maqdisi was his greatest mentor, as Maqdisi never believed in feuding with another sect of Islam: "Whatever their history, their hostility toward Sunnis, or the harm they have done, people of modest means must not be lumped together with military leaders," Maqdisi wrote, "The error that spares the blood of a thousand unbelievers is not as grave as the one that kills even a single Muslim."[414]

Fitting with Hassan Hassan's argument, one man had opposed and attacked Shia Muslims from the beginning: Abu Ali al-Anbari. It may not have been a matter of coincidence that Zarqawi's anti-Shia actions and rhetoric increased in prevalence as Zarqawi began interacting more heavily with Anbari (who would ultimately become Zarqawi's deputy, second in command).[415] "The idea for targeting Shiites probably came from native Iraqis like Anbari – possibly even Anbari himself," Hassan Hassan wrote.[416] "Prior to [then], Zarqawi's fixation was largely with secular Arab regimes," but he ultimately found anti-Shiite views essential in mobilizing Iraqi Sunnis during the insurgency.[417] Ideologically, it is also possible that Zarqawi was influenced by the writings of infamous Salafist ideologue, Ibn Taymiyya as well. Centuries before Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad originated, Ibn Taymiyya wrote,

> Many of the [Shia Muslims] would favor the infidels within his heart more than he would favor the Muslims. That is why when the infidel Turks emerged from the east and fought the Muslims and spilled their blood, in the lands of Khurasan and in Iraq and Sham and in the Peninsula and elsewhere, the [Shia Muslims] were there to aid them in killing Muslims…The same goes for the

> Christians in Al-Sham where the [Shia Muslims] were their greatest helpers. And should the Jews get a state in Iraq or elsewhere, the [Shia Muslims] will be their greatest helpers, for they are always supportive of the infidels…[418]

Yet one religious mentor like Anbari and an ideologues like Ibn Taymiyya alone likely were not enough to lead Zarqawi to turn so vehemently against Shia Muslims with his organization. There were also tactical reasons for his shift against the other sect.

Attacking the Shia with his Sunni organization could spark an eventual retaliation of Shia against the Sunni. After enough of these retaliatory attacks, a civil war could break out in Iraq. Zarqawi knew that he controlled the power to instigate a sectarian civil war.[419] Nada Bakos, a former CIA analyst, stated that Zarqawi knew that "if he [started] a civil war, that's going to cause even more disruption and dislocation inside of Iraq, which enables him to then try to capture more territory."[420] If he could eventually provoke a total sectarian conflict in Iraq, his organization would arise as the Sunni minority's champion as well – this would boost its legitimacy and likelihood of achieving its goals, a fact confirmed by Fawaz A Gerges (the Emirats Chair of the Contemporary Middle East and Director of the Middle East Center for the London School of Economics and Political Science).[421] Even Richard Atwood, the director of the International Crisis Group, affirms this in writing that "Zarqawi…saw that provoking Sunni-Shia confrontation would work in his favor."[422]

These three enemies – the international community, apostate regimes, and non-Sunni religions – would cement themselves as Zarqawi's organizations' principle enemies from then onward. They would continue to be the target of his operations as the organization evolved into ISIS – even after Zarqawi is killed in 2006, they would remain the organizations' targets. They were convenient and strategic choices for Zarqawi, presumably easy to make.

The Materialization of Zarqawi's Insurgency via Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad

But as of early 2004, he was still alive and preoccupied with his attacks against his enemies. Attacks occurred regularly. Between September 2nd and December 21st of that year, Islamic fundamentalists and/or Iraqi insurgents believed to be linked to Zarqawi's Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad carried out no fewer than thirteen attacks in the country. They featured more than fifteen suicide bombers.[423] In one instance, simultaneous suicide car bombings targeted a Red Cross compound and four police stations, killing more than thirty and injuring more than two hundred. In another, suicide bombers targeted Italian and Iraqi forces. And in yet another, suicide bombers attacked coalition forces that killed more than fifteen and injured more than two hundred.

The insurgency intensified in 2004. The list of terrorist incidents is incredibly long. Only the most significant can be named, like Zarqawi's organization having been linked to or fully blamed for the assassinations of the brother of a Kurdish politician and security chief for Iraq's Northern Oil Company, a Kurdish religious leader, an employee for the Iraqi Education Ministry, an Iraqi deputy foreign minister, a Sunni scholar, and the president of the Iraqi Governing Council. All of these assassinations occurred in a matter of months.[424]

On March 2nd of 2004, Zarqawi's organization bombed Shia shrines in Karbala and Baghdad during the Shia holy day of Ashura. The attack involved multiple suicide bombers detonating themselves in crowds surrounding the shrines while other attackers threw grenades or prepared to kill survivors with gunfire. More than 180 were killed with many others injured.[425] A few months later, Baghdad bombings would kill thirty-five children and many others as U.S. troops distributed candy during the inauguration of a sewage treatment plant.[426] The victims were overwhelmingly Shia. These attacks, however, are just a sample of the brutality that Zarqawi

enacted against Shia Muslims – other similarly styled attacks in 2004 that can positively be linked to his organization would be carried out on May 18th, September 14th, and December 19th of 2004.[427]

But his "trademark" act, aside from orchestrating suicide bombings against other Muslims, was demonstrated to the world in early 2004. In front of a video camera, Zarqawi sat an American hostage – a twenty-six year old radio-tower repairman. After reading aloud a statement, two of Zarqawi's men held the hostage down to the ground while Zarqawi stood over top of him and cut off his head with a knife. The body was later found by the American military atop an overpass in Baghdad. In the video, Zarqawi attributed his viciousness to the need for revenge due to the Abu Gharib scandal that leaked earlier that year, where photos of horrendous abuses of Iraqis by the American military were shown to the public. Zarqawi would release yet another gruesome video just months after in which he beheaded two American contractors; this time he cited the United States' failure to release certain Islamic prisoners. These two Americans would not be his organization's last victims. More than a dozen others would have their decapitations filmed and posted onto the internet.

> Emissaries tried to save that infidel mule, offering us all the money we wanted (and we needed it badly to keep our wheel of jihad turning)," Zarqawi said of a beheading, "But we preferred to avenge our brothers and take revenge for our community…in order to strengthen their wills and cause Muslims east and west to rejoice…We swore we would not release this prisoner for money…so that the enemies of God would know that there is no true for them in our hearts.[428]

This cruelty and ruthlessness imposed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi would just be the beginning. Every organization after Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad in the evolution leading up to ISIS would exhibit the same general attributes and the same general objectives against near apostate regimes, the international community, and non-Sunni religious communities.

Despite Zarqawi's once humble background – having never received a substantive religious education and never obtained a genuine military leadership post – he proved to be an immensely capable leader of the post-2003 Iraqi insurgency. At least, he proved to be immensely capable of "fomenting the types of destruction that tore at the roots of Iraq's society and the international community's attempts to facilitate a transition away from Saddam's totalitarian regime."[429] Although his organization had been essentially nonexistent and illegitimate in 2002, it had gained a great amount of traction and became capable of singlehandedly preventing stability in Iraq by early 2004.

The entire world had been given the impression "that a lasting, if not eternal, jihad had been unleashed."[430] And after all of his years attempting to engage in jihad, Zarqawi's Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad in 2004 had finally obtained its position at the epicenter of the jihadist universe."[431]

Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (Al Qaeda in Iraq): 2004 – 2006

In September of 2004, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad became a part of the Al Qaeda franchise and changed its name to Tanzim Qai'dat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn.[*] While the west has come to translate this title simply to Al Qaeda in Iraq, or AQI, it technically translates to "Organization of Jihad's Base in Mesopotamia" or "the land between the two rivers."[432] At this point, it is said that Abu Ali al-Anbari officially became Zarqawi's deputy or second in command.[433]

The facts regarding this 2004 merger or absorption between Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad and Al Qaeda are incredibly murky. Aside from even the date being unclear, there is no

[*] A majority of scholars claim that the date was in September.

universal explanation for the renaming either. As early as 2004, the two organizations differed markedly in their objectives, tactics, enemies, and allies. Bin Laden and Zarqawi may never have had a good relationship. And their two organizations may never have coordinated or worked together beforehand. Thus, some speculation is required regarding the specific reasoning for this franchising. Perhaps it was to increase the funding, recruits, resources, and logistical support that poured into Zarqawi's organization.[434] Perhaps it was for the name-recognition that Al Qaeda offered. Or perhaps it was due to some skillful political maneuvering by Osama Bin Laden to save or elevate his own organization after some eight months of contacts/negotiations with Zarqawi.[435]

There is also little consensus as to whether this name change can be regarded as a merger (the two organizations coming together to work equally in tandem) or an absorption (with one organization usurping the other's authority). Many scholars such as Michael W.S. Ryan, Gregory D. Johnsen, Hassan Hassan, Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli state that Zarqawi actually pledged allegiance to Bin Laden and to Al Qaeda. While others suggest that he was careful never to pledge allegiance, many note that he did do so but was also careful to maintain a high degree of autonomy.[436] Regardless of the case, it is certain that Zarqawi's Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad organization did thereafter become known as Al Qaeda in Iraq. And it is also certain that Zarqawi's organization continued to operate with a large degree of independence, seemingly a *complete* degree of independence, whether this was supported by traditional Al Qaeda leadership or not.[437]

Zarqawi's Insurgency via Al Qaeda in Iraq

The modus operandi of Zarqawi's evolving organization did not change. Many of the aforementioned terroristic events occurred in 2004, possibly after the "merger." His insurgency continued into 2006, continuing to commit unspeakable atrocities and sectarian killings. Electric drills were used against the skulls of living people in some videos while he continued to attack Shia mosques, shrines, and gatherings all throughout Iraq.[438] Security forces, Kurds, foreign civilians, and international humanitarian aid workers also became his targets, however tangentially related to the conflict at hand.[439] And he never forgot about Jordan, his native country that he bore the most animosity against, his "shining example" of an apostate government, as he committed bombings at various events in Amman which killed over sixty and wounded over a hundred.[440] Sectarian violence still continued to increase as well, as chains of Shia-led retribution were ignited.

U.S. and coalition forces had facilitated the eventual scheduling of the first election in Iraq since Saddam Hussein's ousting. Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) immediately took to vehemently protesting it. It vowed a "bitter war" against both voters and candidates, announcing the elections as an "American game." It claimed responsibility for the assassination of Baghdad's governor and multiple attacks come polling day. It also kidnapped the colonel of Iraq's interior ministry.[441]

It is hard for one to look at the behavior of Zarqawi's organization at this point as anything other than something similar to an unleashed rabid dog biting at anything in its vicinity. But this metaphor is accurate. Al Qaeda in Iraq's character and objectives mirrored those of its leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. He was a violent and reactionary man who basked in the thrill that chaos provided. Zarqawi did have strategic/ideological/religious justification against the international community, nearby regimes, and Shia Muslims. But he was never ideologically driven. He may thus have engaged in this violence even without such

strategic/ideological/religious justification – perhaps they just provided him with legitimate grounds for engaging in his own desires.

That same year, Al Qaeda's original leaders – Bin Laden and Zawahiri – intervened. In a private letter obtained by intelligence services, Al Qaeda core leadership urged Abu Musab Zarqawi to tone down the frequency and brutality of his violence. This fifteen page plea particularly concerned with his violence against fellow Muslims. "The mujahid movement must avoid any action that the masses do not understand or approve." Ayman al-Zawahiri wrote in one part of the letter.[442] "Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populations who love and support you will never find palatable," he wrote in another, "are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages."[443] Zawahiri argued that the violence would alienate Muslims and prevent them from supporting the Al Qaeda project of holistically unifying the Islamic community.[444] This is the first material evidence of a growing rift between the two organizations.

Zarqawi's Al Qaeda in Iraq: Igniting a Massive Sectarian Conflict

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi totally disregarded the request of Al Qaeda's original leadership to tone down his violence, fundamentally setting his organization on a track separate from the goals of both Al Qaeda's original leadership…and moderation itself. Zarqawi doubled down on his activities in an assassination on Iraq's outgoing prime minister.[445] Even more significantly, less than two years later he would orchestrate a bombing of the al-Askari mosque on February 22nd of 2006 – one of the holiest sites of Shia Islam in Iraq, if not the world. While Zarqawi's previous attacks had stoked sectarian hostilities, it is this event that undeniably began the genuine and mass sectarian conflict according to most analysts.[446] By March 1st – just one week after the al-Askari bombing – more than 379 people had been killed and 458 people had been

wounded as a result of sectarian violence.[447] A full-blown sectarian civil war had been ignited.[448] This was all according to Zarqawi's plan.

> Targeting and hitting [the Shia's] religious, political, and military depth will provoke them to show the Sunnis their rabies and bare the teeth of hidden rancor working in their breasts. If we succeed in dragging them into the arena of sectarian war, it will be possible to awaken the inattentive Sunni as they feel imminent danger and annihilating death at the hands of these [Shia].[449]

In April of 2006, the Shiite-dominated government of Iraq elected Nouri al-Maliki as prime minster of Iraq – he took the previously mentioned de-Ba'athification a step further and worked to completely purge Sunnis from his government. These Sunnis, too, seem to have turned toward Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) as the new legitimate power structure, an organization capable of articulating and acting on their political and vengeful ambitions. Relations between the Shia and Sunni sects in Iraq would never recover. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi had achieved his goal of creating and exploiting the religious divide.

Early in 2006, Zarqawi had also used his increasingly prominent Al Qaeda in Iraq organization to attempt to consolidate radical Sunni and insurgent forces. In an attempt at unification, Al Qaeda in Iraq announced its creation of the Mujahedeen Shura Council consisting of five other organizations: Jaysh al-Ta'ifa al-Mansura, Saraya 'Ansar al-Tawhid, Saraya al-Jihad al-Islami, Saraya al-Ghuraba, and Kataib al-Ahwal.[450] It was ineffective.[451] But perhaps it is significant because it foreshadowed ISIS's later attempts to consolidate all radical Sunni Islamic groups into only one legitimate organization. After all, in a released video tape discussing this council, Zarqawi called it "the starting point for establishing an Islamic State."[452] He may also have gone so far as to say, "We hope to God that within three months from now the environment will be favorable for us to announce an Islamic state."[453] It is unclear where and when Zarqawi adopted this specific vision.

Death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi would not live to see these attempts at founding an Islamic state. On June 7th of 2006, interrogation of one of his trusted religious clerics led U.S. forces to successfully identify his location.[454*] A pair of American jets bombed a house where he hosted a meeting.[455] A team of Special Forces investigated afterward and confirmed that Zarqawi had been killed alongside five others.[456] Yet his infamous legacy had already been engrained in history– the Jordanian terrorist had created the infrastructure for the group that would become ISIS, oriented the organization against the near enemy, the international community, and non-Sunni religions, adorned the organization's actions with trademark brutality, and developed its habit of extensively using the media to portray its vicious message. Perhaps the only essential contribution that Zarqawi *did not* provide was a grand ideology, but this would come later with new leadership.

George W Bush addressed the international community after Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's death, saying "We can expect the sectarian violence [in Iraq] to continue. Yet, the ideology of terror has lost one of its most visible and aggressive leaders and it provides an opportunity for the new government to turn the tide in the country."[457] To some degree, he was correct. Sectarian violence absolutely did continue. And an opportunity to turn the tide against terror and insurgency was presented. But it was not capitalized upon – the tide did not turn against Al Qaeda in Iraq or terrorism in general (even if AQI's leadership was temporarily disorganized by Zarqawi's death). The insurgency persisted.

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[*] Intelligence efforts may have been aided against growing content against Zarqawi amongst his own cohorts, as noted by Michael W.S. Ryan.

Abu Ayub al-Masri: Providing New Leadership and a New Ideology

Al Qaeda in Iraq did not delay in appointing another leader in 2006. As early as five days later, an Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood member who'd served in both the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Al Qaeda, and experienced combat in Iraq was appointed as AQI's new leader by the Mujahedeen Shura Council.[458] His name was Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, but has better come to be known as Abu Ayub al-Masri.[459*] It seems as though Abu Ayub al-Masri provided Al Qaeda in Iraq with the grand ideology it needed to begin its transition into ISIS. In fact, from this point onward, all the organization's leaders would be highly ideologically driven. This is generally a significant difference from the organization under Zarqawi's leadership.

Boldly, Masri stated, "[We] have reached the end of a stage of jihad and the start of a new one, in which we lay the first cornerstone of the Islamic caliphate project and revive the glory of religion."[460] His concern was no longer solely on conducting an insurgency, but on "capturing and holding large swathes of territory" to form a new Islamic caliphate that had not been witnessed since the days of the 16th century Ottoman Empire.*

However, according to journalist Graeme Wood's interview with one of the Islamic State's most influential preachers, the Islamic caliphate would not just be a territory. It is not just a political entity. It would be a "vehicle for salvation."[461] It would be necessary for the "end times."

Abu Ayub al-Masri, alongside the leaders that followed him, held an incredibly apocalyptic worldview due to their ultra radical interpretations of the religion. According to

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* Very little is known about Abu Ayub al-Masri at this point in time. This may be due to his supposed position as an intelligence and recruitment officer for AQI, which would have necessitated his frequent traveling and use of varying names.

* Many ideological radical Islamists do not recognize the Republic of Turkey under Ataturk as legitimate for it did not fully enforce Islamic law and its caliphs had not descended from the tribe of the Prophet Muhammad

Graeme Wood's interview, they believe that the establishment of a caliphate is a religious duty for all Muslims (as this was how the umma existed during the days of the Prophet Muhammad and the rightly guided caliph's who followed afterward). All Muslims, it is said, are doctrinally obligated to pledge allegiance to a caliph for this was like the salaf. After the Islamic caliphate was reestablished, individuals such as Masri believed, apocalyptic prophecies could proceed to materialization.

As mentioned in the opening pages of this chapter, the Islamic caliphate would first come to encompass land in Iraq and Syria. Muslim armies would amass, consolidate, and become formidable. They then could take the final step necessary in reigning in the final Day of Judgment: defeating the "armies of Rome" whose "allies" could number up to eighty.[462] Once the Muslim armies emerged victorious, the Islamic caliphate would expand to cover the whole world, or at least as far as Istanbul. Then the Dajjal would emerge as the anti-Messiah, pushing the Muslims back to their last stand in Jerusalem where Jesus would return to save those Muslims who remained.[463] This belief/prophecy did not stem from the Quran, but rather from hadiths (words attributed to the Prophet Muhammad) which may have been subject to several interpretations over time.[464]

The aforementioned prophecy would be set in motion immediately upon the return of the Mahdi – "a spiritual and territorial leader who will rule before the end of the world and restore religion and justice." William McCants of the Brooking Institution and others note that the "founding fathers" of ISIS – fighters like Masri – were absolutely confident that the end times were upon them and the Mahdi was due to return soon. The signs, they believed, were everywhere.[465] Perhaps it is not hard to understand why.

Most, if not all, leaders of ISIS and its forerunning organizations had never experienced a stable social, political, economic, or religious environment. Their native countries (like Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, etc) did not enjoy a reasonable degree of stability for any sustained period time if one assumes they were born in the 1950s or later. In fact, their worlds only unraveled as time went by. Ruling regimes became oppressive or were toppled. Borders changed. Wars ravaged their homelands. Battles forced relocation. Travel to visit more stable regions of the world and media that could provide a look into more stable regions of the world were largely absent. This specially holds true in Iraq. At one point, Hussein provided the greatest degree of stability many had known. Less than seventy-two hours later, everything changed. Largely Christian armies had invaded and toppled the government with "shock and awe" tactics and fire/power technology that many had never seen before. Insurgency arose. Bombs and gunshots sounded every single day. A sectarian war raged. Religious monuments were ravaged. Killings occurred more often than not. What other form would an apocalypse take? What else were the many uneducated Middle Eastern Muslims, who grew up in radical environments, to assume?[*] Al Qaeda in Iraq, under Masri's leadership, turned to focus on establishing an Islamic caliphate. A name change accompanied this shift in objective.

Dawla al-Islamiya fi Iraq (the Islamic State in Iraq) under Abu Ayyub al-Masri: 2006 – 2010

Allegedly operating under this belief that the Mahdi's return was just a relatively short period of time away, Abu Ayyub al-Masri rushed to begin putting a state and caliph in place (or declaring the ambitions for them, at least).[466] On October 15th of 2006, in control of a fair

[*] This, of course, is not to legitimize their claim to jihad in the course of establishing an Islamic state. It is simply an attempt to understand their rationale.

percentage of western Iraq's Anbar province, Masri announced the creation of an Islamic state.[467] A man named Abu Omar al-Baghdadi was empowered as its Amir, or "Commander of the Faithful."[468] It is also worth noting that Masri likely did this as a more political than ideological move: by declaring his organization as the caliphate, he had effectively demoted other competing radical Islamist groups to mere supporters.[469] After all, Masri's organization was now the caliphate they were so desperately working toward in the long term.

Abu Ayyub al-Masri, the cabinet that he had assembled, and Amir Abu Omar al-Baghdadi renamed AQI to al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi Iraq, or the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI).[470*] The organization's operational objectives immediately shifted. ISI was no longer focused on solely conducting an insurgency or terroristic operations. It was now a militaristic, political, supposed state-actor working to accumulate territory under its control for the ultimate implementation of Islamic governance. In pursuit of this goal, it remained oriented against Shia Muslims, apostate regimes, and the international community – in that order. The nature of its objectives was totally unforeseen in the world of radical Islamic terrorism until this point.

The reaction amongst other jihadist and insurgent groups to such an announcement was mixed, but many were upset with the decision. Many believed that the liberation of Iraq and other Muslim territories should take priority and be done *before* the declaration of an Islamic caliphate.[471] The reaction was particularly negative from Al Qaeda leadership. Incredibly surprised, Bin Laden and Zawahiri– two individuals who had spent a great deal of time thinking about the ultimate declaration of a state - criticized the move as premature.[472] They continued to demand that the Islamic State in Iraq follow their orders and let them direct the attacks. But, as

[*] It can also be translated to the Islamic State "of" Iraq. According to Cole Brunzel of the Brookings Institution, the Islamic State of Iraq was presented as a state within Iraq that could serve as a sort of "safe haven" or guaranteed territory for Sunni Muslims. The Islamic State in Iraq was considered the actual caliphate that all Muslims should seek to return to.

Zarqawi had, Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi did what they chose in leading their organization. They had made the superior political move. The rift between Al Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq. However, ISI's claim as founding a caliphate was largely ignored and not taken seriously early on.

Right out of the gate, ISI – as an organization principally focused on founding a territorial entity – appeared somewhat strong. Before the end of 2006, it loosely controlled a large amount of Iraq's Anbar Province and was raising $70 to $200 million dollars a year for its cause.[473*] Yet this newfound objective did not come at the expense of enacting a reign of terror. ISI continued wreaking havoc across the country, committing horrendous sectarian killings and brutal terror attacks against local regimes and the international community. But it did not take this first attempt at founding an Islamic state long to fail under Masri's leadership.

The Islamic State in Iraq (ISI): A Poor Start, Near Annihilation

By 2007 just months after its initial declaration, the Islamic State in Iraq began to falter and was pushed in the direction of near annihilation. The group's struggle can be attributed to four main causes. First, General David H. Petraeus assumed control of the United States military in Iraq with a new counter-insurgency strategy in mind.[474] He initiated a policy of maximum opposition against ISI insurgents.[475] A keystone of his strategy focused on identifying and killing or capturing the organization's leadership. It proved immensely successful – in the next three years, an astonishing 80% of ISI leaders had been neutralized. General Ray Odierno told reporters during a Pentagon news conference that thirty-four ISI leaders had been killed or captured and only eight remained on the loose.[476] Second, what has been dubbed a "Sunni

[*] This money was gathered through a combination of ransoms, extortion, oil smuggling, and other illicit activity.

Awakening" occurred at the start of 2007 as well (also due in large part to General Petraeus). Sunni Muslims all over Iraq – interestingly many of which had once participated in the insurgency – turned against ISI as a result of the organization's persistent brutality. Many may also have been alienated by the declaration of a state and the control that was accordingly exerted over their own private, daily lives.* Working in conjunction with U.S. forces and the Iraqi government, these anti-ISI Sunnis "proved effective at counter-insurgency" efforts due to their knowledge of local situations, people, and terrain. These native efforts wounded the organization significantly.[477] Third, Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi's Islamic State in Iraq had overextended. While their objectives may have been feasible, the two proved inept leaders relative to the task at hand: establishing the state, maintain the state, preserving the territory, and implementing Islamic law all while continuing jihad against the international community, insurgency against apostate regimes, and a sectarian civil war in Iraq turned out to be quite the responsibility. The Islamic State in Iraq simply failed to garner the resources and manpower necessary, especially as its recruits either abandon it and joined the Sunni Awakening or left the organization and returned to their native lands. Fourth, as briefly mentioned, ISI's unrelenting brutality alienated many Iraqis. It attempted to prevent its own weakening relevance by increasing its brutality – like a car bombing on August 14th of 2007 that killed almost 800 people.[478] But this only accelerated "the loss of support from the Sunni tribes and Iraqi insurgents" according to Ashmed S. Hasim, an associate professor of strategic studies in the Military Studies Program at Nanyang Technological University.[479] And, on the whole, sectarian violence in Iraq had somewhat declined.

* ISI had attempted to force its way into force its way into economic enterprises and alter customs and mores of local tribes, according to Ahmed S. Hashim, an associate professor strategic studies at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

By 2008, the organization described itself as being in a condition of "extraordinary crisis."[480] By mid-2008, the bounty on Masri was decreased by almost one million dollars.[481] By the end of 2008, the situation in Iraq appeared stable enough to discuss U.S. withdrawal alongside a handoff of responsibilities to government-led security forces. By 2009, "it looked as though the group had all but disappeared" according to Johnsen and the United States military had withdrawn from all Iraqi cities.[482] That same year, U.S. casualties reached a record low since the 2003 invasion.[483] Sometime in this time period, Masri's wife allegedly asked him, "Where is this Islamic State in Iraq that you're talking about? We're living in the desert!"[484] And in April of 2010, the United States military killed a number of the Islamic State in Iraq's leaders during a raid in the Anbar Province. Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi were killed in this raid as well. No Islamic caliphate appeared to exist anywhere.

The 2011 End of the United States' Involvement in the Iraq War

In October of 2011 in the following year, the United States ended its war in Iraq. It had grown war-weary as a country and was generally glad to withdraw. By December 18th, the last remaining United States soldiers exited Iraq.

The nine year conflict had drawn to an end at the cost of 4,488 American, 134,000 Iraqi civilians, and 150 reporters. Total deaths as a direct result of combat are estimated to number up to or over 189,000. Indirect deaths undeniably amount to thousands more. 32,223 American troops were injured, not including those who were affected by PTSD afterward. Tens of thousands of other nationalities were killed, wounded, or remain missing. The nine year Iraq War also created more than 2.8 million refugees and had come at the cost of well over $1.7 trillion

dollars.[485] Only a limited degree of stability had been achieved. No weapons of mass destruction were located.

Dawla al-Islamiya fi Iraq (the Islamic State in Iraq) under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: 2010 – 2013

The deaths of the Islamic State in Iraq's leaders in April of 2010 may have actually strengthened the organization in the long run. Less than a month later, the Islamic State in Iraq's Shura Council appointed its most effective leader yet: a man named Ibrahim ibn 'Awwad ibn Ibrahim ibn 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Badri who still leads the organization today.[486] He is better known by the name he currently rules by: Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Upon the decision to elect Baghdadi, ISI leaders carefully crafted his biography to encompass of the necessary characteristics of a true caliph.[487] He is said to have been born as a member of the Quraysh tribe, a direct descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, in Samarra, Iraq in 1971. [488] Baghdadi was born into a religious and military family. Like many "traditional" other radical Islamic leaders, but unlike Zarqawi, he is said to have been "quiet and pious" in his youth. Yet he allegedly was not very bright – according to Gregory D. Johnsen, low test scores prevented him from ever pursuing law. Whatever legal aptitude test that delivered his low scores proved fateful in the eventual rise of ISIS, as Baghdadi alternatively opted to obtain a degree in Quranic Studies and/or Islamic Law from the University of Baghdad.[489] He is reported to have graduated in 1996, but chose to continue his academic endeavors for an MA or PhD in Islamic Studies. Although many who extensively studied religion in such times in such areas were radicalized in the process, it took Baghdadi some time to cross that threshold; when the United

States and coalition forces invaded Afghanistan in 2001, he simply continued his studies. When the United States and coalition forces invaded Iraq in 2003, he resumed his studies as well.[490]

At some point not long after, though, Baghdadi did indeed become involved with the insurgency. Cole Bunzel, a Postdoctoral Associate in Law and Islamic Law and Civilization Research Fellow at Yale Law, and Ahmed S. Hashim assert that Baghdadi established an Islamic jihad group in late 2003 or very early 2004 titled Jaysh Ahl al-Sunnah wal Jamah or "Army of the Sunni People."[491] Perhaps this was less a matter of Baghdadi's radical ambitions and more a matter of him responding to the situation around him. This may have been a logical progression as a result of his strict religious education and military background during what seemed to be an "infidel invasion." Baghdadi's first organization may have conducted operations all over Iraq…or it may not have been successful in any regard. Either way, Baghdadi was imprisoned around February of 2004 due to his suspected involvement in "terroristic activities."[492]

The United States military took Baghdadi to a prison known as Camp Bucca where he was held as a civilian detainee.[493] Camp Bucca proved consequential in forming future ISIS recruits and leaders – it is hard to envision Baghdadi's rise to the organization's emir without any time in Camp Bucca. Similar to Zarqawi's experience in Al-Jafr prison, Camp Bucca conglomerated a number of radicals, jihadist, and ex-Ba'athis military/security members.[494] Many prisoners there may not have totally understood the reason for their detention, but other imprisoned radicals may have been able to weave together a twisted but understandable narrative regarding their ill fortune.[495] Baghdadi may have been on either side of this phenomenon. Given his extensive religious education, though, one can assume he was able to provide a religious overture for the ongoing Iraqi conflict and indoctrinate the less educated that surrounded him. Brian L. Steed, a professor of military history at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff

College, provides further evidence for this assumption in writing that Baghdadi was given specific responsibilities in the prison to "organize meetings and religious instruction."[496] Camp Bucca logically became a boiling pot for extremism. Cells and networks formed. Baghdadi made contacts; Jason Hanna wrote for CNN that many of Baghdadi's future top lieutenants in ISIS would spend time in Camp Bucca as well.[497] According to William McCants, the prison became known as "the academy."[498]

Consensus does not seem to exist regarding the exact year that Baghdadi was released. It makes the most sense, however, for him to have been released in 2009 as this would given Baghdadi a substantial amount of time to become a religious coordinator in prison and to become networked. This is also when the Iraqi government took control of it.[499] Baghdadi was released because "he was not considered important enough or dangerous enough to keep in custody."[500]

He would come into contact with ISI operatives shortly thereafter, although little is known regarding how he specifically climbed the organization's ranks. The group's Shura Council elected him as emir in his late thirties.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: Restructuring, Refilling, and Reorienting the Islamic State in Iraq

One of his first moves after coming to power was to restructure the declining organization. He began by working to fill its ranks with elite veterans from Hussein's army, particularly from his renowned Republican Guard. Some sources say that he established a military council of eight to thirteen of the most intelligent minds in his organization.[501] Baghdadi also divided the organization's leadership into a hierarchal structure with two ranked echelons. The highest echelon featured the Shura council (like an executive board), a military council (consisting of military commanders from varying regions who made tactical decisions), and a

security and intelligence council (which protected Baghdadi, facilitated communication between the emir and those who would become regional governors, oversaw judicial decisions, and so on).[502] The second leadership echelon is believed to have focused on the more nuanced aspects of state building and maintaining, but more research and less speculation is needed into the subject.[503] Baghdadi conducted the process slowly and meticulously when necessary, establishing "underground networks and sleeper cells."[504] In the words of Ahmed S. Hashim, ISI had laid the groundwork for a "cohesive, disciplined, and flexible organization" that was both "hierarchal and centralized."[505] The reorganization would have been useless, though, if Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was unable to refill the ranks of the Islamic State in Iraq.

But he was, due in large part to the continued de-Ba'athification efforts of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki around the exact same time that Baghdadi took power. Come late 2010 following Baghdadi's release, the United States was fully withdrawing from Iraq and Maliki was assuming control of his government. Yet Maliki did little to ease the existing sectarian conflict that had just begun to settle. In fact, he intensified it. Giving himself and his supporters more and more power, Maliki increasingly worked to totally remove Sunni people from government – even further than they had been during the years of de-Ba'athification.[*] One of the most renowned Sunni tribal leaders and a key leader in the Sunni Awakening, Sheikh Ali Hatem Suleiman, voiced his disgust with Maliki's governance after the U.S. and coalition forces withdrew. "He argues that he is against [the Islamic State in Iraq]," Zana Kharsaw Gulmohamad wrote of Suleiman in an article published via the Global Security Studies, "but [Suleiman opposes] Maliki's way of governing, particularly the neglect and targeting of and discrimination against the Sunni leaders and politicians."[506] Other Iraqi tribal leaders complained that they were

[*] Prime Minister Maliki also named himself interior and defense minister.

being "marginalized, their cities neglected, and political leaders and activists targeted by de-Ba'athification and anti-terrorism laws."[507]

Many Sunni dominated areas also in Iraqi reportedly suffered under Maliki without basic necessities such as electricity under Maliki.[508] Maliki further alienated Sunnis by removing them from military leadership positions while alternatively providing many Shias with "disproportionate benefits."[509] Perhaps Maliki's greatest blunder was forgoing the strides that had been made against ISI during the Sunni Awakening – in mass quantities, Sunni militias began to abandon their responsibilities and enthusiasm for the counter-insurgency project as they went unsupported, unpaid, and had their promises neglected (especially as Baghdadi had enabled ISI to pay these Sunnis larger salaries that Maliki's state could offer).[510] The Sunni Awakening was completely over by the time Prime Minister Maliki reneged on his many promises to incorporate previous militia leaders into the state's security forces.[511] It had been worse than a broken promise regarding advancement, however. Instead, he brought corruption charges against many of those who remained in the government – particularly those who remained in his security forces. With no international community to stop him, Maliki engaged in total "mass removals" of Sunni or non-sectarian leaders in the Iraqi military or other significant power structures.[512] The Sunni/Ba'athist purge that had begun years ago did not just resume under Maliki's independent governance. It was effectively completed.

As a result, the Islamic State in Iraq was again able to position itself as a sort of vanguard for the alienated Sunni masses just as Zarqawi had seven years earlier.[513] This time, even with the previously controversial assertion that they were operating an Islamic state, they were much more successful. Baghdadi used ISI to successfully exploit the rift that had grown between the Sunni and Shia, and between the Sunni and the Iraqi government. In the matter of just over a

year, ISI had filled its ranks. More than 30,000 fighters were soon additionally part of its Sunni army.[514] More importantly, however, it had filled its upper echelons as Ba'athist elites poured into the organization.

Previous military and security experts that had worked alongside Hussein in running Iraq now aided the commanders of ISI. However, many of the organization's most capable leadership – those with the most potential – remained in Iraqi prisons across the country. Rather than carrying on without these leaders, Baghdadi moved to engage in campaigns to break them from their jails (naming one such operation "Breaking the Walls"). He ordered a multitude of large attacks on Iraqi prisons over the span of two years – one operation against Tasfirit Prison freed forty-seven previous leaders while another against the infamous Abu Gharib prison freed approximately five hundred.[515] One of the prisoners to be released was Abu Ali al-Anbari. Baghdadi was correct in his assumption that they would prove capable and effective in assisting the Islamic State in Iraq to create a caliphate eventually.

Under Baghdadi, the Islamic State in Iraq found itself capable by mid-2011 of resuming operations that had been put on hold. Bolstered by its influx of recruits and an increasingly dysfunctional Iraqi government, ISI believed that it could again rise to preeminence – perhaps even greater than before.[516] Thus, regarding its operational objectives, the first goal Baghdadi pursued after restructuration was to shift focus *away* from the international community and *away* from the United States. Baghdadi instead focused the Islamic State in Iraq against the "near enemy" – principally Iraqi state forces. He likely did this for several reasons.

First, the United States and coalition forces had proven capable of destroying or greatly weakening a militant, non-state radical Islamist organization like the Islamic State in Iraq. Second, the United States was leaving the region. There was no reason for Baghdadi to draw

them back in before the establishment of a caliphate; Iraq was demonstrably incapable of serving as the region's stable power structure – why would Baghdadi opt to fill the void with the United States instead of his own organization? Iraqi state forces would need defeated either way, so Baghdadi chose to engage them without their powerful U.S. allies nearby. Third, the organization needed to focus on exploiting the widespread Sunni discontent more than it needed to focus on waging jihad against global superpowers and potentially being driven back underground. The organization relied on Sunni support, or at least Sunni passiveness, to garner a respectable amount of territory and get the caliphate functioning.[517]

Regarding its specific objectives, the Islamic State in Iraq sought to gain control over the territory that the United States was leaving. It devised a "Strategic Plan" to do so.[518] Soon after the United States pulled out, the Islamic State in Iraq came in hard against the transitioning Iraqi state forces. And just as the U.S. had utilized a "Sunni Awakening" plan to its advantage years earlier, ISI sought to do the same – this time "awakening" the Sunnis against the state's corrupt Shia governance.[519]

ISI escalated its insurgency as the U.S. withdrew In Shiite and Kurdish dominated provinces, ISI carried out up to thirty simultaneous attacks at a time. In August of 2011, for example, twenty-two bombings occurred throughout the country just hours apart, intended "not only to inflict material damage…but to diminish the morale of Iraqi security forces" and to diminish the Iraqi people's confidence in Maliki to capably and effectively govern.[520] Conditions were moving in Baghdadi's favor, especially as Al Qaeda was further weakened by the killing of Osama Bin Laden on May 2nd, 2011. This empowered his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, who proved to be a less capable leader overall than Bin Laden had been. ISI's main jihadist rival was becoming irrelevant with ISI as the new face of jihad, if not the overall face of Islamic caliphate

efforts. Yet conditions improved even more favorably for the Islamic State in Iraq in this fateful year of 2011 when power structures all across the Middle East through North Africa were weakened and sectarian divides formed elsewhere as a result of the Arab Spring.

The Arab Spring: Power Vacuums Created in the Hope of Democracy

In the spring of 2011, a time period that has since become known as the Arab Spring, widespread protests erupted throughout Northern Africa and the Middle East in the avid pursuit of democracy. Its beginning has been traced back to Mohamed Bouazizi, a twenty-six year old Tunisian street vendor, who lit himself on fire when police seized his vegetable cart for operating without a permit. This bold individual protest against the government's iron-fisted role sparked the "Jasmine Revolution" in Tunisia.[*] It ripped throughout the country via massive street demonstrations in a matter of weeks and soon reached the capital city of Tunis.[521] Despite the repeated use of oppressive violence and even economic and political concessions, authoritarian president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali was ultimately forced into exile in favor of a democratic government in Tunisia with a constitution.[522] Simultaneously, revolts erupted during the Egypt Uprising of 2011 as well. Mass demonstrations broke out across the country involving tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of citizens after an Egyptian man similarly set himself on fire outside the Egypt's parliamentary building to protest the government's corrupt and oppressive rule. A number of other Egyptian's engaged in this self-immolation as well, but many more famously occupied the Tahrir Square in Egypt's capital city in demand of the president's resignation. After an outbreak of violence, even against the youth groups who worked to lead the revolution, the Egyptian president resigned. An equally oppressive dictator would ultimately take power, but the strength of revolutions in toppling power structures was displayed.[523] Yet Tunisia and Egypt

[*] Tunisia was also experiencing massive unemployment rates, poverty levels, inflation, and corruption.

were not the only two countries involved – mass demonstrations in favor of greater freedoms and participation regarding the political process arose in countries such as Libya and Yemen as well. These democratic protests did not all succeed. Many caused an increase in oppression and political violence, as in Egypt. In other countries like Yemen and Libya, dramatic voids of power have been left where the powerful government once stood – deadly civil wars continue to rage.[524]

ISIS ultimately found itself capable of taking advantage of some situations created as a result of the largely well-intentioned Arab Spring. However, nowhere were the Arab Spring's negative effects more pronounced than in Syria. Nowhere was the Islamic State in Iraq better capable of exploiting a situation than in Syra.

The Start of the Syrian Civil War: An Opportunity for ISI

As uprisings spread beneath various authoritarian regimes throughout the Middle East, Syria (Iraq's neighbor to directly to the West) quickly seemed like the next most likely candidate for mass protest. In an interview with the Wall Street Journal, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was even asked if he expected an uprising in his own country. Of course, he exaggerated the country's stability, while acknowledging some economic and political hardships existed for many Syrians.[525] The reality was much grimmer: Syria was four years into the worst drought it had experienced in the modern era. The rural populations whose livelihood was dependent upon agriculture were reduced into poverty, triggering mass migrations into cities. Across the country, inequality was rampant and corruption was widespread. Throughout all of this President Bashar al-Assad's government remained both tone-deaf to such hardships and incredibly oppressive of its people. As a matter of course, the Syrian government carried out extensive censorship, state surveillance, and torture/arrest of its political opponents.[526]

Yet, such conditions had existed well before 2000. The more proximate trigger for the Syrian Uprising was the arrest of a group of children for writing political graffiti in the rural province of Dara'a. "We got a can of spray paint and we wrote 'Freedom. Down with the regime!" one of the children said. Roughly fifteen of young children were taken into police custody just days later where they were beaten and tortured for weeks.[527] They had fingernails removed and fingers broken. One child said, "It was terrifying…At the police station, under torture and beating, I admitted to the spray-painting and graffiti with my friends."[528] During their confinement, the town protested for their release but knew little about the situation. After they had been released, however – visibly having been tortured – protests in the town escalated against Assad's oppressive police state. Assad responded by sending in tanks and soldiers. "Around 5 or 6 in the morning…They shut down the power, they shut down the internet, the cable television, they shut down everything and surrounded the city," an ex-resident said.[529] Mass arrests took place and the government even took to occasionally firing on protestors.[530]

Within weeks, similar protests sporadically arose in different locations throughout the country. They were met with similar responses by Assad's government, as entire towns and cities were surrounded by government vehicles and artillery. Government forces continued blatantly and unapologetically oppressing the protests with force. Videos soon emerged of the government injuring and killing such protestors.[531] The protests increased in intensity as a result, calling on President Bashar al-Assad to resign. And as his regime continued employing violence, a number of Syrians began to respond with violence as well.

A civil war quickly broke out. A variety of opposing militias emerged, not always linked. Attacks against government forces became widespread, though sporadic and often uncoordinated.[532] Separate from these protests, though similar in their goal of ousting

authoritarian President Bashar al-Assad, arose the Syrian Kurds who desired the right to self-government but were previously unsuccessful in their efforts to obtain it from Assad's regime. They also arose in militias to battle Assad.[533]

The conflict would escalate over the next few months and years. More than 6.2 million Syrians would come to be displaced within the country. More than 5.7 million others would flee it in one of the "largest refugee exoduses in recent history." 13 million would need humanitarian assistance, 1.5 million would become permanently disabled in the fighting, and more than 550 attacks would occur on medical facilities throughout the duration of the fighting.[534] The UK-based monitoring group, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, documented the deaths of 367,965 people over the coming years with an additional 192,035 missing and presumed dead – a number that is still increasing to this day.[535]

Regardless, though, Assad was able to remain in power. He maintained steady authority over many of his military units even as a civil war developed, as they largely consisted of individuals subscribing to the Alawite religion (a sect of Shia Islam) just as Assad did himself. Most of the country, however, consisted of Sunni Muslims.[*] This provided Assad with an opportunity to misconstrue the conflict as one that fell along sectarian lines.[*] He framed the opposition protestors and militias as having been radicalized by extremists like Al Qaeda or the Islamic State in Iraq (though this was not yet true) and warned minority religions/sects that these Sunni Muslims would enact brutal revenge policies if allowed to obtain power.[536] By 2012, the period of civil rest was over. A civil war had broken out between Assad's allies, the Kurds, some aspiring jihadist radical Islamic groups, regional militias, and numerous other anti-Assad forces.

[*]Roughly 70% of the Syrian population consisted of Sunni Muslims. 11-12% of it was Alawite.
[*] The conflict did not originally fall along sectarian lines. Not all of Assad's were Alawite or Shia Muslims. Not all of Assad's opposition were Sunnis.

A variety of forces ultimately became involved in the fray as well. Russia joined on Assad's side, launching airstrikes against what it claims to be enemy jihadist forces. Iran allegedly deployed hundreds of soldiers and billions of dollars in Assad's favor, as well. The Lebanese Hezbollah movement joined the fight as well, financing and arming Shia militias that supported the established Alawite minority. On the other side, Turkey, the United States, United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and France supported the rebel Syrian Democratic Forces that eventually arose. Israel, hoping to curb Iranian influence in the country, has conducted hundreds of airstrikes against Hezbollah forces present in Syria as well.[537] The aforementioned is not an exhaustive list of all the state and non-state actors involved in the Syrian Civil War that arose following the 2011 Arab Spring, but it does shed some light on how extremely complex the conflict became, how many actors contended within the power vacuum that spawned as the Syrian state system's legitimacy deteriorated, and how ravaged Syrian country ultimately became.

Syria accordingly became the perfect state for Baghdadi's expansion of the Islamic State in Iraq and its aspirations for a caliphate. There was no stable power structure in place – ISI had to do no further work to get it to this point. And a divide between the Islamic sects already existed and was already intense. President Bashar al-Assad may have actually *wanted* ISI to expand into his country; with such a group in Syria, Assad could better portray his fight as being between him and Islamic extremists, rather than between him and supporters of a democracy. After all, this would have provided Bashar al-Assad "with the best odds of survival and legitimacy" according to the Hague Center for Strategic Studies.[538]

This fit perfectly with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's operational objectives for ISI beginning late 2011. The Islamic State in Iraq again held the establishment of a caliphate as its principle

goal. But the goal now shifted beyond establishing the caliphate solely in Iraq, especially as the situation in Syria deteriorated. Expansion into the country held true with its prophetic end-times goal, as the city of Dabiq (where the final battle between Muslims and infidels would occur) rested Syria.[539]

Testing the environment that rest across the border, Baghdadi ordered a small group of his own ISI organization to enter Syria on a sort of scouting mission.[540] He placed one of his most trusted lieutenants, a man named Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, in charge of this small regiment.[541*] When Jawlani arrived in Syria sometime in late 2011, he immediately proved capable of networking with what were once local jihadi cells throughout the country. Many radical Islamists that he intertwined had actually been released by Assad himself just weeks before Jawlani's entrance into Syria in an attempt to smear and blur the character of Assad's opposition.[542] Jawlani took his time establishing a credible organization amongst these Syrian jihadists. Other insurgencies in the country would soon come to view Jawlani's growing group "as both effective and authentically Syrian."[543] Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani's envoy on behalf of the Islamic State in Iraq developed greatly in a short period of time and soon became a power in the Syrian Civil War, becoming known for its military capabilities and frequent use of suicide bombers (a trait it undeniably carried over from the Islamic State in Iraq).[544] It became known as Jabhat al-Nusra – later, simply the Nusra Front.

In 2012, Baghdadi still funded this operation. But Jabhat al-Nusra operated with increasing independence and adopted on its own goals and character. By mid-January of 2013, Jawlani's goals for Jabhat al-Nusra had shifted from laying the groundwork for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate to first toppling the Assad regime.

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[*] Some sources claim that Jawlani was originally a regional operations chief for Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi responded by sending a representative in to investigate Jabhat al-Nusra's activity and loyalty to the Islamic State in Iraq. This representative was Abu Ali al-Anbari, who returned with troubling news for Baghdadi. Jawlani was "a cunning person" but "two faced" in running Baghdadi's Syrian envoy.[545] He could not be trusted with the Islamic state project in Syria, Anbari claimed. In response, Baghdadi cleverly began forming individual relationships with the top members of the Jabhat al-Nusra front in a politically skillful attempt to rein them back into the Islamic State in Iraq organization.

On April 9th of 2013, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi delivered one of his rare public statements via audio message. The now-Syrian Jabhat al-Nusra Front organization, Baghdadi falsely proclaimed, was merely an offshoot of the Islamic State in Iraq. The two had merged, he said, and as a result, the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) would then become known as the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (or as Westerners have come to know it, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria).[546*] Only the name ISIS would be used from now on, Baghdadi said.

In this politically motivated move, similar to the one that created the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) years before, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi successfully founded the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as it is known today. With it, he also set its operational objectives for years to come. By wedging itself between Syrian President Bashir al-Assad and the Sunni people of Iraq, ISIS hoped to emerge as a champion of the disaffected once again. In the name of jihad, ISIS would fight viciously to acquire physical territory in Syria and fight viciously to maintain its physical territory in Iraq all with the greater goal of establishing the prophetic Islamic caliphate – one that

* Baghdadi and his organization likely did not refer to it as Syria, for this was what it had been referred to as a result of the Western-made Sykes-Picot plot. Instead, it referred to the land in Syria as al-Sham. This may have had a variety of different meanings, such as: the city of Damascus, the greater area of Damascus, the area of the modern state of Syria, or the area of greater Syria that includes Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and some of Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt.

the world had not seen for centuries. Those ISIS considered heretics would need persecuted and expelled in the process, such as Shias, Kurds, and Christians.

This grand objective necessitated also take jihad against multiple nearby apostate regimes: most significantly Syria and Iraq, but also the state systems of many other countries throughout Northern Africa and the Middle East. Meanwhile, ISIS would encourage lone wolves to continue the fight against the international community, but refrained from ever heavily engaging it head on with full dedication as it was principally focused in first dealing with the nearby regimes. Combat with the international community, with the armies of Rome, was for the final judgment day… after the caliphate had been established.

ISIS in Review

ISIS would continue behaving ruthlessly in pursuit of its objective to establish an Islamic caliphate in Iraq and Syria. After their announcement and name change in 2014, ISIS launched a number of sweeping offensives that captured a great deal of territories and cities – its objective steadfastly remained the establishment of an Islamic caliphate.

Unlike any terror organization to exist before, ISIS would successfully occupy and hold physical expanses of territory with cities and populations operating under its control. ISIS would uniquely act as a state in carrying out the necessary day-to-day functions that were required in pursuit of its objective. Meanwhile, it continued working to expand and defend itself. Of course, it also never lost sight of its terroristic animosity toward the international community or alleged apostate regimes.

By its own terms, ISIS did succeed in obtaining some of its goals under the leadership of Baghdadi. Regarding territory, finances, membership, support, and terroristic aims in general, no

radical Islamic organization has ever been more successful. It did establish what it saw as a caliphate and did successfully alienate “heretics” from it. ISIS would hold onto this physical territory for a great deal of time, only losing its last strategic foothold in March of 2019. Yet even so, many scholars do not consider it wholly defeated.

Research into ISIS as a radical militant organization is still being conducted. Scholarship into it, as stated, is vastly underdeveloped. There is much to learn. This study needs to be expanded and elaborated upon. However, as with Al Qaeda, there is still much that can be learned even from the examination into its evolution that has been detailed in this chapter alone. This is best done via a side-by-side analysis with Al Qaeda.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Due to their size, financing, longevity, resilience, and enormous impact of their existence, Al Qaeda and ISIS serve as two excellent lenses through which the broader phenomenon of radical Islamic terrorism can be viewed. This especially holds true regarding the origin and evolution of such organizations as well as the development of their goals. While both Al Qaeda and ISIS grew out of different situations and different intentions, a number of similarities can be identified that reveal the broader trends of at least these two "successful" radical Islamic terror organizations. The two grew out of viciously anti-imperialist/anti-foreign occupation sentiment, the power vacuums created by ineffective governments, experienced their evolutions in incredibly an incredibly reactionary manner, and were largely driven by the ambition of individual leaders. Yet an analysis of these two "premier" organizations side-by-side also reveals an equally important point: radical Islamic terrorism is not monolithic or universally identical, even between two organizations with the same ultimate objective. Al Qaeda and ISIS bear incredibly different views regarding their role in jihad, the ultimate establishment of a caliphate, violence against the Muslim community, and the tactics that they utilize to pursue their goals.

Both Al Qaeda and ISIS arose as a direct result of foreign invasion, and thus, anti-foreign sentiment. Perhaps this cause for their origin may even have been more influential than religion – in both terror organizations, one generally sees militant action arise *first*, only to be followed by religious justification. Al Qaeda's origins began in fighting the invading Soviet soldiers; it arose as a direct result of Russia's invasion of Afghanistan. Militant action here began before the conflict ever became totally and publicly religious in nature. After the USSR had been repelled, Al Qaeda turned on the United States, extensively citing its presence in Saudi Arabia and Iraq –

this presence being the primary issue due *in part* to religious reasons. In the aforementioned instance, Bin Laden utilized religion more as a justification and means through which the "infidel" should be removed from the land and less as a reasoning for hatred of the West in the first place.

ISIS's origins bear semblance. It arose as a direct result of the United States' invasion of Iraq. Insurgencies began early and were often unlinked, motivated by a number of different causes; while some may have immediately been fighting on a religious basis – as the United States was invading for a second time and it was generally common knowledge that it was coming after the forty-eight hour deadline – a significant number of other individuals fought largely on a political basis. A significant number were likely *not* motivated by a radical Islamist ideology on "day one."

The lingering perception that conflict was religious in origin seems to have only emerged later when Zarqawi had strengthened his communicative abilities and launched his full-blown insurgency. Had no country invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Al Qaeda would not exist. Had no country invaded Iraq in 2003, ISIS would not exist. Furthermore, in examining the three greatest factors contributing to the rise of radical, militant Islam in the first place – the Arab oil boom, the Iranian Revolution, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan – anti-foreign sentiment is present in every single one of them. The Arab oil boom occurred as a result of the Arab oil embargo – an embargo placed on foreign, western countries that supported Israel's military during the war. The Iranian Revolution arose against the Shah of Iran, who'd been empowered by the United States and Britain years earlier. It consequently operated with an anti-Western aura. And the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan led to the creation of the mujahedeen and eventually Al Qaeda itself, which obviously arose as a direct result of foreign aggression.

Both Al Qaeda and ISIS spawned and flourished during the existence of large power vacuums. Neither of these two high-profile terror organizations thrived during times of peace. Rather, both arose following the near-complete upheaval of the state system they operated within (and the illegitimate interim governments that followed). Al Qaeda arose from the Maktab al-Khidamat, which arose to recruit fighters after the Soviet Union completely toppled the Afghan government and empowered an illegitimate communist regime (incompatible with the country's population). No moderately effective government existed in the Peshawar region of Pakistan, either, when Al Qaeda was officially established in 1988. The same can be said for the Islamic State. When Abu Musab al-Zarqawi finally established an effective, lasting/stable Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad and led it to power, there was no effective state system. This continued throughout its evolution into ISIS; through AQI largely under the Coalition Provisional Authority (seen as a foreign occupier), through ISI largely under Maliki and a weak Iraqi government (seen as sectarian and/or a foreign puppet), and through ISIS under a weakened Iraqi state system and a Syrian president facing total opposition (both seen as illegitimate by a vast number of people). While strong state systems have not necessarily proven totally capable of entirely destroying a strong radical Islamic organization once it has been empowered, perhaps they are capable of preventing one's origination in the first place; at the least, the lack of a strong and legitimate state system has clearly contributed/enabled the rise of Al Qaeda and ISIS.

Both Al Qaeda and ISIS worked toward an identical ultimate objective: the establishment or re-establishment of an Islamic caliphate that would have huge prophetic and religious implications. Yet despite this same endgame that neither lost sight of, both proved to be *incredibly* reactionary in determining their immediate objectives. None stayed true to the course

of action set by their organization on "day one," if they were even to identify one. This is particularly evident in Al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda did not arise "from scratch" or to specific ambitions of its founding fathers. Instead, its leaders oriented the organization by generally responding to the environment, situations, and opportunities blatantly placed before them. A surplus of mission-ready, ambitious recruits and a functioning system existed with no purpose before Al Qaeda's founding. Bin Laden, Azzam, and Zawahiri merely reacted and slightly reoriented/repurposed what already existed. Al Qaeda also did not originally act with any sort of clear purpose. It wanted a caliphate many years in the future and intended to serve as an elite Islamic vanguard that would work to awaken the Muslim masses in the meantime. Yet what exactly would this entail? What this research has demonstrated is that Al Qaeda's leadership was not exactly sure.

The organization spent its early years in limbo quite literally searching for an enemy. It reacted and shaped its short-term goals and identity almost entirely based on the opportunities presented before them, a fact made evident in the group's numerous relocations and various candidates for primary enemies. Its focus on the United States as a primary enemy was not fully entrenched until an astonishing *ten years* after its founding.

Once again, a similar case exists regarding ISIS's evolution. Zarqawi was not a long-term ideologue. He did not set a goal during any early religious education that he received and did not proceed to vivaciously work toward it for the decades that followed. Instead, he proved to be incredibly reactionary in nature as well. His ideology broadly changed based on who he surrounded himself with (as evidenced by his interactions with Maqdisi and Anbari) and the opportunities that emerged. His objectives ranged from attacking the secular Jordanian monarchy to then fighting the invading United States forces to fighting the Iraq government to provoking a

war with non-Sunni sects to establishing an Islamic state to a combination of all five, give or take some based on the situation. His predecessors responded to situations the same way, pushing into Syria because the opportunity was present and politically beneficial, not because the organization had always intended to expand into that territory from the beginning.

ISIS's reactionary nature reveals itself largely in the organization's frequent name changes: from Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad to Al Qaeda in Iraq to the Islamic State in Iraq to the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham. Had it operated with one established, entrenched goal from the beginning, one could suppose that it would not have changed its name so frequently. Both Al Qaeda and ISIS were thus reactionary and readily altered their fundamental character and objectives as they felt fit, especially in the short-run.

Another obvious similarity between these organizations – made clear by an analysis of their evolutionary years – is their reliance on individual leaders. The evolution of Al Qaeda generally follows the character and will of leaders such as Azzam, Bin Laden, and Zawahiri. A narrative of Al Qaeda's development, evolution, and operational orientation can be (and has been) provided by looking at these leaders alone. The same can be said for ISIS, at least through Zarqawi and Anbari, if not Masri and Baghdadi – since they were, by nature, much more reclusive figures. One might consider the stance this isn't true, that these organizations haven't been so reliant on leaders. One might consider that these leaders are just where scholars are most readily able to obtain information – assembling a biography of the groups infamous leaders is certainly more feasible than providing an overarching narrative of the group's *entire* membership and goals due to their clandestine nature. Yet this point can be countered simply by examining the two organization's periodic downfalls. Al Qaeda declined greatly after Bin Laden's death, superseded by ISIS. This leads one to see the importance of Bin Laden as an individual in

operating and sustaining the organization. The Islamic State in Iraq declined greatly after Zarqawi's death. It declined further under poor leadership from Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. It declined even further when they were killed and was pushed to near extinction when U.S. General David Petraeus staunchly employed his leadership "decapitation" strategy and nullified some 80% of the organization's leadership. ISI regained strength to become an extremely successful ISIS only when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi took power. All of the aforementioned clearly demonstrates the importance of individual leaders in operating these two salient Islamic terror organizations.

Yet for all of their overarching similarities and the knowledge that can be derived from them, a comparative analysis of Al Qaeda and ISIS highlights the important point that radical Islamic terrorism is not exhibited identically from group to group, not even between the two most "successful" terror organizations ever to exist. Even as early as their formative and evolutionary years, Al Qaeda and ISIS exhibited a number of contrasting differences; the most notable being their views regarding their role in jihad, the correct timing for the caliphate's establishment, violence against non-Sunni Muslims, and the optimal degree of brutality in their actions.

In its formative years, Al Qaeda generally had a limited view of its role in jihad. It considered itself an elite few meant to stir the international Muslim community into rising up and freeing themselves from infidel oppression. As an organization itself, it did not plan on physically founding a caliphate. That objective would come years later, probably not even in the lifetime of Zawahiri or Bin Laden. That was acceptable, though, for Al Qaeda realized that the project would take years; it was not their role, but the role of the Islamic community as a whole. Al Qaeda's focus first rested on expelling the "far enemy" to make this eventual establishment

possible. The fight needed to begin with expelling the foreign "puppet masters," like the United States. Afterward, the Muslim masses could rise up and take the fight to the "near enemy" and oppressive apostate regimes.

In a process that would be slow and take many years, these enemies would gradually be defeated. A caliphate could be formed. And Al Qaeda hoped lead the way in inspiring and facilitating that fight, not conducting it all on its own. ISIS, on the other hand, came to believe that it *was* the caliphate as soon as it had acquired some reasonable quantity of territory in Iraq. All Muslims were religiously obligated to come or return to it and pledge allegiance to its caliph leader, considered "the shadow of God on earth." In the process, it would spearhead the effort against nearby regimes, toppling one after another and conquering territory in the name of the Islamic state. Only after the caliphate had been established, the near enemies conquered, and the Muslim masses returned would it conduct its prophetic and apocalyptic fight against the world's infidels. And this was to occur immediately – the end times were near according to ISIS. Perhaps one of the most pronounced differences between the two was their prioritization of enemies: Al Qaeda immediately focused on the far enemy (Western countries) while ISIS focused on the near enemy (apostate Islamic regimes). This may have arisen as a result of the time in which these organizations arose – Al Qaeda reached its peak while the United States was heavily present in the Middle East, whereas ISIS reached its peak while the United States was completing its withdrawal.

The only difference more pronounced than the two's differences regarding the near and far enemy was its difference of tactic and opinion regarding violence against non-Sunni Muslims. Al Qaeda, as mentioned, sought to unify the Islamic community. This was one of its principal reasons for turning against the United States; attacking it and drawing it into protracted

battle would unify the Muslim masses. Al Qaeda as a whole may have looked down on Shia Muslims, but it certainly was not willing to take to wholly and brutally executing them – after all, they were part of the community they sought to unify whether they liked it or not. In Al Qaeda's opinion, these attacks would not prove fruitful in ever unifying the Muslim masses (something that was necessary in pursuit of its ultimate objectives).

Alternatively, ISIS viewed the alienation of non-Sunni Muslims as essential in the pursuit of its goals; how could it establish its puritanical Islamic caliphate with heretics residing within its own borders? ISIS leaders did not believe that it could. Shia and other non-Sunni sects were never part of the umma to begin with, so there was nothing to be lost. In their view, there was also something to be gained by pivoting staunchly against the Shia sect – it could emerge as the representative force for the Sunni Muslim masses that were increasingly alienated by Shia governments in both Iraq and Syria. It was a strategy that could initially work to fill and unify its ranks, just as pivoting against the United States worked to fill and unify Al Qaeda's ranks.

ISIS also proved to be markedly more indiscriminate in its attacks. While Al Qaeda did conduct horrific bombings in its formative years, they were almost exclusively focused on foreign agencies (like the bombings of the African embassies or the USS Cole). At all stages, however, ISIS proved more inclined toward vehement and indiscriminate atrocities – bombings of weddings and religious centers, beheadings, mass shootings, and so on.

Radical Islamic terrorism is by definition intended to be a frightening prospect to those who are selected as its enemies. It is intended to be. By design, the reaction to terrorism is often emotional – a reaction of fear, a reaction of anger, or combinations of both. Since the very first radical Islamic terror attacks decades ago, the public has exhibited a broad array of responses ranging from short-lived tears at home to life-changing trips to recruitment offices, from

government-altering legislation to world-changing military incursions. The news media has frequently capitalized on this raw emotion. Its sensationalistic take garners views and stirs talk. Yet there is much to be gained from stepping back from this emotionally driven commentary. When that cloud of fear and sadness (and emotion in general) is lifted, one can examine terror organizations like Al Qaeda and ISIS for what they truly are: political and militant non-state actors with generally legitimate grievances against entities stronger than themselves, who analyze their situations and rationalize their actions with radical interpretations of religious material. After understanding these organizations for what they truly are, the people joining and leading such organizations can be better understood. From there, the organizations' origins and developments can be better examined. Their evolving objectives can be better analyzed. And as a whole, radical Islamic terror organizations can be *better understood,* and thus, *better defeated.* With further genuine analysis conducted regarding their development, they can more likely to become a thing of the past. Hopefully this work is a meaningful contribution to such a process.

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Ross B. Lehman Freshman Leadership Award, 2016

Joe Paterno Renaissance Scholarship, 2015

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