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Fighting Salafi-Jihadist Insurgencies: How Much Does Religion Really Matter?

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How do jihadist insurgencies differ from non-jihadist ones? Jihadist insurgents, like all insurgents, seek to control the government, need money and weapons, and thrive where government is weak. Yet their cause—jihad at local, regional, and global levels—gives them instant friends and resources, but also built-in enemies and burdens. Jihadist insurgents often organize, recruit, and fund-raise differently than traditional insurgent groups. The agendas of these militant groups often go against the local residents' sense of nationalism and anger these communities with their extreme interpretations of Islam. To take advantage of this, the United States can amplify local voices that are best able to discredit these insurgents and press allied regimes to disrupt the mosques, schools, and fund-raising networks that help support them. However, Washington should also recognize that weakening these groups at the local level may make them more likely to embrace international terrorism. Allied efforts to co-opt jihadists may make area societies and governments less favorable to other U.S. policies. Finally, failed democratization—a particularly salient issue given the Arab Spring—risks playing into the jihadist narrative.

For over ten years the United States has fought or helped its allies fight an array of insurgencies.¹ Afghanistan and Iraq are only the most prominent examples of countries with strong insurgencies: fighting has also plagued India, Mali, Nepal, Nigeria, Uganda, and Yemen, among many others. For the United States, however, the most prominent and challenging insurgent foes are those motivated by a desire to impose a political system that they claim derives from the tenets of Islam. Many of these Islamists espouse a virulent anti-U.S. agenda and are affiliated with or allied to, in varying degrees, Al Qaeda.

Such associations are not surprising: as part of its core mission, Al Qaeda has always promoted like-minded insurgencies. Indeed, in the words of one expert, Al Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden promoted, and at times directed, a “worldwide, religiously inspired, and

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professionally guided Islamist insurgency.”² So defeating Al Qaeda, in part, depends on defeating its insurgent allies. Beyond the Al Qaeda link, the goals of these movements are often transnational, and as a result insurgencies in remote areas such as Mali and Yemen risk spreading to neighboring countries, thus developing into far bigger strategic problems.³

It is tempting to dismiss the role of Islam in these insurgencies or, more accurately, argue that the religious dimension is little more than another twist on a centuries-old strategy for gaining political power. In many ways this is true: Islamist insurgents, like all insurgents, seek to control the government, need money and weapons, and thrive where government is weak. Yet Islamist insurgents also possess their own distinct characteristics. Their cause—*jihad* at local, regional, and global levels—gives them instant friends and resources, but also built-in enemies and burdens. They often organize, recruit, and fund-raise differently than traditional insurgent groups, taking advantage of particular constituencies but at the same time confronting the challenges inherent in their limited appeal.

Not surprisingly, the best ways to fight Islamist insurgents varies too. These agendas of these militant groups often go against the local residents’ sense of nationalism and anger these communities with their extreme interpretations of Islam. To take advantage of this, the United States can amplify local voices that are best able to discredit these insurgents and press allied regimes to disrupt the mosques, schools, and fund-raising networks that help support them. In addition, the United States and its allies need to adopt a more regional and global approach to counter the cross-border nature of the insurgencies they are fighting.

Washington should also recognize the tradeoffs inherent in fighting these groups: weakening these groups at the local level may make them more likely to embrace international terrorism. Allied efforts to coopt Islamists may make area societies and governments less favorable to other U.S. policies. Finally, failed democratization—a particularly salient issue given the Arab Spring—risks playing into the *jihadist* narrative.

How do Islamist insurgencies differ from non-Islamist ones? In trying to answer this question, this article focuses on a subset of Islamist insurgencies: those with a “*Salafi-jihadist*” ideology that are often affiliated with, allied to, or sympathize with Al Qaeda.⁴ Examples of this category include groups such as Al Qaeda of Iraq (AQI), Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the Shebaab in Somalia, Al Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Boko Haram in Nigeria, Ansar Dine in Mali, the Taliban, and elements found among insurgents in Chechnya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Kashmir.

This article first reviews the basic needs of every insurgent movement. It then discusses the specificities of *Salafi-jihadist* insurgencies, determining how they do, and do not, differ in their needs and in the manner in which they seek to achieve their objectives. The third section assesses the associated strengths and weaknesses that derive from the *Salafi-jihadist* approach to insurgency. The article builds on this assessment in the fourth section by discussing how the counterinsurgency (COIN) toolkit should be modified to best combat *Salafi-jihadist* insurgents. The article concludes by examining several of the tradeoffs associated with COIN against *Salafi-jihadists*.

What All Insurgencies Need: A Review

Every insurgency is unique in its particulars, but in general they share a common set of factors that allow them to survive and, in some cases, prosper.⁵ These include, but are not limited to:

- *A Cause.* Insurgents fight for something: their land, their social class, their people, and so on. At times, this cause is vague or ineffable, and it is frequently overcome

by revenge, survival, and other immediate factors or by local specificities that defy easy categorization.⁶ A successful cause, however, is an emotive one that is linked with an identity around which people can rally against a perceived enemy.⁷

- *A Narrative and Propaganda.* Related to the cause is the story that an organization tells about its struggle, including its critique of the current order, what it plans to offer supporters, and how it will govern when it comes to power. This narrative carries with it both rewards and threats: the “proletariat” or “peasants” are championed by Marxists, while the “bourgeoisie” or “landed classes” are threatened. Nationalists favor one language or culture group but oppose supposedly foreign groups and those within their own community who work with them. The narrative draws on the cause but is not identical: the group may emphasize or deemphasize parts of its true goals in its narrative to more effectively attract popular support. Organizations typically develop propaganda apparatuses to diffuse and publicize their narrative, although at times it is spread largely by word of mouth and charismatic leaders.
- *Weak Government.* When government is strong, it is able to police its citizens, provide basic services, and otherwise take the wind out of an insurgent’s sails—not to mention employ thousands or even millions of police and soldiers to actively hunt down insurgents. Even if the insurgency is confronting an unpopular government and has considerable support for its narrative, taking on a strong regime is challenging.⁸
- *Haven.* Vital for any insurgency is a base from which to operate.⁹ A haven provides the insurgents with a safe area to recruit, fund-raise, propagandize, plan, train, and secure their leadership. If the government being opposed is strong, this haven is often situated outside the country, ideally along its borders.¹⁰ However, if the government is weak, the group may be able to carve out portions of the countryside, or even parts of urban areas, to use as sanctuary.
- *Recruits.* Insurgencies, like conventional militaries, need bodies. Hundreds of fighters are usually necessary before an insurgency is recognized as such, and numbers in the thousands or tens of thousands are common. Insurgencies need a steady stream of recruits to replace those who are killed or arrested—or desert and defect. Ideally, recruits are educated, motivated, and come from a range of backgrounds, which enables the insurgency to claim it is speaking for as broad a community as fits its ideology. If the recruits only come from one of many communities within a country, the group risks being labeled a narrow movement out to advance only a small part of society’s interests regardless of its narrative.
- *Weapons and Supplies.* As with recruits, insurgencies need a stream of weapons, ammunition, medicine, and other supplies to replace equipment lost or broken. Insurgents rarely possess the ability to outgun regime forces, but having a steady supply of weapons allows them to offset regime advantages in mobility and airpower, helping to level the playing field, or at least reduce its tilt.
- *Organization, Unity, and Leadership.* To be more than a mob, an insurgency requires organization and leadership. Communist insurgencies historically employed a model of tight organization, while other insurgencies have drawn on traditional tribal leaders and structures or have coalesced around other, more decentralized figures. In some instances the nominal leadership of an insurgency exercises at best loose control over the overall movement. Usually, the more organized and disciplined the insurgency, the more likely it is to prosper.
- *Intelligence and Counterintelligence.* Insurgents must gather intelligence on a government to determine weaknesses and potential targets and, even more importantly, to prevent the government from learning insurgent identities and whereabouts.¹¹

This often requires outreach to, or intimidation of, the civilian population. Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, Jr. emphasize the particular problem of “nondenunciation”—convincing the population not to inform on rebel activities to the government and, ideally, to provide intelligence to the insurgents.¹² If insurgents do not gain popular acquiescence, the people will betray the insurgents and the government’s firepower advantage will quickly neutralize them.

- *Bad Counterinsurgents*. Insurgents do not win through unilateral efforts alone—they often find their adversary to be their best friend. Weak states (or sluggish leaders) may respond feebly to a nascent insurgency, enabling it to gain strength when it could otherwise be easily suppressed. Conversely, a state’s over-reaction and poor counterinsurgency doctrine can work to alienate local communities, strengthen the insurgents’ narrative, alienate neighboring states that might prove a haven, and drive the population into the arms of the insurgents.

Some of the above are universal requirements of insurgency, such as recruits and organization, while others fall into the category of “highly useful.” The particular balance, of course, varies, determined by the setting of the insurgency and the stage of the insurgency, among other factors.¹³

Salafi-Jihadist Variations

Salafi-jihadist insurgencies, like all insurgencies, need a combination of the above factors to survive and prosper. Yet their particular *jihadist* flavor affords them distinct attributes that affect their success and provides the starting point for how to best combat them. This section adapts the generic list above to the *Salafi-jihadist* particulars.

The *cause* of *Salafi-jihadist* insurgencies is distinct from most insurgencies historically. *Salafi-jihadist* insurgencies all embrace the goal of establishing an Islamic state, overturning supposedly apostate governments, and driving the United States, other Western powers, and their local non-*Salafi* allies out of their country or region. The precise order of these goals may vary between and within groups, but they universally stress a rejection of any deviation from what they perceive as the oneness of God and display hostility to non-Muslims.¹⁴ Deviators range from the obvious (unbelievers) to supposed apostates (notably Shi’a Muslims, in many countries) to those Sunnis who are not fully devoted and embrace folk customs, mysticism, or simply a more compromising form of political Islam. *Salafi-jihadist* groups are also opposed to democracy, which they consider elevates man’s law above God’s.¹⁵ Furthermore, *Salafi-jihadists* oppose nationalism, rejecting the boundaries that divide Muslims as drawn by colonial powers and recognized by the community of nations. They call on Muslims to fight as Muslims, not as Egyptians, Iraqis, or other national communities. As noted below, their logistics and other networks equally disregard these boundaries, extending across borders.

The *narrative* and *propaganda* of *Salafi-jihadist* insurgencies stress that young men should join the fighting, while older men, women, and children should succor the insurgents financially and organizationally. *Salafi-jihadist* rhetoric often dwells on the more popular elements of their ideology, particularly resistance to non-Muslim foreigners or to disliked rival Muslim communities. As such, AQI stressed the need to resist the Iraqi Shi’a community’s bid for power (often tied in with rhetoric aimed at the foreign “Persians” next door in Iran) and *jihadist* propaganda in Syria stresses the apostate nature of the ‘Alawi leadership.

Targeting often reflects this narrative. The Islamic Group and Egyptian Islamic Jihad attacked Coptic Christians and intellectuals in Egypt as part of their campaign in the

1990s. They opposed the secular and nationalistic nature of the intellectuals, who usually emphasized Arabness and Egyptianness as a political identity as opposed to Islam.¹⁶ They also scorned the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, believing that the organization's hesitation on issue of *jihad* and its willingness to compromise made it a traitor to the overall cause. Indeed, there are vicious propaganda fights currently occurring between *Salafi-jihadists* and Brotherhood figures. Ayman al-Zawahiri even took the time to write a book denouncing the Muslim Brotherhood's supposed betrayal of Islam. In Gaza, Hamas, a Brotherhood-based group, has forcefully suppressed *Salafi-jihadists*.¹⁷

Due to their rejection of nationalism, *Salafi-jihadists* often operate regionally and internationally. They do not see the border between, say, Iraq and Syria as having any political value—indeed, its existence goes against their ideal of Muslim unity. Thus, in contrast to most insurgencies (including most non-*Salafi-jihadist* Islamist insurgencies), the struggle reaches well beyond the country in question. Yet their rejection of nationalism is often honored only in the breach. Their rhetoric is often anti-foreign and warns that the Muslim community is under attack—in many ways, they are defining their religious community as a nation. As Graham Fuller contends, Islamist struggles are in fact far more likely to succeed when they harness nationalism, as they have intermittently done in Chechnya, Kashmir, Iraq, and elsewhere.¹⁸

These narrative points are often confused, however, because of the *organization and leadership* of most *Salafi-jihadist* groups. The movement is globalized, and many struggles cross borders, but it is not unified. Within the *Salafi-jihadist* community, a range of *sheikhs* are cited in justifying *jihadist* actions. These *sheikhs*, however, differ with regard to both priorities and tactics.¹⁹ And within the fighting groups themselves, individual leaders stress different agendas and justifications.

Unity is often elusive, and infighting is common. Ideological differences, and the decentralized nature of the logistics networks, make it difficult for leaders to suppress rival groups and discipline the movement. Simply put, in many cases no one has the authority—whether from charisma, political dominance, or logistical and financial control—to enforce order. The Al Qaeda core has tried to encourage affiliated and allied insurgencies to unite both locally and globally, but has had at best mixed success. The decline in Al Qaeda core funding and operational freedom has further hindered this goal.

Only rarely do these insurgencies draw on traditional leaders. Indeed, their religious message usually positions them in opposition to the religious traditions of the country, with the exception of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, particularly with regard to folk and mystical elements. They often excoriate traditional religious leaders rather than coopt them. Instead—and in keeping with their attitude that religion, not nationality, is what should matter—foreigners have often played important roles in leadership. For example, much of the Shebaab's current leadership is foreign, and AQI's founder and first leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, was a Jordanian.

The level of *government weakness* in the Muslim world varies, but in general it is weaker and at more risk of political instability than the average country.²⁰ This weakness varies, however, with states of the Persian Gulf proving strong in many ways, while countries such as Mali, Somalia, and Yemen exhibit weak governments. Making this assessment difficult is a question of causality: the successful insurgency keeps the government weak and thus is as much a cause of, as opposed to result of, the government weakness. So in Iraq and Algeria, AQI and AQIM respectively have prevented the governments from further consolidating power.

Salafi-jihadist insurgencies often enjoy the benefits of a *haven* in neighboring states. Traditionally, states support insurgent movements for ideological reasons, to weaken rivals,

and to placate domestic audiences.²¹ There is no state that currently shares an ideology with Al Qaeda–linked groups. However, Pakistan has supported a range of Pakistani *Salafi-jihadist* groups to advance its agendas in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Iran offers more limited support to Al Qaeda in part to preserve its options to strike at potential foes as well as gain leverage within this movement.²²

Even more common is the toleration of *Salafi-jihadist* activities. Under former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Yemen turned a blind eye to *jihadist* organization and operations abroad in order to turn them against domestic foes and to avoid alienating important constituents. Syria before the civil war there allowed *jihadists* to transit its country to fight in Iraq in order to bleed U.S. forces there. A number of countries in the Muslim world have allowed *jihadists* to raise money, issue propaganda, and recruit either due to a lack of concern over their activities or a sense that a confrontation would be politically risky. None of these havens are comparable to traditional havens such as what the Viet Cong enjoyed in North Vietnam. However, they all enable *Salafi-jihadist* insurgents to hold some degree of sanctuary.

Making this more complex, the transnational nature of the *Salafi-jihadist* cause often leads groups to support one another—so a limited haven may be granted by another non-state actor rather than a friendly government. Geographic proximity, not surprisingly, plays a vital role. AQI is able to help *Salafi-jihadists* in Syria in part by giving them a rear base for logistical activity. Unusually, the Al Qaeda core also saw itself as providing a logistics function for the entire movement: it set up training camps, issued propaganda, and established recruiting and transit networks. It endeavored to assist not only its own activities, but also those of a wide array of like-minded groups. For example, fighters in Egypt might have trained in Pakistan as part of a deliberate Al Qaeda effort to shore up like-minded groups.

This transnational nature also affects *recruiting* and *weapons*. Although the bulk of recruits are typically local, there is a large cadre of foreigners attracted to fights in Somalia, Syria, and of course Iraq. These foreign fighters often come with advantages. Many are highly dedicated and willing to conduct suicide attacks. The State Department reported 279 suicide bombings in 2011, with Sunni extremists conducting 93 percent of them.²³ In addition, they often bring lessons learned and best practices from other fights, increasing the pace of innovation. Moreover, many are combat veterans: they are more skilled and more dedicated, making them highly valued by local fighters who respect their determination and proficiency. One local commander in Syria noted that his own forces lack “the ability to plan and lacks military experience. That is what [Al Qaeda] can bring. They have an organization that all countries have acknowledged.”²⁴

Recruiting is thus done on two levels: local and international. This often should involve (but does not always in practice) different streams of propaganda. Complicating this effort, however, is the fact that what appeals to foreigners often does not work with locals and vice-versa. In particular, the nationalist flavor of some Islamist insurgencies may turn off foreign fighters, while the rejection of nationalism and the more extreme religious views of highly motivated foreigners may turn off locals. Al Qaeda–linked fighters have complained that groups in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and elsewhere lack a proper understanding of Islam, while fighters in these and other countries often oppose the puritanical practices of the foreigners.

Much recruiting is done via religious networks and organizations.²⁵ Mosques and religious social organizations are often important for encouraging individuals to enter the broader movement and provide local “spotters” for insurgents, giving them the opportunity to identify likely recruits. Mosques develop reputations, and some mosques may have

particularly high concentrations of insurgent sympathizers. Thus in some countries there may be only a small number of mosques where insurgent sympathizers hold sway.²⁶

Charismatic preachers or fighters often play a particularly important role in inspiring individuals to join the fight. Recruitment may be highly decentralized, with individuals joining up because they are attracted to the message of one person, rather than the mission of the group as a whole. This creates multiple recruitment centers within a group, not all of which are subject to the discipline of the central insurgent leadership.

Weapons and supplies are usually local in origin, though exceptions abound. Iraq and Yemen were already awash in arms, and fighters in Syria have obtained weapons primarily from standard black market sources as well as from the Syrian army itself. (In Mali, in contrast, much of the weaponry came from Libya's arsenals.) However, the funds for many of these purchases can come from abroad, particularly if the support or toleration of foreign governments allows for the establishment of cross-border supply networks. Wealthy donors have provided money for fighters in particularly popular struggles, providing local fighters with the means to attract recruits and arm themselves more effectively.²⁷ Much of the funding for Chechen rebels in the late 1990s came from wealthy supporters in the Gulf: little of the money came from government coffers, but area regimes tolerated this support.

Intelligence and *counterintelligence* pose particular difficulties for the foreign fighters within Al Qaeda-linked groups. Differences in language, dialect, or accent make them stand out from the locals, and thus more easily identifiable by regime and foreign intelligence officials. Even more important, locals may be less willing to cooperate with foreigners and more willing to identify and betray them, both because they hold no sense of national loyalty to them and because the foreigners lack the community ties that make betrayal difficult in many cases. Finally, insurgent counterintelligence is often done in a rudimentary way, relying on the vetting of individuals through the numerous but not systematic reporting by members of the local community. This process works well, for the most part, when the fighters are local, but in the case of foreigners gaining a similarly large volume of information is far harder.

Generalizing about the *counterinsurgents* facing *Salafi-jihadist* insurgencies is difficult, as they vary widely in their competence and nature. In some cases they preside over a nation divided by religion, sect, and ethnicity, making it difficult for the regime to take the wind out of the insurgents' sails without alienating key supporters or broad communities. In many instances the governments are venal and incompetent, tarnished further with a hefty dose of brutality. On balance, however, their skill and political weaknesses appear similar to that of many of the countries in the developing world currently facing insurgencies.²⁸ Here there is a selection effect: in countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, there is no *Salafi-jihadist* insurgency because the governments crushed them, while in other countries insurgents of roughly the same strength survived or even grew because the governments they faced were too weak or incompetent to defeat them.

Associated Strengths and Weaknesses

Salafi-jihadist insurgents, like all insurgents, are usually outgunned by their adversaries, and often suffer from defections and desertions. Likewise, they often flourish when governments are corrupt, weak, and incompetent. Nevertheless, the particular strengths and weaknesses of *Salafi-jihadist* combatants deserve considerable attention.

Strengths

Even with the death of bin Laden and the Arab Spring, the *Salafi-jihadist* ideology remains alive and well. The discourse in the Muslim world is far more open to the global outlook

Salafi-jihadists espouse than it was in the years before 9/11.²⁹ In addition, Al Qaeda and several like-minded groups have built up a vast and sophisticated propaganda apparatus that, through a range of media, reaches across borders in the Muslim world.³⁰

Polling data, however imperfect, suggests the power of some of these ideas. A 2011 poll found declining, but still quite high, support for Al Qaeda in Muslim countries—easily high enough to support an insurgency. In Nigeria, Al Qaeda received a favorability rating of almost 50 percent. This figure came in at just over 25 percent in the Palestinian territories and about 20 percent in Indonesia and Egypt.³¹

Thus, it is evident that *some* of the causes, grievances and narrative of *Salafi-jihadist* groups enjoy at least *some* credibility with *some* audiences in the host country. Often this backing is dismissed as not representing majority opinion, and this is almost invariably the case. But in many cases no group exists that effectively channels majority opinion. Moreover, these groups are often highly committed and ruthless, which enables them to suppress potential rivals or at least survive long enough to generate some organizational momentum. So *Salafi-jihadists* can mix the genuine support they enjoy with the use of violence to intimidate individuals away from supporting rival groups or the government, both of which may represent unattractive options to constituents for other reasons.

Because of the power of these ideas and their institutional support, *Salafi-jihadist* groups enjoy a built-in fund-raising and recruitment structure—at least outside the host country. In Saudi Arabia and several other Gulf states, *Salafi* ideas enjoy considerable support among the religious establishment. Many wealthy citizens of these countries provide direct financing to fighters overseas and monetary support for a range of charities and other religiously oriented organizations that *Salafi-jihadist* groups can exploit and coopt. In Syria, as one expert noted, “You have secular people and very moderate Islamists who join *Salafi* groups because they have the weapons and the money. There tends to be more Salafi guys in the way the groups portray themselves than in the groups on the ground.”³²

The *Salafi-jihadist* insurgencies attract many foreign fighters. The Shebaab have between 200 and 500 foreign fighters in their ranks, while as many as five percent of Iraq’s insurgents came from outside Iraq and perhaps over 10 percent in the case of Yemen—large numbers given the sizes of these insurgencies.³³ (Nigeria appears to have little or no foreign role so far.)

In Afghanistan, Algeria, Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Yemen, among other countries, Al Qaeda-linked groups are thriving. To different degrees, these groups cooperate with one another and with the Al Qaeda core based in Pakistan.³⁴ In so doing, they gain access to weapons, supplies, recruitment networks, training, and other essentials that typical, more locally based, insurgents lack. In addition, these like-minded insurgencies offer a “lessons learned” factory, where insurgents can be trained in the latest Improvised Explosive Device (IED) technology and discuss which propaganda is the most and least effective.

In some cases, as noted above, these insurgents may provide their brothers next door with a de facto haven. In Syria, for example, fighters are drawing on networks from Iraq and Lebanon for logistics.³⁵ Pakistani groups, of course, provide a wide range of support to the Afghan Taliban and other anti-regime fighters. This support can involve training, assistance with recruitment, a haven for leaders, and other vital assistance.

Ideology glorifying martyrdom paired with the ability to attract foreign fighters enables *Salafi-jihadist* groups to attract suicide bombers and sustain a terror campaign, making them relatively more deadly in their use of terrorism as compared to other insurgent groups.

Thus, *Salafi-jihadist* groups often come to the fight with a range of advantages. Their message and their networks enjoy considerable reach, and they are consistently able to

sustain an effective insurgency. However, many of the factors that make them formidable also limit their appeal and leave them vulnerable to government and U.S. countermeasures.

Weaknesses

The *Salafi-jihadists* have a limited appeal, one that touches on cultural chords and symbols that attract select audiences but simultaneously alienate and exclude other, usually far bigger, demographics. Many of their weaknesses stem from this exclusionary ideology.

The global nature of the *Salafi-jihadist* ideology, and the broader transnational networks on which they draw, set them squarely in opposition to nationalism. In some countries, where national sentiment is already weak, this represents at most a limited problem for them. Yet in many countries, the other elements of anti-government opposition espouse strongly nationalistic positions and may oppose the *Salafi-jihadists* as a direct result of their foreign connections. Moreover, even countries like Somalia and Afghanistan, which, to put it charitably, are weak states, hostility to foreigners, including fellow Muslims, remains strong, particularly if they are perceived as seeking to control the politics of the country. The central propaganda produced by the global *Salafi* movement often overlooks or downplays local differences and grievances, to the detriment of overall effectiveness.

The *Salafi-jihadists* are also critical of democracy and, with this stance, they alienate more mainstream Islamists, large segments of the population, as well as much of the opposition in general. The tyrannical nature of the government is often a rallying cry for opposition movements of all sorts, and the *Salafi-jihadists'* rejection of representative government creates impediments to forging a united front with democratic-leaning parts of the opposition. Perhaps most importantly, it also alienates other Islamist groups, like the Muslim Brotherhood, which are more favorable to democracy or at the very least view it as a means of gaining power.

In addition, many struggles do not fit the universal *Salafi-jihadist* narrative. The United States, the ideal bogeyman, has played an active role in some conflicts, notably Afghanistan and Iraq, but only a minor one in Yemen and almost none in Algeria, Mali, Nigeria, and others. At times the conflict on the ground is solely among Muslim actors, and between Sunni Muslims at that. This renders the use of standard Al Qaeda rhetoric and propaganda to motivate fighters difficult.

In general *Salafi-jihadists* espouse a "vanguard" strategy, believing that a relatively small and select group of fighters will lead the Muslim community to victory. As a result, they fail to build the social welfare and political mobilization networks that give many insurgencies deep roots in a society. Hamas and Hizballah build hospitals, schools, and housing, gaining admiration and a wealth of connections in the process.³⁶ This neglect of investment in social welfare organizations by most *Salafi-jihadist* groups, however, is a tremendous weakness, depriving them of a source of legitimacy and networks in society.

Just as the *Salafi-jihadists* have a built-in network of supporters, so too do they suffer immediate enemies. The *Salafi-jihadists* are violently hostile to religious minorities such as Shi'a in Afghanistan and Iraq and 'Alawis in Syria. In addition, they strongly oppose mystical traditions, such as the Sufi brotherhoods in Algeria and Mali. Non-Muslim minorities, such as Arab Christians, are of course also an anathema. In addition to these obvious, and from the *Salafi-jihadist* point of view, welcome, adversaries, the *Salafi-jihadists* often oppose traditional power structures. Their emphasis on Islamic purity frequently puts them at odds with tribal leaders and traditional religious authorities. Al Qaeda central has tried to convince affiliate groups to refrain from alienating these constituencies, usually to no avail.

The highly ideological nature of the *Salafi-jihadist* movement makes it prone to division. Its credo rests on the rejection of religious compromise. However, what constitutes the true faith and proper practice is divisive even within, more accurately especially within, the most extreme circles. Divisions are particularly acute around two related issues: who is a true Muslim, and what is the acceptable level of civilian casualties. Some *Salafis* see non-Sunnis as merely misguided, while others consider them to be apostates. Thus, AQAP shuns cooperation with Houthis in Yemen, a potentially powerful ally against the weak Yemeni government, considering instead the tribal and Shi'a group as an enemy. Further, some *Salafis* condemn all non-*Salafis*, while others are accepting of practicing Sunnis who are less puritanical. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, *Salafi* insurgents may alienate potential supporters within the Sunni community by rejecting their traditions and leaders, thus depriving themselves of valuable manpower and potentially creating a counterintelligence disaster.

The decision to cast some or all non-*Salafis* as apostates makes killing them more acceptable—another key weakness of this type of insurgency. Coercion is vital to successful insurgencies, but it depends on being able to both reward as well as punish, and *Salafis* are far better at the former than the latter. In addition, their killing of civilians often alienates potential supporters and recruits throughout the Muslim world.

The Al Qaeda core has learned the lesson of the dangers posed by excessive killing of civilians and has urged affiliates like AQI to be discriminate—usually to no avail. A study by West Point found that due to the killing of civilians and other mistakes committed by affiliates, some within the Al Qaeda command sought to distance the core from its affiliates.³⁷ Although bin Laden favored attacks on civilian targets like embassies and the World Trade Center, even he worried that regular and indiscriminate attacks on ordinary civilians like those perpetrated by AQI could discredit the movement in the eyes of ordinary Muslims, “distorting the image of the jihadis in the eyes of the *umma*'s [Muslim community's] general public and separating them from their popular bases.”³⁸

Despite the common critique that the *Salafi-jihadist* agenda is entirely destructive, in reality many groups care tremendously about ruling. Imposing an Islamic state, even on part of a country, is often a priority for *Salafi* insurgents: Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, and Yemen have all seen varying efforts in this regard. Such an effort, however, often alienates more than it attracts. Much of the *Salafi* critique is more compelling to the populace when in opposition. In power, the discrimination, poor social service provision, corruption, and other governmental problems they fought against do not go away, and the added harsh repression of non-*Salafi* voices often further alienates the population.

Divisions within the leadership—based on ideology, personality, rival charismatic leaders, or other differences—commonly make *Salafi* groups less effective than their numbers would suggest. Frequently they work directly against like-minded groups, or at least strictly limit cooperation with them. In addition, they may not cooperate with other anti-regime forces on purely ideological grounds.

Perhaps more importantly, the divisions and multiple leaders constrain the ability of the organization to act as a coherent whole. Many of the essentials of successful insurgency, such as using violence selectively, become problematic with this structure. For instance, individual groups may use ferocious violence, discrediting the movement as a whole, or groups may fight each other and otherwise “waste” scarce resources.

The decentralization of the *Salafi* movement also complicates counterintelligence. They are less able to systematically probe for leaks, compartment information, teach sophisticated operational security, or isolate leadership elements. Further, the group's use of, and reliance on, foreign elements and their concomitant opposition to local community institutions and leaders creates added difficulties in intelligence.³⁹

Although *Salafi* insurgents often enjoy instant substate allies across borders, these friends are outweighed by a bigger problem: hostile neighboring governments. A few regimes in the Middle East cynically exploit *Salafi* groups, giving them arms, a haven, and other support in order to weaken rivals or otherwise serve regime interests. Yet even these regimes remain hostile to these groups in general, out of fear that their ideology might inspire radicals within the country and in response to pressure from the many enemies of *Salafi* insurgents, particularly the United States. Thus most governments will provide intelligence to the United States, assist in policing borders, and otherwise oppose the insurgency. Even countries that remain hostile to the United States, like Iran, are fickle friends to the *Salafi-jihadists*, whose “assistance” often hurts as much as helps.⁴⁰

Internationally, *Salafi-jihadists* consistently make enemies of Western powers, particularly the United States. In response, Washington regularly aids governments opposed to *Salafi-jihadists* while also employing its own forces and resources to target them directly. The results can be disastrous for the *Salafi-jihadists*. Abu Musab al-Suri, a *jihadist* strategist, declared that the 9/11 attacks cast “jihadists into a fiery furnace . . . a hellfire which consumed most of their leaders, fighters, and bases . . .”⁴¹

Impact on the COIN Toolkit

The “counterinsurgency toolkit” for fighting *Salafi-jihadist* insurgencies overlaps considerably with the standard toolkit, but the efficacy of different instruments, and their relative importance, varies considerably. As with any insurgency, the United States will want to build up the host government’s ability to effectively prosecute COIN—a difficult task that usually involves wrenching political and economic changes as well as military training.⁴² Washington can also assist in killing and arresting suspected insurgents, particularly leaders and key operatives. Local community support is vital: insurgencies must be fought at the national and local level simultaneously.

When fighting the *Salafi-jihadist* doctrine, the United States has *less* ability to attack the messenger and the message than it did for Communist or nationalist insurgencies. The United States, of course, is not a historic center of Islam and Muslim-American religious leaders do not enjoy a significant following in the Muslim world itself. Simply put, as the polling data suggest, the United States is not viewed as credible by religious publics in the Muslim world, let alone in *Salafi* communities. Favorability ratings of the United States and the Obama administration hover at less than twenty percent in many Muslim countries.⁴³

Moreover, U.S. policies can—and should—feed into much of the *Salafi-jihadist* narrative. Of course, the United States is not bent on subjugating the Muslim world. But the United States is, and should be, supportive of women’s rights and democracy. Recent provocations, like the airing of the anti-Muslim screed “The Innocence of Muslims,” are inevitable in a large and boisterous democracy; indeed, their frequency may grow as globalization better connects more and more audiences and as plummeting production costs allow even the most pathetic of fools to produce his own movie. More controversially, the United States remains an unabashed ally of Israel, and even adopting a more critical stance here would not satisfy the vast majority of skeptics in the Muslim world. Washington will, by necessity, also work with Arab dictators and other local foes in a range of ways.

The United States can, however, amplify internal critics of the *Salafi-jihadist* insurgents in the Muslim world. Their critiques are far more effective than any originating in the West, and U.S. assistance can help to distribute their videos and treatises more widely, putting the insurgents on the defensive. The global nature of the debate works as an advantage here, as critics of the insurgents from Egypt to Indonesia can all be harnessed.

As with any insurgency, depriving the movement of a haven in a neighboring state or remote part of the country is vital. However, if a haven cannot be prevented, it may offer intelligence advantages, providing a point of concentration for intelligence assets.⁴⁴ In addition, the use of drone aircraft enables targeting in some havens that had previously been considered inviolable.⁴⁵ Ironically, the drone campaigns are conducted in countries like Pakistan and Yemen, which are nominal allies, and not on the territories of avowed enemies, like Iran.

Sources of radicalization, such as mosques and religious schools, are also vulnerable to disruption. Truly militant mosques and *madrassahs* in Pakistan in reality represent only a small fraction of religious institutions. So it's not a question of changing the entire education system or reforming the religious establishment, which is at times advocated, but instead focusing, for intelligence purposes, on a finite number of particular *madrassahs*, public schools, and mosques.

Arresting and killing terrorist leaders, while desirable, embodies a less effective approach in the case of *Salafi-jihadist* insurgencies than for other types. Here their common weaknesses—decentralization and multiple charismatic leaders—are an asset. While removing one node is still valuable, the redundancy inherent in their organizations allows them to compensate with less disruption than would be so for a hierarchical organizations. So while drone strikes offer many advantages, the insurgencies in question are often already divided and decentralized.

Charismatic leaders, however, are an important exception to this point that is particularly relevant to the *Salafi-jihadist* insurgencies. *Salafi-jihadist* groups are less institutionalized and more likely to rise and fall on the strengths of individuals. If these leaders are particularly committed to attacking the United States or are otherwise deemed unusually hostile to U.S. interests compared to likely successors, then targeting them may have more of a payoff than targeting non-*Salafi-jihadist* groups.

Although most allies share hostility to *Salafi-jihadist* insurgencies, many can be reluctant to confront them, particularly if the insurgents enjoy domestic support. Changing this passivity is a vital U.S. task. This represents particular difficulties, as the United States may not actively oppose all the causes being supported (such as aid to fighters in Syria), and of course allies may be far more supportive of these causes. Much of the effort to coordinate and encourage cooperation must be realized behind the scenes, as the legitimacy of the regime risks falling further if they are perceived to be acting on America's behest against Islamic voices.

The deliberate killing of civilians and the predominance of *takfiri* elements within the *Salafi-jihadist* movement both embody powerful negatives that can be leveraged against these groups by parties seeking to undermine their popular support. Their practice of declaring other Sunni Muslims to be unbelievers is wildly unpopular with the wider public and earns the *jihadists* condemnation from a range of religious leaders, as well as other *jihadists*. In the cases of Egypt and Algeria in the 1990s, the brutal tactics employed by the various terrorist and insurgent groups against fellow Muslims alienated potential recruits and funders, eventually leaving the groups isolated.⁴⁶ Ten years later, AQI suffered a similar fate.

Highlighting differences and fissures is also vital. Members of the global *jihadist* movement hold markedly different views on which religious leaders to follow, the nature of an Islamic state, the priority of different "fronts" in the struggle, and so on. An information operations campaign can work to widen these gaps, emphasizing, and thus encouraging, the divergences. Promoting certain websites over others, giving wide play to dissenting voices, and reprinting critical tracts all represent methods useful in advancing anti radical

Islamist critiques. Much of this effort is more effectively executed by the security services of U.S. allies, which may be more familiar with local groups, particularly on propaganda and recruiting levels, but the United States can provide technical and financial support for their efforts.

The issue of democracy offers another opportunity to combat *Salafi-jihadi* influence. The United States and its allies should call attention to *Salafi-jihadists'* repeated and bitter critiques of democracy. More than this, the United States should advocate publically for open political systems in communities from which *jihadists* draw, as polls have found widespread support for democracy in Arab and Muslim countries.⁴⁷ U.S. leaders should communicate their support for free elections and their willingness to engage with peaceful *Salafi-jihadists* of all stripes, even where disagreement remains significant. U.S. public diplomacy should also highlight statements by peaceful *Salafi* leaders in support of elections and draw contrast between these views and those espoused in the communiqués of foreign *Salafi-jihadists*. Such an effort may lead to tension between the radical, global elements of the *jihadist* group and those that have a more local orientation. In Iraq such efforts proved successful—U.S.-sponsored elections at the end of 2005 led to splits between Zarqawi's group and other Sunnis, including some who had fought alongside him. The Sunni Association of Muslim Schools declared that Zarqawi's threats to massacre those who participated in elections "damaged the image of the jihad."⁴⁸

Local nationalism is, or at least can be, a potent U.S. ally when fighting *Salafi-jihadist* groups.⁴⁹ Many of the most important *jihadist*-linked struggles, such as those in Chechnya, Kashmir, and Iraq, began with a more straightforward nationalist struggle against a perceived foreign invader. And even in cases where the struggle did not commence for nationalistic reasons, such as in Yemen, nationalism remains a pivotal issue among locals as well as many within the *jihadist* community. *Salafi-jihadists'* more global focus is often at odds with this initial, local focus of *jihadist* struggles.

One conflict in which this dilemma has been evident is in Somalia. Because of its affiliation with Al Qaeda, the Shebaab "runs the risk of having one of its most powerful ideological card—Somali nationalist, anti-foreigner sentiment—turned against it, as domestic adversaries accuse it of being a puppet of foreign jihadists bringing more trouble to the country."⁵⁰ In addition, these foreign fighters often attempt to undermine local power relationships by going against tribe and clan structures. Given this, and the strong anti-foreign sentiment of many Somalis, playing up the role of foreigners in the Shebaab's senior leadership ranks is vital. Even the egregious behavior of a few individuals who do not represent broader trends should be highlighted to discredit the relationship with foreign *Salafi-jihadists* in general. In short, whenever possible, the *foreign* nature of *Salafi-jihadists* should be emphasized, particularly when it involves atrocities or other unwelcome behavior. Rather than allowing *Salafi-jihadists* to exploit nationalism for its ends, the goal should be to expose *Salafi-jihadists* for the anti-national force they represent.

Foreign allies are often best positioned for intelligence penetration given that many recruits, fund-raisers, and other key personnel of the *Salafi-jihadist* insurgency emanate from outside the borders of the country in conflict. In general, the United States should remain in the background and focus on training and advisory programs to improve indigenous capacity, as open U.S. support can undercut the legitimacy of a government and allow insurgents to claim the nationalist mantle by default. The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq at the end of 2011, and the planned drawdown of American troops from Afghanistan are opportunities to implement this more broadly in the Muslim world. The U.S. role, however, remains significant: allies often are suspicious of one another or lack the analytic capacity to piece together and coordinate information and operations from multiple countries.

Thus, the United States facilitates and orchestrates the intelligence effort, serving as a force multiplier.

Tradeoffs

Many policies that could enhance COIN also carry with them risks and tradeoffs for the United States outside the COIN realm. These deserve consideration as the benefits to COIN are weighed.

Perils of Success

One of the biggest tradeoffs is that helping allies defeat *Salafi-jihadist* insurgents can in turn raise the danger of terrorism against the United States. For a locally focused insurgent group confronting failure, departing from a local agenda to embrace a global one gives it more (and often less defended) targets to attack and a different set of grievances to exploit. These benefits can maintain the momentum of a group for years, in contrast to an era when members died or were arrested with no appreciable gain in recruits or damage to the enemy.

For example, Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) leader Ayman al-Zawahiri had once endorsed a local agenda to the point that he declared that even the defeat of Israel must wait until Islam triumphed in Egypt. Yet after 1997 he accepted bin Laden's broader view that America embodied the root problem, not local regimes. Before joining up with Al Qaeda, al-Zawahiri and his followers were chronically short of funds and conducted few successful attacks in Egypt. Moreover, they were being hounded from place to place—Sudan expelled Islamic militants in 1996, al-Zawahiri's effort to set up a sanctuary in Chechnya failed, and the United States helped disrupt the EIJ base in Albania through a rendition campaign that led to the unraveling of much of their remaining network in Egypt proper. As one former EIJ activist contended, "Zawahiri was cornered. He had nowhere to go. He joined with bin Laden because he needed protection."⁵¹ The result for the United States, of course, was that much of EIJ's overseas cadre joined with Al Qaeda, swelling their numbers and providing them with valuable expertise that helped enable the 1998 embassy bombings and other deadly strikes.

For counterinsurgency purposes, the United States might help an ally defeat a local insurgency, only to find that a fraction of the group shifts its emphasis toward regional and global targets, including those of the United States. In Yemen, for example, a weakened AQAP might see some members abandon their goals in Yemen but turn instead toward more attacks on U.S. targets.

Good for COIN, Bad for Other U.S. Objectives

To discredit *Salafi-jihadists*, the United States should work to amplify the voices of their critics. Most credible critiques, however, distinguish between attacking Muslim governments and undertaking what they consider "legitimate" fights, such as killing American soldiers in Iraq or targeting Israeli forces. So U.S. efforts to bolster these voices in aid of allied governments run the risk of rebounding in certain scenarios.

Similarly, groups like Hamas pose a challenge for the United States. Hamas unquestionably threatens the security of Israel, is generally critical of U.S. policy, and is otherwise opposed to U.S. interests. Yet, Hamas possesses tremendous credibility in the Gaza Strip—gained by its struggle against Israel—that strengthens its rebuff of Al Qaeda.

Specifically, Hamas's Muslim Brotherhood philosophy, its social and political wings, and its willingness to compromise on issues like elections and temporary cease-fires with Israel all represent rejections of Al Qaeda and its teachings. Thus, when Hamas battles Al Qaeda and its local sympathizers, it can undermine these organizations' effectiveness, commitment, and doctrine far more credibly than can the United States or its allies.

Another standard and appropriate recommendation is to encourage governments to try to coopt aspects of the insurgents' message and buy off elements of the insurgency amenable to compromise and cooptation. Egypt (under Mubarak), Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and other Muslim states have strived to burnish their own Islamic credentials in order to undermine the insurgents' religious critique. This many involve granting respected Islamists more visible/prominent roles in the media, courts, or education, or shaping the country's foreign policy to be more supportive of Islamic causes. As a result, anti-U.S. voices, albeit nonviolent, may gain more influence among Muslim societies, and government policies may become more critical in other vital areas (e.g., military cooperation with the United States or efforts by Egypt to crack down on anti-Israel militants), setting back some U.S. interests.

Democratization Risks

Democracy offers many advantages for counterinsurgency. In a democratic system, it is often difficult for would-be insurgents to gain many followers, as people believe they can change the system peacefully. In Egypt, the fall of Mubarak and the spread of elections have offered *Salafist* groups, including former *jihadists*, a chance to participate in legitimate politics. They have embraced this, with the *Salafist* al-Nour party garnering almost a quarter of the overall vote in the first parliamentary elections held after the revolution. While the United States may oppose some of its policies, the group has made statements indicating that it would respect the peace deal with Israel⁵² and has signaled that it will focus first on domestic matters, paying less attention to Egypt's foreign policy. While Egypt remains in flux, initial fears portending that *jihadists* arrested by the Mubarak regime in the 1990s who showed sympathy toward Al Qaeda, including al-Zawahiri's brother Mohammad, would immediately resort to violence appear to be overstated, although some of these fighters appear to have again taken up arms in the Sinai.

Failed or partial democratization, however, can create exceptionally dangerous situations. In Iraq, the Maliki government's exclusion of Sunnis from the electoral process and from power in general holds the potential to trigger radicalization within Sunni communities. Depriving the Sunnis of electoral power legitimates Al Qaeda's argument that violence, not political participation, is what works. Similarly, should Egypt's military prevent Islamists from using their electoral mandate to govern, the potential for large-scale radicalization is extremely high.⁵³

Democracy may also prove a mixed blessing for the United States in the Muslim world. If peaceful Islamists win elections—and results so far suggest that the question is largely about the margin of victory rather than whether it is likely—they may be more hostile to the United States on issues ranging from U.S. support of Israel to cooperation on military and intelligence matters. Indeed, there may be an inherent tension between the obvious point that COIN should rely heavily on local allies and local democratization because it may bring a more hostile government to power or one that is too weak to effectively disrupt insurgents. In any event, U.S. influence over democratization in the Muslim world is limited at best, and intervention or even strong rhetoric can lead to charges of meddling that would backfire against pro-U.S. voices. The United States can, however, make its position in

support of democracy, including a role for *Salafi-jihadist* parties, clear to both Arab publics and voices within Arab security establishments.

Final Words

The fight against *Salafi-jihadist* insurgents is distinct from the struggle against other types of insurgencies, but many of the central concepts remain constant. Local communities must be supported and secured. The national government must gain the respect of its people politically and economically. Counterinsurgents must gather and use intelligence effectively. And the enemy must be attacked at all levels—both at its narrative and its operations.

Yet ignoring the distinct characteristics of *Salafi-jihadists* would be disastrous, preventing the United States from capitalizing on their weaknesses and leaving the United States and its allies vulnerable when they prove strong. None of the ideas presented in this article represent a panacea, and many are challenging for the United States—a foreign, non-Muslim power—to implement effectively. Nevertheless, they offer a means of better combating *Salafi-jihadist* insurgents and, over time, contributing to their defeat.

Notes

1. This article uses the definition of insurgencies provided in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) pamphlet *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*. This definition states: “Insurgency is a protracted political-military activity directed toward completely or partially controlling the resources of a country through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations. Insurgent activity—including guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and political mobilization, for example, propaganda, recruitment, front and covert party organization, and international activity—is designed to weaken government control and legitimacy while increasing insurgent control and legitimacy. The common denominator of most insurgent groups is their desire to control a particular area. This objective differentiates insurgent groups from purely terrorist organizations, whose objectives do not include the creation of an alternative government capable of controlling a given area or country.” Using this definition, insurgencies typically, although not inherently, have three components: political mobilization, guerrilla warfare, and the use of terrorism. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* (n.d.), p. 2. The pamphlet was published in the 1980s and republished in 2012. This definition is more comprehensive than others, but the others to emphasize the importance of guerrilla warfare. Fearon and Laitin see insurgency as involving “small, lightly armed bands practicing guerrilla warfare from rural base areas.” James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review* 97 (February 2003), pp. 75–90.

2. Anonymous (Michael Scheuer), *Through Our Enemies Eyes* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006), p. xviii. Although the United States understandably focuses on Al Qaeda as a terrorist group, much of its energy has gone into promoting insurgencies around the Islamic world.

3. Adding further complexity to this challenge, in a surprising twist, the United States has at times backed rebels who are themselves allied with these *jihadists*, as in Libya and now Syria.

4. The term “Islamist” can be applied to a wide range of organizations, most of which have a peaceful agenda. In addition, the term is broad enough to include groups that define Islamism to simply mean an Islamic identity or a desire to slightly increase the Islamicization of the country. For purposes of this article, I focus on the subset of Islamists that French scholar Gilles Kepel has labeled “*Salafi-jihadists*.” See *The Trail of Radical Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002). *Salafi-jihadists*, as the label implies, espouse a variant of Islam (*Salafism*) that is puritanical and harkens back to the early generations of Islam’s founders. In addition, they call upon the Muslim world to support violent struggles against the United States, the West in general, and Muslim regimes

they deem unIslamic (often all of them). Often the particulars of *Salafi-jihadism* vary considerably in practice.

5. The concept of an insurgency as a set of inputs and outputs that can be modeled across countries draws on Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, Jr., *Rebellion and Authority* (Chicago: Markham, 1970).

6. David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

7. Arline and William McCord, "Ethnic Autonomy: A Socio-historical Synthesis," in *Ethnic Autonomy: Comparative Dynamics*, ed. Raymond Hall (New York: Pergamon Press, 1979), p. 427.

8. See in particular Paul Collier, "Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44 (2001), pp. 839–53 and Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffer, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56 (2004), pp. 563–595.

9. Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2000).

10. Idean Salehyan, "Transnational Rebels: Neighboring States as Sanctuary for Rebel Groups," *World Politics* 59 (January 2007), pp. 217–242. Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge, 2005).

11. As Blake Mobley contends, militant groups "face an even more basic threat to their existence: the discovery of their activities, members, and plans by government law enforcement and intelligence agencies." Blake Mobley, *Terrorism and Counterintelligence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 1. Mobley is writing about terrorist groups, but several of his cases also involve insurgent organizations, and the generalization applies across this substate spectrum.

12. Leites and Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority*, p. 10.

13. On the stages of insurgency as classically defined, see Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*. For a discussion of how groups go from small entities to full-blown insurgencies, see Daniel Byman, "Understanding Proto-Insurgencies," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31(2) (2008), pp. 165–200.

14. Jarrett Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (Oxon: Taylor & Francis, 2009).

15. The literature on nationalism is vast. For a sample, see Anthony Smith, *Nationalism* (Polity Press, 2010); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Stephen Van Evera, "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War," *International Security* 18(4) (Spring 1994), pp. 5–39.

16. Fouad Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), pp. 200–204; Kepel, *Jihad*, pp. 275–289.

17. International Crisis Group, *Radical Islam in Gaza*, Middle East Report no. 104, 29 March 2011; and Barak Mendelsohn, "Al Qaeda's Palestinian Problem," *Survival* 51(4) (2009), pp. 71–86.

18. Graham Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p. 126.

19. Jarret M. Brachman and William F. McCants, "Stealing Al Qaeda's Playbook," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29(4) (2006), pp. 309–321 and William McCants, Jarret Brachman, and Joseph Felter, *Military Ideology Atlas* (West Point, NY: West Point Combating Terrorism Center, November 2006).

20. A study done *before* the Arab Spring found that the majority of Middle East and North countries scored poorly on a political stability/absence of violence index, particularly outside the Persian Gulf states. See D. Kaufmann, A. Kraay, and M. Mastruzzi, *The World Wide Governance Indicators: Methodology and Analytic Indicators* (World Bank, 2010) available at papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1682130 (accessed 12 February 2012).

21. See Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge, 2005) and Daniel Byman, Peter Chalk, Bruce Hoffman, William Rosenau, and David Brannan, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (New York: RAND, 2001).

22. The U.S. Department of the Treasury reported in 2009 that in the mid-1990s a *Salafi-jihadist* with ties to bin Laden negotiated a secret relationship with Iran that allowed safe transit of *jihadists* via Iran to Afghanistan. In a 2008 interview with *As-Sahab*, then the number two leader of Al Qaeda,

Ayman al-Zawahiri, admitted that prior to 9/11, Al Qaeda and Iran worked together “on confronting the American-led Zionist/Crusader alliance.”

23. “Country Reports on Terrorism 2011,” U.S. Department of State, 31 July 2012. For a discussion of how these tactics spread throughout the network, see Michael Horowitz, “Nonstate Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations: The Case of Suicide Terrorism,” *International Organizations* 64 (Winter 2010), pp. 33–64.

24. Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, “Al-Qaida Turns Tide for Rebels in Battle for Eastern Syria,” *The Guardian*, 30 July 2012. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jul/30/al-qaida-rebels-battle-syria> (accessed 19 March 2013).

25. Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

26. C. Christine Fair, “The Enduring Madrasa Myth,” *Current History* 111(744) (April 2012), pp. 135–140 and “Militant Recruitment in Pakistan: A New Look at the Militancy-Madrasah Connection,” *Asia Policy* 1 (4) (Summer 2007). Available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/AP4_Fair.pdf (accessed 19 March 2013); and *The Madrassah Challenge: Militancy and Religious Education in Pakistan* (Washington, DC: USIP, March 2008). Available at http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/Madrassah918_1As.pdf (accessed 19 March 2013).

27. Smuggling appears to be one of the most prominent sources according to this Reuters report: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/07/13/us-syria-arms-rebels-idUSBRE86C0KQ20120713> (accessed 19 March 2013). However, many arms are captured from government forces. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/29/world/middleeast/syrian-rebels-get-arms-from-a-diverse-network-of-sources.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed 19 March 2013). Foreign suppliers (Saudi Arabia and Qatar) do not seem to be making a huge impact. See http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/arms-deliveries-to-syrian-rebels-delayed/2012/07/11/gJQA6hRiDW_story.html (accessed 19 March 2013).

28. For a discussion of these problems, see Daniel Byman, “Counterinsurgency and the War on Terror,” *International Security* 31(2) (2006), pp. 79–115.

29. Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) and Thomas Hegghammer, “The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters,” *International Security* 35(3) (Winter 2010/11), pp. 53–94.

30. Jarret M. Brachman, “High Tech Jihad: Al-Qaeda’s Use of New Technology,” *Fletcher Forum for World Affairs* 30(2) (2006) and Manuel R. Torres Soriano, “Jihadist Propaganda and Its Audiences,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 1(2) (2007).

31. “Osama Bin Laden Largely Discredited Among Muslim Publics in Recent Years,” *Pew Research Center*, 2 May 2011. Available at <http://www.pewglobal.org/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-largely-discredited-among-muslim-publics-in-recent-years/> (accessed 19 March 2013).

32. Neil MacFarquhar, “As Syrian War Drags On, Jihadists Take Bigger Role,” *New York Times*, 29 July 2012. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/30/world/middleeast/as-syrian-war-drags-on-jihad-gains-foothold.html?pagewanted=all&.moc.semityn.www> (accessed 19 March 2013).

33. Much depends on whether ethnic Somalis who left Somalia are considered “foreign” or not. For different figures, see “UK Terrorism Analysis,” *RUSI* (February 2012). Available at <http://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/UKTA1.pdf> (accessed 19 March 2013); Catherine Herridge, “Ranks of Somali Terror Group Swelling with Foreign Fighters, Including Americans, Official Says,” *Fox News* 17 November 2011. Available at <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/11/17/ranks-somali-terror-group-swelling-with-foreign-fighters-including-americans/?test=latestnews> (accessed 19 March 2013); and David Shinn, “Al Shabaab’s Foreign Threat to Somalia” in “The Foreign Fighters Problem, Recent Trends and Case Studies: Selected Essays,” *FPRI* April 2011. Available at <http://www.fpri.org/pubs/2011/ForeignFightersProblem.pdf> (accessed 19 March 2013). On Iraq see Aaron Zelin, “Foreign Fighters Trickle into Syrian Rebellion,” *The Washington Institute*, 11 July 2012. For Yemen, see Carl Prine, “Yemen and the Two Clocks,” *Line of Departure*, 11 June 2012. Available at <http://www.lineofdeparture.com/2012/06/11/yemen-and-the-two-clocks> (accessed 19 March 2013).

34. Daniel Byman, "Breaking the Bonds between Al-Qa'ida and Its Affiliate Organizations," Saban Center Analysis Paper no. 27 (The Brookings Institution, August 2012).
35. Joseph Holliday, "Syria's Armed Opposition," *Institute for the Study of War* (March 2012), pp. 32–34.
36. Beverley Milton-Edwards and Stephen Farrell, *Hamas* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2010); Matthew Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 80–107, 171–202; Nicholas Blanford, *Warriors of God: Inside Hezbollah's Thirty-Year Struggle against Israel* (New York: Random House, 2011).
37. Nelly Lahoud et al., "Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Ladin Sidelined," West Point Combating Terrorism Center (2012), p. 21.
38. As quoted in Lahoud et al., "Letters from Abbottabad," p. 13.
39. Mobley, *Terrorism and Counter-Intelligence*, pp. 3–4.
40. For example, Sayf al-Adl claimed in an interview published in 2005 by Jordanian journalist Fu'ad Husayn that because of U.S. demands, after Iran released Hekmatyar in 2002, Iranian pressure "confused us and (we) aborted 75 percent of our plans" and that there were many arrests—suggesting Iran was helping disrupt Al Qaeda at this time.
41. Jason Burke, *The 9/11 Wars* (London: Allan Lane, 2011), p. 165.
42. Byman, "Friends Like These."
43. "Arab Spring Fails to Improve U.S. Image," *Pew Research Center* 17 May 2011. Available at <http://www.pewglobal.org/2011/05/17/arab-spring-fails-to-improve-us-image/> (accessed 19 March 2013). Indonesia is a notable exception to this hostility.
44. Mobley, *Terrorism and Counter-Intelligence*, p. 4.
45. For an assessment of the drone campaign, see Bryan Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism," *International Security* (Spring 2012), pp. 9–46.
46. Kepel, *Jihad*, p. 320. Also, their violence often reflects a lack of grassroots support or organization.
47. "Most Muslims Want Democracy, Personal Freedoms, and Islam in Political Life," *Pew Research Center*, 10 July 2012.
48. Evan Kohlmann, "State of the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq," The NEFA Foundation (2007). Available at http://counterterrorismblog.org/2007/10/the_sunni_insurgency_has_becom.php (accessed 19 March 2013).
49. See Burke, *The 9/11 Wars* for more on the importance of "local nationalisms."
50. Ken Menkhaus, "Somalia After the Ethiopian Occupation: First Steps to End the Conflict and Combat Extremism," Enough Project, February 2009. Available at <http://www.enoughproject.org/files/Somalia%20After%20the%20Ethiopian%20Occupation.pdf> (accessed 19 March 2013).
51. As quoted in Andrew Higgins and Alan Cullison, "Terrorist's Odyssey," *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 July 2002, p. A1.
52. "Egyptian Salafists Tell Israel They Will Keep the Peace," *Ahram Online*, 21 December 2011. Available at <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/29870.aspx> (accessed 19 March 2013).
53. U.S. support for minority rights, particularly women's rights, is a policy that Al Qaeda will use to try to turn locals against democracy. Although democracy in general has high levels of support, Western notions of women's rights do not. Al Qaeda tries to capitalize on claims that the United States is subverting Islam with its emphasis on women's rights, helping them counter the broader hostility to their anti-democratic message. See *Arab Human Development Report 2002* (United Nations Development Programme). Available at <http://www.arab-hdr.org/publications/other/ahdr/ahdr2002e.pdf> (accessed 19 March 2013).