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From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State

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Note to the reader

“The Islamic State” refers here to the group once known as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI, October 2006–April 2013), the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS, April 2013–June 2014), and the Islamic State (IS, June 2014–present). This usage conforms to the group’s own shorthand for itself—as “the Islamic State” (*al-Dawla al-Islamiyya*), or merely “the State” (*al-Dawla*)—going back to 2006. My intention is to mimic the group’s self-appellation and emphasize its perception of having existed since 2006, not to be dogmatic.

Most primary texts cited are drawn from the Internet, and all links were functional as of December 2014. I have maintained an archive of all primary sources in the event that they do not last.

Arabic is fully transliterated in the footnotes but not in the main text.

Introduction

“If one wants to get to know the program of the [Islamic] State, its politics, and its legal opinions, one ought to consult its leaders, its statements, its public addresses, its own sources”

—Abu Muhammad al-‘Adnani, official spokesman of the Islamic State, May 21, 2012¹

For all the headlines surrounding the Islamic State on a daily basis, the group remains for many shrouded in mystery. As Major General Michael K. Nagata, special operations commander for U.S. Central Command, confessed in late December 2014: “We do not understand the movement [i.e., the Islamic State], and until we do, we are not going to defeat it.” Of the group’s ideology he said: “We have not defeated the idea. We do not even understand the idea.”²

It is this *idea*—the ideology of the Islamic State—that forms the subject of this paper.

The pervasive sense of mystery about the group is in a way understandable. While by no means new—it was founded in 2006—the Islamic State seemed to come out of nowhere in 2013–2014. Only in April 2013 did the group, known officially as the Islamic State of Iraq, draw international attention as something more than a mere front for al-Qaeda’s Iraq branch. Announcing its expansion to Syria, the Islamic State of Iraq rechristened itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS), and so reintroduced itself to the world. After gaining resources, recruits, and momentum, the group redoubled its efforts in Iraq, capturing most of the Sunni areas of that country in June 2014. It then declared itself the caliphate, or the global Islamic empire, nixing

the “Iraq and Sham” part of its name in a nod to its extraterritorial ambitions.

The events marking the Islamic State’s dramatic rise from obscurity were sudden and unforeseen. The group and its ideology, however, were well within view for nearly eight years. Frequent, lengthy audio addresses from its senior leaders, on numerous political and theological subjects, were broadcast *ad nauseam* between 2006 and 2010.³ This self-marketing campaign laid bare what the Islamic State stood for and what it intended to accomplish. The presentation was not oblique; the ideology of the Islamic State was, and remains, on full display.

The air of mystery about the Islamic State derives from the lack of attention prior to 2013. Conventional wisdom, both in the Middle East and the West, held that al-Qaeda in Iraq had merely changed its name in October 2006 to the Islamic State of Iraq. As is now known, the significance of the “name change” was much greater than was appreciated at the time. It signaled the start of an ambitious political project: the founding of a state in Iraq—a proto-caliphate—that would ultimately expand across the region, proclaim itself the full-fledged caliphate, and go on to conquer the rest of the world. The extent of these ambitions went largely unnoticed.⁴

1. Abū Muḥammad al-‘Adnānī, “Innamā a’iḥukum bi-wāḥida,” *Mu’assasat al-Furqān*, 21 May 2012.

Transcript: <https://ia600605.us.archive.org/7/items/enma.a3ezakom/waheda.pdf>.

2. Eric Schmitt, “In Battle to Defang ISIS, U.S. Targets Its Psychology,” *The New York Times*, 28 December 2014.

3. These were collected and transcribed in *al-Majmū’ li-qādat Dawlat al-‘Irāq al-Islāmiyya*, Nukhbat al-‘Ilām al-Jihādī, 2010, https://archive.org/download/Dwla_Nokhba/mjdawl.doc. The 38 speeches of the group’s first two senior leaders, Abū ‘Umar al-Baghdādī and Abū Ḥamza al-Muhājir (both killed in April 2010), run to nearly 17 hours of audio and occupy more than 200 pages transcribed.

4. For an exception see Brian Fishman, *Fourth Generation Governance: Sheikh Tamimi Defends the Islamic State of Iraq*, Combating Terrorism Center, 23 March 2007.

The first iteration of the Islamic State project was a dismal failure. Founded by al-Qaeda in Iraq, the Islamic State emerged at a time when Iraq's Sunni insurgency was fast losing momentum. The announcement of the state, meant to concentrate the energies of the insurgents, met with little enthusiasm. The Islamic State of Iraq would linger, but it was in disrepair for years. By the time the last U.S. forces left Iraq at the end of 2011, it was a seemingly negligible political actor. But in 2012 the Islamic State resurfaced in a bold attempt finally to implement the plan that it had embarked upon six years earlier.

This paper sets forth the main lines of the ideology of the Islamic State and carefully follows its historical trajectory. Part I, *Doctrines*, takes up the group's fundamental religious and political beliefs and places them in the broader context of Islamic political thought. Part II, *Development*, examines the ideological history of the Islamic State, including the jihadis' own debates surrounding it, in four discernible stages. The first is that of the genesis of the Islamic State idea in what is called the Zarqawi prelude (2002–2006), the period of jihadism's initial rise in Iraq under the leadership of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi (d. 2006). The second is that of the Islamic State of Iraq (2006–2013), a largely failed attempt at state formation coinciding with jihadism's decline in the country. The third is that of the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (2013–2014), which saw the much-delayed success of the Islamic State idea in the group's expansion to Syria. The fourth is that of the Islamic State as the outright caliphate (2014–present).⁵

Pursuant to 'Adnani's advice in the epigraph above, the sources relied upon here are mainly those of the Islamic State itself. Official statements from the Islamic State, elaborating its doctrines, are translated in the Appendix.

5. For a comprehensive examination of the Islamic State's history see Charles Lister, *Profiling the Islamic State*, Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper Number 13, November 2014, http://www.brookings.edu/-/media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling%20islamic%20state%20listers/en_web_listers.pdf.

PART I

Doctrines

The Islamic State's Brand of Jihadi-Salafism

“My dear [Muslim] community: As we did not lie against God when we announced the Islamic State, so we do not lie against God when we say that it will persist...It will persist upon its creed (‘aqida) and its path (manhaj), and it has not, nor will it ever, substitute or abandon these”

—Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, leader of the Islamic State, July 21, 2012⁶

Individual members of the Islamic State are of course driven by numerous factors; not all members are motivated by—or even aware of—the ideology of the group that they support. The Islamic State as a political entity, however, is inconceivable apart from its ideology. The group’s senior leadership, by all appearances highly ideologically driven, sets the policies and direction of the group. The content of the Islamic State’s ideology thus merits serious attention.

That ideology should be understood on two levels. The first is Jihadi-Salafism, the school of Islamic political thought to which the group belongs. The second level is the Islamic State’s hardline orientation within this school, which is to a large degree what separates it from al-Qaeda today.

Jihadi-Salafism

The Islamic State, like al-Qaeda, identifies with a movement in Islamic political thought known as Jihadi-Salafism, or jihadism for short. The group’s leaders explicitly adhere to this movement. For example, in a 2007 audio address, then-Islamic State leader Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi appealed “to all Sunnis, and to the young men of Jihadi-Salafism (*al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya*) in particular, across the entire world.”⁷ In the same year, his deputy described the Islamic State’s fighters as part of “the current of Jihadi-Salafism.”⁸

These were not idle words. Jihadi-Salafism is a distinct ideological movement in Sunni Islam. It encompasses a global network of scholars, websites, media outlets, and, most recently, countless supporters on social media. The movement is predicated on an extremist and minoritarian reading of Islamic scripture that is also textually rigorous, deeply rooted in a premodern theological tradition, and extensively elaborated by a recognized cadre of religious authorities. Only recently has jihadi scholarship, along with the formation of the jihadi school, been the subject of serious academic inquiry.⁹

The Brotherhood Dimension

Two streams of Islamic thought contributed to the emergence of the jihadi school in the later 20th century. The first is associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna as a political movement bent on winning power and influence in society and capturing the state, the Muslim Brotherhood has never been as doctrinally rigorous as present-day jihadis. The Brotherhood is an exclusively Sunni movement, but it is not implacably hostile to other Islamic sects, such as Shi’ism, or orientations, such as Sufi mysticism. The movement emerged in response to the rise of Western imperialism and the associated decline of Islam in public life, trends it sought to reverse via grassroots Islamic activism.

6. Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, “Wa-ya’bā ‘illāh illā an yutimm nūrahū,” Mu’assasat al-Furqān, 21 July 2012. Transcript: <https://ia601207.us.archive.org/14/items/2b-bkr-bghdd/143393.pdf>.

7. Abū ‘Umar al-Baghdādī, “Wa-in tantahū fa-huwa khayr lakum,” Mu’assasat al-Furqān, 8 July 2007. Transcript in *Majmū’*, 26–35.

8. Abū Ḥamza al-Muhājir, “Qul mūtū bi-ghayzikum,” Mu’assasat al-Furqān, 5 May 2007. Transcript in *Majmū’*, 147–152.

9. See, for example, Daniel Lav, *Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), and Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

The Muslim Brotherhood championed the restoration of the caliphate as the ideal system of government for the Islamic world, a popular theme in the earlier 20th century. With the dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, various Muslim leaders and groups across the world, from North Africa to Arabia to Southeast Asia, called for the reestablishment of the caliphate.¹⁰ Yet the Muslim Brotherhood's emphasis on the caliphate is particularly significant, as the earliest jihadi ideologues and groups emerged as radical splinters from the Brotherhood. Jihadi ambitions for reviving the caliphate would seem to derive from the Brotherhood's.

The Brotherhood's founder spoke at length of the caliphate. In one instance he remarked: "Islam requires that the Muslim community unite around one leader or one head, the head of the Islamic State, and it forbids the Muslim community from being divided among states..."¹¹ Elsewhere Banna commented: "The Muslim Brotherhood puts the idea of the caliphate and work to restore it at the forefront of its plans."¹²

Yet in practice, as one historian has noted, the Brotherhood evinced "a relative indifference" to actually restoring the caliphate.¹³ Building a caliphate was more of a long-term goal than an immediate objective. Banna himself acknowledged that achieving this goal would require significant legwork, including convening conferences and forming political parties and alliances across the Islamic world. Nonetheless, idealistic talk would continue to feature in Brotherhood statements, and occasionally still comes out. As recently as 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide spoke of reestablishing "the Muslim State."¹⁴

The Salafi Dimension

The second stream of Islamic thought contributing to the Islamic State's ideology is known as Salafism, a primarily theological movement in Sunni Islam concerned with purifying the faith.¹⁵ Salafism focuses on eliminating idolatry (*shirk*) and affirming God's Oneness (*tawhid*). Salafis view themselves as the only true Muslims, considering those who practice so-called "major idolatry" to be outside the bounds of the Islamic faith. Those worshipping—or perceived to be worshipping—stones, saints, tombs, etc., are considered apostates, deserters of the religion. These include the Shi'a and, for many Salafis, democrats, or those participating in a democratic system. The Shi'a are guilty of *shirk* on account of their excessive reverence of the Prophet Muhammad's family, among other things, while democrats err in assigning "partners" to God in legislation, deemed the prerogative of the Divine Legislator.

A distinctive Salafi intellectual genealogy extends to medieval times. The writings of the Syrian Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and his students provide the core Salafi theological corpus. Later significant Salafi thinkers came from the Wahhabi movement, or Wahhabism, a subset of Salafism founded in the Arabian Peninsula by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792). In the late 18th century Wahhabism was wedded to the Saudi political establishment, and remains so today. The Saudis helped the Wahhabis to impose their version of the faith across Arabia by waging jihad against perceived heretics for the sake of eliminating *shirk* and affirming *tawhid*. Wahhabi jihad involved the destruction of tombs and shrines and the enforcement of proper ritual practices, as well as cleansing Islam of Shi'ism.

10. Madawi Al-Rasheed, Carool Kersten, and Marat Shterin, "The Caliphate: Nostalgic Memory and Contemporary Visions," in *Demystifying the Caliphate*, ed. Al-Rasheed, et al (London: Hurst & Co., 2013), 1-30.

11. Quoted in Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir Abū Fāris, *al-Niẓām al-sisāyī fī 'l-Islām* (Jordan: n.p., 1980), 169.

12. Ḥasan al-Bannā, *Majmū'at rasā'il al-imām al-shahīd Ḥasan al-Bannā* (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1965), 284-285.

13. Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 235.

14. Muḥammad Ismā'īl and Muḥammad Ḥajjāj, "Badī': al-khilāfa al-rāshida wa-iḥyā' dawlat al-Islām wa'l-sharī'a hadaf al-ikhwān," *al-Yawm al-Sābi'*, 29 December 2011, <http://www.youm7.com/news/newsprint?newid=565958>.

15. For more on Salafism see Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (London: Hurst, 2009). The term *Salaḥī* derives from *al-salaḥ al-ṣāliḥ*, meaning "the venerable ancestors" of the first generations of Islam whom Salafis seek to emulate.

The anti-Shi'ite element in jihadism derives from Salafism's historical animus toward the Shi'a.¹⁶ In 1792, for example, Saudi Wahhabi forces launched an attack on the Shi'ite center of al-Ahsa' in eastern Arabia in order to stamp out Shi'ite practices there.¹⁷ Later, in 1801, they besieged the two holiest Shi'ite shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala in Iraq, pillaging Karbala and killing several thousand.¹⁸ As late as 1927, the leading Wahhabi scholars of the Saudi kingdom sought forcibly to "convert" the Shi'a of the country's eastern province or else expel them.¹⁹ The modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia no longer actively prosecutes the anti-Shi'ite war; anti-Shi'ite sentiment, however, still runs deep in Salafism.²⁰

The Emergence of the Jihadi School

In the later decades of the twentieth century the Arab Middle East saw the rise of violent Islamist groups influenced by both Muslim Brotherhood activism and Salafi exclusivism. These groups, including Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Group, in Egypt, and the Armed Islamic Group and the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat, in Algeria, were the forerunners of today's Jihadi-Salafi groups. Ideologically, their main inspiration was Sayyid Qutb, a prolific Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood ideologue who advocated a radical, revolutionary version of Brotherhood activism. These groups aimed to overthrow the established governments and replace them with Islamic states. Al-Qaeda shared a similar ideology but advocated a different strategy, focusing on attacking the United States as the first step to creating an Islamic state in the Middle East. Al-Qaeda's leader, Osama Bin Laden, spoke frequently of restoring the caliphate.²¹

In conjunction with the rise of these groups, there also appeared a loose-knit network of independent scholars who gave ideological substance to the emergent jihadi movement. The works of scholars like the Jordanian-Palestinian Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and the Syrian Abu Basir al-Tartusi helped set the tone of the movement.²² Influenced more by Qutb and the Brotherhood early on, these scholars gradually distanced themselves from him and adopted a more Salafi orientation. Their focus on the more violent aspects of Salafism gave birth to Jihadi-Salafism.

In the last 20 years jihadism has thus been increasingly dominated by its Salafi dimension.²³ As a result, Muslim Brotherhood authors, who according to Salafis do not adhere to proper theology, are seldom quoted or referenced by modern jihadis. Rather, works by Ibn Taymiyya and the scholars of the Wahhabi tradition have become the ideological backbone of the movement.

The Islamic State's Brand of Jihadi-Salafism

If jihadism were to be placed on a political spectrum, al-Qaeda would be its left and the Islamic State its right. In principle, both groups adhere to Salafi theology and exemplify the increasingly Salafi character of the jihadi movement. But the Islamic State does so with greater severity. In contrast with al-Qaeda, it is absolutely uncompromising on doctrinal matters, prioritizing the promotion of an unforgiving strain of Salafi thought.

The Islamic State's adoption of this acutely severe version of Jihadi-Salafism is attributable to Abu

16. Salafis are by no means the only Sunni Muslims to show hostility toward the Shi'a in Islamic history. Salafis, however, have made anti-Shi'ism a central component of their identity.

17. George S. Rentz, *The Birth of the Islamic Reform Movement in Saudi Arabia* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2004), 227.

18. Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 28.

19. Guido Steinberg, "Jihadi-Salafism and the Shi'is: Remarks about the Intellectual Roots of Anti-Shi'ism," in *Global Salafism*, 114–115.

20. It should be pointed out that many if not most Salafis today are politically quietist, "arguing that all forms of overt political organization and action, let alone violence, are forbidden...and moreover [that] obedience to Muslim rulers—even unjust ones—is religiously mandated." See Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," 48–50.

21. See, for example, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, trans. Bruce Lawrence (New York: Verso, 2005), 121.

22. See Wagemakers, *A Quietest Jihadi*, and "Between Purity and Pragmatism? Abu Basir al-Tartusi's Nuanced Radicalism," in *Jihadi Thought and Ideology*, ed. Rüdiger Lohlker and Tamara Abu-Hamdeh (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2014), 16–36. On jihadi scholars' role in "set[ting] the intellectual tone" of the movement see Lav, *Radical Islam*, 2–3, 170–171, and *passim*.

23. Lav, *Radical Islam*, 168–172.

Muṣ'ab al-Zarqawi, the founder of al-Qaeda in Iraq who studied theology with the prominent jihadi scholar Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. The first leaders of the Islamic State, Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, were likewise Jihadi-Salafi stalwarts. Their speeches drew extensively on established Salafi authorities, many of them from the Wahhabi tradition.²⁴ The current official spokesman of the Islamic State, Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani, even taught the writings of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab to fellow jihadis.²⁵ A Vice News documentary of the Islamic State from August 2014 showed an official preaching van in Raqqa, Syria plastered with Wahhabi catechisms.²⁶ Some Islamic State official publications are little more than long quotations from Wahhabi scholars.²⁷

The Islamic State's texts and speeches emphasize a number of doctrinal concepts. The most prominent of these stipulate: all Muslims must associate exclusively with fellow "true" Muslims and dissociate from anyone not fitting this narrow definition; failure to rule in accordance with God's law constitutes unbelief; fighting the Islamic State is tantamount to apostasy; all Shi'a Muslims are apostates deserving of death; and the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas are traitors against Islam, among many other things.²⁸ Importantly, the Islamic State anchors these concepts in traditional Salafi literature, and is more dogmatic about their application than al-Qaeda.

The group's approach to the doctrine of jihad also bears a distinctly Salafi imprint. Traditionally, ji-

hadis, including those in al-Qaeda, have espoused "defensive jihad," casting their militant acts as defensive in nature.²⁹ They perceive the Middle East to be under attack by secular "apostate" rulers and their Western "crusader" backers. The Islamic State also advocates for "defensive jihad." As former Islamic State leader Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi once observed, "The rulers of Muslim lands are traitors, unbelievers, sinners, liars, deceivers, and criminals."³⁰ What is more, he said in 2007, "[we believe that] fighting them is of greater necessity than fighting the occupying crusader."³¹

The Islamic State also emphasizes the offensive form of jihad, which in the Wahhabi tradition is premised on the uprooting of *shirk*, idolatry, wherever it is found.³² For example, in a 2007 speech Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi quoted a Wahhabi-trained scholar on the purpose of jihad: "The end to which fighting the unbelievers leads is no idolater (*mushrik*) remaining in the world."³³ In another speech, Baghdadi explicitly emphasized the importance of "offensive jihad," which he defined as "going after the apostate unbelievers by attacking [them] in their home territory, in order to make God's word most high and until there is no persecution." Consistent with Wahhabi doctrine, "persecution" is understood to mean idolatry.³⁴

The Islamic State's "offensive jihad" is directed mainly against the region's Shi'a. Apart from theology, the perception that the Shi'a have expansionist designs on the Middle East necessitates fighting them. The Shi'ite project, so it is believed, aims at

24. See *Majmū'*, *passim*. Some of the more commonly cited Wahhabi authorities are Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb himself, Ḥamad ibn 'Atīq (d. 1884), and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Sa'dī (d. 1956).

25. Turkī al-Bin'alī, *al-Lafz al-sānī fī tarjamat al-'Adnānī*, 26 May 2014, 7, <http://www.gulfup.com/?ziPYqa>.

26. "The Islamic State," *Vice News*, August 2014, <https://news.vice.com/show/the-islamic-state>.

27. See, for example, the booklet *al-Tāghūt*, Maktabat al-Himma, 2013, https://archive.org/download/Hima-Library/taghout_web.pdf, which is an assemblage of quotations from Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, Abdallāh Abū Buṭayn (d. 1865), Sulaymān ibn Suḥmān (d. 1930), and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Qāsim (d. 1972).

28. See *Majmū'*, 70–75, 15, 82, 14, 37–38, and 60.

29. The classic formulation of such defensive jihad was given by the Egyptian Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām Faraj (d. 1982), translated in Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York: MacMillan, 1986).

30. Abū 'Umar al-Baghdādī, "Wa'd Allāh," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 22 September 2008. Transcript in *Majmū'*, 76–82.

31. Baghdādī, "Qul innī 'alā bayyina min Rabbī," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 13 March 2007. Transcript in *Majmū'*, 12–16.

32. On the traditional classifications of "offensive jihad" (*jihād al-ṭalab*) and "defensive jihad" (*jihād al-daf'*) see Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 297–298 and 363–373.

33. Abū 'Umar al-Baghdādī, "Adhilla 'alā 'l-mu'minīn a'izza 'alā 'l-kāfirīn," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 22 December 2007. Transcript in *Majmū'*, 50–58. The scholar in question is a Mauritanian named Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Shinqīṭī (d. 1973).

34. Baghdādī, "Fa-ammā 'l-zabad fa-yadhhab jufā'an," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 4 December 2007. Transcript in *Majmū'*, 43–50.

a “Shi’ite crescent extending from Tehran to Beirut.”³⁵ The Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Asad regime in Syria all form part of this “crescent.” Iran’s leaders are aiming “to turn Iraq into a Shi’ite state,” and the United States is complicit in their plan.³⁶ According to the Islamic State, Iraq’s recent historical transition from a Sunni to a Shi’ite majority is evidence of a creeping “Shi’itization.” As Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi once asserted, it was only in the last 50 to 70 years that Sunni conversion to Shi’ism began.³⁷ Before then, Iraq was a Sunni country.³⁸

Separately, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State equally emphasize the need to restore the caliphate, though they are at odds as to whether the Islamic State has actually done this.

Claiming the Salafi-Wahhabi Heritage

The most prominent jihadi scholars, despite their own Salafi rigor, have tended to side with al-Qaeda over the Islamic State in the developing feud between the two groups. This is partly due to their loyalty to al-Qaeda and its senior leadership. Pro-al-Qaeda jihadi scholars also object to the Islamic State’s inclination toward extreme and arbitrary violence, including gruesome beheadings, and its perceived excess in the practice of *takfir*, or declaring other Muslims to be unbelievers.

The Islamic State, however, maintains its own scholarly authorities, largely drawn from a younger generation. The most prominent (and possibly most influential) of these scholars is the 30-year-old Bahraini Turki al-Bin‘ali.³⁹ A former student of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Bin‘ali is now a resident Islamic State scholar and is rumored to be a

top authority.⁴⁰ In mid-2014, after falling out with his former mentor over the Islamic State’s feud with al-Qaeda, Bin‘ali authored a bitter refutation of his teacher. Bin‘ali compared Maqdisi’s rejection of the Islamic State to a famous 18th-century Yemeni scholar’s rejection of the early Wahhabi movement in Arabia.⁴¹ This Yemeni had originally welcomed the young Wahhabi state, only to denounce it upon rumors of excess in violence and *takfir*. It is on the same grounds, Bin‘ali complained, that Maqdisi today has denounced the Islamic State.

Bin‘ali’s point in drawing this comparison was clear: from his perspective, the Islamic State is—like the early Wahhabi state before it—the true keeper of the Salafi-Wahhabi heritage. Confident in this role, it will never relinquish its divine mission. Jihadis who fail to support the Islamic State are simply on the wrong side of history.

35. Baghdādī, “al-‘Izz bi-siyānat al-dīn wa-‘l-‘ird,” Mu’assasat al-Furqān, July 8, 2009. Transcript in *Majmū’*, 104–112.

36. Ibid.

37. Baghdādī, “al-Dīn al-naṣīḥa,” Mu’assasat al-Furqān, 12 February 2008. Transcript in *Majmū’*, 59–64.

38. Conversion to Shi’ism in Iraq is more accurately dated to the later 19th and earlier 20th centuries. See Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi’ites of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25.

39. For his biography see Abū Usāma al-Gharīb, *Minnat al-‘Alī bi-thabat shaykhinā Turkī al-Bin‘alī*, 2013, <https://archive.org/download/minato.alali001/minato.alali001.pdf>.

40. On this rumor see the Tweet from @wikibaghdadi, Twitter Post, 13 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/wikibaghdady/status/532890372318310401>.

41. Turkī al-Bin‘alī, Shaykhī ‘l-asbaq, 31 May 2014, 9–12, <http://www.gulfup.com/?teBfhp>. The Yemeni scholar in question is Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 1768); for further discussion see Bernard Haykel, “al-Amīr, Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. Gudrun Krämer, et al, Brill Online, 2014.

PART II

Development

The Zarqawi Prelude (2002–2006)

“The path that [Shaykh Zarqawi] tread—whose waymarks he put in place and guided toward—those who came after him followed its course. And we, God willing, are following in their footsteps”

– Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, April 9, 2013⁴²

The Islamic State’s ideology developed within the context of the Iraqi insurgency of the early 2000s. This period saw the arrival in Iraq of a younger generation of jihadis influenced by the more extreme strain of Jihadi-Salafism. The most influential of these young men was the Jordanian Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, who inspired and set in motion the ideological trajectory that the Islamic State continues to follow.

Zarqawi directly contributed to the Islamic State’s two most prominent ideological tenets: an extreme anti-Shi’ism and a focus on restoring the caliphate. While Zarqawi’s sectarian views clashed with the al-Qaeda leadership’s, he shared al-Qaeda’s emphasis on the caliphate.

Zarqawi’s “Path”

Born in Jordan in 1966, Ahmad Fadil Nazzal al-Khalayila, better known as Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, received little formal secular or religious education.⁴³ He nonetheless became a key exponent of jihadism in Jordan.

In the late 1980s Zarqawi left Jordan to participate in the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan, where he

began a close relationship with Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, from whom Zarqawi learned the strict tenets of Jihadi-Salafism. Between 1994 and 1999, Zarqawi and Maqdisi were imprisoned in Jordan, where together they led a jihadi missionary group.⁴⁴ Through the hardship of prison, Zarqawi developed into a charismatic leader and cultivated a following. Upon his release in 1999, he returned with some followers to the Afghanistan-Pakistan area, setting up a training camp in the western Afghan city of Herat.

Zarqawi’s activities in Afghanistan during this period presaged the ideological stringency of today’s Islamic State. Zarqawi distanced himself from al-Qaeda, whose main base was in the east of the country. The Egyptian al-Qaeda military commander Sayf al-‘Adl, who cooperated with Zarqawi in Afghanistan between 1999 and 2001, confirms that Zarqawi was only loosely affiliated with al-Qaeda.⁴⁵ Zarqawi did not give Bin Laden the oath of fealty, or *bay‘a*. According to ‘Adl, Zarqawi’s Herat training camp served as a center for more Salafi-leaning jihadis.⁴⁶ Maqdisi likewise stated that Zarqawi did not submit to Bin Laden’s authority in Afghanistan due to his stricter theology.⁴⁷

42. Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, “Wa-bashshir al-mu’minīn,” Mu’assasat al-Furqān, 9 April 2013. Transcript: http://ia600606.us.archive.org/15/items/w_bsher_1/tcJN8J.pdf.

43. For more on Zarqāwī’s life see Jean-Pierre Milelli, “Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Jihad in ‘Mesopotamia,’” in *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, ed. Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2008), 237–250, and Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 85–115.

44. On this group, see Joas Wagemakers, “A Terrorist Organization that Never Was: The Jordanian ‘Bay‘at al-Imam’ Group,” *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 68, no. 1, 2014.

45. For more on Zarqāwī’s relationship with al-Qaeda during this period see Nelly Lahoud, “Metamorphosis: From al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad to Dawlat al-Khilafa (2003–2014),” in *The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State*, Combating Terrorism Center, December 2014, 9–12.

46. Sayf al-‘Adl, “Tajribatī ma’ Abī Muṣ‘ab al-Zarqāwī,” Minbar al-Tawhīd wa’l-Jihād, May 2005, <http://www.tawhed.ws/dl/?i=ttofofom6f>, 8.

47. Abū Muḥammad al-Maqdisī, “al-Zarqāwī: āmāl wa-ālām,” Minbar al-Tawhīd wa’l-Jihād, July/August 2004, <http://www.tawhed.ws/dl/?i=dtwiam56>, 8.

After the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Zarqawi and his associates moved to the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq in 2002 where they formed a group called Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad ("the Group of God's Unity and Jihad"). In 2004 Zarqawi finally gave *bay'a* to Osama Bin Laden, thereby christening the group al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Zarqawi's Anti-Shi'ism

Zarqawi articulated a strategy of deliberately targeting the Iraqi Shi'ite community with the intention of stoking civil war. In a February 2004 letter to the al-Qaeda leadership, later intercepted by U.S. forces, Zarqawi attacked the Shi'a in both theological and political terms, and his arguments remain a staple of the Islamic State's ideology.⁴⁸ In a February 2012 audio statement, Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani referred his listeners to Zarqawi's lectures as the definitive word on the Shi'a.⁴⁹

Addressing the Shi'a through a theological lens, Zarqawi cited a number of classical Sunni Muslim authorities, including Ibn Taymiyya, to make the case that the Shi'a are beyond the bounds of Islam. He furthermore attributed to them a sinister and duplicitous role in Islamic history. For example, he called the Safavid dynasty, the 16th-17th-century Iranian dynasty that converted Iran to Shi'ism, "a dagger that stabbed Islam and the Muslims in the back," and he pointed to a Shi'ite role in the Mongol sacking of Baghdad in 1258.⁵⁰ In the present era, he went on, this age-old Shi'ite deceit takes the form of a bid for regional hegemony, through an attempt to create a Shi'ite super-state across the Middle East. "Their aspirations are expanding by the day to create a Shi'ite state extending from Iran

across Iraq and Syria and Lebanon all the way to the paper Gulf kingdom."⁵¹

Though at the time of his writing the Americans were an occupying power in Iraq, Zarqawi saw the Shi'a as the greater threat. While "the Crusader forces will disappear from sight tomorrow or the day after," the Shi'a will remain "the proximate, dangerous enemy of the Sunnis...The danger from the Shi'a...is greater and their damage worse and more destructive to the [Islamic] nation than the Americans."⁵² The Shi'ite historical hatred of Sunnis cannot be overcome, according to Zarqawi, with goodwill. Rather the only solution is battlefield victory.⁵³

Zarqawi believed that the Shi'a would willingly cooperate with the Americans in order to seize power in Iraq. His letter thus advocated attacking the Shi'a in order to spark a civil war and rally Sunnis to the cause of jihad in Iraq. As he put it, "targeting and hitting [the Shi'a] in [their] religious, political, and military depth will provoke them to show the Sunnis their rabies and bare the teeth of the hidden rancor working in their breasts. If we succeed in dragging them into the arena of sectarian war, it will become possible to awaken the inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent danger and annihilating death at the hands of these Sabeans [i.e., Shi'a]."⁵⁴

Zarqawi pursued this strategy in Iraq. Both Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's second-in-command, and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Zarqawi's former teacher, would criticize Zarqawi for targeting the Shi'a. Zawahiri contended that the Shi'ite masses were not necessarily infidels who could be fought; rather they were excused their theological errors on account of their ignorance.⁵⁵

48. Abū Muṣ'ab al-Zarqāwī, "Risāla min Abī Muṣ'ab al-Zarqāwī ilā 'l-shaykh Usāma ibn Lādin," 15 February 2004, in *Kalimāt muḍī'a*, Shabakat al-Burāq al-Islāmiyya, June 2006, 58–76, <https://archive.org/download/fgfrt/1a.pdf>. Translated excerpts from the letter can be found in *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, 251–267. *Kalimāt muḍī'a* is a more than 600-page compilation of Zarqāwī's writings and transcribed speeches.

49. Abū Muḥammad al-'Adnānī, "al-'Irāq al-'Irāq yā ahl al-sunna," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 24 February 2012. Transcript: <https://archive.org/download/nokbah672/iraq2012.pdf>.

50. Zarqāwī, "Risāla," 64–65.

51. *Ibid.*, 64.

52. *Ibid.*, 62, 74. The translation is in Bernard Haykel, "Al-Qa'ida and Shiism," in *Fault Lines in Global Jihad*, ed. Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (London: Routledge, 2011), 194.

53. Zarqāwī, "Risāla," 62.

54. *Ibid.*, 73. Translation in Haykel, "Al-Qa'ida and Shiism," 194.

55. Ayman al-Zawāhirī, [Letter to Zarqāwī,] 16 July 2005, 10, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Zawahiris-Letter-to-Zarqawi-Original.pdf>.

Zarqawi's (and al-Qaeda's) Plan for the Caliphate

While Zarqawi and the central al-Qaeda leadership were at odds over the Shi'a, they shared an ambition to found a state in Iraq to serve as the proto-caliphate, a goal that was articulated even before Zarqawi's relocation to northern Iraq in 2002.

The al-Qaeda military strategist Sayf al-'Adl claims to have discussed this matter with Zarqawi in Iran, where both fled in late 2001 in the wake of the American invasion of Afghanistan. Speaking of Zarqawi's intended relocation to Iraq, 'Adl wrote: "This [would be] our historical opportunity by means of which perhaps we would be able to establish the Islamic State, which would have the main role in eradicating oppression and helping establish the Truth in the world, God willing. I was in agreement with my brother Abu Mus'ab in this analysis."⁵⁶ From the evidence at hand, it is not clear whether the idea for establishing this embryonic caliphate in Iraq began with Zarqawi or with his al-Qaeda counterparts. In any event, both would propagate this idea between 2004 and 2006.

In mid-2005 three al-Qaeda leaders wrote to Zarqawi to discuss their statehood ambitions for Iraq. The first, Sayf al-'Adl, instructed Zarqawi that "it is necessary for you to announce, clearly and plainly, that your objective is to recommence Islamic life by means of establishing the Islamic State, which will proceed to solve all the problems of the [Muslim] community." 'Adl was optimistic, claiming that "facts and circumstances, my dear brother, are propitious and favorable for announcing this state."⁵⁷

Zawahiri followed up with a letter to Zarqawi in July 2005 that was intercepted by U.S. forces.⁵⁸ Zawahiri outlined a four-stage strategy for al-Qaeda in Iraq, telling Zarqawi to expel the Americans, establish an Islamic state, expand the jihad to Iraq's neighbors, and ultimately confront Israel. Zawahiri described the first two goals as "near-term." Like 'Adl he appeared optimistic, envisioning the Islamic state to be in the offing. He hoped that eventually it would "reach the status of the caliphate."⁵⁹

The third al-Qaeda leader, 'Atiyyat Allah al-Libi (d. 2011), wrote Zarqawi in December 2005. His letter seemed to take for granted that it was Zarqawi's objective to establish the kind of state described by 'Adl and Zawahiri. Only in passing did he refer to Zarqawi's aim to "destroy a power and a state and erect on their debris the Islamic State, or at least [what] is to be a building block in the right direction toward it."⁶⁰

Zarqawi's numerous public pronouncements indicate that the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq was fully on board with this caliphate strategy.⁶¹ Before officially joining his group to al-Qaeda, Zarqawi had spoken several times in favor of it. In May 2004 he said, "I am currently in Iraq waging jihad with my brothers to establish for Islam a homeland and for the Qur'an a state";⁶² in July, "the dawn of the Qur'anic state has appeared";⁶³ and in August, "We in Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad are assailing the enemy and fighting injustice aiming to return the caliphate to the earth, apply the Shari'a, and establish the Abrahamic religion."⁶⁴ In his October 2004 pledge of fealty to Osama Bin Laden, Zarqawi anticipated the dawn of the caliphate, saying, "[its establishment] could be [achieved] by our hands."⁶⁵

56. Sayf al-'Adl, "Tajribatī," 20. 'Adl's text does not state whether this conversation with Zarqawī in Iran took place in late 2001 or early 2002.

57. Ibid., 22.

58. For more on this letter see William McCants, "State of Confusion: ISIS's Strategy and How to Counter It," *Foreign Affairs*, 10 September 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141976/william-mccants/state-of-confusion>.

59. Zawahiri, [Letter to Zarqawī,] 4.

60. 'Atiyyat Allāh al-Libī, [Letter to Zarqawī,] 12 December 2005, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Atiyahs-Letter-to-Zarqawi-Original.pdf>, 6.

61. See *Kalimāt muḍṭā'a*, 102, 133, 141, 145, 152, 175, and 523.

62. Abū Muḍ'ab al-Zarqawī, "Min Abī Muṣ'ab al-Zarqawī li-kalb al-Urdunn 'Abdallāh al-Thānī," 15 May 2004, in *Kalimāt muḍṭā'a*, 102.

63. Zarqawī, "al-Mawjif al-shar'ī min ḥukūmat Karzāy al-'Irāq," 23 July 2004, in *Kalimāt muḍṭā'a*, 141.

64. Zarqawī, "Kalimat al-shaykh Abī Muṣ'ab 'abr sharīṭ 'Riyāh al-naṣr," 8 August 2004. Transcript in *Kalimāt muḍṭā'a*, 149-152.

65. Zarqawī, "Bayān al-bay'a li-Tanzīm al-Qā'ida bi-qiyādat al-shaykh Usāma ibn Lādin," 17 October 2004. Transcript in *Kalimāt muḍṭā'a*, 174-176.

The Islamic State: An Idea in Motion

In 2006 al-Qaeda in Iraq was edging closer to establishing the much-discussed state. On January 15, Zarqawi's group formed the Mujahidin Shura Council, which united al-Qaeda in Iraq with five other jihadi organizations operating in the area.⁶⁶ The new council, ostensibly headed by an Iraqi, had the stated purpose of closing jihadi ranks in Iraq at a time when al-Qaeda in Iraq was declining in popularity. In April, Zarqawi, showing his face in a video message for the first time, hailed the Mujahidin Shura Council as "the starting point for establishing an Islamic state."⁶⁷ In a fuller version of the video recovered by U.S. forces in May, Zarqawi was more specific: "We hope to God that within three months from now the environment will be favorable for us to announce an Islamic emirate."⁶⁸ Two months from the time of the video, on June 7, Zarqawi was killed by a U.S. airstrike. But in October the emirate he had foretold was founded.

Upon Zarqawi's death, al-Qaeda urged the jihadis in Iraq to press on with the caliphate strategy. In his June eulogy of Zarqawi, Zawahiri reiterated what he had outlined in his letter a year before. Addressing "my mujahidin brothers in Iraq," he said: "know that the community of Islam has put its hopes on you, and that it is necessary for you to establish the Islamic State in Iraq, then to make your way toward captive Jerusalem and restore the caliphate."⁶⁹ That process was indeed underway.

66. "Bayān ta'sīs Majlis Shurā 'l-Mujāhidīn," <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=5cckqf0o>.

67. Abū Muṣ'ab al-Zarqāwī, "Hādihā balāgh lil-nās," April 24, 2006. Transcript in *Kalimāt muḍī'a*, 515-524.

68. "Al-Zarqāwī yatawaqqā' i'lān imāra Islāmiyya bi'l-'Irāq fī ghuḍūn thalāthat ashhur," *al-'Arabiyya*, 5 May 2006, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2006/05/05/23474.html>.

69. Ayman al-Zawāhirī, "Rithā' shahīd al-umma wa-amīr al-istishhādiyyīn Abī Muṣ'ab al-Zarqāwī," Mu'assasat al-Sahāb, June 2006. Transcript in *al-Milaff al-kāmil lil-bayānāt wa'l-maqālāt al-muta'alliqa bi-stishhād al-shaykh Abī Muṣ'ab al-Zarqāwī*, Shabakat al-Burāq al-Islāmiyya, n.d., 40-46, <https://archive.org/download/fqfrrt/2b.pdf>.

The “Paper State” (2006–2013)

“Some have written fatwas calling for the dissolution of the [Islamic] State. They have claimed that it is a paper state, an Internet state. They have encouraged criminals to act against it. Blood has been shed on account of their fatwas”

– Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, former war minister of the Islamic State, October 24, 2008⁷⁰

2006–2013 witnessed the establishment of the abortive Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), a group that both Western and regional media referred to as al-Qaeda in Iraq. While there were indeed links between al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the fledgling Islamic State, the latter was from the beginning never fully subordinate to al-Qaeda. Significantly, the central al-Qaeda leadership showed only minimal enthusiasm for the establishment of the state that it had previously called for, likely because it lost control of the state-building process and tired of the hardline ideology disposing the Islamic State to ignore orders from the al-Qaeda leadership.

Establishing the State

On June 12, 2006, al-Qaeda in Iraq announced a successor to the late Zarqawi as leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq: an Egyptian named Abu Hamza al-Muhajir (aka Abu Ayyub al-Masri, d. 2010).⁷¹ The new leader, a close aide to Zarqawi, was a former member of Zawahiri’s Islamic Jihad Group in Egypt.⁷² His position was short-lived, however, as al-Qaeda in Iraq soon ceased to exist in any official capacity.

On October 12, 2006, the Mujahidin Shura Council announced an alliance of several more jihadi factions and Sunni tribal leaders known as the Alliance of the Scented Ones, which three days later announced the establishment of “the

Islamic State of Iraq.” The emirate’s writ was to run through “Baghdad, Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Nineveh, and parts of the provinces of Babil and Wasit.” The audio statement unveiling the Islamic State came from its newly proclaimed media spokesman, an Iraqi named Muharib al-Juburi (d. 2007). Juburi identified the state’s leader as “Commander of the Faithful” Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi (d. 2010).⁷³

A former police officer whose real name was Hamid Dawud Khalil al-Zawi, Baghdadi became the leader of the jihadi movement in Iraq, appointing Abu Hamza as his deputy and war minister of the Islamic State. Neither would show his face to the media, but both frequently used the Islamic State’s official Furqan Media Agency to address the world.

Islamic State of Iraq, or Islamic State in Iraq?

The state announced in October 2006 by Muharib al-Juburi was known by two names. More officially, it was “the Islamic State of Iraq” (*Dawlat al-Iraq al-Islamiyya*), but it also went by “the Islamic State in Iraq” (*al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi l-Iraq*), or simply “the Islamic State” (*al-Dawla al-Islamiyya*) for short.⁷⁴ The distinction underscores the two ways in which the new polity was billed to the Iraqi public and the larger Islamic world.

70. Abū Hamza al-Muhājir, “al-Liqā’ al-ṣawtī al-awwal ma’ al-shaykh Abī Hamza al-Muhājir,” Mu’assasat al-Furqān, 24 October 2008. Transcript in *Majmū’*, 181–190.

71. His real name was ‘Abd al-Mun’im ‘Izz al-Dīn ‘Alī al-Badawī.

72. “Egypt Discloses True Identity of al-Qaeda Leader in Iraq,” *The Daily Star*, 3 May 2007, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2007/May-03/72371-egypt-discloses-true-identity-of-al-qaeda-leader-in-iraq.ashx#axzz3HsPHg6GC>; and “Mas’ul amnī: sā’ī barīd al-Baghdādī awṣalanā ilā makhba’ za’īmāy al-Qā’ida,” *al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ*, 29 April 2010, http://classic.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=567358&issueno=11475#.VFVWAedi_tY.

73. Muḥārib al-Jubūrī, “al-I’lān ‘an qiyām Dawlat al-‘Irāq al-Islāmiyya,” 15 October 2006. Transcript in *Majmū’*, 221–223.

74. Examples of both usages abound. See, for example, Muḥārib al-Jubūrī, “al-Tashkīliyya al-wizāriyya al-ūlā li-Dawlat al-‘Irāq al-Islāmiyya,” Mu’assasat al-Furqān, 19 April 2007. Transcript in *Majmū’*, 230–231.

The Islamic State *of* Iraq was presented as a state for Iraq's Sunni population. The Kurdish and Shi'ite communities had staked out semi-autonomous zones following the U.S. invasion in 2003; this was to be the Sunni zone. Juburi described the new state as such in his announcement: "After the Kurds have taken possession of a state in the north, and the Shi'a have been established in a federal state in the middle and south...it has become necessary for the honorable and free Sunnis among the mujahidin and engaged scholars and notables to give something [comparable] to their brothers and their sons...especially in light of the farcical drama known as 'Maliki's state,' in which, sadly, traitorous Sunnis have played roles."⁷⁵

The Islamic State *in* Iraq was billed as a state for the world's Muslims, the proto-caliphate championed by Zarqawi and al-Qaeda. In this sense, Juburi spoke of his group as "following the example of the Prophet when he left Mecca for Medina [in 622] and established the Islamic State there, notwithstanding the alliance of the idolaters and the People of the Book against him." Juburi and many others in the Islamic State further claimed that "the territories [under our control] equal in expanse the first state in Medina."⁷⁶ In other words, the Islamic State was following the example of the state founded by Muhammad—the caliphate.

On balance, the Islamic element prevailed over the Iraqi in the group's propaganda, even though the Islamic State of Iraq remained the more official name. Territorial nationalism does not sit well with jihadi ideology, and this was evident in the early pronouncements of the group.

On November 10, 2006, Abu Hamza proclaimed "the beginning of a new and important stage of which we are laying the first brick, inaugurating the proj-

ect of the Islamic caliphate." "We are not the sons of Sykes-Picot," he continued. "We are the sons of [the Prophet Muhammad]."⁷⁷ As Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi said in his second public address, delivered on February 3, 2007, "We are fighting not for any patriotism but rather for God's word to be the most high."⁷⁸

The newly proclaimed leader of the Islamic State was titled *amir al-mu'minin* ("Commander of the Faithful"), the traditional title of caliphs in Islamic history, and he was described as a descendent of the Prophet's tribe of Quraysh, establishing a traditional qualification for the office of the caliphate.⁷⁹ All Iraqi Sunnis were called on to give him the oath of fealty, or *bay'a*, and Baghdadi soon identified all Iraqis failing to do so as sinners.⁸⁰ If not the caliph already, Baghdadi was being presented, and presenting himself, as caliph-in-waiting.

"Informing Mankind"

In January 2007 the Islamic State's Shari'a Council issued a lengthy scholarly justification of its statehood claim called "Informing Mankind of the Birth of the Islamic State."⁸¹ The treatise attempted to establish the Islamic State's legitimacy in terms of Islamic law, or Shari'a. Sunni literature on government is traditionally ambiguous concerning the nature of the state in question, so the Islamic State could thus conveniently draw on such literature to suggest—but not assert—that it was the caliphate.

The treatise identified three traditionally legitimate avenues for a ruler to assume power in Islam: (1) election by an elite group of electors known as the *ahl al-hall wa'l-'aqd* ("those who loose and bind"); (2) designation by the preceding ruler; and (3) seizure of power by brute force.⁸² The work argued that the Islamic State pursued the first course.

75. Juburi, "al-'Ilān 'an qiyām Dawlat al-'Irāq al-Islāmiyya."

76. Ibid.

77. Abū Ḥamza al-Muhājir, "Inna 'l-ḥukm illā lillāh," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 10 November 2006. Transcript in *Majmū'*, 140-144.

78. Abū 'Umar al-Baghdādī, "Fatḥ min Allāh wa-naṣr qarīb," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 3 February 2007. Transcript in *Majmū'*, 8-11.

79. See, for example, Muhājir, "Inna 'l-ḥukm illā lillāh."

80. Baghdādī, "Fatḥ min Allāh wa-naṣr qarīb," and "Qul innī 'alā bayyina min Rabbī."

81. Uthmān ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Tamīmī, *I'lām al-anām bi-mīlād Dawlat al-Islām*, Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 2007. The version of *I'lām* referenced here is that published by Minbar al-Tawḥīd wa'l-Jihād, available at <http://www.tawhed.ws/dl?i=436zeuhb>. The text identifies Tamīmī, who died in a battle with U.S. forces in late 2006, as the work's "adviser." For more on this treatise see Brian Fishman, *Fourth Generation Governance*.

82. Tamīmī, 13.

According to the authors, the *ahl al-hall wal-'aqd* in Iraq were those waging jihad against the Americans and Shi'a, constituted in the Alliance of the Scented Ones established in mid-October.⁸³ The Alliance was representative and inclusive, based on the principle of consultation.⁸⁴ The Alliance had reportedly obtained the support of more than 60% of the local Sunni tribal shaykhs for the Islamic State project; it also attempted to consult with other Sunni Islamist groups but had little success. In any event, the project went ahead in view of the overriding legal obligation to appoint a leader in one's absence.⁸⁵

The treatise justified the Islamic State's statehood claim on the basis of its supposed political success and promotion of Salafi theology and Islamic law. The American military, the authors claimed, was breathing its last breaths in Iraq, and the Iraqi government was a farce, creating an opportune moment for building a state.⁸⁶ The mujahidin held the real authority in the Sunni areas of Iraq.⁸⁷ Taking one of Juburi's arguments a step further, the work argued that the territory of the newly formed Islamic State was actually larger than—not just equal to—that of the original Islamic state founded by the Prophet Muhammad in Medina.⁸⁸

The treatise also boasted of having brought true *tawhid* (God's unity) to Iraq, ridding the land of *shirk* (idolatry) and destroying shrines.⁸⁹ The State had also established Shari'a courts and appointed Muslim judges to rule in accordance with Islamic law.⁹⁰ The foundation of the state was to be a "major political blow and great shock to the enemy," marking a momentous advance for the jihadi movement.⁹¹ Waxing

caliphal, it stated: "This state of Islam has arisen anew to strike down its roots in the region, as was the religion's past one of strength and glory...The territory of Iraq today is ready for a great Islamic project...its resources and riches are sufficient to push the region toward a great Islamic tide."⁹²

Initial Reception

The announcement of the Islamic State in Iraq was celebrated on jihadi media, which recognized the significance of the state's founding. Leading jihadi online forums soon displayed a banner—as they continue to do so—counting the number of days passed since the state's establishment. The banner reads: "[a certain number of] days have passed since the announcement of the Islamic State and the [Muslim] community's coming hope...and it will continue to persist by the will of God."⁹³

But outside the narrow world of the jihadi Internet, the announcement of an Islamic state in Iraq drew little attention. The new entity had difficulty convincing either Iraqis or outside observers that it was more than just a new name for al-Qaeda in Iraq. Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir both complained that Iraqis and foreigners wrongly persisted in calling their Islamic State of Iraq a branch of al-Qaeda.⁹⁴ Their claim to have founded a state was not being taken seriously.

The Islamic State even failed to unite the Jihadi-Salafi groups active in Iraq at the time. One of these, the Islamic Army of Iraq, issued a searing critique of the Islamic State in early April 2007.⁹⁵ This came partly

83. Ibid., 14, 22.

84. Ibid., 29. This may have been a nod to Zawahiri, who had instructed Zarqawi to form a "council, or *hay'a*, of the *ahl al-hall wal-'aqd* to represent the local populace." See Zawāhirī, [Letter to Zarqāwī,] 6.

85. Tamīmī, 22. For this obligation Tamīmī relies specifically on an argument made by Juwaynī (d. 1085). See *ibid.*, 15, 31.

86. Ibid., 50.

87. Ibid., 25.

88. Ibid., 27.

89. Ibid., 42–43.

90. Ibid., 43–46.

91. Ibid., 12.

92. Ibid., 81, 83.

93. See, for example, <https://shamikh1.info/vb/>.

94. See, for example, Abū 'Umar al-Baghdādī, "al-Bunyān al-marṣūṣ," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 15 April 2008 (transcript in *Majmū'*, 66–69), and Muhājir, "al-Liqā' al-sawtī al-awwal ma' al-shaykh Abī Ḥamza al-Muhājir."

95. "Radd al-Jaysh al-Islāmī fī 'l-'Irāq 'alā khitābāt al-akh Abī 'Umar al-Baghdādī," *Shabakat Hanīn*, 5 April 2007, <http://www.hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?p=53646>.

in response to an audio address by Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi from mid-March labeling as “sinners” all members of jihadi groups who failed to carry out the “duty of the age”—i.e., giving *bay’a* to the Islamic State’s leader.⁹⁶ The Islamic Army of Iraq called this kind of talk “dangerous,” and accused the Islamic State of killing more than 30 of its members for refusing “to give *bay’a* to al-Qaeda, or its other names.” Clearly the Islamic Army did not recognize the establishment of any state. The statement ended with an appeal to Osama Bin Laden to restrain his—as it was perceived—Iraqi affiliate.⁹⁷

The scholarly authorities of Jihadi-Salafism, for their part, offered little commentary on the controversial announcement. The most prominent of the few scholars to do so was the Kuwaiti Hamid al-‘Ali, one of the leaders of Kuwait’s Salafi community and a known al-Qaeda sympathizer.⁹⁸ Like the Islamic Army of Iraq, ‘Ali likewise took issue with Baghdadi’s description of Iraqi Sunnis who were withholding *bay’a* as “sinners.” In a fatwa issued on his website on April 4, 2007, ‘Ali urged the Islamic State to renounce its establishment of a state and return to what it was before, “a jihadi faction among the other jihadi factions.”⁹⁹ From ‘Ali’s perspective, the very idea of the Islamic State of Iraq was problematic, as it suggested itself as “the legitimate imamate known in the Shari‘a,” i.e., the caliphate. In his view, Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi’s “state” did not meet the test of statehood, which is political capability; as such it was not a state in any actual sense. Several months later, ‘Ali wrote a poem ridiculing the Islamic State as “imaginary” and existing only online.¹⁰⁰

The conflict between the Islamic State of Iraq and the Islamic Army of Iraq, including the contribution of Hamid al-‘Ali, drew the attention of some pro-Islamic State jihadi scholars. One of these, Abu Dujana al-Khurasani, accused ‘Ali and the Islamic Army of colluding against the Islamic State. He criticized the Islamic Army for its local focus and supposed willingness to cooperate with the Baghdad government; in contrast, the Islamic State had in its view “the expanse of the Islamic caliphate.”¹⁰¹

Turki al-Bin‘ali, the young Bahraini scholar who wrote under a pseudonym at the time, fumed at ‘Ali for his hypocrisy. ‘Ali, he said, was supporting Hamas, deemed by most jihadis to be insufficiently Islamic, while accusing “the Islamic State of Iraq of not possessing the fundamentals of a state.” He referred the Kuwaiti to the argument found in *Informing Mankind* that asserted the Islamic State covered a greater territorial expanse than the Prophet’s original state.¹⁰²

The debate surrounding the Islamic State’s legitimacy died down quickly. In Iraq, the *Sabwa*, or “Awakening” movement of Iraq’s Sunni tribes, was ascendant, rendering both the Islamic State and Islamic Army increasingly weaker and less relevant politically. For jihadis outside of Iraq, the celebration of the proto-caliphate’s advent subsided. All that remained was the banner on jihadi forums marking the time passed.

Relations with al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda was not consulted at the time of the Islamic State’s founding.¹⁰³ Although al-Qaeda voiced nominal support for the new emirate, com-

96. Baghdādī, “Qul innī ‘alā bayyina min Rabbī.”

97. “Radd al-Jaysh al-Islāmī.”

98. On Hāmid al-‘Alī see Carine Lahoud-Tatar, *Islam et politique au Koweït* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011), 203.

99. Hāmid al-‘Alī, “Hal man lā yubāyi’ Dawlat al-‘Irāq al-Islāmiyya uṣāṭ wa-hal huwa wājib al-‘aṣr?” 4 April 2007, http://www.halali.cc/f_open.php?id=1a55240a-3422-102a-9c4c-0010dc91cf69.

100. Alī, “Amjād al-nikk naym,” 9 January 2008, http://www.halali.cc/q_open.php?id=5d858b22-0fad-102b-be60-0010dce-2d6ae.

101. Abū Dujāna al-Khurāsānī, “Junūd al-Jaysh al-Islāmī hājirū ilā Abī ‘Umar al-Baghdādī,” *Muntadayāt Shabakat Shumūkh al-Islām*, 16 April 2007, <https://shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=215&highlight=%CF%CC%C7%E4%C9+%C7%E1%CE%D1%C7%D3%C7%E4%ED+%CD%C7%E3%CF+%C7%E1%DA%E1%ED>.

102. Turkī al-Bin‘alī, *Buzūgh al-fajr bi’l-mahājīāt al-‘ashar*, Minbar al-Tawhīd wa’l-Jihād, 2009, 16–22, <http://www.tawhed.ws/dl/?i=18120902>.

103. Ādam Ghadan (Adam Pearlman), [Letter to Usāma ibn Lādin,] [late January 2011,] <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/SOCOM-2012-0000004-Orig.pdf>, 8; “Bayān bi-sha’n ‘alāqat Jamā’at Qā’idat al-Jihād bi-Jamā’at ‘al-Dawla al-Islāmiyya fi ‘l-‘Irāq wa’l-Shām,” Markaz al-Fajr lil-‘Ilām, 22 January 2014, <http://justpaste.it/ea9k>; Ayman al-Zawāhirī, “Shahāda li-haqn dimā’ al-mujāhidīn bi’l-Shām,” Mu’assasat al-Sahāb, 2 May 2014 (transcript: <https://archive.org/download/shehadaemam/shehada.pdf>).

munication between the two groups was minimal and relations were strained.

Al-Qaeda praised the Islamic State in December 2007, when Osama Bin Laden issued an audio statement defending the state against the likes of the Islamic Army of Iraq and Hamid al-'Ali. Describing the Islamic State's fighters as "among the most committed to the Truth and loyal to the way of the Prophet," Bin Laden said that other Sunni militants in Iraq had no excuse in hesitating to give *bay'a* to Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi. Bin Laden criticized the argument that "full political capability is a condition for establishing the Islamic Emirate in the present time"; if that were so then "Islam would never achieve a state." The United States, he said, with its military might, has the ability "to make war on any state and bring down its government" at will. Given the example of the Prophet, who founded his state amid trying circumstances, full political capability cannot be a legitimate condition for founding a state.¹⁰⁴

Earlier in the month, Ayman al-Zawahiri had also welcomed "the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq," appealing to "all my mujahidin brethren in Iraq to join this blessed caravan." Zawahiri was apparently still hopeful that the new statelet could ultimately become the long-awaited caliphate. He urged "the Islamic community altogether to support this fledgling, nascent state, for it is, God willing, the portal to the liberation of Palestine and to the revival of the caliphal Islamic state."¹⁰⁵

The Islamic State and al-Qaeda appeared to agree that the affiliate known as al-Qaeda in Iraq no longer existed. Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi proclaimed in

late 2007: "[al-Qaeda in Iraq] was officially dissolved in favor of the Islamic State."¹⁰⁶ Around the same time Ayman al-Zawahiri remarked that "there is nothing in Iraq today called al-Qaeda. Rather the group al-Qaeda in Iraq has merged with other jihadi groups into the Islamic State of Iraq, may God protect it, which is a legitimate emirate."¹⁰⁷ Yet the agreement seemed to end there.

In private, relations between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State were fraught. Poor communication represented a problem, as it had during the Zarqawi era. The al-Qaeda leadership had repeatedly chided Zarqawi's branch for its failure to communicate. In a December 2005 letter to Zarqawi, 'Atiyyat Allah al-Libi remarked that there was practically no coordination between the leadership and its Iraqi branch, referring to "current disruption and loss of communication." He gave Zarqawi a direct "order" to prioritize dispatching messengers to meet with al-Qaeda's leaders. He added that preparing messengers was far more important than preparing "brothers for certain operations like the recent Amman hotels [operation]," referring to a series of bomb attacks on hotels in the Jordanian capital in November.¹⁰⁸

Relations did not improve with the announcement of the Islamic State. In March 2008 Zawahiri wrote to Abu Hamza al-Muhajir requesting "comprehensive and detailed reports on your current conditions," noting that this request had been made repeatedly.¹⁰⁹ He attached to his letter an older one from Sayf al-'Adl, dated November 2007, which likewise urged Abu Hamza not to "forget to communicate, for we are awaiting your news and reports about your conditions...All of our previous requests...we are still awaiting [responses to] them."¹¹⁰

104. Usāma ibn Lādīn, "Al-Sabīl li-ihbāt al-mu'āmarāt," Mu'assasat al-Sahāb, December 2007. Transcript: www.tawhed.ws/dl/?i=24041002.

105. Ayman al-Zawāhirī, "Ḥaqā'iq al-ṣirā' bayn al-Islām wa'l-kufr," Mu'assasat al-Sahāb, December 2007. Transcript: <http://www.tawhed.ws/r/?i=kdmwdhq2>.

106. Abū 'Umar al-Baghdādī, "Fa-ammā 'l-zabad fa-yadhab jufā'an."

107. Ayman al-Zawāhirī, "Liqa' al-Sahāb al-rābi' ma' al-shaykh Ayman al-Zawāhirī," Mu'assasat al-Sahāb, November/December 2007. Transcript: <https://nokbah.com/-w3/?p=110>.

108. 'Atiyyat Allāh al-Libī, [Letter,] 3.

109. Ayman al-Zawāhirī, [Letter to Abū Ḥamza al-Muhājir,] March 10, 2008, http://iraqlogger.powweb.com/downloads/aqi_leadership_letters_sept_08.pdf, 1. This letter, among others, was obtained by Multinational Forces-Iraq on 24 April 2008 and made available to the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. See Bill Roggio, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, and Tony Badran, "Intercepted Letters from al-Qaeda Leaders Shed Light on State of Network in Iraq," *The Long War Journal*, 12 September 2008, <http://www.defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/intercepted-letters-from-al-qaeda-leaders-shed-light-on-state-of-network-in/#sthash.0xkusSCN.dpuf>.

110. Sayf al-'Adl, [Letter to Abū Ḥamza al-Muhājir,] 26 January 2008, 2. Link in note 109.

When news finally did reach the al-Qaeda leadership, they were appalled by the state of affairs in Iraq. The Islamic State's founding had been a miserable failure. In late April 2007 the Islamic State's senior jurist, a Saudi named Abu Sulayman al-'Utaybi, drafted a letter to al-Qaeda's leaders alerting them to the discouraging situation. Not only was the Islamic State losing territory in its supposed strongholds, such as Ramadi, but its leaders were misrepresenting reality. Abu Hamza's oft-repeated claim to have won the support of numerous Sunni Arab tribal shaykhs was simply untrue. The Islamic State's media arm was releasing videos of old operations as if they were new. The group was in disarray. The announcement of the state had been rushed and the "commander of the faithful," Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi, had been chosen haphazardly.¹¹¹ When al-Qaeda's leaders received the letter, apparently near the end of the year, they were understandably worried. They requested a detailed response from Abu Hamza.¹¹²

Meanwhile, in spring 2007, one of al-Qaeda's senior religious scholars, the Palestinian Abu 'l-Walid al-Ansari, dispatched a harsh letter to Baghdadi and Abu Hamza criticizing their failure to consult al-Qaeda before declaring their state.¹¹³ Ansari was against the idea of dissolving the state, as such a move would be to the advantage of "the enemies," but he clearly regretted its founding.¹¹⁴ He mentioned that "many" in al-Qaeda had "questions and concerns" about the newly announced Islamic State and that it had been a cause of anxiety and fear.¹¹⁵ Ansari asked the new emirate's leaders for a report on the circumstances leading up to their decision.¹¹⁶ This may have been provided by Abu Hamza, who, according to Zawahiri, wrote al-Qaeda a letter "justifying the establishment of the state."¹¹⁷

The exact nature of the relationship between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State was not revealed to the public at this time, and continues to be debated. In 2014 Zawahiri would claim that Abu Hamza al-Muhajir had conveyed in secret the Islamic State's "loyalty" (*wala'*) to the al-Qaeda leadership.¹¹⁸ It appears, however, that the group did not give bay'a, the oath of fealty, to al-Qaeda's leader, the standard practice for al-Qaeda affiliates.

In any event, the Islamic State's secret "loyalty" to al-Qaeda apparently counted for little. By 2011 al-Qaeda leaders were still complaining that the Islamic State paid them little heed. The American al-Qaeda spokesman Adam Gadahn even advised Osama Bin Laden "to sever [al-Qaeda's] organizational ties" with the Islamic State of Iraq, as it amounted to an "imaginary state" whose controversial acts of extreme violence were tarnishing al-Qaeda's name. Al-Qaeda had not ordered or advised the Islamic State's behavior; in any case, the "ties" between the two groups had been "effectively cut for a number of years," and the state of affairs ought to be made official.¹¹⁹

New, More Effective Leadership

By the time that Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir were killed in a joint raid by U.S. and Iraqi forces near Tikrit on April 18, 2010, the Islamic State had lost any semblance of statehood. The year before his death, Abu Hamza was combatting charges that his state was a "paper state."¹²⁰ His wife, according to testimony given the Iraqi police, had once asked him: "Where is the Islamic State of Iraq that you're talking about? We're living in the desert!"¹²¹

111. Abū Sulaymān al-'Utaybī, "Risālat al-shaykh Abī Sulaymān al-'Utaybī lil-qiyāda fī Khurāsān," April 28, 2007, <http://justpaste.it/do3r>. The letter appeared online on 23 November 2013. I am grateful to Will McCants for bringing it to my attention.

112. Ayman al-Zawāhirī, [Letter to Abū Ḥamza al-Muhājir,] 25 January 2008, 3, and [Letter to Abū 'Umar al-Baghdādī,] March 6, 2008, 6. Link in note 109.

113. Abū 'l-Walīd al-Anṣārī, "Risālat naṣīḥa li-Abī 'Umar al-Baghdādī min al-Shaykh Abī 'l-Walīd al-Anṣārī," Nukhbat al-Fikr, 2014, <https://archive.org/download/Abu.al.Walid.al.Ansari.New/naseha.pdf>. The letter appeared online on 22 October 2014. The context suggests it was written in March or April 2007. On Anṣārī see Kévin Jackson, "Al-Qaeda's Top Scholar," *Jihadica*, 25 September 2014, <http://www.jihadica.com/al-qaedas-top-scholar/>.

114. Anṣārī, "Risālat naṣīḥa," 14.

115. *Ibid.*, 12.

116. *Ibid.*, 13.

117. Zawāhirī, "Shahāda," 1.

118. *Ibid.*

119. Ghadan, [Letter,] 8.

120. Muhājir, "al-Liqā' al-ṣawtī al-awwal ma' al-shaykh Abī Ḥamza al-Muhājir."

121. Ṣādiq al-'Irāqī, "Zawjat Abū Ayyūb al-Maṣrī: waṣalnā Baghdād qabl suqūṭ nīẓam Ṣaddām, wa-zawjī ghāmiḍ wa-mutashaddid," al-Riyāq, <http://www.alriyadh.com/520823>.

In illustration of the group's depreciating political relevance, the Pentagon in February 2008 reduced the bounty on Abu Hamza from \$5 million to \$100,000. "The current assessment, based on a number of factors, shows that he is not as an effective leader of al Qaeda in Iraq [i.e., the Islamic State of Iraq] as he was last year," said a Pentagon spokesman.¹²² Meanwhile, Baghdadi's influence appeared so marginal that U.S. officials in 2007 were led to believe he was an actor playing a fictional character.¹²³ While this turned out not to be true, rumors of Baghdadi's nonexistence persisted into 2009.¹²⁴

Within a month of their death, the Shura Council of the Islamic State appointed a new emir, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who remains the group's leader.¹²⁵ Like his predecessor, the new Baghdadi claimed descent from Muhammad's tribe of Quraysh and was hailed as the "commander of the faithful." Yet it would be more than two years before he issued an audio address.¹²⁶ In the meantime, the Islamic State's media output declined precipitously. Official statements from the new leadership did not emerge until mid-2011, when an audio address appeared in the name of the Islamic State's new official spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani, a Syrian.¹²⁷ Baghdadi and 'Adnani soon became the two most promi-

nent voices of the group, frequently delivering audio messages.

The new leaders, who speak in exquisite classical Arabic, are far more gifted orators than their predecessors. Reliable information on the identities and backgrounds of the two men has only emerged in the last two years.

According to 'Adnani, Baghdadi's real name is Ibrahim ibn 'Awwad ibn Ibrahim ibn 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Badri, born and raised in Samarra and educated in Baghdad.¹²⁸ According to INTERPOL, he was born in 1971.¹²⁹ The only biography of Baghdadi, written by Turki al-Bin'ali, appeared in August 2013.¹³⁰ In addition to providing Baghdadi's lineage all the way back to the Prophet Muhammad, the biography asserts that Baghdadi received a doctorate in Islamic jurisprudence from the Islamic University in Baghdad, has written a book on Qur'anic recitation, and has worked as a preacher in various Iraqi mosques.¹³¹ In 2003 he formed a jihadi group, and in 2006 joined the Islamic State of Iraq as a judge and member of its Shari'a councils.¹³² Baghdadi was detained by U.S. forces between February and December 2004.¹³³

According to the State Department, 'Adnani's real name is Tah Subhi Falaha, born in 1977 near

122. "Reward for Wanted Terrorist Drops," *CNN*, 13 May 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/05/13/pentagon.masri.value/>.

123. Dean Yates, "Senior Qaeda Figure in Iraq a Myth: U.S. Military," *Reuters*, 18 July 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/07/18/us-iraq-qaeda-idUSL1820065720070718>.

124. Campbell Robertson, "Terrorist or Mythic Symbol: A Tale of Iraqi Politics," *The New York Times*, 30 May 2009.

125. "Bayān min Majlis Shūrā Dawlat al-'Irāq al-Islāmiyya," Markaz al-Fajr lil-'Ilām, 16 May 2010, <https://shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=62187>.

126. Baghdadi, "Wa-ya'bā 'llāh illā an yutimm nūrahu." The only previous communication from Baghdadi was a written eulogy for Osama Bin Laden released 9 May 2011. See "Bayān 'an istishhād al-shaykh al-mujāhid Usāma ibn Lādin," Markaz al-Fajr lil-'Ilām, 9 May 2011, <https://shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=109019>.

127. Abū Muḥammad al-'Adnānī, "Inna Dawlat al-Islām bāqiya," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 7 August 2011. Transcript: <https://archive.org/download/nokbah565/dawlat.pdf>.

128. Abū Muḥammad al-'Adnānī, "Hādha wa'd Allāh," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 29 June 2014. Transcript: <http://www.gulfup.com/?3D7MKR>.

129. "Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai," *INTERPOL*, updated 3 June 2014, <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQI2991E.shtml>.

130. Turkī al-Bin'ālī, *Mudd al-ayādī li-bay'at al-Baghdādī*, Minbar al-Tawhīd wa'l-Jihād, 5 August 2013, <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=05081301>. The original has been deleted but is still available at <http://jihadology.net/2013/08/05/minbar-at-taw%E1%B8%A5id-wa-l-jihad-presents-a-new-article-from-abu-hamam-bakr-bin-abd-al-aziz-al-athari-extend-our-hands-in-bayat-to-al-baghdadi/>. For a detailed analysis of this document see Joas Wagemakers, "Al-Qaida Advises the Arab Spring: The Case for al-Baghdadi," *Jihadica*, September 21, 2013, <http://www.jihadica.com/al-qaida-advises-the-arab-spring-the-case-for-al-baghdadi/>.

131. Bin'ali, *Mudd al-ayādī*, 2–4.

132. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

133. Aaron Zelin, "Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: Islamic State's Driving Force," *BBC*, 30 July 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28560449>.

Aleppo in northern Syria.¹³⁴ Bin‘ali’s biography of ‘Adnani states that ‘Adnani and a group of Syrian jihadis gave *bay‘a* to Zarqawi before the U.S. occupation of Iraq. In 2003, ‘Adnani left for Iraq to support the jihadi uprising, his career being interrupted by a nearly six-year period of incarceration in a U.S. detention facility.¹³⁵ ‘Adnani possesses scholarly proclivities as well, having taught theology and law in jihadi training camps.¹³⁶

The Comeback

In late January 2012, the Islamic State appeared on the verge of a comeback.¹³⁷ The group released a number of speeches proclaiming its imminent “return,” adding that it was winning new supporters daily.¹³⁸ “The [Islamic] State will soon return, God willing, to all the areas that have been taken from it,” ‘Adnani said in February.¹³⁹ Baghdadi went a step further, announcing in July 2012 that the Islamic State “is returning anew, advancing to take control of the ground that it had and more... The Islamic State does not recognize synthetic borders, nor any citizenship besides Islam.”¹⁴⁰ Drawing on mounting Sunni resentment toward the sectarian policies of Shi’ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, the speeches dwelled on Sunni grievances and the supposed Shi’ite expansionist plot. Violence in Iraq indeed increased dramatically in 2012 with the Islamic State’s resurgence.¹⁴¹

Meanwhile, in late 2011 Baghdadi had sent a contingent of fighters to Syria to form a jihadi group called Jabhat al-Nusra (“the Salvation Front”), which quickly grew in popularity as the leading Sunni rebel militant group in the Syrian civil war.¹⁴² At the time, however, neither Jabhat al-Nusra nor the Islamic State acknowledged their relationship.

134. “US adds IS Spokesman, al-Nusra Front Rebel to Terrorist List,” *AFP*, 18 August 2014, <http://www.afp.com/en/node/273919/>.

135. Bin‘ali, *al-Lafz al-sānī fi tarjamat al-‘Adnānī*, 9–10.

136. *Ibid.*, 7.

137. While the public push for the comeback did not start till 2012, its groundwork was being laid as early as 2010. See Lister, *Profiling the Islamic State*, 10–11.

138. See the three speeches of Abū Muḥammad al-‘Adnānī, “al-Ān al-ān jā‘a ‘l-qitāl,” Mu‘assasat al-Furqān, 25 January 2012 (transcript: <https://archive.org/download/N5bh88/qetal.pdf>), “al-‘Irāq al-‘Irāq yā ahl al-sunna,” and “Innamā a‘izukum bi-wāḥida,” and the one from Abū ‘Umar al-Baghdādī, “Wa-ya‘bā ‘llāh illā an yutimm nūrahu.”

139. ‘Adnānī, “al-‘Irāq al-‘Irāq yā ahl al-sunna.”

140. Baghdādī, “Wa-ya‘bā ‘llāh illā an yutimm nūrahu.”

141. “Still Bloody,” *The Economist*, 5 January 2013.

142. Abū Muḥammad al-Jawlānī, “al-‘Ilān ‘an Jabhat al-Nuṣra,” Minbar al-Tawḥīd wa‘l-Jihād, 2012, www.tawhed.ws/dl/?i=0308141g.

The State of Disunity (2013–2014)

“The Islamic State was a mere joke. If anyone spoke of the Islamic Emirate all would give him looks of wonder and bewilderment, and perhaps follow with laughs of mockery and derision. An Islamic emirate in the 21st century!? But the peculiar joke transformed—with the arrival of the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham—into an explosive volcano, whose lava and rock all fear will get hold of them...a great ‘tsunami’ that will destroy everything”

– ‘Abdallah ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Shinqiti, “The Tsunami of the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham,” January 1, 2014¹⁴³

During the period between April 9, 2013 and July 29, 2014 the Islamic State—previously respected by few—sought to project its sovereignty in Syria. Jihadis were ecstatic at the news of the Islamic State’s expansion; jihadism, however, was soon plagued by infighting, both on the battlefield and in the ideological realm. The ideological fissures that continue to divide Islamic State and al-Qaeda supporters emerged during this period.

Defying al-Qaeda

On April 9, 2013, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi released an audio statement announcing the Islamic State’s expansion to Sham, the Arabic word for greater Syria.¹⁴⁴ Jabhat al-Nusra, he revealed, was “an extension of the Islamic State of Iraq.” Its emir, Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, was one of the Islamic State’s “soldiers,” who had been sent to Syria with a number of colleagues on a secret mission. The names “the Islamic State of Iraq” and “Jabhat al-Nusra” were hereby void, he said, and the Islamic State of Iraq was retitled “the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham.” The “banner” of the new group would ultimately become “the banner of the caliphate, God willing.” After six

and a half years of contraction, the Islamic State was back on the path of expansion.

Jawlani was not pleased, and the very next day he issued an audio statement of his own. Refusing to disband his group, he said that “the banner of the Front [i.e., Jabhat al-Nusra] will remain as it is with no changes.” Jawlani “reaffirmed” the group’s *bay’a* to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Jabhat al-Nusra became an official al-Qaeda affiliate.¹⁴⁵ As Jawlani saw it, Zawahiri was his boss, not Baghdadi.¹⁴⁶

Despite Jawlani’s objection, the Islamic State moved to Syria anyway, drawing thousands of Jabhat al-Nusra fighters into its ranks. Neither side tolerated the other’s presence in Syria. In late May Zawahiri himself stepped into the fray to “decide the case,” as he put it. In a written directive leaked to Al Jazeera in June 2013, he annulled the Islamic State’s incorporation of Syria, ordering the groups to remain separate entities observing separate jurisdictions—Iraq and Syria respectively.¹⁴⁷ Yet from Baghdadi’s perspective, Zawahiri was not his boss. As “the commander of the faithful,” he was not going to be told what to do.

143. ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Shinqīṭī, *Tsūnāmī ‘l-Dawla al-Islāmiyya fī ‘l-‘Irāq wa‘l-Shām*, Mu’assasat al-Ghurabā’, 1 January 2014, 3, <http://www.gulfup.com/?EsyUJG>. The author, a pseudonymous jihadi scholar from Mauritania, previously supported the Islamic State but now sides with al-Qaeda. See his *al-Khilāfa laysat hiya ‘l-khilāf*, Minbar al-Tawhīd wa‘l-Jihād, 10 August 2014, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=16081402>.

144. Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, “Wa-bashshir al-mu‘minīn.”

145. Abū Muḥammad al-Jawlānī, “Kalima ṣawtiyya lil-fātiḥ Abī Muḥammad al-Jawlānī,” Mu’assasat al-Manāra al-Bayḍā’, 10 April 2013. Transcript: <http://occident2.blogspot.com/2013/04/text-of-jabhat-al-nusras-amir-abu.html>.

146. Jawlānī’s claim to be “reaffirming” his *bay’a* to Zawahiri suggests the presence of some confusion in the Islamic State over the nature of its relationship with al-Qaeda.

147. Ayman al-Zawahiri, [Letter to Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī and Abū Muḥammad al-Jawlānī,] 23 May 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.net/file/Get/64c64867-0eb8-4368-a1fd-13c7afbc9aa3>.

On June 15, Baghdadi rebutted Zawahiri, declaring that “the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham will endure, so long as we have a vein that pulses and an eye that bats.”¹⁴⁸ Signaling its original expansionist nature, he added that “[the Islamic State] will not retreat from any spot of land to which it has expanded, and it will not diminish after enlarging.” Baghdadi declared Zawahiri’s directive unacceptable on account of “numerous legal and methodological objections.” He added that the Islamic State’s decision to defy al-Qaeda was made in consultation with the Islamic State’s Shura Council and Shari’a Committee.

In a follow-up audio message to Baghdadi’s, Adnani denounced Zawahiri’s edict more aggressively.¹⁴⁹ “No one,” he thundered, “will stop us from aiding our brethren in Syria! No one will stop us from fighting the ‘Alawis¹⁵⁰ and waging jihad in Syria! No one will stop us from remaining in Syria! Iraq and Syria will remain one theater, one front, one command!” He elaborated seven “objections” to Zawahiri’s edict: it was an order to commit a sin; it affirmed the Sykes-Picot division of the Middle East; it validated those “disobedient rebels” in the Jabhat al-Nusra leadership; it set a precedent for rebellion; it was made without properly consulting the parties to the dispute; it gratified the enemies of the mujahidin; and it senselessly demanded the withdrawal of mujahidin from Syria.

The case for *Bay’a* to Baghdadi

Jihadi ideologues were divided over which side to support. One group dominated by younger jihadis threw its weight behind Baghdadi and the Islamic State, while another group of mainly se-

nior jihadis opposed the Islamic State’s outright defiance of al-Qaeda.

The debate among jihadi scholars centered on *bay’a*. Described above as an oath of fealty, *bay’a* is more accurately the traditional contract of rule in Islamic law between commander and commanded.¹⁵¹ In 2006 the Islamic State claimed that Iraqi Sunnis refusing to give its leader *bay’a* were in a state of “sin.” Those supporting the Islamic State now argued that Muslim groups fighting in Syria were obligated to give *bay’a* to Baghdadi.

In 2013 a number of jihadi scholars made this case in online treatises.¹⁵² The first, in June, came from a Tunisian named Abu Ja’far al-Hattab, formerly a Shari’a Council member of the jihadi group Ansar al-Shari’a in Tunisia and now rumored to be an official in the Islamic State.¹⁵³ Hattab identified two types of *bay’a* in Islamic law: “restricted” and “unrestricted.”¹⁵⁴ A restricted *bay’a* is given to the leader of a militant group, such as Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi as head of al-Qaeda in Iraq; its terms are limited, obligating obedience only in matters of jihad. An unrestricted *bay’a* is given to the head of a political community; its terms are unlimited, obligating obedience in all matters. According to Hattab, the Islamic State’s *bay’a* was unrestricted.¹⁵⁵ The recipient of an unrestricted *bay’a* is traditionally expected to meet certain qualifications—required of the caliph—including being Muslim, male, free, a descendant of Quraysh, just, sound of mind, and learned. Hattab assured that Baghdadi possesses all these qualities.¹⁵⁶

Turki al-Bin’ali’s biography of Baghdadi, published on the website of Abu Muhammad al-

148. Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, “Bāqiya fī ‘l-‘Irāq wa’-l-Shām,” Mu’assasat al-Furqān, 15 June 2013. Transcript: <http://alplatformmedia.com/vb/showthread.php?t=24134>.

149. Abū Muḥammad al-‘Adnānī, “Fa-dharhum wa-mā yaftarūn,” Mu’assasat al-Furqān, 19 June 2013. Transcript: <http://alplatformmedia.com/vb/showthread.php?t=24303>.

150. The Alawites are the largest Shi’ite sect in Syria and dominate Syrian politics.

151. Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), 58–59.

152. Three were most prominent: Abū Ja’far al-Ḥaṭṭāb, *Bay’at al-amṣār lil-imām al-mukhtār*, Mu’assasat al-Bayāriq, 26 June 2013, <https://archive.org/download/Bayaatu-lamsar/Bayaatu-lamsar.pdf>; Bin’alī, *Mudd al-ayādī li-bay’at al-Baghdādī*; and Abū ‘l-Ḥasan al-Azdī, *Mūjibāt al-inḍimām lil-Dawla al-Islāmiyya fī ‘l-‘Irāq wa’-l-Shām*, Mu’assasat al-Mas’ada, 10 August 2013, <https://archive.org/download/OZOOO67/Xu3F1.pdf>.

153. On this rumor see the Tweet from @Kosari_ from 20 February 2014, https://twitter.com/Kosari_/status/436571875813384193.

154. Ḥaṭṭāb, *Bay’at al-amṣār*, 10–19.

155. *Ibid.*, 27.

156. *Ibid.*, 27–28.

Maqdisi in August 2013, made similar arguments. Titled “Extend [Your] Hands to Give Bay‘a to Baghdadi,” it emphasized Baghdadi’s eminent qualifications to be leader. Significantly, Bin‘ali anticipated the Islamic State’s caliphate declaration in no uncertain terms, stating: “We ask God for the day to come when we will see our shaykh seated upon the throne of the caliphate.”¹⁵⁷

The Case Against *Bay‘a* to Baghdadi

In November 2013, the two senior jihadi ideologues Maqdisi and Abu Qatada al-Filastini issued written statements against giving *bay‘a* to Baghdadi in Syria.¹⁵⁸

Abu Qatada’s short work took the form of an open letter to the mujahidin in Syria, advising them as a veteran jihadi and witness to countless battlefield gains squandered by infighting. Abu Qatada advised fighters to avoid the mistakes of “previous experiences,” warning that the current “disunity and disputation” among Syrian mujahidin “terrify and horrify every admirer.”¹⁵⁹ He blamed such divisions on jihadi leaders enamored of power, and no doubt had Baghdadi foremost in mind. Challenging Baghdadi’s title of “commander of the faithful,” Abu Qatada averred: “There exists no emir firmly established such that he should be treated as the caliph—or with similar names and titles.” Jihadi groups are fighting to achieve strength in order to establish the Islamic state, but no organization is yet worthy of that name. The Islamic State was not a real “state” but merely a “battlefield command” like other jihadi groups. In other words, the Islamic State’s was only a restricted *bay‘a*. It was an error for mujahidin to fight for their organization “as if it is an end in itself and not a means [to an end].”¹⁶⁰

Abu Qatada criticized fellow jihadi scholars promoting *bay‘a* to Baghdadi in Syria. Their fatwas, he said, reflect “naïveté and childishness,” and their authors are “elementary students” or “pretenders to religious knowledge.” By categorically supporting one side in Syria they were making unity and reconciliation impossible.¹⁶¹

Maqdisi’s critique, a short memorandum to certain mujahidin in Syria soliciting his advice, touched on the same themes in a more measured tone. Maqdisi likewise denied the Islamic State’s claim to statehood or proto-caliphal status, and stressed “the clear difference between battlefield commands...and the politically capable state.”¹⁶² The path to proper Islamic statehood ought to follow certain “stages,” he said, that lead to “political capability.” Skipping any of these stages—i.e., declaring a state prematurely—was dangerous as it would foment civil war.¹⁶³ Maqdisi advised “our brothers in Jabhat al-Nusra and our brothers in the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham” to fight “under one banner and under one emir.” That emir, however, was not Baghdadi. In an explicit rejection of Baghdadi’s status as emir, he emphasized that Syria’s jihadi leadership ought to be of Syrian origin, the better to appeal to the Syrian people.¹⁶⁴

Despite Maqdisi and Abu Qatada’s attempts to rein in young, zealous jihadi scholars, the latter remained committed to the Islamic State.

The Scholars Divided

Abu Qatada and Maqdisi drew quick responses from pro-Islamic State jihadi scholars. The Jordanian ‘Umar Mahdi Zaydan (who like the Bahraini Bin‘ali and the Tunisian Hattab now also lives in the Islamic State)¹⁶⁵ rejected Abu Qatada’s charge

157. Bin‘ali, *Mudd al-ayādī*, 5.

158. Abū Muḥammad al-Maqdisī, “Laysa ka-man tarḍā bi-shaḥq ibnihā,” *Minbar al-Tawḥīd wa’l-Jihād*, 5 November 2013, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=17111301>, and Abū Qatāda al-Filastīnī, “Risāla li-ahl al-jihād bi’l-Shām,” November 1, 2013, <http://www.tawhed.ws/dl?i=02111303>.

159. Filastīnī, “Risāla,” 3.

160. *Ibid.*, 5.

161. *Ibid.*, 4.

162. Maqdisī, “Laysa ka-man tarḍā,” 3.

163. *Ibid.*, 2.

164. *Ibid.*, 1-2.

165. “Wuṣūl ‘Umar Mahdī min al-Urdunn li-‘Dā’ish’ mubāyī’an al-Baghdādī,” *Akhbār al-Urdunn*, October 16, 2014, <http://www.jordanews.com/jordan/29929.html>.

that pro-Islamic State jihadis were “childish” for promoting bay‘a to Baghdadi.¹⁶⁶ After naming 12 jihadi ideologues and their works supporting the Islamic State, Zaydan asked, “Are all of these naïve... and childish?”

Another response came from a member of the Shari‘a Council on Maqdisi’s website, the anonymous Mauritanian scholar Abu ‘l-Mundhir al-Shinqiti. In a series of essays dated between September and January, Shinqiti took aim at the argument—made by Abu Qatada and Maqdisi—that the Islamic State was no state but rather merely a battlefield command.¹⁶⁷ On the contrary, he said, it was unmistakably the “unrestricted imamate.” In other words, it was possessed of an unrestricted bay‘a. How could it not be when those pledging bay‘a called it a “state”?¹⁶⁸

The battle lines between the two sides were thus drawn. Al-Qaeda supporters maintained that there was nothing special about the Islamic State as a jihadi group: it was a battlefield command with a restricted bay‘a. Islamic State supporters countered that it was indeed special: it was a state with an unrestricted bay‘a, thus giving it the potential to expand and conquer more territory. It was, as Bin‘ali had suggested, the future caliphate.

The Reconciliation “Initiatives”

These debates held practical implications on the ground in Syria. The Islamic State not only conceived of itself as the “unrestricted imamate” with an “unrestricted bay‘a,” it acted as such. With statehood there came a system of courts claiming exclu-

sive jurisdiction, and as the Islamic State attempted to project its sovereignty in Syria it angered rival Sunni Muslim militant groups. In early January 2014 their anger developed into a military offensive against the Islamic State.

The crisis was precipitated by an escalating dispute in the town of Maskana on the eastern outskirts of Aleppo. Affiliates there of the Islamic Front, a Syrian Islamist umbrella organization, had clashed with the Islamic State, resulting in numerous casualties and prisoners on each side. The Islamic Front called for “an independent Shari‘a court” to mediate the conflict, but the Islamic State would accept nothing of the sort.¹⁶⁹ The Islamic Front reiterated its demand after one of its senior commanders was tortured and killed in Maskana by the Islamic State: “We warn the Islamic State organization not to follow in its regular manner by standing in the way of...an independent court.”¹⁷⁰

Pro-Islamic State scholars opposed arbitration in an impartial court. Bin‘ali wrote online that such third-party mediation would “infringe on the right of the Muslim sovereign and his state.”¹⁷¹ The Islamic State’s courts were the only courts that counted.

The question whether the Islamic State ought to accept arbitration, in Maskana and elsewhere, became a point of contention between jihadis. Pro-al-Qaeda jihadis favored arbitration. Over the course of January, a number of important jihadi leaders and scholars presented reconciliation “initiatives” based on the idea of an independent court. These came from Jabhat al-Nusra leader Jawlani,¹⁷² the Eryp-

166. ‘Umar Mahdī Zaydān, “al-Naqd li-qawl man ja‘ala ‘l-khilāfa al-Islāmiyya min dīn al-rafd,” November 6, 2013, <http://www.gulfup.com/?YQHBT1>.

167. Abū ‘l-Mundhir al-Shinqīṭī, *Matā yafqahūn ma’nā ‘l-tā‘a?*, Mu’assasat al-Ghurabā’, 4 September 2013, <http://www.gulfup.com/?xHA1X4>; *Raf’ al-malām ‘an junūd Dawlat al-Islām*, Mu’assasat al-Ghurabā’, 3 December 2013, <http://www.gulfup.com/?YiLPpd>; *Fuṣūl fī ‘l-imāma wa‘l-bay‘a*, Minbar al-Tawḥīd wa‘l-Jihād, 10 December 2013, <http://www.gulfup.com/?G3IHwf>; and *Fatāwā bilā ṭayyār*, Mu’assasat al-Ghurabā’, 8 January 2014, [https://archive.org/download/fatawa.bila.tyar.pdf](https://archive.org/download/fatawa.bila.tyar/fatawa.bila.tyar.pdf).

168. Shinqīṭī, *Fatāwā bilā ṭayyār*, 4.

169. “Al-Jabha al-Islāmiyya taṣdur bayānan bi-sha’n maqṭal al-duktūr Abū Rayyān wa-Jamā‘at al-Dawla tuṭālib Aḥrār al-Shām bi-munāzara ‘alāniyya fī awwal bayān lahā,” *Ḥalab Niyūz*, 2 January 2014, <http://halabnews.com/news/45625>.

170. Ibid.

171. Turkī al-Bin‘alī, *Khaṭṭ al-midād fī ‘l-radd ‘alā al-duktūr Iyād*, December 2013, 15, <https://archive.org/download/al-medad/i4SX1.pdf>.

172. Abū Muḥammad al-Jawlānī, “Allāh Allāh fī sāḥat al-Shām,” Mu’assasat al-Manāra al-Bayḍā’, 7 January 2014. Transcript: <https://nokbah.com/-w3/?p=4309>.

tians Hani al-Siba'i and Tariq 'Abd al-Halim,¹⁷³ al-Qaeda leader Zawahiri,¹⁷⁴ and the Saudi 'Abdallah al-Muhaysini.¹⁷⁵ The initiatives all called for an independent tribunal, an idea that the Islamic State could not accept. In an audio message on January 19, Baghdadi proposed a counter-initiative: an unconditional ceasefire.¹⁷⁶ He explained that his state was only fighting in self-defense, and so anyone who desisted from fighting it would not be harmed.

Meanwhile, the pro-al-Qaeda Maqdisi was working on a more elaborate initiative to bridge the divide between the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra. Maqdisi proposed that each group proffer its own judge; a third judge, selected by him, would be available if necessary.¹⁷⁷ Bin'ali was Maqdisi's intermediary with the Islamic State leadership. The plan, however, went nowhere. In his correspondence with Maqdisi, Bin'ali disabused his onetime teacher of the feasibility of these initiatives. "The State is the State," he said. "Have you ever heard of the Prophet's state, or the Rightly-Guided Caliphs' state, or the Umayyad State, or the Abbasid State submitting to the judgment of an independent person?... We are a state, so how could you compel us to submit to the judgment of an independent court?... Don't you know that an independent court means a different state?"¹⁷⁸

The Break with al-Qaeda

On February 2, 2014, al-Qaeda issued a statement officially dissociating itself from the Islamic State.¹⁷⁹ The statement asserted that al-Qaeda was "not responsible for [the Islamic State's] actions,"

and that no organizational ties existed. The statement bracketed the Islamic State's name with quotes and referred to it as a "group," clearly dismissing its statehood claim.

Tensions between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State worsened in mid-2014 when Zawahiri publically clarified the historical relationship between the two groups. The Islamic State was no doubt originally a "branch" of al-Qaeda, he said.¹⁸⁰ To make his case Zawahiri quoted previous correspondence in which Islamic State officials addressed the al-Qaeda leadership as "our commanders" and "our leaders."¹⁸¹ In one of these statements from 2010, the Islamic State had asked al-Qaeda when it should "renew its bay'a" to the group.¹⁸²

'Adnani soon after countered Zawahiri's claims in a heated audio message.¹⁸³ "The [Islamic] State is no subservient branch of al-Qaeda, nor was it ever before," he stated. He did not deny that Zawahiri's quoted correspondence was genuine, but he claimed that deferential forms of address were used only out of respect. Furthermore, he contended, the Islamic State had never given al-Qaeda bay'a, and Zawahiri was unable to prove that it had.

The true nature of the groups' relationship, according to 'Adnani, was that the Islamic State acted independently within Iraq while deferring to al-Qaeda's leadership beyond. Thus the Islamic State routinely flouted al-Qaeda's orders in Iraq, said 'Adnani, never following its "frequent requests to withhold from targeting the Shi'a masses." Outside Iraq, however, the Islamic State acceded to al-Qaeda's

173. Hānī al-Sibā'ī and Tāriq 'Abd al-Halīm, *Da'wa lil-ṣulḥ wa'l-safḥ bayn al-mujāhidīn fi 'l-Shām*, 21 January 2014, <http://www.almaqreze.net/ar/news.php?readmore=2348>.

174. Ayman al-Zawāhirī, "Nidā' 'ājil li-ahlinā fi 'l-Shām," Mu'assasat al-Sahāb, 22 January 2014. Transcript: <http://justpaste.it/e6p2>.

175. 'Abdallāh ibn Muḥammad al-Muḥaysinī, *Mubādarat al-umma*, 25 January 2014, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=25011403>.

176. Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, "Wa'llāh ya'lam wa-antum lā ta'lāmūn," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 19 January 2014. Transcript: <http://www.gulfup.com/?cjuayYo>.

177. Abū Muḥammad al-Maqdisī, *FT bayān ḥāl "al-Dawla al-Islāmiyya fi 'l-'Irāq wa'l-Shām" wa'l-mawqif al-wājib tujāhahā*, Minbar al-Tawḥīd wa'l-Jihād, [May 26,] 2014, <http://www.tawhed.ws/dl?i=260514018>. In the correspondence quoted here, Maqdisī refers to Bin'ali as the Islamic State's "vaunted Sharī'a official" (*al-sharī'a al-mubarrāz*). In his response to Maqdisī, Bin'ali identifies himself as the person in question. See Bin'ali, *Shaykhī 'l-Asbaq*, 13.

178. Quoted in Maqdisī, *FT bayān ḥāl*, 11-12.

179. "Bayān bi-sha'n 'alāqat Jamā'at Qā'idat al-Jihād bi-Jamā'at 'al-Dawla al-Islāmiyya fi 'l-'Irāq wa'l-Shām."

180. Zawahiri, "Shahāda," 1.

181. *Ibid.*, 3.

182. *Ibid.*, 4.

183. Abū Muḥammad al-'Adnānī, "'Udhran amīr al-Qā'ida," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 11 May 2014. Transcript: <http://justpaste.it/othran>.

For more on this statement see William McCants, "State of Confusion," from which several of my conclusions are drawn.

demands, not engaging, for example, in operations against Iran.

Jihadism Divided

The controversy over the Islamic State's alleged *bay'a* to al-Qaeda has formed a key issue in the ongoing jihadi ideological debate. Pro-al-Qaeda jihadis have supported Zawahiri's claim, while pro-Islamic State jihadis have followed 'Adnani in disputing it. The point is crucial, for if the Islamic State was indeed merely a branch of al-Qaeda, its refusal to follow Zawahiri's order to retreat to Iraq in May 2013 represented an act of insubordination. Without *bay'a*, the Islamic State was under no obligation to respect the order.

As the debate intensified in early 2014, pro-al-Qaeda jihadis began emphasizing the Islamic State's tendency towards extreme violence and *takfir*, the excommunication of fellow Sunni Muslims. Some have even likened them to the Kharijites, a group from the first century of Islam known for its excess in *takfir*.¹⁸⁴ These arguments, however, surfaced only after the reconciliation initiatives had failed.

Neutrality in the ideological conflict between the Islamic State and al-Qaeda has proved impossible. Maqdisi and others would try for months in 2014 to come to some kind of reconciliation with the Islamic State, but by late May 2014 even Maqdisi could hold out no longer. In a statement specifying "the obligatory position" to be adopted toward the group, he accused it of "deviating from the path of Divine Truth, being unjust to the mujahidin, following the road of extremism...refusing arbitration, declining reform, [and] disobeying the commands of its senior leaders and shaykhs."¹⁸⁵

This debate would persist into the next period with the declaration of the caliphate.

184. See, for example, Abū Qatāda al-Filasṭīnī's description of the Islamic State leadership as "the dogs of the inhabitants of hellfire" (*kilāb ahl al-nār*), a synonym for the Kharijites. Filasṭīnī, *Risāla ilā ahl al-jihād wa-muḥibbīhi*, Mu'assasat al-Baṣīra, 28 April 2014, <http://www.gulfup.com/?lJgDs9>.

185. Maqdisī, *FT bayān ḥāl*, 6.

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“I have been appointed to rule over you, though I am not the best among you... If you see that I do right, help me, and if you see that I do wrong, set me right. And obey me so long as I obey God touching you. If I disobey Him, no obedience is owed me from you”

– Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Mosul, July 4, 2014, quoting the accession speech of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (d. 634), first caliph of Sunni Islam¹⁸⁶

In June 2014 the Islamic State again made a surprise move, this time in Iraq. The group swept into western Iraq nearly unimpeded, conquering most of the country’s Sunni territories, including the city of Mosul. On June 29, it finally declared itself the caliphate in a triumphant audio address by Abu Muhammad al-‘Adnani.¹⁸⁷ Henceforward the group was to be known simply as “the Islamic State,” ‘Adnani announced, no longer “the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham.” Its sovereignty was to extend across the entire world, not just Iraq and Syria. Five days later, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi made his first-ever public appearance, delivering a sermon from the pulpit of the great mosque of Mosul. Quoting the accession speech of the first Sunni Muslim caliph, he channeled the memory of the early Islamic caliphate.

The declaration of the caliphate was motivated by the group’s military momentum and takeover of Sunni Iraq, and by the onset of the holy month of Ramadan at the end of June. In his speech ‘Adnani noted that the Islamic State had come “to possess all the constituent elements of the caliphate,” and that Baghdadi—referred to now as Caliph Ibrahim—possessed all the necessary qualifications as caliph.

Pro-Islamic State scholars had increasingly favored such a declaration. Two months earlier,

Bin‘ali had penned an essay arguing that full political capability was not a prerequisite for declaring the caliphate.¹⁸⁸ Maqdisi claims to have remarked upon hearing the title of this work: “The announcement declaring their organization the caliphate must be imminent.”¹⁸⁹

The Ideological Implications of the Caliphate

The formalization of the Islamic State’s status as the renascent caliphate modified the existing ideological debate among jihadis. Previously, the Islamic State’s status was the main matter of dispute; now al-Qaeda’s legitimacy was thrown into doubt.

The newly proclaimed caliphate called upon all Muslims throughout the world to give Baghdadi *bay‘a* as caliph. As ‘Adnani stated, “We inform the Muslims that, with the announcement of the caliphate, it has become obligatory for all Muslims to give *bay‘a* and support to Caliph Ibrahim.”¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, all existing jihadi groups worldwide were expected to accept the Islamic State’s supreme authority: “Void is the legitimacy of all emirates, groups, administrations, and organizations to which his [i.e., Baghdadi’s] authority extends and his army comes.”

186. Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, [Mosul sermon,] 1 July 2014. Transcript: https://archive.org/download/kutba_j/k_j.pdf. Cf. Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd al-‘arīd*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1983f., 4:150. There are other versions of Abū Bakr al-Siddīq’s accession speech, but Baghdādī clearly follows the recension of Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih.

187. ‘Adnānī, “Hādha wa’d Allāh.”

188. Turkī al-Bin‘alī, *al-Qiyāfa fī ‘adam ishtirāṭ al-tamkīn al-kāmil lil-khilāfa*, Mu’assasat al-Ghurabā’, 30 April 2014, <http://justpaste.it/gOjn>.

189. Abū Muḥammad al-Maqdisī, *Hādihā ba’d mā ‘indī wa-laysa kullahu*, Minbar al-Tawḥīd wa’l-Jihād, 1 July 2014, <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=01071401>.

190. ‘Adnānī, “Hādha wa’d Allāh.”

The Islamic State ordered all able Muslims to emigrate to the territory under its control. Baghdadi stated in an audio address a few days after ‘Adnani’s: “O Muslims in all places. Whoso is able to emigrate to the Islamic State, let him emigrate. For emigration to the Abode of Islam is obligatory.”¹⁹¹

Al-Qaeda, in the Islamic State’s view, had become irrelevant to the pursuit of global jihad. Its affiliates were being ordered to dissolve themselves and join the Islamic State.

To Give or Not to Give *Bay‘a*

Their legitimacy now challenged, al-Qaeda’s affiliates found it harder to maintain neutrality in the ongoing conflict between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the North African affiliate based in Algeria, quickly rejected the caliphate declaration in a statement released in mid-July.¹⁹² It reproved the Islamic State for not consulting the al-Qaeda leadership, reaffirmed the group’s *bay‘a* to Ayman al-Zawahiri, and called for reconciliation between the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria. Nonetheless, some members split away to join the Islamic State, forming a new group called “Soldiers of the Caliphate in the Land of Algeria.”¹⁹³

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the Arabian al-Qaeda affiliate based in Yemen, has also experienced infighting over the Islamic State. According to one well-informed analysis from November 2014, “a groundswell of enthusiasm for [the Islamic State] is emerging among the ranks of insurgents in

Yemen.”¹⁹⁴ At least two prominent AQAP-aligned scholars, ‘Abd al-Majid al-Hitari and Ma‘mun Hatim, support the Islamic State’s caliphate claims.

Perhaps frustrated by the meager reception of the caliphate among the affiliates, the Islamic State in late 2014 tried to force their hand. In early November the group orchestrated a series of *bay‘as* issued as audio statements online. These came from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt, Libya, and Algeria; only the Sinai and Algerian pledges, however, were issued by established groups.¹⁹⁵ A week later Baghdadi released an audio address “accepting” the *bay‘as* and declaring the Islamic State to have expanded to those areas.¹⁹⁶

Except in the Sinai, where the “Sinai Province” has issued statements and videos, the intended “provinces” of the Islamic State have been slow to materialize.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, the effort may have the opposite of the intended effect in Yemen, where Ma‘mun Hatim, a known Islamic State supporter, rejected the November Yemeni *bay‘a*. Hatim wrote that AQAP ought to be convinced to give *bay‘a* to Baghdadi as a group.¹⁹⁸ Certain jihadis giving *bay‘a* in Yemen before the time is right, he said, will only divide jihadi ranks during a time that division cannot be afforded. The November *bay‘a* also provoked AQAP’s leadership to reject the Islamic State forcefully, as AQIM had done in July.¹⁹⁹

Al-Qaeda’s Counter-Caliph

The central al-Qaeda leadership reacted to the June 29 caliphate declaration in unforeseen fashion. Rather than immediately denouncing the Islamic

191. Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, “Risāla ilā ‘l-mujāhidīn wa‘l-umma al-Islamiyya fī shahr Ramaān,” Mu‘assasat al-Furqān, 1 July 2014. Transcript: https://archive.org/download/K_R_abubkr/et34.pdf.

192. “‘Amm al-jamā‘a aml al-umma,” Mu‘assasat al-Andalus, 4 July 2014, <http://justpaste.it/g82p>.

193. Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, “Bay‘ah to Baghdadi: Foreign Support for Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State (Part 2),” *Syria Comment*, 27 September 2014, <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/bayah-baghdadi-foreign-support-islamic-state-part-2/>.

194. Saud Al-Sarhan, *A House Divided: AQAP, IS, and Intra-Jihadi Conflict*, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, November 2014, <http://rd.alfaisalmag.com/all-commentaries-pdf/Commentaries-1.pdf>, 4.

195. Links to audio of the *bay‘as* are found at http://minbar-alansar.blogspot.com/2014/11/blog-post_85.html.

196. Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, “Wa-law kariha ‘l-kāfirūn,” Mu‘assasat al-Furqān, November 13, 2014. Transcript: <http://www.gulfup.com/?wTJX2C>.

197. On the implications of this expansionist effort see Aaron Zelin, “Colonial Caliphate: The Ambitions of the ‘Islamic State,’” *Jihadology*, July 8, 2014, <http://jihadology.net/2014/07/08/the-clairvoyant-colonial-caliphate-the-ambitions-of-the-islamic-state/>.

198. Sees Hātim’s Tweets (now deleted) from 11 November 2014: <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/B2LoFNmCCAAZg1N.jpg>, <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/B2LpjmOCAAEG8X.jpg>, and <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/B2LpjmOCEAApMzW.jpg>.

199. Hāriṭh al-Nazārī (d. 2015), “Bayān bi-sha’n mā warada fī kalimat al-shaykh Abī Bakr al-Baghdādī ‘Wa-law kariha ‘l-kāfirūn,” Mu‘assasat al-Malāḥim, 21 November 2014. Video available at <http://shabakataljahad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=41954>.

State's new caliphate, al-Qaeda responded by proposing its own counter-caliph: Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad 'Umar, head of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan since 1996.²⁰⁰ Like the Islamic State's Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Mullah 'Umar holds the title "commander of the faithful," which previously seemed merely ceremonial. Beginning in mid-July, however, al-Qaeda began to play up the caliphal implication in the title.

On July 13, al-Qaeda released an old video of Osama Bin Laden describing Mullah 'Umar in nearly caliphal terms.²⁰¹ The poor-quality film, from mid-June 2001, shows Bin Laden delivering a lecture on the significance of a recent meeting between George W. Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin. In the question-and-answer session following, Bin Laden is asked to clarify the nature of his *bay'a* to Taliban leader Mullah 'Umar. While widely known that al-Qaeda members in the Afghanistan-Pakistan area give *bay'a* to Mullah 'Umar, the terms of that *bay'a* have been less clear.²⁰² The questioner inquires into them: "You have remarked that you gave *bay'a* to the Commander of the Faithful Mullah 'Umar. Is this *bay'a* the supreme *bay'a*, or is it [merely] a temporary *bay'a* leading toward the supreme *bay'a*?"

The term supreme *bay'a*, equivalent to the unrestricted *bay'a* encountered above, relates to the "supreme imamate," a synonym for the caliphate. The questioner was asking Bin Laden if he had a contract of allegiance to Mullah 'Umar as putative caliph. The answer was an emphatic yes.

Bin Laden responded: "Our *bay'a* to the commander of the faithful is a supreme *bay'a*. It is founded on Qur'anic prooftexts and prophetic hadith...It is incumbent upon every Muslim to affirm in his

heart that he has given *bay'a* to the Commander of the Faithful Mullah 'Umar. This is the supreme *bay'a*." Although Bin Laden did not use the term caliph or caliphate, he clearly had the caliphal institution in mind. In the same question he was asked: "What are the necessary qualifications that the caliph of the Muslims must meet?" Traditionally one of these qualifications is descent from the Prophet Muhammad's tribe of Quraysh, and in this regard Mullah 'Umar does not qualify. But Bin Laden argued that the Taliban leader was not disqualified on this count, citing the legal precedent that the qualification can be ignored in the event of necessity or weakness.²⁰³

Not all al-Qaeda leaders, however, agreed with Bin Laden. Zawahiri, for instance, had argued the opposite case. In 2008, asked the same question posed to Bin Laden above, Zawahiri responded: "Mullah Muhammad 'Umar—may God protect him—is the emir of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and whoever joins it, Shaykh Osama Bin Laden—may God protect him—being one of his soldiers. As for the commander of the faithful across the world, this is the leader of the caliphal state that we, along with every faithful Muslim, are striving to restore, God willing."²⁰⁴ Here Zawahiri denied that all Muslims must give *bay'a* to Mullah 'Umar, the caliph-in-waiting having not yet emerged.

From mid-2014 onwards, however, Zawahiri changed his position and led a campaign to portray Mullah 'Umar as the proto-caliph. On July 19, al-Qaeda released a new newsletter, *al-Nafir*, the first words of which were as follows: "[Al-Nafir] begins its first issue with the renewal of the *bay'a* to the Commander of the Faithful Mullah Muhammad 'Umar, the mujahid—may God protect him—and it affirms that al-Qaeda and its branches in

200. For more on this subject see William McCants, "Zawahiri's Counter-Caliphate," *War on the Rocks*, 5 September, 2014, <http://warontherocks.com/2014/09/zawahiris-counter-caliphate/>.

201. Usāma ibn Lādin, "Bushrayāt," Mu'assasat al-Sahāb, June 2001. Transcript: <http://www.gulfup.com/?i5qM2s>.

202. For more on the issue of Bin Laden's *bay'a* to Mullah 'Umar, see Vahid Brown, "The Facade of Allegiance: Bin Ladin's Dubious Pledge to Mullah Omar," *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 3, no. 1, January 2010, 1–6.

203. This legal precedent is indeed well-established. Many medieval Muslim scholars, according to Wilferd Madelung, argued that "the qualifications of the imām stipulated in the classical doctrine [of the caliphate] could be ignored or expressly waived by the doctrine of necessity (*ḍarūra*)." See Madelung, "Imāma," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. Bernard Lewis, et al (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 2nd ed., 3:1168.

204. Ayman al-Zawāhirī, "al-Liqā' al-maftūḥ ma' al-shaykh Ayman al-Zawāhirī—al-juz' al-thānī min al-as'ila," Mu'assasat al-Sahāb, April 2008. Transcript: <http://www.tawhed.ws/r1?i=7534&x=1502092g>.

all locales are soldiers in his army, acting under his victorious banner, by God's help and His grant of success, until the Shari'a prevails...until every part of the land of Islam is liberated...until the Islamic conquests again take place...and return all the violated lands of Islam to the coming caliphal state, God willing."²⁰⁵

Al-Qaeda continued this theme in September when it announced the formation of a new affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS).²⁰⁶ Again, Zawahiri stressed the supreme leadership of Mullah 'Umar: "The establishment of this new branch is good news for the Muslims in all the world that the call of jihad under the leadership of the Islamic Emirate [of Afghanistan], by God's bounty, is enlarging and expanding." In line with Zawahiri, the AQIS leader described the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan as "the hope of the [Muslim] community for the revival of the caliphate." Al-Qaeda's propaganda was now portraying Afghanistan, not Iraq, as the seat of the long-awaited caliphate.

Following the Bin Laden video and the newsletter, the former pro-Islamic State ideologue Abu 'l-Mundhir al-Shinqiti came out in favor of al-Qaeda's proposition of Mullah 'Umar as caliph. This Mauritanian jihadi scholar caused an uproar in July with a fatwa rejecting the Islamic State's caliphate declaration on the grounds that Mullah 'Umar was already caliph.²⁰⁷ Shinqiti argued that the Islamic State's announcement did not have the interests of the Muslim community in mind, in that it aimed to settle a score with Jabhat al-Nusra. He furthermore criticized the Islamic State for failing to con-

sult with Mullah 'Umar, who had been caliph in his view since 1996. In his thinking, the Shari'a does not strictly speaking distinguish between emir and caliph. Therefore the first Muslim leader to be given bay'a as the leader of a large polity ipso facto becomes caliph, with priority claim to the title. Like Bin Laden, Shinqiti also countered the charge that Mullah 'Umar is disqualified on the grounds of not descending from Quraysh.

Islamic State supporters were naturally outraged at the idea of a challenger to Baghdadi. At least six pro-Islamic State jihadis wrote refutations of al-Qaeda and Shinqiti.²⁰⁸ The authors enumerated multiple reasons why Mullah 'Umar cannot be caliph: he is not from Quraysh; he participated in the United Nations; the caliph cannot exist only in theory but must enjoy real political power, as does Baghdadi; the terms of his bay'a as caliph must be clearly understood by all concerned ("How can Mullah 'Umar be caliph and no one has known this until now?"); and the caliph must espouse proper Salafi theology as jihadis do, not the Maturidism²⁰⁹ of the Taliban.

Ongoing Ideological Warfare

The ongoing conflict between the Islamic State and al-Qaeda is most evident in the ideological and media fronts. It is now the norm for jihadi web forums to identify—even openly—with one group or the other. The ideological landscape is further defined by hyperactive groups of disputatious jihadi scholars. On the one side stand the younger, pro-Islamic State jihadis, affiliated with upstart media outlets on Twitter, and on the other stands a contingent of

205. *Al-Nafir*, Mu'assasat al-Sahāb, no. 1, July 2014, <http://justpaste.it/ALNAFIR>.

206. Ayman al-Zawahiri, *et al*, "Wa-tasimū bi-habl Allāh jamī'an," Mu'assasat al-Sahāb, 3 September 2014. Transcript: <http://justpaste.it/gy43>.

207. Abū 'l-Mundhir al-Shinqīṭī, *l'lān al-khilāfa fī 'l-mīzān al-sharī*, Minbar al-Tawhīd wa'l-Jihād, 15 July 2014, <http://www.tawhed.ws/dl?i=28071401>.

208. In order of appearance: Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān 'Ubayda al-Athbajī, "Waqafāt muḥadhdhir min kalām Abī 'l-Mundhir," Mu'assasat al-Ghurabā, 19 July 2014, <http://t.co/lo4heUaduU>; Abū 'Umar al-Kuwayṭī, "Tanbīh al-mujāhid al-mustanfīr min takhlīṭ al-Shinqīṭī Abī 'l-Mundhir," 19 July 2014, <http://justpaste.it/gabw>; Abū Maysara al-Shāmī, "Khilāfa 'alā minhāj al-nubuwwa am 'khilāfa' qūṭriyya," 20 July 2014, https://archive.org/download/minhaj_201407/minhaj.pdf; Gharīb al-Ikhwān, "Hal al-Mulā 'Umar ḥafīzahu 'llāh khalīfa?" 20 July 2014, <https://www.alplatformmedia.com/vb/showthread.php?t=55933>; Aḥmad Bawādī, "Izhār al-ḥujaj wa-ibtā'āl mā fī maqāl al-Shinqīṭī min lujaj," 21 July 2014, http://ahmadbawadi.blogspot.com/2014/07/abawadi_19.html; Abū Salama al-Shinqīṭī, "al-Maqāl al-tafṣīlī fī 'l-tashkīk bimā nusiba lil-shaykh Abī 'l-Mundhir al-Shinqīṭī," Mu'assasat al-Ghurabā, 22 July 2014, <http://justpaste.it/gbyn>.

209. Māturīdism is a school of Sunni theology traditionally tied to the Ḥanafī legal school, the Taliban being associated with both. See Wilferd Madelung, "Māturīdiyya," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. C.E. Bosworth, et al (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 2nd ed., 6:847-848.

older, pro-al-Qaeda jihadis affiliated with the websites of several senior jihadi scholars.

Two online outfits exemplify this state of affairs. One is the Ghuraba' Media Foundation, a pro-Islamic State group that publishes its material via Twitter,²¹⁰ and each week publishes essays, books, and poems devoted to defending the Islamic State against its detractors. It hosts a coterie of regular contributors, including two Mauritians, an Iraqi, a Moroccan, a Sudanese, and several others of unidentifiable origin. The second outfit is the website of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, *Minbar al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad* ("The Pulpit of God's Unity and Jihad"), which includes a number of regular writers hostile to the Islamic State.²¹¹

These two groups see each other as locked in an unending ideological war over the direction of jihadism. In mid-August 2014 a Ghuraba' author addressed Minbar: "Your battle with the Islamic State is surely a losing battle. So pick up your pens and ready your paper, for this is a battle that will endure, not expire... The Ghuraba' Media Foundation has been and will remain the redoubtable fortress for the defense of the truthful mujahidin, as we deem them, of the Islamic State."²¹²

Indeed, this battle of pens is not letting up. In late August one Minbar scholar put together a summa of the criticisms used to repudiate the Islamic State's caliphate declaration.²¹³ In mid-September a Ghuraba' scholar responded with a point-by-point rebuttal.²¹⁴ Most recently, the two outfits sparred over the validity of the Islamic State's immolation of Jordanian pilot Mu'adh al-Kasasiba in January 2015. In general, Ghuraba' is far more prolific than Minbar and other competitors. If productivity is any measure, the pro-Islamic State jihadis are winning.

210. Its Twitter handle as of this writing is @alghuraba_ar11. For an archive of Ghuraba' writings see <http://justpaste.it/archivealghuraba>.

211. <http://www.tawhed.ws>.

212. Abū Salama al-Shinqīṭī, *Akrīm bihim man ghurabā'*, Mu'assasat al-Ghurabā', 7 August 2014, <http://justpaste.it/gpa5>.

213. Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Muhājir, *al-Khulāṣa fī munāqashat i'lān al-khilāfa*, Minbar al-Tawḥīd wa'l-Jihād, 29 August 2014, <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=29081402>.

214. Abū Barā'a al-Sayf, *al-Raṣāṣa li-ibtāl maqāl al-Khulāṣa*, 19 September 2014, <https://justpaste.it/h533>.

Conclusion

The rise of the Islamic State in 2013–2014 has energized the jihadi movement, attracting tens of thousands of young Muslims around the globe. While the Islamic State had hoped for this level of zeal from its 2006 founding, its initial efforts failed. Sectarian turmoil in Iraq and Syria has given the group a new lease on life, and allowed it to pursue its original caliphah vision.

The Islamic State's harsh strain of Jihadi-Salafi ideology is now more popular today than ever. As long as the Islamic State maintains the trappings of an actual state in Iraq and Syria—or beyond—governing territory and dispensing justice, support for the group and its ideology will continue to grow. While the U.S.-led air campaign beginning in August 2014 has so far arrested the Islamic State's momentum, it remains unclear whether the campaign will reverse its advance. At all events, political turmoil elsewhere in the Middle East, particularly in Libya and Yemen, is creating conditions conducive to the Islamic State's intended expansion.

Regardless of the coalition's long-term success, the military campaign can actually strengthen the Islamic State's ideology by lending credence to its conspiratorial worldview: namely, the view that the region's Shi'a are conspiring with the United States and secular Arab rulers to limit Sunni power in the Middle East. The U.S. pursuit of a nuclear deal with Iran contributes to this perception.

The military campaign also bodes poorly for U.S. homeland security. The Islamic State has long prioritized the Middle East over the West, focusing on seizing and holding territory in its

home theater, then bringing down neighboring governments. The air campaign, however, has apparently altered the group's strategic calculus. On September 21, 2014, Islamic State official spokesman Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani called on all supporters to kill Westerners arbitrarily throughout the world—Americans, Canadians, Australians, and their allies, both civilians and military personnel.²¹⁵ This call is being met, with Islamic State-inspired attacks having occurred in these countries.²¹⁶ Never before has the group seemed so intent on targeting the West. In another speech on January 26, 2015, 'Adnani repeated his call.²¹⁷

Nonetheless, it remains regional governments and their citizens who are most threatened by the Islamic State. Ultimately, they must lead this war, not the United States.

The seemingly unbridgeable division between supporters of the Islamic State and supporters of al-Qaeda might appear to be a positive development; this is not the case. This division is now a fixture of the jihadi organizational and ideological landscape, and profound competition between organizations and ideologues consumes much time and effort. So far, however, jihadis outside the Syrian theater have shown few signs of coming to blows over the intra-jihadi struggle. Indeed, AQAP and an Islamic State supporter collaborated in the Paris attacks in January 2015. Rather than a cause for hope, this competition is a testament to the increasing political salience of jihadism globally. Jihadism has become a movement capable of sustaining such division.

215. Abū Muḥammad al-'Adnānī, "Inna Rabbaka la-bi'l-mirṣād," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 21 September 2014. Transcript: <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Inna-Rabbaka-la-bil-mirsad.pdf>.

216. David Kirkpatrick, "Attacks in West Raise New Fears Over ISIS' Influence," *The New York Times*, 24 October 2014; Michelle Innis, "Sydney Hostage Siege Ends With Gunman and 2 Captives Dead as Police Storm Cafe," *The New York Times*, 15 December 2004; and Rukmini Callimachi and Andrew Higgins, "Video Shows a Paris Gunman Declaring His Loyalty to the Islamic State," *The New York Times*, 11 January 2015.

217. Abū Muḥammad al-'Adnānī, "Qul mūtū bi-ghayzikum," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 26 January 2015. Transcript: <http://ia902601.us.archive.org/13/items/Perish.In.Your.Rage/Tafreegh.Perish.In.Your.Rage.pdf>.

Bringing the Islamic State down to size is certainly a necessary step toward reversing this trend. The longer the group enjoys a plausible claim to statehood, the more likely its organizational and ideological unity will remain intact. Yet if the Islamic State can again be reduced from a plausible “caliphate” to an ignominious “paper state,” and if its larger-than-life ruler can be eliminated, the group may never recover. A withering statelet with an unremarkable leader, as the Islamic State saw in the earlier period of its existence, makes for poor propaganda.

APPENDIX

The Islamic State's Creed and Path

Translator's note: The following four extracts, drawn from audio statements issued by the Islamic State between 2007 and 2014, elaborate the main lines of its “creed and path” (*‘aqida wa-manhaj*). The first is a précis of the creed and path, drawing on an earlier and longer composition by al-Qaeda in Iraq from 2005.²¹⁸ The second, third, and fourth extracts provide something of an update, introducing several points of ideology that apply only since the declaration of the caliphate in June 2014.

“Some of Our Fundamentals,”
Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi,
*March 13, 2007*²¹⁹

People have attributed to us numerous lies having no basis in our creed (*‘aqida*). They have claimed that we hereticize the generality of Muslims, that we deem licit the shedding of their blood and the taking of their property, and that we compel people to join our state with the sword.

Against [these charges], these are some of our fundamentals that refute those lies, [presented here] so that there not remain any excuse for a liar, nor any doubt for a supporter.

First: We believe in the necessity of destroying and eradicating all manifestations of idolatry (*shirk*) and [in the necessity of] prohibiting those things that lead to it, on account of what the Imam Muslim transmitted in his *Sahih* on the authority of Abu ‘l-Hayaj al-Asadi, who said: “Ali ibn Abi Talib—may God be pleased with him—said to me: Should I not urge you to do what the Messenger of

God—may God bless and save him—urged me to do? That you not leave a statue without obliterating it, or a raised grave without leveling it?”

Second: The rejectionists [i.e., the Shi‘a] are a group of idolatry and apostasy; in addition, they inhibit the performance of many of Islam’s unambiguous rites.

Third: We believe in the unbelief and apostasy of the sorcerer and in the necessity of killing him, [and we believe in] not accepting his repentance—as regards judgments in this [lower] world—after he has been apprehended. ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab—may God be pleased with him—said: “The punishment of the sorcerer is a strike with the sword.”

Fourth. We do not hereticize any Muslim who prays in the direction of our *qibla* [i.e., the Ka‘ba in Mecca] on account of sins, such as fornication, drinking alcohol, and theft, so long as he does not consider it to be licit. Our position on faith is a middle way between the extremist Kharijites and the lax Murji‘ites;²²⁰ whoso utters the two professions of faith and manifests to us Islam—so long as he does not engage in one of the nullifiers of the nullifiers of Islam²²¹—we accord him the treatment accorded Muslims, and we entrust his soul to God, who is most high. [Our position on faith is furthermore] that unbelief is of two kinds, greater and lesser, and that a judgment [of unbelief] falls on whoever commits it [whether] in creed, word, or deed. However, hereticizing the specific individual among them and judging him to be destined for hellfire forever is conditional upon the establish-

218. The earlier composition, *Hādhihi ‘aqīdatunā wa-manhajunā*, is found at <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=ygz0yz64>, and is different from that translated by Bernard Haykel in *Global Salafism*, 51–56.

219. Abū ‘Umar al-Baghdādī, “Qul innī ‘alā bayyina min Rabbī,” Mu‘assasat al-Furqān, 13 March 2007. Transcript in *al-Majmū‘ li-qādat Dawlat al-‘Irāq al-Islāmiyya*, 2010, 12–16.

220. On the significance of these terms in this context see Joas Wagemakers, “‘Seceders’ and ‘Postponers’? An Analysis of the ‘Khawarij’ and ‘Murji‘a’ Labels in Polemical Debates Between Quietist and Jihadi-Salafis,” in *Contextualizing Jihadi Thought*, ed. Jeevan Deol and Zaheer Kazmi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

221. The “nullifiers of Islam” (*nawāqid al-Islām*) are ten in the Wahhabi tradition. See *al-Durar al-saniyya fi ‘l-ajwiba al-Najdiyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Qāsim (n.p.: Warathat al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Qāsim, 2012), 8th ed., 10:91–93.

ment of the conditions of hereticization (*takfir*) and the absence of factors prohibiting it.

Fifth. We believe in the necessity of appealing for judgment to God’s law, by means of bringing cases before the Shari’a courts in the Islamic State and seeking them out in the absence of knowledge of them. For appealing for judgment to the *taghut* [lit., “idol”] of man-made laws and tribal decisions and the like is among the nullifiers of Islam. God said: “Whoso judges not according to what God has revealed—they are the unbelievers” (Q. 5:44).²²²

Sixth. We believe in the necessity of revering the Prophet—may God bless and save him—and of prohibiting disputation with him,²²³ and [we believe in] the unbelief and apostasy of whoever disparages his honored stature and position, or the stature of his pure family and blameless companions among the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs and the remainder of the companions and [their] families. God—Who is most high—said: “Surely we have sent thee as a witness, good tidings to bear, and warning, that you may believe in God and His Messenger and succor Him, and reverence Him, and that you may give Him glory at the dawn and in the evening” (Q. 48:9–10). And He said, describing [the Prophet’s] companions: “Muhammad is the Messenger of God, and those who are with him are hard against the unbelievers, merciful one to another. Thou seest them bowing, prostrating, seeking bounty from God and good pleasure. Their mark is on their faces, the trace of prostration. That is their likeness in the Torah, and their likeness in the Gospel: as a seed that puts forth its shoot, and strengthens it, and it grows stout and rises straight upon its stalk, pleasing the sowers, that through them He may enrage the unbelievers. God has promised those of them who believe and do deeds of righteousness forgiveness and a mighty wage” (Q. 49:29).

Seventh. We believe that secularism in the multiplicity of its banners and the variety of its programs,

such as nationalism, patriotism, Communism, and Ba’thism, is flagrant unbelief, nullifying Islam and expelling one from the religion. Furthermore, we believe in the unbelief and apostasy of whoever participates in the political process, such as the parties of [Salih] al-Mutlaq, [Tah] al-Dulaymi, and [Tariq] al-Hashimi, among others, on account of what is in this process of substitution of the law of God—Who is most high—and empowerment of the enemies of God among the crusaders, the Shi’a, and all the other apostates over the necks of God’s believing servants. God—Who is most high—said concerning whoever agrees with the idolaters in substituting something of God’s law: “The Satans inspire their friends to dispute with you; if you obey them, you are idolaters” (Q. 6:121). Likewise we believe that the path of the Islamic Party [i.e., the party of Tariq al-Hashimi] is a path of unbelief and apostasy; it is not different in its path and conduct from the rest of the paths of unbelief and apostasy, such as the party of [Ibrahim] al-Ja’fari and [Iyad] al-’Allawi. Furthermore, [we believe that] their leaders are apostates, there being no difference to us between a government official and a branch director. [However,] we do not believe in the unbelief of the generality of those entering [the political process], so long as legal proof has not [yet] been furnished for them.

Eighth. We believe in the unbelief and apostasy of whoever extends to the occupier and his supporters any kind of assistance—such as clothing, food, medical treatment, etc.—that helps him and strengthens him. And [we believe that] by virtue of this act he becomes a target for us whose blood is licit to shed.

Ninth. We believe that jihad in God’s path is an individual obligation, from the fall of al-Andalus until the liberation of [all] Muslim lands, and [that it is an individual obligation] in the presence of a pious person or an impious person. And [we believe that] the greatest of sins after disbelief in God is barring from jihad in God’s path at the time when it is an

222. Quotations from the Qur’an are based on the translation by A.J. Arberry.

223. *Al-taqaddum bayn yadayhi*, a reference to Q. 49:1.

individual obligation. Ibn Hazm said: “No sin after disbelief in God is greater than the sin of forbidding jihad against the unbelievers and commanding the surrender of the Muslim’s women to them on account of the sinfulness of a Muslim man whom others do not call to account for his sinfulness.”

Tenth. We believe that lands in which the laws of unbelief prevail, and in which the judgments of unbelief predominate over the judgments of Islam, are lands of unbelief. This does not mean that we hereticize all the inhabitants of [these] lands. Since the judgments that prevail in all the lands of Islam today are the judgments of the *taghut* and his law, we believe in the unbelief and apostasy of all the rulers and armies of these states, and [we believe that] fighting them is of greater necessity than fighting the occupying crusader. Therefore it is necessary for us to make known that we will fight any forces warring against the Islamic State of Iraq, even if they have Arabic and Islamic names. We advise them and warn them not to be a scapegoat for the occupier, as has been suggested [as a way] to solve the crisis of the occupying crusader in Iraq.

Eleventh. We believe in the necessity of fighting the police and army of the state of the *taghut* and apostasy and what arises from them of appellations, such as the defense [force] for oil facilities and the like. And we believe in the necessity of destroying and eradicating any building or facility that it becomes clear to us will be taken by the *taghut* as a station.

Twelfth. We believe that the factions of the People of the Book [i.e., Christians and Jews], and those of their ilk such as the Sabeans and others, are today in the Islamic State a people of war not enjoying a status of protection. They have violated what they agreed upon [with the Muslims] in numerous, countless regards. Therefore if they desire security and safety, they must create a new pact with the Islamic State in accordance with the conditions of the Pact of ‘Umar²²⁴ that they violated.

Thirteenth. We believe that the members of the jihadi groups active in the theater are our brothers in religion; we do not charge them with unbelief or iniquity. However, [we believe that] they are sinners on account of their holding back from the duty of the age, which is coming together under one banner.

Fourteenth. Any group or person who makes an agreement with the warring occupier, [that agreement] is of no consequence to us. Rather it is void and rejected. We thus warn the occupier against striking any secret or open accords without the permission of the Islamic State.

Fifteenth. We believe in the necessity of respecting the active and truthful religious scholars (*‘ulama*). We defend them and we follow their lead in the event of calamities and misfortunes; and we expose those who follow the path of the *taghut* or compromise with it on any matter of God’s religion.

Sixteenth. We recognize the due of those who have gone before us in jihad. We grant them their station, and we provide well for them touching their family and property.

Seventeenth. We believe in the necessity of setting free Muslim prisoners and women from the hands of the unbelievers, by means of raiding or ransoming. The Messenger of God—may God bless and save him—said: “Set free the captive.” Likewise we believe in the necessity of caring for their families and the families of the martyrs. [The Messenger of God]—upon him be blessing and salvation—said: “He who provisions a warrior, he himself has made war; he who provides well for a warrior touching his family, he himself has made war.”

Eighteenth. We believe in the necessity of educating the [Muslim] community in the matters of their religion, even if [this means that] some of the fortunes of this world will escape them. And we obligate [them to learn] of worldly knowledge that

224. In Islamic tradition, a pact reached between the second Sunni Muslim caliph, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644), and certain Christians of Syria, stipulating the rights and duties of the latter.

which the [Muslim] community requires; what is beyond that is permitted so long as it does not violate the ordinances of the monotheistic law.

Nineteenth. We believe in prohibiting all that calls to impropriety or assists it, such as the satellite [T.V.] device. And we impose on woman the legal obligation to cover her face and to refrain from going out unveiled and from mixing [with men], and the requirement of chastity and purity. God—Who is most high—said: “Those who love that impropriety should be spread abroad concerning them who believe—there awaits them a painful chastisement in the present world and the world to come. And God knows, and you know not” (Q. 24:19).

*“This is the Promise of God,” Abu Muhammad al-ʿAdnani, June 29, 2014*²²⁵

After the Islamic State came, by God’s bounty, to possess all the constituent elements of the caliphate—which Muslims are sinning for failing to establish—and it became clear that no impediment or legal excuse exists to absolve the Islamic State of the sin of its delaying or not establishing the caliphate, the Islamic State, represented by the *ahl al-hall wa’l-ʿaqd* (lit., “those who loose and bind”), including senior figures, leaders, commanders, and the Shura Council, has decided to announce the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate, the appointment of a caliph for the Muslims, and the giving of *bayʿa* [i.e., fealty] to the mujahid shaykh, the learned, the active, and the devout, the warrior and the renewer, the descendant of the Prophet’s house, Ibrahim ibn ʿAwwad ibn Ibrahim ibn ʿAli ibn Muhammad, the Badri, the Qurashi, the Hashimi, and the Husayni by descent, the Samarra’i by birth and upbringing, and the Baghdadi by learning and residence.²²⁶ He has accepted the *bayʿa*, becoming thereby the leader and caliph for the Muslims in all places...

We inform the Muslims that, with the announcement of the caliphate, it has become obligatory for all Muslims to give *bayʿa* and support to Caliph Ibrahim—may God protect him. Void is the legitimacy of all emirates, groups, administrations, and organizations to which his authority extends and his army comes...

A message to all groups and organizations waging jihad, working to support God’s religion, and raising the slogans of Islam, and [a message] to the leaders and commanders: We say, Fear you God... We see no legal excuse for you to delay supporting this state...It is the caliphate! The time has come for you to end this lethal division and separation and disunity...

O soldiers of the groups and organizations. Know that after this political capability and the establishment of the caliphate, the legitimacy of your groups and organizations is void. It is not permissible for any of you who believe in God not to profess loyalty (*wala*) to the caliph...And know that nothing has delayed victory, and continues to delay it, more so than the existence of these groups; they are the cause of division and difference...

*“A message to the Mujahidin and the Muslim community in the Month of Ramadan,” July 1, 2014*²²⁷

O Muslims in all places, rejoice, take heart, and hold your heads high! For today you have, by God’s bounty, a state and caliphate that will renew your dignity and strength, that will recover your rights and your sovereignty: a state joining in brotherhood non-Arab and Arab, white and black, eastern and western; a caliphate joining together the Caucasian, Indian, and Chinese, the Syrian, Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, and North African, the American, Frenchman, German, and Australian.

225. Abū Muḥammad al-ʿAdnānī, “Hādha waʿd Allāh,” Muʿassasat al-Furqān, 29 June 2014. Transcript: <http://www.gulfup.com/?3D7MKR>.

226. Badrī refers to an Iraqi tribe; Qurashī to the Prophet Muhammad’s tribe of Quraysh; Hāshimī to a clan within Quraysh named for the Prophet’s great-grandfather; Ḥusaynī to the Prophet’s grandson; Sāmarrāʾī to the Iraqi city of Samarra; and Baghdādī to Baghdad.

227. Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, “Risāla ilā ’l-mujāhidīn wa’l-umma al-Islāmiyya fī shahr Ramaḍān,” Muʿassasat al-Furqān, 1 July 2014. Transcript: https://archive.org/download/K_R_abubkr/et34.pdf.

God has brought their hearts together, and they have become, by God's grace, brothers loving together in God, standing in one trench, defending one another... Their blood has mixed under one banner and for one purpose...

O Muslims, come to your state. Yes, your state! Come! Syria is not for Syrians, and Iraq is not for Iraqis. The earth belongs to God! He bestows it on whom He wills of His servants...

O Muslims in all places. Whoso is able to emigrate to the Islamic State, let him emigrate. For emigration (*hijra*) to the Abode of Islam (*Dar al-Islam*) is obligatory. God—Who is most high—said: “And those the angels take, while still they are wronging themselves—the angels will say, ‘In what circumstances were you?’ They will say, ‘We were abased in the earth.’ The angels will say, ‘But was not God’s earth wide, so that you might have emigrated in it?’ Such men, their refuge shall be hellfire—an evil homecoming!” (Q. 4:97)...

*“Though the Unbelievers Be Averse,”
Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, November
13, 2014*²²⁸

O Muslims, be assured, for your state is well and in the best of conditions. Its advance will not cease, and it will continue expanding, God willing, “though the unbelievers be averse” (Q. 9:32, 40:14, 61:8).

O Muslims, rejoice, for we bring you good news of the announcement of the Islamic State’s expansion to new lands: to the Land of the Two Holy Places [i.e., Mecca and Medina] and Yemen, and to Egypt, Libya, and Algeria. We announce the ac-

ceptance of the *bay‘a*²²⁹ of those who gave us *bay‘a* from among our brothers in those lands, the voiding of the names of the organizations in them, their declaration as new provinces of the Islamic State, and the appointment of governors (*wulat*, sing. *wali*) over them. Likewise we announce the acceptance of the *bay‘as* of those who gave us *bay‘a* from among the organizations and individuals in all those named provinces and elsewhere, and we ask every individual from among them to join with the nearest province about him and to hear and obey its governor appointed by us...

228. Baghdādī, “Wa-law kariha ‘l-kāfirūn,” Mu’assasat al-Furqān, November 13, 2014. Transcript: <http://www.gulfup.com/?wTJX2C>.

229. The five new “provinces” of the Islamic State had given bay‘a to Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī simultaneously on November 10, 2014. Each issued an identical bay‘a pledge that reads as follows: “In obedience to the command of God—Who is all-powerful and all-glorious—and in obedience to His Messenger—may God bless and save him—to be not divided and to cling to community, we announce our giving of bay‘a to the Caliph Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Awwād ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥusaynī al-Qurashī: hearing and obeying, in what is agreeable and what is disagreeable, and in what is difficult and what is easy, observing [his] prerogative [to appoint commanders], and not disputing the command of those in authority, except in the event that we see an act of flagrant unbelief and we have proof thereof from God. We call on the Muslims in all places to give bay‘a to the caliph and to support him, in obedience to God and in order to carry out the forsaken duty of the age.” For the Arabic text see the transcript of one of the five statements, “Bayān min mujāhidī ‘l-Yaman bi-bay‘at khalīfat al-muslimīn,” Mu’assasat al-Bunyān, November 10, 2014, at <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Yemen-baya.pdf>.

About the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World

The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World is a research initiative housed in the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. The Project's mission is to engage and inform policymakers, practitioners, and the broader public on the changing dynamics in Muslim-majority countries and to advance relations between Americans and Muslim societies around the world.

To fulfill this mission, the Project sponsors a range of activities, research projects, and publications designed to educate, encourage frank dialogue, and build positive partnerships between the United States and Muslim communities all over the world. The broader goals of the Project include:

- Exploring the multi-faceted nature of the United States' relationship with Muslim-majority states, including issues related to mutual misperceptions;
- Analyzing the social, economic, and political dynamics underway in Muslim societies;
- Identifying areas for shared endeavors between the United States and Muslim communities around the world on issues of common concern.

To achieve these goals, the Project has several interlocking components:

- The U.S.-Islamic World Forum, which brings together leaders in politics, business, media, academia, and civil society from the United States and from Muslim societies in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. The Forum also serves as a focal point for the Project's ongoing research and initiatives, providing the foundation for a range of complementary activities designed to enhance dialogue and impact;
- An Analysis Paper Series that provides high-quality research and publications on key questions facing Muslim states and communities;
- Workshops, symposia, and public and private discussions with government officials and other key stakeholders focused on critical issues affecting the relationship;
- Special initiatives in targeted areas of demand. In the past these have included Arts and Culture, Science and Technology, and Religion and Diplomacy.

The Project's Steering Committee consists of Martin Indyk, Vice President and Director of Foreign Policy Studies; Tamara Wittes, Senior Fellow and Director of the Center for Middle East Policy; William McCants, Fellow and Director of the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World; Kenneth Pollack, Senior Fellow in the Center; Bruce Riedel, Senior Fellow in the Center; Shibley Telhami, Nonresident Senior Fellow of the Project and Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland; and Salman Shaikh, Fellow and Director of the Brookings Doha Center.

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