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**NAVAL  
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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**STATES OF TERROR: UNDERSTANDING EVOLVING  
ISLAMIST TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS AND THE  
THREAT THEY POSE**

by

Dylan P. McCulley

September 2016

Thesis Advisor:  
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**STATES OF TERROR: UNDERSTANDING EVOLVING ISLAMIST  
TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS AND THE THREAT THEY POSE**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(HOMELAND SECURITY AND DEFENSE)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Islamist militant organizations appear to be evolving from traditional disassociated networks, al-Qaeda's model, into centralized regional powers with the intent of developing into national governments. This thesis presents a comparative case study of five mainstream Islamist militant organizations, the Islamic State, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, al-Shabaab, the Afghan Taliban, and Hezbollah, to determine how close they have come to statehood and how such a change may affect U.S. homeland security. The criteria used to analyze the case studies were primarily derived from the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, which describes a state as an entity with a permanent population, defined borders, an ability to conduct governance, and an ability to enter into relations with other national governments. Additional criteria were used to determine the organizations' propensity to threaten the United States in their governmental capacity. This thesis found that none of the Islamist militant organizations in the case studies currently fit all the criteria for statehood; however, none fit al-Qaeda's disassociated model either. Therefore, the international community should consider defining and more accurately classifying these groups as militant states.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

AMZ	Abu Musab al-Zarqawi
AQI	al-Qaeda in Iraq
AQAP	al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
ICU	Islamic Courts Union
IED	improvised explosive device
IS	Islamic State
ISI	Islamic State in Iraq
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
JFS	Jabhat Fatah al-Sham
JTJ	Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad
NGO	non-governmental organization
TFG	Transitional Federal Government

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the early 21st century, Islamist militant organizations are abandoning al-Qaeda's organizational model of disassociated networks operating around the world and turning toward a centralized regional-power approach. The intent of these organizations appears to be to build national governments that function under their interpretation of Islam and *Sharia* law. A comparative case study of five prominent organizations was conducted to measure the progress made toward statehood as defined by the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, which claims that states should have:

- A permanent population
- Defined Borders
- Established governance
- The capacity to enter into relations with foreign governments<sup>1</sup>

The organizations in this study included the Islamic State, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, al-Shabaab, Hezbollah, and the Afghan Taliban.

The Islamic State has met two out of the four criteria set forth by the Montevideo Convention. It has established governance and instituted *Sharia* law over a permanent population of Syrian and Iraqi civilians as well as numerous foreign fighters who have come from abroad. Although it has been claimed that the Islamic State has made oil deals with both the Turkish and Syrian governments, evidence remains uncertain. While the Islamic State controls significant portions of territory in both Syria and Iraq, its borders are fluid and have been defined by neither time nor politics.

Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, al-Qaeda's former Syrian affiliate, has also met two out of the four Montevideo criteria; it has also established governance over Syrian citizens who inhabit territory under its control. JFS has neither defined borders nor relations with foreign governments.

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<sup>1</sup> "Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed September 14, 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/sovereignty/montevideo-convention-rights-duties-states/p15897>.

Hailing from Somalia, Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin, or al-Shabaab, has fulfilled two out of the four criteria set forth by the Montevideo Convention. In the early 2000s, al-Shabaab took control over much of southern Somalia, including portions of the nation's capital, Mogadishu. Despite its initial success, the African Union prevented its efforts to establish Somalia as an Islamic emirate. Within the small portions of territory it still controls, al-Shabaab has instilled governance under Sharia law over the local permanent population. However, the organization's span of control does not have defined borders, and the organization has not demonstrated an ability to officially enter into relations with foreign nations.

Hezbollah's use of suicide terrorism in the 1980s elevated the organization's infamy among the international community. It has technically fulfilled three out of the four criteria in the Montevideo Convention, though this is debatable; the argument could be made that it has fulfilled all four criteria. Hezbollah has long controlled much of Southern Lebanon, where it originated. In 2016, Hezbollah established itself as a legitimate political party. While the region directly controlled by Hezbollah does not have defined borders, the organization's participation in the Lebanese political system lends credence to the argument that Hezbollah's borders are those of Lebanon. Hezbollah has long maintained relations with both the Syrian and Iranian governments.

The Afghan Taliban is the only organization among the case studies that has at one time fulfilled all of the Montevideo Convention's criteria for statehood. Before being ousted by the United States during Operation Enduring Freedom, the Taliban established itself as Afghanistan's recognized national government. This means that the Taliban was able to establish governance over the population of Afghanistan, and the territory it controlled was limited to the borders of Afghanistan. The Taliban established official relations with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and other Middle Eastern nations. In the years since the drawdown of Operation Enduring Freedom, the Taliban has seen resurgence and continues to regain power within Afghanistan.

Ideological analysis of the case studies indicates an apocalyptic slant to those of Sunni groups like the Islamic State, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, and al-Shabaab that maintain a belief that a global Islamic caliphate will rise and bring an end to all other religions.

The five case study organizations do not fit all the criteria for statehood; however, they do not exactly fit the traditional definition of terrorist groups, either. This could affect U.S. homeland security in the future as current counter-terrorism policy, which clings to antiquated definitions of terrorist organizations, becomes ineffective at countering these groups. Therefore, the United States should identify a third classification to categorize these hybrid terrorist–government groups as militant states. This new classification will allow U.S. decision-makers to write policies tailored to these groups, which have made current counter-terrorism policy obsolete.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandparents, Mike and Mary Lee, who have never stopped believing in me. Your support and guidance has brought me to where I am today.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This thesis is aimed to explicitly address the following question: To what extent have modern Islamist terrorist organizations evolved to resemble political entities, and what is the associated impact on homeland and national security policies?

### A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many would argue that during the early 21st century, Islamist militant organizations have experienced an “evolutionary shift.” Some of these organizations have begun to seize and hold land in an attempt to establish governance through *Sharia* law.<sup>1</sup> There are many examples of this phenomenon. In Afghanistan, for instance, a force of religious students (*talibs*) became politically known as the Taliban and then as the official national government of Afghanistan for several years (1994–2001).

Other examples of this evolutionary shift have been demonstrated by a disenfranchised split-off group of Somali militants—al-Shabaab—that nearly conquered Somalia by seizing large areas of the country and imposing *Sharia* law on the population. Hezbollah in Lebanon is yet another example. Hezbollah started as an anti-Israeli militant organization and has now risen to the status of a legitimate political party in Lebanon. In Syria, the former al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat Fatah al-Sham is trying to overthrow the Syrian government and turn the nation into an emirate of al-Qaeda’s proposed global Islamic caliphate. Finally, and possibly most importantly from a U.S. policy perspective, the Islamic State, a burgeoning militant force, has declared itself an Islamic caliphate in the Middle East. The Islamic State’s plan is not limited to Iraq and Syria; its proposed five-year plan is to expand its borders to all regions formerly under the caliphate of the golden age of Islam and beyond.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ryan Lucas, “Al-Qaeda Splinter Group Declares Captured Territory in Syria, Iraq New Islamic State,” *Dallas Morning News*, June 29, 2014, <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/local-news/20140629-al-qaeda-splinter-group-declares-captured-territory-in-syria-iraq-new-islamic-state.ece>.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Chandler, “What Is an Islamic Caliphate and Why Did ISIS Make One?” *The Wire*, June 30, 2014, <http://www.thewire.com/global/2014/06/what-is-an-islamic-caliphate-and-why-did-isis-make-one/373693/>.

This thesis assesses the evolutionary steps being taken by the Islamic State, al-Shabaab, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, Hezbollah, and the Afghan Taliban.<sup>3</sup> This study is intended to provide a greater understanding of how to counter the threat these groups pose.

Furthermore, analyzing these groups provides information that is crucial to detect potential changes in the threat environment caused by this evolutionary shift. An ancillary intent of this thesis is to change standing perceptions of Islamist militant organizations. This thesis identifies the specific ways in which Islamist militant groups have changed, from the al-Qaeda model of disparate cells working independently toward a common goal around the world, into centralized regional powers that appear as national governments. If this shift is happening, the West's counter-terrorism strategy may soon become obsolete. A key assumption of this thesis is that a new counter-terrorism policy may be required to adequately fit the new hybrid militant group/state governments. A central methodological assumption is that such a study benefits from a systematic comparative case study analysis Islamist terrorist organizations' nation-building efforts. It is further assumed that such an approach has important implications for how the United States can effectively counter these organizations.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The research question has two key methodological implications. First, in order to provide analysis, it is important to assess how terrorism is adapting and evolving. Doing so requires identifying concrete historical examples concerning such evolution. Second, primary source materials, such as *Dabiq* magazine, *Inspire* magazine, and other propagandist materials, provide evidence of the evolution and adaptation of terrorism and terrorists. The literature surrounding the history and evolution of terrorism appears at first expansive and diverse. The following literature review encompasses studies primarily of

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<sup>3</sup> Hezbollah is the only case study within this project that follows Shiite ideology. Because of this, a note must be made to address the differences in these groups as they pertain to this study. This thesis primarily examines data pertaining to the actions of terrorist organizations as they relate to "nation building" or seeking the establishment of official governance over a group of people in a specified geographic region. There is therefore no reason why the Sunni/Shia ideological differences should become a problem for this research. The differences in Sunni and Shia Islam, while stark, do not affect the research or thesis as a whole. Any differences in ideology are identified in the text of this thesis as required.

the Islamic State, but it also covers recent analysis of the Afghan Taliban, Hezbollah, al-Shabaab, and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham.

## **1. Definition of Terrorism**

Analyzing the evolution of terrorism requires establishing a general definition thereof. In the United States, each agency seems to have a slightly different definition based on the agency's mission. The U.S. State Department defines terrorism as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents."<sup>4</sup> The Department of Defense's definition is similar to the State Department's. It defines terrorism as "the unlawful use of violence or threat of violence, often motivated by religious, political, or other ideological beliefs, to instill fear and coerce governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are usually political."<sup>5</sup> The definitions from the State Department and the Department of Defense include language that implies a focus on terrorism as a threat to the world, rather than to the United States.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) definition of terrorism focuses on the legality of terrorism as it pertains to the United States: "The unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof in furtherance of political or social objectives."<sup>6</sup> The legal focus on the FBI's definition makes sense as it comes from a domestic law enforcement agency. The Department of Homeland Security defines terrorism as a criminal act that endangers people, infrastructure, or resources; violates U.S. laws; and that is designed to intimidate civilians and influence government policy.<sup>7</sup> Like the FBI's definition, this definition focuses on terrorism as an illegal act, though it broadens the

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<sup>4</sup> "Glossary," Department of State, accessed September 14, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/info/c16718.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Joint Publication 1-02) (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2016), [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new\\_pubs/jp1\\_02.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> "What We Investigate" FBI, accessed March 22, 2016, <https://www.fbi.gov/albuquerque/about-us/what-we-investigate/priorities>.

<sup>7</sup> 107th Congress, "Homeland Security Act of 2002," November 25, 2002, [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/hr\\_5005\\_enr.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/hr_5005_enr.pdf).

definition to encompass violence against infrastructure as well as citizens, again catering to the mission of the agency.

Based on a synthesis of these definitions and an analysis of the commonalities, the definition of terrorism used herein is as follows: an ideologically motivated use or threat of violence by a non-governmental organization against a population with the intention of coercing or influencing a government or society.

## **2. The Evolution of Terrorism**

There is a constantly growing body of literature, scholarly or otherwise, concerning the history and evolution of terrorism. Interestingly, much of the information seems to fit into one of two categories: studies that document terrorism from ancient times to around 2004 and treatments that analyze terrorism from September 11, 2001, to the near-present. Since modern terrorism first emerged in the mid-1900s, it has undergone several well-documented evolutionary stages. The first stage included the shift from nationalist-centered terrorism to religious terrorism. The next wave saw suicide terrorism followed by lone-wolf attacks and decentralized terror organizations in the post-9/11 world. Bruce Hoffman provides a general overview of terrorism, its history, and much of its evolution beginning in the 1700s.<sup>8</sup> His work also includes a history of the definition of terrorism, which has been a critical guide to this thesis. Hoffman holds that contemporary terrorism began with the fall of the colonial era in the mid-1900s; his work covers terrorism until 2006.

Unlike in the 1960s and '70s, when the majority of terrorist groups followed a Marxist or nationalist ideology, the last three decades have witnessed a proliferation of Islamic jihadist militant groups. Recent evolutionary steps in terrorism include the implementation of suicide terrorism, as Robert Pape discusses in depth in his book *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Terrorism*.<sup>9</sup> Notably, Pape makes the claim “that suicide terrorism is mainly a response to foreign occupation rather than the product of Islamic

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<sup>8</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).

fundamentalism.”<sup>10</sup> On that note, Pape also claims that military action rarely stops such groups. This is a crucial point—one that policymakers should not ignore when attempting to deal with the groups. From Pape’s perspective, military action is not necessarily the best way to counter terrorism. It may be that military action taken against organizations with regional control in the Middle East prompts more traditional terrorist attacks in the West.

To more efficiently target Western nations, terrorist organizations have also distributed propaganda via technology mediums in an effort to inspire disenfranchised individuals to conduct similar attacks. While this innovation is not a new phenomenon, its use has greatly increased in recent years. Jeffrey Simon elaborates on this topic and its value in *Lone Wolf Terrorism: Understanding the Growing Threat*. Simon claims that the rise in lone-wolf terrorism is directly related to the emergence of a new technological wave of terrorism. Specifically, Simon writes that the internet and the availability of extremist ideology to anyone from the comfort of home spur lone wolves. The availability of internet propaganda coupled with the inherent difficulty in finding these solitary actors has increased the popularity of lone-wolf terrorism.<sup>11</sup> Pape and Simon agree that military action is not necessarily the answer to the problem of terrorism; it only causes more attacks to occur. Marc Sageman outlines the reasons for this increase in his book *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*. Sageman maintains that global hostility toward al-Qaeda has forced the organization to adopt a less centralized course, which encourages individuals or small groups to essentially self-radicalize and further al-Qaeda’s goals individually.<sup>12</sup>

After 2001, al-Qaeda turned away from its former model—a centralized command structure that would direct operations around the world. In *The Mind of the Terrorist: The Psychology of Terrorism from the IRA to al-Qaeda*, Jerrold Post says that al-Qaeda “operated much more autonomously, out of hubs and nodes but absent the prior

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey D. Simon, *Lone Wolf Terrorism: Understanding the Growing Threat*, 1st edition (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

centralized hierarchical control.”<sup>13</sup> This is interesting in the context of this thesis because it seems that many organizations, including Jabhat Fatah al-Sham and the Islamic State, have used that autonomy to make themselves more centralized.<sup>14</sup> Along those lines, al-Qaeda was forced to adopt new innovations like lone-wolf terrorism to remain successful in the wake of the Global War on Terror.

In spite of al-Qaeda’s shift toward the encouragement of lone-wolf attacks in the West, many organizations have made significant efforts to establish themselves as regional powers, going so far as to declare themselves states. Sageman provides ideological context for this change in *Understanding Terror Networks*. This work discusses the history and evolution of the global jihadist movement, focusing prominently on al-Qaeda and the jihadist fight in Afghanistan. He states, “The Salafi Jihad is a revivalist movement advocating the violent overthrow of local Muslim government—the ‘near enemy’—and establishment of an Islamic state.”<sup>15</sup> This is exactly what many Sunni extremist organizations are trying to accomplish. Angel Rabasa and Cheryl Benard agree with this notion in *Eurojihad: Patterns of Islamist Radicalization and Terrorism in Europe*, stating that a small minority of Muslims are waging jihad as a means to establish the Islamic state.<sup>16</sup> While the international community has tended to ignore these claims of statehood, these organizations should be measured against the international community’s definition of statehood to determine how closely modern terrorist organizations resemble states.

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<sup>13</sup> Jerrold M. Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist: The Psychology of Terrorism from the IRA to al-Qaeda*, First edition (New York: St. Martin’s, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Angel Rabasa and Cheryl Benard, *Eurojihad: Patterns of Islamist Radicalization and Terrorism in Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

### **3. Definition of States**

The Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States is a treaty that was signed in 1933 in Montevideo, Uruguay and defined statehood for the international community. According to Article I, “The state as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: a) a permanent population; b) a defined territory; c) government; and d) capacity to enter into relations with the other states.”<sup>17</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, states are defined by these guidelines. Also, according to the Montevideo Convention, statehood is not contingent on recognition from other states. While the convention was ratified by the United States, this system of defining statehood was also adopted by the European Union. These criteria will be used to determine the extent to which Islamist terrorist organizations are becoming more like traditional states. Should the behavior of modern Islamist militant organizations ever match this definition of statehood, it would have wide implications for homeland security in the West. For example, one terrorism case was called into question when a defense attorney made the claim that his client could not be tried for terrorism because the Islamic State is not a terrorist organization, but a state instead.<sup>18</sup> Similar problems will likely emerge in other as yet unforeseen areas of homeland security policy. Most terrorist groups do not fulfil all of the Montevideo criteria as of 2016; however, they seem to have grown beyond the confines of traditional terrorist organizations. It is therefore difficult to define them as one or the other. A new definition is required to help policymakers adequately deal with hybrid, state-like terrorist organizations.

### **C. METHODOLOGY**

The analytical research presented in this section contains two central parts: part one focuses on identifying and examining the extent to which Islamist militant organizations are beginning to resemble state governments, and part two addresses the

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<sup>17</sup> “Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed September 14, 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/sovereignty/montevideo-convention-rights-duties-states/p15897>.

<sup>18</sup> Abby Simmons, “Lawyers for Minnesota Terror Suspects Argue ISIL Not a Terrorist Organization,” *Star Tribune*, August 8, 2015, <http://www.startribune.com/lawyers-for-minnesota-terror-suspects-argue-isil-not-a-terrorist-organization/321094901/>.

extent to which this perceived mutation changes the threat these groups pose to the United States.

This research project takes the form of a comparative case study of five groups: the Islamic State, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, al-Shabaab, Hezbollah, and the Afghan Taliban. The research provides an understanding of the phenomenon of Islamist terror organizations that are evolving into political entities like states and governments. The research uses data from scholarly articles and news sources, and publications from the militant organizations themselves.<sup>19</sup>

The following criteria are used in the analysis chapter to visually demonstrate the state-like similarities each group shares. It also demonstrates how closely each individual group resembles the internationally recognized definition of a state set forth by the Montevideo Convention. To demonstrate this, criteria derived from the Montevideo Convention were used to assess the case study's progression to statehood. Those criteria are:

- The organization's span of control has defined borders.
- The region controlled by the organization contains a permanent population.
- The organization acts in a governmental capacity in the region it controls.
- The organization has the capacity to enter into relations with foreign governments.
- The organization interacts with neighboring militant organizations.

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<sup>19</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research Design and Methods*, forth, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009).

The following set of questions or analytic criteria is used to illustrate potential alterations to the threat posed by changes in the case study groups. Each question addresses a key aspect of the organization's world-view, ideology, or international reach.

- Is the organization apocalyptic?
- Do the majority of recruits come from the region under the organization's control?
- Does the organization have a precursor?
- Is the organization primarily interested in overthrowing an existing regime?
- Does the organization follow the Maoist model of revolution/guerrilla warfare?
- Is the organization primarily political?
- Has the organization conducted violent operations outside the geographic region in which it exists?
- Does the organization participate in international jihad?
- Is the organization religiously based?
- Does sectarianism play a role in the organization?

To determine if the case studies meet these criteria, data was collected and synthesized from books, scholarly and political journals, and publications produced by the militant organizations. Each question (or criteria) was answered with a "yes" if the case study matched the criterion or a "no" if the case study failed to match the criterion's verbiage.

#### **D. CHAPTER OUTLINE**

Chapters II–VI provide overviews of each case study for this thesis. Chapter VII compares the extent to which each case study organization has evolved into a regional power rather than traditional terrorist group. It concludes by addressing the potential threat implications of the evolutionary changes in each case study group.

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## II. CASE STUDY: THE ISLAMIC STATE

Recently, al-Qaeda has been overshadowed by its former affiliate in Iraq, the Islamic State. The Islamic State's resilience, successes in taking regional control, excessively brutal tactics, and ability to inspire attacks around the world have granted it international notoriety and legitimacy. The Islamic State used its notoriety on June 29th, 2014, to designate itself a caliphate. When it made this claim, the Islamic State essentially identified itself as a national government or state.

In 2003, a jihadist organization known as Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTJ) became active in Iraq under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. In 2004, JTJ officially joined al-Qaeda and became al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). According to Ahmed Hashim, AQI "provided al-Qaeda with a ready-made base from which to strike the United States and [Abu Musab al-Zarqawi] with prestige. He was now part of a brand name that drew recruits and financial and logistical support."<sup>20</sup> Joining the al-Qaeda franchise provided AQI with legitimacy among the radical Islamist population, boosting recruitment. Furthermore, al-Qaeda's robust covert supply network greatly aided AQI in the Iraq war.<sup>21</sup> Eventually, AQI concerned al-Qaeda's leadership due to its brutal tactics levied against Iraqi civilians—especially the Shiite population. Al-Qaeda eventually sent a letter to AQI ordering it to cease attacks on civilians.<sup>22</sup>

In 2006, Zarqawi was killed in an airstrike and Abu Ayyub al-Masri was selected as the new Iraqi representative of AQI.<sup>23</sup> In order to grow the organization, Masri made AQI more Iraq-focused to appeal to the local population. The group was subsequently rebranded as the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) and an Iraqi named Abu Umar al-Baghdadi

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<sup>20</sup> Ahmed S. Hashim, "The Islamic State: From al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate," *Middle East Policy* 21, no. 4 (December 1, 2014): 69–83, doi:10.1111/mepo.12096.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> "Mapping Militant Organizations: The Islamic State," Stanford University, April 24, 2016, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/1>.

was placed at its head.<sup>24</sup> In 2010, Syria fell into a state of civil war and Abu Muhammad al-Baghdadi assumed control of the newly branded Islamic State of Iraq.

The death of Osama bin Laden in 2011 and Ayman al-Zawahiri's rise to power in al-Qaeda ultimately led to the end of the relationship between al-Qaeda and ISI.<sup>25</sup> In 2013, ISI unilaterally announced a merger with its affiliate group in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra, and rebranded itself as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).<sup>26</sup> Both Jabhat al-Nusra and al-Qaeda resisted this move and officially broke relations with ISIS.<sup>27</sup> Over the next year, ISIS gained significant portions of territory in Syria and on June 29, 2014, declared itself an Islamic caliphate under the name the Islamic State.<sup>28</sup> Al-Baghdadi declared himself caliph and emphasized that all Muslims were duty-bound to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State.<sup>29</sup>

## A. ANALYSIS

### (1) Ideology

The Islamic State's ideology is nearly identical to that of its parent organization, al-Qaeda. Although al-Qaeda's primary concern in the short term has been carrying out global jihad against the West and non-Sunni Muslims, one of the organization's core tenets is establishing a global Islamic caliphate.

The Islamic State, however, believes itself to be the newly established caliphate, mirroring the one built by the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is quoted in *Dabiq*, the Islamic State's English-language magazine, portraying the Islamic State as an Islamic utopia:

It is a [caliphate] that gathered the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, [Syrian], Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, [North African], American, French, German, and

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Hashim, "The Islamic State."

<sup>27</sup> "Mapping Militant Organizations: The Islamic State," Stanford.

<sup>28</sup> Hashim, "The Islamic State."

<sup>29</sup> Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic*, March 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/02/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

Australian. Allah brought their hearts together, and thus, they became brothers by His grace, loving each other for the sake of Allah, standing in a single trench, defending and guarding each other, and sacrificing themselves for one another.<sup>30</sup>

When measured against the humanitarian crisis and harsh justice the Islamic State imposes, al-Baghdadi's words seem disingenuous. The Islamic State believes its interpretation of Islam is the only correct form and all non-Sunni, non-Islamic beliefs to be apostate in nature. The Islamic State deals harshly with all non-Sunni Islamic beliefs through public executions via shootings, beheadings, and crucifixions, a far cry from bringing "hearts together."

### ***What Is a Caliphate?***

The caliphate that the Islamic State wants to establish is deeply rooted in the organization's ideology. Establishing a caliphate is a task also deeply rooted in Sunni fundamentalism. Greg Meyer elaborates on the social importance of caliphates: "From [the Muslim] perspective, the caliphates represented a golden age of Islam, when Muslims had vast political and economic power and were at the cutting edge in many arts and sciences. Re-creating the caliphate is the path to restoring that lost glory, in their view."<sup>31</sup> Some Muslims consider the current state of Islam as much diminished from its former glory under the caliphate. Followers of al-Qaeda's ideology link the caliphate with the reestablishment of Islam as a major power. The last caliphate was the Ottoman Empire, which filled that role from approximately 1300 A.D. to 1923. The dissolution of the Ottoman caliphate left the Islamic world without a centralized Islamic power until the founding of the Islamic State's caliphate in 2014.

According to the Islamic State's ideology, a man must meet certain criteria under Islamic law for him to become the leader, or caliph, of a caliphate. According to Graeme Wood, the individual must be a Muslim male in good health from the Quraysh tribe, the

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<sup>30</sup> "Khilafah Declared," *Dabiq*, June 2014, <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-islam-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Greg Meyer, "What's a Caliphate?" NPR, June 30, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/06/30/326916530/whats-a-caliphate>.

Prophet Muhammad's affiliation, with territory in which he can impose Sharia law.<sup>32</sup> Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State were able to fulfill all criteria to establish a caliphate, and it had the population and territory to impose Sharia law.

### *Apocalyptic Views*

The Islamic State believes that the Koran specifically ties the group to the end times. Al-Qaeda in Iraq views itself as an organization destined to lead the world into the end times.<sup>33</sup> The Islamic State believes that the final battle between the forces of true (Sunni) Islam and the infidels of the world will take place in Northern Syria near a town called Dabiq. Supporters of the Islamic State have taken strides to bring about this final battle between the Islamic State and Rome, which is prophesied in one of the Islamic hadith, or narratives. The identity of Rome in this context is a heavily disputed topic as the Papal Army was disbanded long ago. One theory holds Istanbul as Rome because it was once the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire.<sup>34</sup> Another theory maintains that any infidel army, including U.S. armed forces, could be Rome.<sup>35</sup> The Islamic State uses televised beheadings and terrorist attacks in Western countries to force them into direct conflict, which leads one to believe the latter theory.<sup>36</sup>

### **(2) Tactics**

The Islamic State's military strategy includes two primary fronts. The first is conventional war in Syria. It has used conventional military methods to capture and hold the territory used to build its caliphate. To do this, the group has seized leftover military weapons from the Iraq war and has developed conventional tactics, which it employs when taking over regions. Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan explain, "ISIS seized millions of dollars' worth of American and foreign military equipment after it forced three Iraqi divisions to flee in June 2014, and it has also seized large stockpiles of

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<sup>32</sup> Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants."

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

weapons as well as equipment, facilities, and cash from Syria's regime and rebel groups."<sup>37</sup> Many actions like this appear very similar to an invading country during a conventional campaign. Weiss and Hassan explain the Islamic State's counter-insurgency tactics: "Once ISIS controls an area, it establishes a semblance of order and shows zero tolerance for any rivalry or public display of weapons. It immediately disarms the local communities, primarily of heavy weapons."<sup>38</sup> In this way, the Islamic State is able to establish control in a newly conquered territory very quickly. Members of the Islamic State have also been known to carry out kidnappings of foreign personnel, including journalists and aid workers. Islamic State members either ransom the hostages back to their countries of origin or publically execute them.<sup>39</sup>

The second front in the Islamic State's war is abroad. Due to the significant following the Islamic State enjoys, it has been able to convince foreign supporters—through propaganda and social media forums—to carry out attacks abroad in their own countries. By encouraging these attacks, the Islamic State avoids the difficulties associated with inserting operatives into a foreign country. Extremist propaganda available on the internet has led citizens around the world to carry out attacks on their own in whatever country they reside. The Islamic State then claims responsibility for these lone-offender attacks even though its leadership did not explicitly order them. Two recent examples were carried out on the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, California, and at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. The Islamic State neither ordered these attacks, nor communicated them to the Islamic State before they occurred. However, during the commission of both, the perpetrators communicated their allegiance to the Islamic State. These Islamic State-inspired terrorist tactics range in impact. Attacks on small groups of people, such as the New York Hatchet attack on three police officers and the Garland, Texas, attack on one security guard, have relatively low impact. On the

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<sup>37</sup> Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 1st edition (New York: Regan Arts, 2015).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> "Mapping Militant Organizations: The Islamic State," Stanford.

other hand, when Islamic State–inspired individuals carry out attacks on large crowds, such as those in Paris, Belgium, and Orlando, the result is greater collateral damage.

The Islamic State is focused on these attacks abroad because they are an unconventional way to strike opposing states that are either too strong or too far out of reach to attack logistically. Therefore, while the Islamic State carries out its conventional war of occupation, it also carries out an unconventional war in the West.

### **(3) Governance**

The Islamic State has proven itself as an effective governing body relative to any other government the Syrians have had previously. Unlike the Syrian government, the Islamic State learns and adapts from its mistakes. Weiss and Hassan quote a resident of the Islamic State, Ghassan al-Juma from Hasaka, as claiming, “The [Assad] regime made mistakes and repeated them. ... The [Free Syrian Army], too, made mistakes, and nobody could stop them. But when ISIS makes mistakes, it does not repeat them. You go and complain. If nobody responds to your complaint, you go to the perpetrator’s leader, and you always get what you want if you are right.”<sup>40</sup> This is in stark contrast to other groups like the Free Syrian Army that have been in charge in the past. In this way, the organization not only maintains control, it also establishes itself as a legitimate and fair government in the eyes of the populace. Its brand of justice is enticing to the local population.

The Islamic State’s interpretation of Sharia law and its form of justice might seem inhumane to Westerners, but to people living under the Assad regime and other Islamist organizations, it is a justice that is exceedingly rare. Weiss and Hassan provide the following example: “An uncle ... lost hundreds of thousands of Syrian pounds years before the uprising, in a fraud scheme by a local businessman. When ISIS controlled the city of Abu Kamal, the fraudulent man was arrested and forced by ISIS to return all money taken unlawfully.”<sup>41</sup> In addition, the Islamic State treats its fighters with the same fairness that it treats the local population. According to Weiss and Hassan, “ISIS

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<sup>40</sup> Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS*.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

provided safety and security; its methods of justice were swift, and nobody was exempt from punishment, including its own fighters who deviated from the strict moral code it had laid down. Consequently, kidnappings, robberies, and acts of extortion all but disappeared.”<sup>42</sup> This justice system, while harsh, proved to be an effective measure in keeping the peace and making the public feel safe.

Finally, the Islamic State provides services for the population it controls. Members are not all appointed to military roles, as governance employs a large percentage of the population in order to provide services such as security, medical care, food, and a justice system.<sup>43</sup> In addition, it manages economic control in its attempt to legitimize and strengthen its governance in Syria and Iraq.<sup>44</sup>

#### **(4) Permanent Population**

The Islamic State has asserted its control over the population living within its unofficial borders. Yuval Shany, Amichal Cohen, and Tal Mimran elaborate on the Islamic State’s population:

The requirement of a permanent population stems from the fact that a State is a means of realizing the shared aspirations of groups that have united due to cultural, religious, historical or other characteristics they have in common. There is no threshold of a minimum number of nationals necessary for a State. All that is necessary is a permanent population that identifies itself as citizens of the nation that makes up the State. This requirement is fulfilled when the population ties its fate to the place in which the entity has been established and exercises its power of governance.<sup>45</sup>

Most of the Islamic State’s population continues to live within its borders because it is their generational homeland. Arguably, the local residents do not count as a permanent population because they are not necessarily willing subjects. On the other hand, the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Yuval Shany, Amichai Cohen, and Tal Mimran, “ISIS: Is the Islamic State Really a State?,” The Israel Democracy Institute, September 14, 2014, <http://en.idi.org.il/analysis/articles/isis-is-the-islamic-state-really-a-state/>.

thousands of foreign fighters who have moved to the Islamic State's territory could fit this qualification under the Montevideo Convention because they identify themselves as citizens of the Islamic State.<sup>46</sup>

### **(5) Recruitment**

Syrians account for the largest percentage of membership in the Islamic State; however, the Islamic State also has an impressively robust foreign recruitment strategy. Although an official count does not exist, according to the Soufan Group, nearly 30,000 foreign fighters have travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight for their various militant groups.<sup>47</sup> The Islamic State has developed a successful strategy for appealing to the youth through social media outlets. By playing on many youths' inherent insecurities and their need to belong, the Islamic State has convinced many teens, both male and female, to depart for Syria. Islamic State recruiters have successfully targeted young Americans on the internet because their message speaks to the youth's disenfranchisement and angst. Additionally, Islamic State recruiters deliver a promise that youths can make an impact on the world.<sup>48</sup>

### **(6) Borders**

The Islamic State controls territory in both Syria and Iraq; however, the borders are constantly changing. Times of growth are due to conquest by the Islamic State. Meanwhile, operations carried out by opposition and foreign military groups have led to an overall decline in the territory held by the Islamic State.<sup>49</sup> While the Islamic State still controls an expansive amount of territory, it does not have specifically defined borders as

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> The Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq* (New York: The Soufan Group, December 2015), [http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG\\_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf](http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf).

<sup>48</sup> Paola Marizan, "Moderate Muslims Counter ISIS Propaganda with Their Own Media Strategy," NPR, July 27, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2015/07/27/424961326/moderate-muslims-counter-islamic-state-propaganda-with-own-media-strategy>.

<sup>49</sup> Armin Rosen, "ISIS' Territory in Syria and Iraq Is Shrinking—But There's a Catch," *Business Insider*, January 5, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-islamic-state-territory-shrinks-in-iraq-and-syria-us-led-coalition-2016-1>.

of 2016. The Islamic State’s plan for the future (seen in Figure 1) includes expansion throughout the Middle East, Northern Africa, and parts of Europe.<sup>50</sup>



Figure 1. The Islamic State’s Five-Year Expansion Plan<sup>51</sup>

### (7) Foreign Relations

The Islamic State does not generally engage diplomatically with other nations. The Islamic State’s international dealings are focused on recruiting, fundraising, and carrying out terrorist attacks. However, in 2015, U.S. Treasury representative Adam Szubin alleged that the Islamic State has been selling oil to both Turkey and the Assad Regime in Syria.<sup>52</sup> The Islamic State may be making as much as \$40 million per month in oil sales.<sup>53</sup> While the Assad regime is also located in Syria, this could constitute

<sup>50</sup> Mark Aitken, “ISIS Unveils Chilling New Map of Europe as it Plans for World Domination by 2020,” *Mirror*, August 9, 2015, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/isis-unveils-chilling-new-map-6224227>.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Vishakha Sowane, “ISIS Sells Oil to Syria’s Assad Regime, Some to Turkey, U.S. Official Says,” *International Business Times*, December 11, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-sells-oil-syrias-assad-regime-some-turkey-us-official-says-2221300>.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

foreign relations should the caliphate meet the other criteria in the Montevideo Convention. Alternatively, both Szubin and the Russian government allege that the Islamic State is selling oil to Turkey. If this is proven, it fulfills the criterion in the Montevideo Convention that states have an ability to conduct foreign relations. Turkey could be providing legitimacy to the Islamic State's caliphate.

Aside from the Syrian government and Turkey, most nations disavow the Islamic State. It is unlikely that any nation will ever recognize the Islamic State, even if it does manage to fulfill all the requirements of the Montevideo Convention.

### **(8) Relations with Other Militant Organizations**

The Islamic State is embroiled in mixed inter-organizational relations. The Islamic State and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham have been at odds with each other since 2013 because Jabhat Fatah al-Sham has refused to pledge itself to the Islamic State. Since then, the two groups have clashed violently and frequently. Other Islamist organizations are also viewed with animosity by the Islamic State. Many claim the Islamic State's methods are too harsh and violent. The Islamic State's ideology is not set up to allow for any view of Islam other than its own, and considers all other sects of Islam as abominations. This leaves no room for ideologically different militant groups in Syria and Iraq.

Groups like the Free Syrian Army also have a complex and difficult relationship with the Islamic State. Though they work together from time to time when it is tactically beneficial to the Islamic State, the group's ideology will not allow another group to establish a secular government in Syria. Stanford University provides this example: In September 2014, "ISIS and the Free Syrian Army signed a truce; they both agreed to the release of around 100 prisoners and that a border issue between Syria and Turkey be submitted to an Islamic court."<sup>54</sup> In short, the Islamic State is willing to get along with local, likeminded militant groups. This is necessary if it is to hold control over the territory it has gained.

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<sup>54</sup> "Mapping Militant Organizations: The Islamic State," Stanford.

The Islamic State also has varied relations with other transnational organizations. By coming onto the international scene, the Islamic State has attracted several other Islamist organizations. It quickly overshadowed al-Qaeda in the perception of other likeminded groups as the most powerful Islamist organization in the world. This has caused rifts in al-Qaeda-affiliated organizations. Many organizations have experienced internal strife wherein members want to place the organization under the control of the Islamic State, but leadership does not want to break its allegiance to al-Qaeda. An example of this, according to Stanford University, occurred within al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) when AQAP initially “announced support for ISIS and offered advice to the group in a statement made on its website in August 2014. In November of that year, however, AQAP declared Baghdadi’s caliphate illegitimate and refuted him after he claimed that Yemen was a part of his Islamic State, although it is likely that not all AQAP members support the decision to stand against ISIS.”<sup>55</sup> Additionally, the Islamic State has caused rifts in the membership of al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda’s Somali affiliate, wherein a significant number of the membership was in favor of leaving al-Qaeda and declaring allegiance to the Islamic State. This caused conflict within the organization, as most members wanted to remain loyal to al-Qaeda.

## **B. CASE STUDY RESULTS**

Table 1 contains the results of the Islamic State case study regarding both statehood and the organization’s will and capacity to affect U.S. homeland security. The statements in Table 1 are used in the analysis chapter to indicate the extent to which the Islamist militant organization has evolved from the traditional model of a terrorist group into an entity that resembles a state government. To measure this, the statements in Table 1 were derived from the guidelines set forth in the Montevideo Convention, which is the internationally recognized policy for statehood. Follow-up questions are also provided in the table to measure potential alterations to the current threat environment. In Chapter VII, the answers to the questions are synthesized with the answers from the other case studies. The answers in Table 1 are derived from the information within this chapter.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

Table 1. Islamic State Case Study Results

Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
Borders		X	Controls wide amounts of territory but the borders of these regions are constantly changing
Permanent Regional Population	X		
Governmental Capacity	X		
Foreign Relations		X	May be selling oil to Turkey and Assad regime in Syria
Relations with Militant Groups	X		Demands obedience from all organizations; those that do not yield are considered enemies
Apocalyptic	X		
Regional Recruits	X		
Precursor	X		Originally known as al-Qaeda in Iraq
Overthrowing Existing Regime		X	
Maoist Model Warfare	X		Semi-conventional military force and openly engages Syrian government in battle
Primarily Political	X		Has a conventional military force, but significant effort is undertaken in civic matters
Extra-Regional Violent Ops	X		Claimed responsibility for significant attacks in Europe and North America
International Jihad	X		Adheres to al-Qaeda's global caliphate ideology
Religiously Based	X		Efforts to establish a nation based in interpretation of Islam
Sectarianism	X		Inherently anti-Shiite; prides itself for being above the pettiness of racism

The four Montevideo Convention criteria for statehood appear at the top of the list. The indicators of militant statehood (or progression toward statehood) proposed in this thesis follow.

## **C. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the Islamic State is likely to remain the most significant threat to U.S. and Western national security into the future. Through its brutal tactics and hostile takeovers of regions in both Syria and Iraq, it has retained substantial amounts of territory. Its encouragement of homegrown violent extremists abroad has provided it a means to forcefully influence policy in Western nations.

While the Islamic State does not yet have fully defined borders, the organization does control a significant amount of territory in Syria and Iraq. The Islamic State also continues to govern a permanent population who has come to the Islamic State willingly as well as those Syrian and Iraqi residents who happen to live within the group's territorial borders. Finally, while its tactics are exceedingly brutal, the Islamic State has established itself as a governing body over a significant population. Its version of Sharia law may be brutal, but it is also fairer, from a certain point of view, than the governance of the Assad regime. According to the Montevideo Convention, the case could be made that the Islamic State is extremely close to fulfilling all the requirements of statehood in the region it governs.

The Islamic State has made the establishment of a legitimate caliphate in the Middle East a primary objective for the group, and all of its actions have been done to further that goal.

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### III. CASE STUDY: JABHAT FATAH AL-SHAM (JABHAT AL-NUSRA)

Al-Qaeda's primary concern is furthering its global jihad against non-Wahhabi Muslims, other religions, and non-believers; however, one of its ideological tenets hinges on the establishment of a global Islamist caliphate. Al-Qaeda has not made a formal attempt to establish itself in any part of the world, but Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, a former al-Qaeda affiliate, has taken advantage of the Syrian civil war to garner support for an Islamic emirate in the name of al-Qaeda.

Jabhat Fatah al-Sham was initially known as Jabhat al-Nusra and was created by the al-Qaeda franchise when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the head of al-Qaeda in Iraq, began to organize jihadist militant groups in Syria. Jabhat al-Nusra garnered support from local militant groups and was able to establish itself as a well-supplied organization with the help of al-Qaeda in Iraq.<sup>56</sup> Although al-Qaeda in Iraq became known for its brutal tactics and administration of justice, Jabhat al-Nusra took a more moderate governance approach. While The Islamic State regularly posts videos of its members beheading various members of other religions, foreign nationals, and others, Jabhat al-Nusra avoids those tactics.<sup>57</sup>

In 2013, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared a merger of the Islamic State in Iraq and Jabhat al-Nusra. He then rebranded the organization the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). However, Jabhat al-Nusra officially severed its partnership with ISIL because the group neither wanted nor agreed to the merger. After that, Jabhat al-Nusra reaffirmed its allegiance to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. Since then, Jabhat al-Nusra evolved into an autonomous organization, conducting its own operations against the Syrian government and rival factions within Syria, including the Islamic State. It is attempting to establish itself as a governing body and an alternative to the Syrian

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<sup>56</sup> Tim Arango, Anne Barnard, and Hwaida Saad, "Syrian Rebels Tied to Al-Qaeda Play Key Role in War," *New York Times*, December 8, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/09/world/middleeast/syrian-rebels-tied-to-al-qaeda-play-key-role-in-war.html>.

<sup>57</sup> "Mapping Militant Organizations: Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (Formerly Jabhat al-Nusra)," Stanford University, August 25, 2016, <https://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/493>.

government. In July 2016, Jabhat al-Nusra cut ties with al-Qaeda to better unite Syria's militant groups and to stop U.S. and Russian airstrikes against the group. As of August 2016, Jabhat al-Nusra is known as Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (JFS). JFS's split from al-Qaeda has not caused a change in its ideology or objectives, which are outlined in this chapter.

## A. ANALYSIS

### (1) Ideology

Jabhat Fatah al-Sham's ideology is closely tied to al-Qaeda's.<sup>58</sup> In 2005, Abu Bakr Naji outlined al-Qaeda's strategy and its rationale for the establishment of a global Islamic caliphate in a manifesto entitled "The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage through Which the Umma Will Pass."<sup>59</sup> The "management of savagery" refers to the strategy for exploiting the breakdown of order that will happen if a current government topples. As described in a post by Mark Tapson on *The Counter Jihad Report* blog, the administration of savagery entails the following:

- Establishing internal security
- Providing food and medical treatment
- Securing the borders against the invasion of enemies
- Establishing Sharia law
- Establishing a fighting society at all levels and among all individuals.<sup>60</sup>

JFS has made progress in each of the aforementioned areas. It has implemented Sharia and established enforcement groups and courts as means to providing security, it has made medical supplies and food available to the population, and it has engaged enemies to its cause in an effort to secure its territory.

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<sup>58</sup> Jennifer Cafarella, *Jabhat Al-Nusra in Syria: An Islamic Emirate for al-Qaeda* (Middle East Security Report no. 25) (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, December 2014), <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/jabhat-al-nusra-syria>.

<sup>59</sup> Abu Bakr Naji, "The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage through Which the Umma Will Pass," translated by William McCants, John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, May 23, 2006, <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/abu-bakr-naji-the-management-of-savagery-the-most-critical-stage-through-which-the-umma-will-pass.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup> Mark Tapson, "The Management of Savagery," *The Counter Jihad Report*, October 26, 2014, <https://counterjihadreport.com/2015/11/13/the-management-of-savagery/>.

JFS is carrying out its war against the Syrian government as a portion of al-Qaeda's grander mission of building a global Islamic caliphate.<sup>61</sup> JFS's ideology and mission hinges on developing an Islamic emirate, which will become a piece of al-Qaeda's global Islamic caliphate. According to its ideology, the establishment of the caliphate will bring about a new era in which Islam becomes the world's religion.<sup>62</sup>

Because bringing about a global Islamic caliphate is JFS's core goal, overthrowing the Assad regime in Syria and implementing local governance is a key short-term objective. JFS is primarily concerned with dislodging the Assad regime, not only because the humanitarian crisis has overwhelmed the area, but also because it will be easier to take the seat of governance vacated by the current government. Adhering to al-Qaeda's plan for establishing a global caliphate, it will then declare Syria as the first of many Islamic emirates that will one day make up the caliphate. According to Syria analyst Jennifer Cafarella, "This Caliphate will reverse what Salafi-Jihadists view as the decline of the Muslim community, challenging an 'anti-Islamic alliance' of 'Crusaders,' 'Zionists,' and 'apostates.' Jihadi scholars consider this goal so important that fighting to establish this Caliphate becomes a duty incumbent upon every Muslim."<sup>63</sup> JFS takes this calling very seriously; however, unlike ISIL, which calls itself the caliphate reborn, JFS will not establish a caliphate without consent from other Islamist organizations in the region.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, JFS has made claims that they do not care if they act as the controlling force in Syria once it becomes an Islamic emirate, just that it becomes one.<sup>65</sup>

## (2) Tactics

Early in the Syrian civil war, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham used traditional terrorist tactics against Syrian government forces, carrying out suicide bombings and vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attacks. In order to generate support, meet political and military aims, and finance its operations, JFS has been known to stage

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<sup>61</sup> Cafarella, *Jabhat Al-Nusra in Syria*.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> "Mapping Militant Organizations: Jabhat Fatah al-Sham," Stanford.

<sup>65</sup> Cafarella, *Jabhat Al-Nusra in Syria*.

kidnappings of foreign soldiers in Syria. Cafarella elaborates: “In August 2014, the group released a video in collaboration with ISIS that threatened to kill a unit of Lebanese soldiers it had taken hostage if Hezbollah did not withdraw from Syria.”<sup>66</sup> Since 2012, JFS has strengthened its recruitment and evolved to carry out conventional military attacks on Assad’s bases and airports and to enforce no-fly zones with anti-aircraft weaponry.<sup>67</sup>

### (3) Governance

Jabhat Fatah al-Sham has developed an effective hybrid strategy of conquering and then implementing social services through existing, likeminded militant organizations. The group’s long-term goals of developing an Islamic emirate require the group to function not only as a military organization but also as a political organization should the group hold control of Syria once the Assad regime falls. To that end, Cafarella states, “[Jabhat Fatah al-Sham] actively pursues the establishment of Shari’a courts in which other rebel groups will participate. [Its] strategy for governance therefore directly grows out of its strategy for integration with Syria’s wider opposition: [JFS] uses its military prowess to build relationships with rebel groups, capitalize on their local connections, intertwine covertly with their existing structures, and translate its social programs into local governance.”<sup>68</sup> While it has generally been welcomed in the regions to which it has expanded, JFS drew some adversity because it immediately began implementing Sharia law in the regions it controlled. For the most part, Cafarella explains, JFS is generally successful at implementing Sharia.<sup>69</sup>

JFS has gained the trust of the population by providing it with basic services.<sup>70</sup> Rana Khalaf elaborates on the provisions JFS provides: “Its work is not limited to legal issues, but extends to cover public services like relief work and medical services, and to

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<sup>66</sup> “Mapping Militant Organizations: Jabhat Fatah al-Sham,” Stanford.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Cafarella, *Jabhat Al-Nusra in Syria*.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> “Mapping Militant Organizations: Jabhat Fatah al-Sham,” Stanford.

intervene in the everyday life of citizens.”<sup>71</sup> These practices have caused much of the permanent population in regions under JFS’s control to rely on the organization. JFS has shown the population under its control a level of fairness in matters of justice unseen under Assad’s rule.

While JFS tries to maintain an indirect position of authority over regional powers, the group does control key assets, presumably to ensure cooperation in Syria and progress toward becoming an Islamic emirate. Stanford University claims that JFS put Aleppo bakeries back in business but, in an effort to retain control of the population, managed the supply of flour.<sup>72</sup>

#### **(4) Recruitment**

Jabhat Fatah al-Sham’s recruitment strategy is very similar to the Islamic State’s. Swaths of foreign fighters have come to Syria to join the organization because of an effective social media campaign. According to Adam Baczko, Gilles Dorronsoro, and Arthur Quesnay, JFS “owes this independence to foreign funding and war-hardened fighters who share the same ideology. To preserve its identity, [JFS] tightly controls the recruitment of militants. To the authors’ knowledge, it is the only movement that has instituted a trial period for its fighters.”<sup>73</sup>

#### **(5) Borders**

As part of the campaign to reestablish a caliphate, al-Qaeda’s ideology, which JFS follows, calls for securing borders against foreign powers. This likely includes fighting any militant group or government currently involved in Syria, which has accepted support from the United States or other foreign powers. This also includes combating any militant organization supporting the current Syrian government.

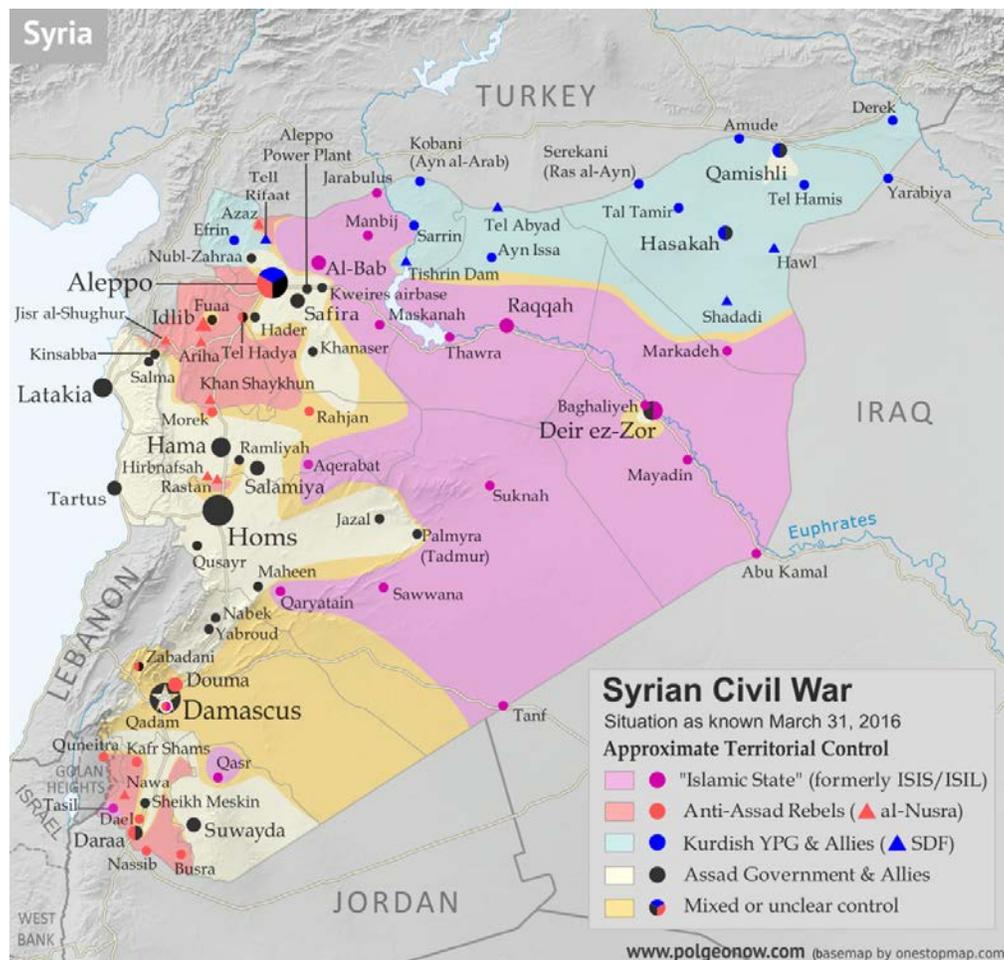
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<sup>71</sup> Rana Khalaf, “Governance without Government in Syria: Civil Society and State Building during Conflict,” *Syria Studies* 7, no. 3 (June 16, 2015): 37–72, <https://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/syria/article/view/1176>.

<sup>72</sup> “Mapping Militant Organizations: Jabhat Fatah al-Sham,” Stanford.

<sup>73</sup> Adam Baczko, Gilles Dorronsoro, and Arthur Quesnay, “Building a Syrian State in a Time of Civil War,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 16, 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/04/16/building-syrian-state-in-time-of-civil-war/fzrk?reloadFlag=1>.

Because JFS does not directly control areas in Syria, as with the Islamic State, the borders of its territory are neither officially nor practically defined. However, the main concentration of Syrian towns under JFS control is focused around the northwestern part of Syria near Aleppo. The map in Figure 2 shows areas of territorial control of the groups fighting in Syria and is accurate as of March 2016. Despite JFS's control of territories and small towns in Syria, it has no defined borders.



Areas under Jabhat Fatah al-Sham control are shown in peach, with red triangles.

Figure 2. Territorial Control in Syria as of March 31, 2016<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Koen Adams, Evan Centanni, and Djordje Djukic, "Syrian Civil War Control Map: April 2016," Political Geography Now, March 31, 2016, <http://www.polgeonow.com/2016/03/syrian-civil-war-control-map-april-2016.html>.

## **(6) Foreign Relations**

Jabhat Fatah al-Sham maintains an aggressive relationship with outside nations. Its current primary objective is to overthrow the Syrian government and to establish an emirate of its own. As it sees nations like the United States and Russia who do not oppose the Syrian government as direct enemies, it targets the armed forces of these nations. The group does have one advantage over the Islamic State regarding foreign policy; JFS is assumed to pose less of a threat than the Islamic State, allowing it to operate relatively unnoticed in the Islamic State's shadow. In a CNN article, Cafarella states, "Al-Qaeda, meanwhile, has been quietly playing the long game. America's focus elsewhere has played directly into the group's hands, allowing the group to exploit its time out of the spotlight and set up a return to the global stage once ISIS is defeated."<sup>75</sup> The Islamic State's brutal tactics against civilians and foreign nationals makes it the more valuable target, taking attention away from JFS and allowing it to operate relatively unobstructed. "While ISIS is ruthlessly presiding over the territory it controls, [JFS] is cultivating local relationships, building capabilities it intends to use against the U.S. in the future."<sup>76</sup> Should it be successful in toppling the Assad regime in Syria, JFS will be required to open communication with other nations to develop its economy. That said, because the group is linked with al-Qaeda and radical Islam, it is unlikely that a nation under the control of Jabhat Fatah al-Sham will ever be recognized as a nation-state.

## **(7) Relations with Other Militant Organizations**

Jabhat Fatah al-Sham has mixed relations with the other Syrian militant organizations. Typically, the group is aggressive toward any organization that backs the Assad regime in Syria, but it remains friendly toward most Islamist organizations. The Mapping Militant Organizations project at Stanford University claims that "Like most militant organizations in the Syrian conflict, [JFS's] relationships with other groups are

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<sup>75</sup> Jennifer Cafarella, "Syria: The Most Dangerous Terror Group Isn't ISIS," CNN, February 26, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/26/opinions/syria-isis-al-qaeda-nusra/index.html>.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

complex and constantly change on the ground. It typically maintains strong relationships with Islamist groups that are not ISIS.”<sup>77</sup>

JFS does not have good relations with Lebanese Hezbollah. Hezbollah is pursuing a policy of support for the government in Syria because of its long-standing alliance with the Assad regime. Hezbollah and the Assad regime are part of the Axis of Resistance, an organization led by Iran and made up of Middle-Eastern nations and organizations to resist Western influence. The Assad regime in Syria has proven itself a strong ally of Hezbollah in providing financial support, weapons, and safe haven for Hezbollah to establish training camps. Additionally, the proliferation of Sunni extremist groups is cause for concern among the Lebanese Shiite population. For these reasons, it is in Hezbollah’s best interests to keep the Assad regime in power, which places the organization at odds with JFS.<sup>78</sup>

## **B. CASE STUDY RESULTS**

Table 2 contains the questions that were answered in the case study. These questions are used in the analysis chapter to indicate the extent to which Jabhat Fatah al-Sham has evolved from the traditional model of a terrorist group into an entity that resembles a state government. To measure this, the statements in Table 2 were derived from the guidelines set forth in the Montevideo Convention. Follow-up questions have also been provided to measure potential changes to the current threat environment. As mentioned previously, Chapter VII synthesizes the following answers with answers from the other case studies.

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<sup>77</sup> “Mapping Militant Organizations: Jabhat Fatah al-Sham,” Stanford.

<sup>78</sup> Marisa Sullivan, *Hezbollah in Syria* (Middle East Security Report no. 19) (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, April 2014), [http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah\\_Sullivan\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah_Sullivan_FINAL.pdf).

Table 2. Jabhat Fatah al-Sham Case Study Results

Questions	Yes	No	Comments
Borders		X	Exercises control over territory and cities but does not maintain borders
Permanent Population	X		
Governmental Capacity	X		
Foreign Relations		X	Not at this time, but could change should the group achieve regional dominance
Relations with Militant Groups	X		Governance strategy includes cultivating relationships with local militant organizations and combatting organizations either in support of Assad or Western nations
Apocalyptic	X		
Regional Recruits	X		
Precursor	X		
Overthrowing Existing Regime	X		One primary goal is to topple the Assad regime in Syria
Maoist Model Warfare	X		Maintains semi-conventional military force and openly engages Syrian government in battle
Primarily Political		X	
Extra-Regional Violent Ops		X	
International Jihad		X	
Religiously Based	X		Adheres to al-Qaeda's global caliphate ideology
Sectarianism	X		

The four Montevideo Convention criteria for statehood appear at the top of the list. The indicators of militant statehood (or progression toward statehood) proposed in this thesis follow.

## **C. CONCLUSION**

In sum, the Jabhat Fatah al-Sham case study reveals the driving force behind radical Islamist groups' move toward statehood. Its devotion to al-Qaeda's ideology propels its primary objective of establishing an emirate under al-Qaeda's caliphate. While the group does not currently have specific borders or relations with outside nations, its devotion to courting local militias and success implementing a legal system based on Sharia law, as well as JFS's dedication to community service projects, has won favor from local militia groups and the local population in the areas it controls. That it has a governance structure and a permanent populace under its direct control are significant steps toward statehood, according to the Montevideo Convention. JFS could become a significant threat to the West in the future should it succeed in gaining control over Syria. It would be unwise to ignore JFS in the face of the threat posed by the Islamic State.

#### IV. CASE STUDY: AL-SHABAAB

The Somali terrorist group Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin, more commonly known as al-Shabaab, or the youth, originated as the militant arm of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). The ICU was a Sunni fundamentalist organization whose main ideological goal was to establish control of Somalia and implement a rigid interpretation of Sharia law. Al-Shabaab had its actual beginnings before joining forces with the ICU; Holly Yan elaborates: “Al-Shabaab’s predecessor was al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI), which worked to create an Islamist emirate in Somalia. It was partially funded by former al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.”<sup>79</sup> The organization only achieved prominence, however, after it joined the ICU.

In 1991, the overthrow of a dictatorship under President Siad Barre propelled Somalia into a state of anarchy that lasted until 2004, when the international community installed a new Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in an effort to bring the region under control.<sup>80</sup> The government was an abomination to radical Islamist groups due to its secular nature and support from foreign nations.

Al-Shabaab maintained its position as the militant arm of the ICU from approximately 1997 to 2006, carrying out attacks on the TFG and international workers in Somalia. In mid-2006, the ICU was able to temporarily establish control in Somalia before Ethiopian troops invaded the country, threw out the ICU from power, and reinstalled the West-friendly TFG. Al-Shabaab was able to retain its organizational structure after the Ethiopian invasion and in spite of ICU members’ efforts to reunite the shattered organization. Al-Shabaab continued to pursue its own agenda of revenge against Ethiopia by dealing destabilizing blows to the TFG. Al-Shabaab’s scorn had its roots in the fact that the ICU did not have a global agenda.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Holly Yan, “What Is Al-Shabaab, and What Does it Want?,” CNN, April 2, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/02/world/africa/al-shabaab-explainer/index.html>.

<sup>80</sup> “Chronology of Somalia’s Collapse, Conflict,” Reuters, January 1, 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-idUSL0188726320070101>.

<sup>81</sup> “Mapping Militant Organizations: Al Shabaab,” Stanford University, February 20, 2016, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/61>.

In 2008, as al-Shabaab's relationship with al-Qaeda began to grow, its ideology and tactics also grew more similar to al-Qaeda's. It was through this relationship that al-Shabaab was able to gain notoriety and begin to attract foreign fighters to the region to join its cause. In 2012, al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda officially joined forces.<sup>82</sup> Since then, al-Shabaab has carried out a land war with the TFG and attacks outside the borders of Somalia.

## **A. ANALYSIS**

### **(1) Ideology**

Al-Shabaab began with an ideological desire to bring Somalia under Sharia law as part of the ICU. However, in the years after the two groups split, the organization's ideology became less nationalist and more aligned with al-Qaeda. Al-Shabaab has taken extreme actions in the pursuit of its form of justice, carrying out punishments such as cutting off the hands of thieves and stoning adulterers.<sup>83</sup> Today, al-Shabaab is still ideologically driven to establish Somalia under Sharia law, but it also wants to build an Islamic emirate like Jabhat Fatah al-Sham does in Syria. Al-Shabaab's Islamic Emirate will later become part of a global Islamic caliphate that will be built by al-Qaeda once the governments of their enemies fall under the might of al-Qaeda's jihad. What was once a semi-religious nationalist movement primarily concerned with establishing Sharia law in Somalia now increasingly mirrors the global struggle against non-Sunni infidels.

### **(2) Tactics**

Over the last few years, al-Shabaab has developed from a semi-conventional military force waging conventional war against the TFG and its neighbors to an asymmetric, decentralized organization.<sup>84</sup> Al-Shabaab has been known to undertake bombings, assassinations, kidnappings and suicide attacks against the TFG and foreign

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<sup>82</sup> "Somalia's al-Shabab Join al-Qaeda," BBC, accessed August 13, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-16979440>.

<sup>83</sup> "Mapping Militant Organizations: Al Shabaab," Stanford.

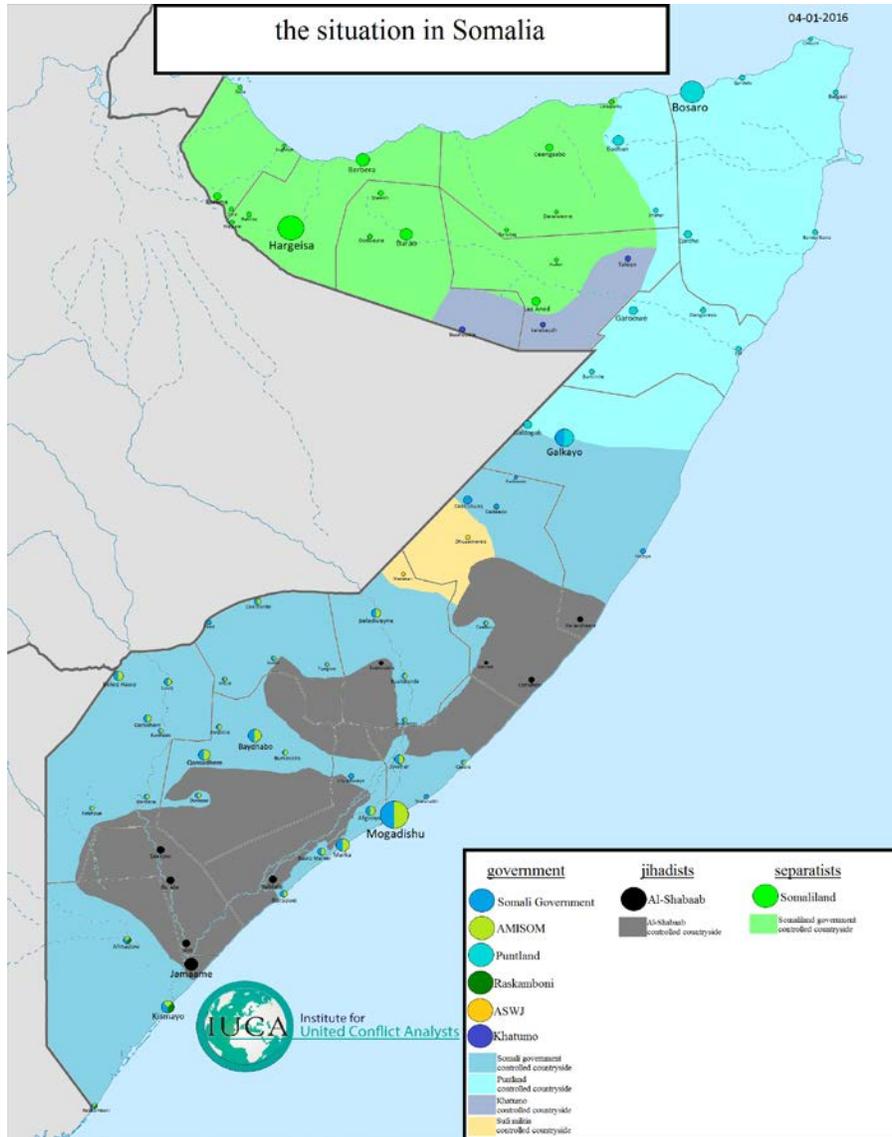
<sup>84</sup> John Campbell, "Africa in Transition: The Danger of Al-Shabaab's Evolution," *Africa in Transition*, April 30, 2015, <http://blogs.cfr.org/campbell/2015/04/30/the-danger-of-al-shabaabs-evolution/>.

support forces within Somalia. The group has claimed responsibility for numerous international terrorist attacks throughout the East African region, including the 2010 bomb blasts in Kampala, Uganda, against World Cup spectators and the 2013 attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, wherein several gunmen killed 67 civilians. Al-Shabaab was also responsible for the 2015 attacks on a Kenyan university that claimed approximately 147 lives. The main targets of its attacks—Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda—have all been involved in direct military action against the group.

Although al-Shabaab claims the Somali struggle for dominance is part of a greater global Islamic jihad, the organization has yet to demonstrate attacks in other continents as a priority. Recent losses of territory in Somalia to invading forces from the African Union forced al-Shabaab to take to the shadows and resort to asymmetric operations and terrorist actions abroad in the surrounding region.

### **(3) Borders**

Although al-Shabaab is now operating in a less centralized, more asymmetric manner, at its height the group controlled most of southern Somalia, including parts of the capital. Military advances on al-Shabaab's territorial holdings have devastatingly reduced the organization's span of control in Somalia to small pockets of territory (see Figure 3).



Areas under al-Shabaab control are shown in dark gray, with black circles.

Figure 3. The Territorial Situation in Somalia as of 2016<sup>85</sup>

<sup>85</sup> "Somalia: Map Update," *pietervanostaeyen*, August 1, 2015, <https://pietervanostaeyen.com/2015/08/01/somalia-map-update-dd-august-1-2025/>.

#### (4) Governance

In its years as a significant power in Somalia, al-Shabaab has exercised its own version of governance within the territories it controls. Locally, in Somalia, the organization enforces its interpretation of morality. Oscar Mwangi elaborates: “It has prohibited various social activities that it considers immoral, such as watching movies, watching football, chewing khat, shaving beards, and not dressing in a conservative manner.”<sup>86</sup> The group has provided social services and carried out justice along the lines of Sharia law. According to Mwangi, al-Shabaab has been very successful in its community-outreach programs: “Somali communities, especially southern ones, have not only welcomed it into their towns, but in some cases give [alms] to aid in the movement’s jihad efforts. The community level operations are an essential element in al-Shabaab’s strategy to sustain its activities, hence it is always trying to expand its local-community infrastructure and support.”<sup>87</sup> By offering services to Somali communities, al-Shabaab has increased its worth to the residents as a positive alternative to any other group or government in the region. Al-Shabaab has built community governments encompassing local militias and developed a relatively robust system of governance.

By providing necessities for the Somali community, al-Shabaab was able to generate local community support. Mwangi says, “Al-Shabaab plays a critical role in the distribution of food and money to the affected and vulnerable communities in the country. It has set up food distribution centers and collects [alms] from the communities it governs and thereafter distributes money to those most in need.”<sup>88</sup> The provision of services also provided for other community needs. Similarly, the provision of services requires al-Shabaab to recruit non-military positions to help manage governance.<sup>89</sup> Along with provisions of food and infrastructure, the creation of jobs has helped bathe al-Shabaab in a positive light for the local population.

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<sup>86</sup> Oscar Gakuo Mwangi, “State Collapse, Al-Shabaab, Islamism, and Legitimacy in Somalia,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 13, no. 4 (December 1, 2012): 513–27, doi:10.1080/21567689.2012.725659.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

## **(5) Population**

For a time, al-Shabaab maintained control over a relatively large population that inhabited the regions under its control. Though it has now lost much of its original territory, it was effective at maintaining peace and order and was accepted—though in many cases probably under duress—as the strongest regional power in Somalia. As of 2016, al-Shabaab controls very little territory, though it formerly governed most of southern Somalia and parts of Mogadishu. The populations under al-Shabaab’s control seemed to have accepted the organization’s governance until the African Union forces liberated their towns.

After the reign of President Siad Barre from 1991 to the early 2000s, the people of Somalia did not have much holding them together as a community. Abdi Samatar elaborates: “After more than a decade of war, Somalis’ only remaining source of moral and political alternative to chaos was the population’s staunch adherence to Islam.”<sup>90</sup> This religious loyalty likely plays into the population’s willingness to be ruled by an Islamic government.

## **(6) Recruitment**

Al-Shabaab has been successful in its efforts to recruit Somali nationals within its span of control, and abroad within the surrounding regions. Most of al-Shabaab’s fighters are Somali nationals. Al-Shabaab has also demonstrated a robust recruitment corps using social media to attract foreign fighters from English-speaking countries. Al-Shabaab is responsible for the first known American suicide bomber in history.<sup>91</sup>

Omar Hammami, also known as Abu Mansoor al-Amriki, was an Alabama-born male who became radicalized, disappeared, and was found on an English-language recruitment message posted to YouTube for al-Shabaab. Since then, Hammami rose in the ranks of al-Shabaab and eventually became the leader of al-Shabaab’s English-

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<sup>90</sup> Abdi Ismail Samatar, “Defeating Al-Shabab and Dismembering Somalia,” Al Jazeera, July 1, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/06/defeating-al-shabab-dismemberin-201463019484226147.html>.

<sup>91</sup> Laura Yuen and Sasha Aslanian, “Minnesota Pipeline to Al-Shabab,” Minnesota Public Radio, September 25, 2013, [http://minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/ongoing/somali\\_timeline/](http://minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/ongoing/somali_timeline/).

speaking recruitment campaign. In 2013, inner conflict caused Hammami to leave the organization; shortly thereafter, al-Shabaab forces reportedly killed him.

### **(7) Relations with Other Militant Organizations**

Since its beginning, al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda have maintained a close relationship. Fighters from each group are known to train together. Al-Shabaab officially pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2012 and has maintained that standing since.

Al-Shabaab's relationship with the Islamic State is dubious. The Islamic State has reached out to al-Shabaab, calling for it to sever ties with al-Qaeda and join its ranks instead. This has caused a rift within al-Shabaab as some members believe that they should follow the Islamic State's call while others disagree, claiming that they should continue to exercise their allegiance to al-Qaeda. Connor Gaffey elaborates: "A small faction of fighters under an Al-Shabaab commander in the Puntland region, northern Somalia, did declare their allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi late in 2015, but such instances have been limited and the Somali group's leadership has reportedly threatened to kill any potential defectors."<sup>92</sup> In this way, al-Shabaab leadership attempts to maintain organizational control and dissuade traitors to its cause.

Al-Shabaab's affiliate organizations, al-Hijra in Kenya and Ras Kamboni in Somalia, officially announced a merger in 2010. Al-Shabaab also has rival organizations within Somalia, such as Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a, dedicated to protecting the nation's traditional form of Sufism.<sup>93</sup>

### **(8) Foreign Relations**

While no foreign countries have outwardly supported al-Shabaab, allegations have been made that it may be receiving weapons and funding from Eritrea, Djibouti, Iran, Syria, Libya, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>94</sup> Al-Shabaab's relations with foreign organizations are equally tumultuous as its relations with foreign states. The group

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<sup>92</sup> Connor Gaffey, "Why Al-Shabab Is Not Joining ISIS," *Newsweek*, January 22, 2016, <http://www.newsweek.com/al-shabab-not-joining-isis-418656>.

<sup>93</sup> "Mapping Militant Organizations: Al Shabaab," Stanford.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

heavily regulates the actions of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), limiting where they can help the population, what aid they can provide, and what they can feed the population. Mwangi elaborates on the reasons for this, explaining that

Al-Shabaab's efforts to regulate international NGOs aims to achieve two objectives: to portray itself as the protector of the people and to assert itself as the legitimate and effective authority in the regions that it controls. Firstly, Al-Shabaab accuses the United States and international donors of using imported food aid to undermine Somali farmers during the harvest season. It also warns the Somali people against becoming dependent on aid from the infidels.<sup>95</sup>

By dissuading the local population from accepting foreign aid, al-Shabaab is able to maintain itself as the regional provider.

## **B. CASE STUDY RESULTS**

Table 3 contains the results of the Al-Shabaab case study regarding both statehood and the organization's threat to U.S. homeland security. The statements in Table 3 are used in Chapter VII to indicate the extent to which the Islamist militant organization has evolved from the traditional model of a terrorist group into an entity that resembles a state government.

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<sup>95</sup> Mwangi, "State Collapse."

Table 3. Al-Shabaab Case Study Results

Questions	Yes	No	Comments
Borders		X	
Permanent Regional Population	X		
Governmental Capacity	X		
Foreign Relations		X	
Relations with Militant Groups	X		
Apocalyptic	X		Ideology includes participation in global Islamic caliphate
Regional Recruits	X		
Precursor	X		
Overthrowing Existing Regime	X		Interested in legitimate government participation
Maoist Model Warfare	X		
Primarily Political		X	Organization has political goals but is mostly militaristic
Extra-Regional Violent Ops	X		
International Jihad	X		
Religiously Based	X		
Sectarianism	X		

The four Montevideo Convention criteria for statehood appear at the top of the list. The indicators of militant statehood (or progression toward statehood) proposed in this thesis follow.

## **C. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, while al-Shabaab is not yet defeated and still presents a clear threat to the region surrounding the Horn of Africa, it is unlikely that the organization will recover from its current state as an uprooted insurgency. It is also unlikely that the group will carry out attacks outside eastern Africa, despite having recruited many foreign fighters from nations like the United States and European countries. At one time, al-Shabaab came very close to seizing control of the government of Somalia. It had a defined territory, rumors of an ability to deal with other nations, a span of control encompassing a permanent population, and ability to exercise governance within the area it controlled.

Al-Shabaab will likely remain a regional threat. The tribalism of Somalia's population will continue to cause the TFG great trouble and could allow for an al-Shabaab resurgence due to regional instability and Somalia's inability to effectively establish governance independent of United Nations and African Union forces.

## V. CASE STUDY: HEZBOLLAH

Hezbollah, meaning “Party of God,” is a Shiite militant group located in Lebanon. Since its inception in 1985, the group’s primary focus has been bringing an end to the nation of Israel and paving the way for an official state of Palestine in the Levant. In 2015, United States Director of National Intelligence James Clapper omitted Hezbollah from the unclassified world-threat review for the first time.<sup>96</sup> While Hezbollah still presents a possible threat to U.S. interests abroad, it is arguable if the Shiite militant organization ever possessed the desire to directly threaten the United States or make its cause anything more than a regional issue unique to the Levant.

Hezbollah has evolved from a terrorist organization into a legitimized political party within Lebanon. It functions as part of the national government, providing services for the population and advocating on behalf of the local Shiite population. Hezbollah has fulfilled nearly all the criteria for statehood under the Montevideo Convention. It takes part in governing the country of Lebanon, exerting control over a territory with defined borders and a permanent population, and builds relations with foreign nations.

In the early 1980s, Israel invaded southern Lebanon in an effort to drive out Palestinian militant organizations in the region.<sup>97</sup> Palestinian militants had used towns in southern Lebanon as safe havens to carry out operations against Israel and rival Lebanese organizations.<sup>98</sup> In response to this occupation, and sparked by Iran’s example during its own Shiite revolution, a new militant organization, Hezbollah, formed.<sup>99</sup> After World War II, the Sunnis were granted control of the country, which left the minority Shia population neglected and voiceless.<sup>100</sup> Between the 1980s and early 2000s, Hezbollah was responsible for many terrorist attacks against Israel and international interests. The

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<sup>96</sup> Jack Moore, “U.S. Omits Iran and Hezbollah from Terror Threat List,” *Newsweek*, March 16, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/iran-and-hezbollah-omitted-us-terror-threat-list-amid-nuclear-talks-314073>.

<sup>97</sup> “Mapping Militant Organizations: Hezbollah,” Stanford University, August 5, 2016, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/81>.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

group is credited with the first suicide bombing carried out by an Islamist organization.<sup>101</sup>

While Hezbollah has proven itself a deadly adversary over the years, it has made significant efforts to increase its political status within the government of Lebanon. Most of the major attacks carried out by Hezbollah ended by the late 1990s; however, according to Stanford University, the group maintains itself as a fighting force in the region and runs training camps for its members and members of other groups.<sup>102</sup>

## **A. ANALYSIS**

### **(1) Ideology**

As Hezbollah is the only Shiite militant organization within this study, its ideology differs greatly from all the other organizations'. The differences between the Sunni and Shiite sides of Islam are vast; importantly, however, the Shias are greatly outnumbered by the Sunnis. Nearly all Middle Eastern countries have Sunni-led governments.

Hezbollah's first manifesto claimed that the terror group's primary objectives were to destroy Israel, combat international influences, and destroy its enemies within Lebanon.<sup>103</sup> Hezbollah claimed that any incursions into Lebanese affairs by foreign entities could be viewed as hostile acts against the Lebanese people.<sup>104</sup> In 2009, Hezbollah released another, more moderate manifesto that claimed the organization would continue to pursue Lebanese control and an end to the nation of Israel.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Renee Montagne, "A Look at the History of Suicide Attacks," NPR, July 19, 2005, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4760240>.

<sup>102</sup> "Mapping Militant Organizations: Hezbollah," Stanford.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

## **(2) Borders**

Hezbollah's headquarters are in southern Lebanon, and the group has the most direct control in this region.<sup>106</sup> Though the group acts as a political party in Lebanon, it is not in control of the entire country. Although Hezbollah controls territory, it is a stretch to say that it can claim the Lebanon's internationally accepted borders as its own borders. From that point of view, Hezbollah does not entirely fit the Montevideo Convention's description. On the other hand, Hezbollah wields great political power, so the border argument cannot be ignored. Hezbollah is a functioning part of the government. Therefore, the borders of Lebanon, and largely the southern region where Hezbollah exercises the greatest control, could be said to fulfill the border criteria set forth by the Montevideo Convention.

## **(3) Population**

Hezbollah's population consists of Lebanese citizens who live primarily in the southern region of Lebanon. However, because the group acts like a political party and takes part in the government, Hezbollah could claim the entire population of Lebanon as being under its control. Unlike other Islamist organizations, Hezbollah does not discriminate against its subjects based on religion. Hezbollah offers protection to Shia and Sunni Muslims alike as well as to Christians and members of other religions.<sup>107</sup> Hezbollah's resident population is particularly war-torn because its territory is along the southern border with Israel.

## **(4) Recruitment**

Most of Hezbollah's recruits come from Lebanon. The indoctrination of potential recruits begins at a young age with programs similar to the Boy Scouts of America.<sup>108</sup> In

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<sup>106</sup> "Hezbollah," Counter Extremism Project, accessed August 11, 2016, <http://www.counterextremism.com/threat/hezbollah>.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

2009, Hezbollah opened its ranks to Sunni and non-Muslim recruits.<sup>109</sup> The organization employs recruiters to ensure only high-quality citizens enter Hezbollah's ranks.

### **(5) Tactics**

Hezbollah's tactics have been used as inspiration by many other terrorist organizations. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the group used traditional terrorist tactics to carry out attacks through airplane hijackings, kidnappings, and bombings. In the years since Hezbollah began taking political power in Lebanon, the group has developed significantly into a traditional military force.<sup>110</sup> This transition from an asymmetric force into a conventional military has changed the tactics it uses. In spite of its increasing legitimacy, Hezbollah's military still operates in a mostly asymmetrical capacity, using actions such as rocket attacks on Israeli towns.

### **(6) Governance**

Hezbollah has been successful at its governance projects in Lebanon since the early 1980s. From the beginning, it likely understood that civic matters were more important in garnering support from the local population than military efforts against Israel. James Love elaborates on Hezbollah's success in earning local support: "Hezbollah's Social Service Section is integrated into Lebanese society. The Lebanese Shi'a view Hezbollah's services as an essential part of everyday life. Hezbollah has gained and continues to maintain contact with the population."<sup>111</sup> Hezbollah's social sector is very robust and has allowed the organization to obtain significant trust from the public.

Hezbollah's service provision is necessary for the organization to compete with aid organizations and the Lebanese government. James Love further elaborates: "In Lebanon, sectarian differences are sharply politicized and institutionalized, and virtually all political players (as well as religious groups and secular NGOs) offer social welfare in

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> James B. Love, *Hezbollah: Social Services as a Source of Power* (JSOU Report 10-5) (Hurlburt Field, FL: Joint Special Operations University, 2010), <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a525243.pdf>.

one form or another.”<sup>112</sup> These social services appear in the form of education, basic utilities, healthcare, education, and basic utilities.<sup>113</sup>

Hezbollah is primarily concerned with the defense of the Lebanese Shiite population and claims it a victory when Israeli military efforts fail to cause lasting damage to Lebanon. Developing a robust civil infrastructure and utilities commission is important for recovering as swiftly as possible after Israeli attacks.

### **(7) Foreign Relations**

Hezbollah enjoys a greater-than-most ability to deal and negotiate with foreign countries. This is primarily because it has found common cause with other Shia nations like Iran and Syria. Iran has been a significant ally and financier and has enabled training and equipping of Hezbollah fighters. Hezbollah and Iran find common ground in their belief in the Shia path of Islam. Additionally, Iran and Hezbollah have a mutual hatred of Israel, which is one of the reasons Iran backs Hezbollah so strongly. Similarly, Hezbollah has taken sides in the current Syrian conflict, acting as an ally to the regime of Bashar al-Assad, the official president of the Syrian government. This is much to the detriment of organizations vying for the Syrian seat of governance, like the Islamic State and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham.

### **(8) Relations with Other Militant Organizations**

Hezbollah has developed a robust training program and, according to Stanford University, “it has begun training and assisting other terrorist organizations, often acting as a facilitator for Iranian sponsorship.”<sup>114</sup> Hezbollah does not discriminate in its support of other groups—even for Christian militias operating in Lebanon.<sup>115</sup> Hezbollah’s relations with Sunni militant groups are poor, as expected, because one of Hezbollah’s

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<sup>112</sup> Melanie Cammett, “How Hezbollah Helps (and What it Gets out of it),” *Washington Post*, October 2, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/10/02/how-hezbollah-helps-and-what-it-gets-out-of-it/>.

<sup>113</sup> Stanford University, “Hezbollah.”

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

primary objectives is to protect the Shia population from Sunni persecution. To that end, it has been in Hezbollah's interests to take part in the struggles of other Shia-led nations. Due to positive relations with the Assad regime in Syria, Hezbollah has experienced heightened animosity from the Islamic State and other Syrian opposition groups like Jabhat Fatah al-Sham.<sup>116</sup> This animosity is also due to the atrocities committed by the Islamic State against the Shia population in Iraq and Syria. Hezbollah and certain Palestinian groups like Hamas are civil due to their common enemy, the Israeli government. However, the Sunni-Shia split leaves a chasm between some of these groups and Hezbollah.

## **B. CASE STUDY RESULTS**

Table 4 contains the results of the Hezbollah case study regarding both statehood and the organization's will and capacity to affect U.S. homeland security. The statements in Table 4 are used in Chapter VII to indicate the extent to which the Islamist militant organization has evolved from the traditional model of a terrorist group into an entity that resembles a state government.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

Table 4. Hezbollah Case Study Results

Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
Borders		X	Though the argument could be made that the borders of Lebanon count
Permanent Regional Population	X		
Governmental Capacity	X		
Foreign Relations	X		Strong relations with Iran and the Syrian government
Relations with Militant Groups	X		
Apocalyptic		X	
Reginal Recruits	X		
Precursor	X		
Overthrowing Existing Regime		X	Interested in legitimate government participation
Maoist Model Warfare	X		
Primarily Political	X		Organization has a military arm
Extra-Regional Violent Ops	X		
International Jihad		X	
Religiously Based	X		Religiously based but not exclusive
Sectarianism	X		

The four Montevideo Convention criteria for statehood appear at the top of the list. The indicators of militant statehood (or progression toward statehood) proposed in this thesis follow.

## **C. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, Hezbollah has demonstrated a willingness, desire, and ability to exercise governance over the population of Lebanon. The argument can be made that the organization technically fulfills all criteria for a government set forth by the Montevideo Conference. Hezbollah takes part in governing a swath of territory that has defined borders and the Lebanese citizens who live there. It provides services to its population in the form of education, health, garbage collection, power, and other necessities like drinking water and infrastructure repair. Hezbollah has demonstrated an ability to foster relationships with other nations. Iran may not be a trusted country as far as the international community is concerned; per the convention, however, this could qualify. Hezbollah is unlikely to pose a threat to the United States or the West in the future. If it has the will to do so in coming years, Hezbollah will likely continue to grow from a militant organization to a political party, taking part in the governing body of Lebanon similar to Sinn Fein in Ireland.

## VI. CASE STUDY: THE AFGHAN TALIBAN

The Taliban rose out of the civil war in Afghanistan following the Soviet withdrawal.<sup>117</sup> The Taliban established prominence as a political organization in 1994 when it appeared in seminaries preaching Deobandi Islam, a conservative interpretation of the religion related to Wahhabism.<sup>118</sup> The word *Taliban* in Pashto, the plural form of the word *talib*, translates as “seekers of knowledge.” The movement spread quickly throughout Afghanistan with support partly from the Pakistani Directorate General for Inter-Services Intelligence and recruitment from the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islami religious party, and expanded out of the Kandahar province and across southern Afghanistan. The Taliban has come closest to establishing—and for a time did establish—control of a national government.

In 1996, al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was exiled from Sudan and eventually came to rest in Afghanistan under the protection of Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban. In exchange for housing, Osama bin Laden provided funds and increased the Taliban’s capabilities, which enabled it to seize control of over 90 percent of the country by 1998.<sup>119</sup> After linking the attacks of September 11, 2001, to al-Qaeda, the United States demanded that the Taliban cease providing a safe haven to the group and expel it from Afghanistan. Taliban leader Mullah Omar refused the United States’ request because protection of other (non-Shia) Muslims is an obligation under the Taliban’s Deobandi interpretation of Islam.<sup>120</sup> Shortly after 9/11, the United States invaded Afghanistan (where al-Qaeda planned the 9/11 operation) in an effort to neutralize the Taliban and uproot al-Qaeda.<sup>121</sup> While the United States was initially able to supplant the

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<sup>117</sup> Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan,” *Orbis* 51, no. 1 (2007): 71–89, doi:10.1016/j.orbis.2006.10.006.

<sup>118</sup> “Who Are the Taliban?,” BBC, May 26, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-11451718>.

<sup>119</sup> “The Taliban,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed August 17, 2016, <http://www.cfr.org/taliban>.

<sup>120</sup> Johnson and Mason, “Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan.”

<sup>121</sup> “Operation Enduring Freedom Fast Facts,” CNN, September 30, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/28/world/operation-enduring-freedom-fast-facts/index.html>.

Taliban during the war, the Taliban was never defeated. With the cessation of direct military action (and associated “rules of engagement”) and withdrawal of the vast majority of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, the Taliban has once again established itself. Presently, the Taliban controls more land in Afghanistan than it did in 2001.

## A. ANALYSIS

### (1) Ideology

The Taliban is a nationalist Islamist organization whose narrative exudes religious nationalist and tribalist undertones. These undertones formed the driving platform behind Taliban operations in Afghanistan in the post-occupation years.<sup>122</sup> The Taliban adheres to the Deobandi interpretation of Islam, and all narratives in the group’s ideology are fundamentally inseparable from this fact.

According to Thomas H. Johnson and Chris Mason, Deobandi Islam is a conservative interpretation whose followers seek “to emulate the life and times of the Prophet Mohammed.”<sup>123</sup> From a Deobandi perspective, adhering to social classes in Islam is wrong, meaning that loyalty to Islam always comes first before loyalty to a nation. Johnson and Mason elaborate:

The Deobandi interpretation holds that a Muslim’s primary obligation and loyalty is to his religion. The Deobandis oppose any kind of social caste system within Islam, to include, naturally, any monarchy. Loyalty to country is always secondary. Deobandis also believe they have a sacred right and obligation to wage jihad to protect the Muslims of any country.<sup>124</sup>

The Taliban’s jihad and military themes are related to these religious tenets and include a narrative that allows for the Taliban’s struggle against occupation and oppression as a legitimate Islamic jihad. Jihad and fighting against foreign influence is more than compulsory; it is a religious duty for all Afghans. The military and jihad themes are

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<sup>122</sup> Michael Semple, *Rhetoric, Ideology, and Organizational Structure of the Taliban Movement* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2014), <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW102-Rhetoric-Ideology-and-Organizational-Structure-of-the-Taliban-Movement.pdf>.

<sup>123</sup> Johnson and Mason, “Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan.”

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

understandingly attractive to a culture that has developed through insurgency. Afghans, in the form of the *mujahideen*, not only successfully resisted military forces of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, but also carried out an insurgency against the United States after the U.S. invasion in 2001 that was greatly successful.

The Taliban makes the nationalist claim that it is the rightful resistance to foreign occupation. It claims the Afghan government that “formally” took control in 2004 is a physical representation of foreign occupation and American interests.<sup>125</sup> Therefore, the Taliban declares anyone involved in the current government of Afghanistan an apostate and puppet to foreign powers.

Nationalism meets religion in the last tier of the Taliban’s ideological drivers, which demands the creation of an Islamic emirate. All orders and movements undertaken by the Taliban, are “claimed” under the authority of Islam. This authority grants the Taliban the right to govern the behavior of Muslims.<sup>126</sup> With these foundational beliefs, the Taliban rules over the territory it controls with the assurance that it is doing Allah’s will and that the U.S.-backed Afghan government is a foreign abomination.

## **(2) Tactics**

The Taliban primarily conducts asymmetric attacks akin to Maoist guerrilla tactics to achieve its ends. Gilles Dorronsoro articulates the changes in Taliban warfare: “Since 2006, the Taliban have been using field radios and cell phones to coordinate groups of fighters. They are able to coordinate complex attacks, are mobile, and are improving their use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).”<sup>127</sup> Taliban attacks often take the form of assassinations and targeted IED attacks. Other forms include rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), shootings, sniping, and guerrilla tactics. Over the last few years, the Taliban has also begun targeting civilians with its guerrilla tactics. Johnson

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<sup>125</sup> Semple, *Rhetoric, Ideology, and Organizational Structure of the Taliban Movement*.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Gilles Dorronsoro, *The Taliban’s Winning Strategy in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009), [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/taliban\\_winning\\_strategy.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/taliban_winning_strategy.pdf).

makes the claim that the Taliban has also focused on media-driven attacks, including use of larger IEDs, turban-borne IEDs, and an increase in female suicide bombers.<sup>128</sup>

The Taliban frequently uses *taranas*, or chants, to spread propaganda through cultural identifiers.<sup>129</sup> According to Thomas H. Johnson and Ahmad Waheed, “The chants are communicated in the local language and traditional style and often represent a manipulation of Afghan traditions, narratives, collective memory of events and culture to serve Taliban interests.”<sup>130</sup> The messages conveyed by these chants are meant to garner support from the population and instill a sense of obedience. According to Johnson and Waheed, chants include the following themes:

- Taliban victory in the cosmic conflict is inevitable.
- Islam cannot be defeated.
- The Taliban are national heroes and willing to sacrifice all for Allah and country.
- Afghans have a long and honorable history of defeating invading foreign infidels.
- Foreign invaders as well as their Afghan puppets are attempting to destroy Afghan religion and traditions.
- All Afghans have an obligation to join the jihad against the foreigners and apostates.<sup>131</sup>

Spreading these chants has been a very successful strategy, as have other Taliban propaganda and narratives.<sup>132</sup> The United States and the Afghan government have not taken these chants seriously and, as a result, the Taliban continues to spread the propaganda unprotected. Similarly, the Taliban is also known to use leaflets of

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<sup>128</sup> Thomas H. Johnson, “Taliban Adaptations and Innovations,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 24, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 3–27, doi:10.1080/09592318.2013.740228.

<sup>129</sup> Thomas H. Johnson and Ahmad Waheed, “Analyzing Taliban Taranas (Chants): An Effective Afghan Propaganda Artifact,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 22, no. 1 (March 2011): 3–31, doi:10.1080/09592318.2011.546572.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> See Thomas H. Johnson, *Taliban and Other Afghan Insurgent Narratives: The Use and Power of Stories in a Conflict Environment* (Oxford University Press and Hurst Publishers, Forthcoming, 2017).

propaganda to gain the trust and belief of the Afghan population. These letters have many different purposes, from garnering support to issuing threats to those affiliated with the Afghan government. These leaflets are called “night letters” because they are often delivered at night as a threat.<sup>133</sup>

### **(3) Borders**

Before the United States invaded Afghanistan, the Taliban’s span of control encompassed the entire country of Afghanistan (see Figure 4). The nation has officially designated borders, which are for the most part recognized among the international community. The Durand Line is the Afghan–Pakistani border and dissects traditional Pashtun tribal lands. This border is very porous, and Pakistan has made efforts to encourage Islamist ideology on the Afghan side of the border in an effort to strengthen its position with regards to Pakistan–India issues. Despite the Taliban’s span of control no longer encompassing the nation, before 9/11 this terrorist/jihadi group fit the criteria under the Montevideo Convention as a nation with defined borders.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

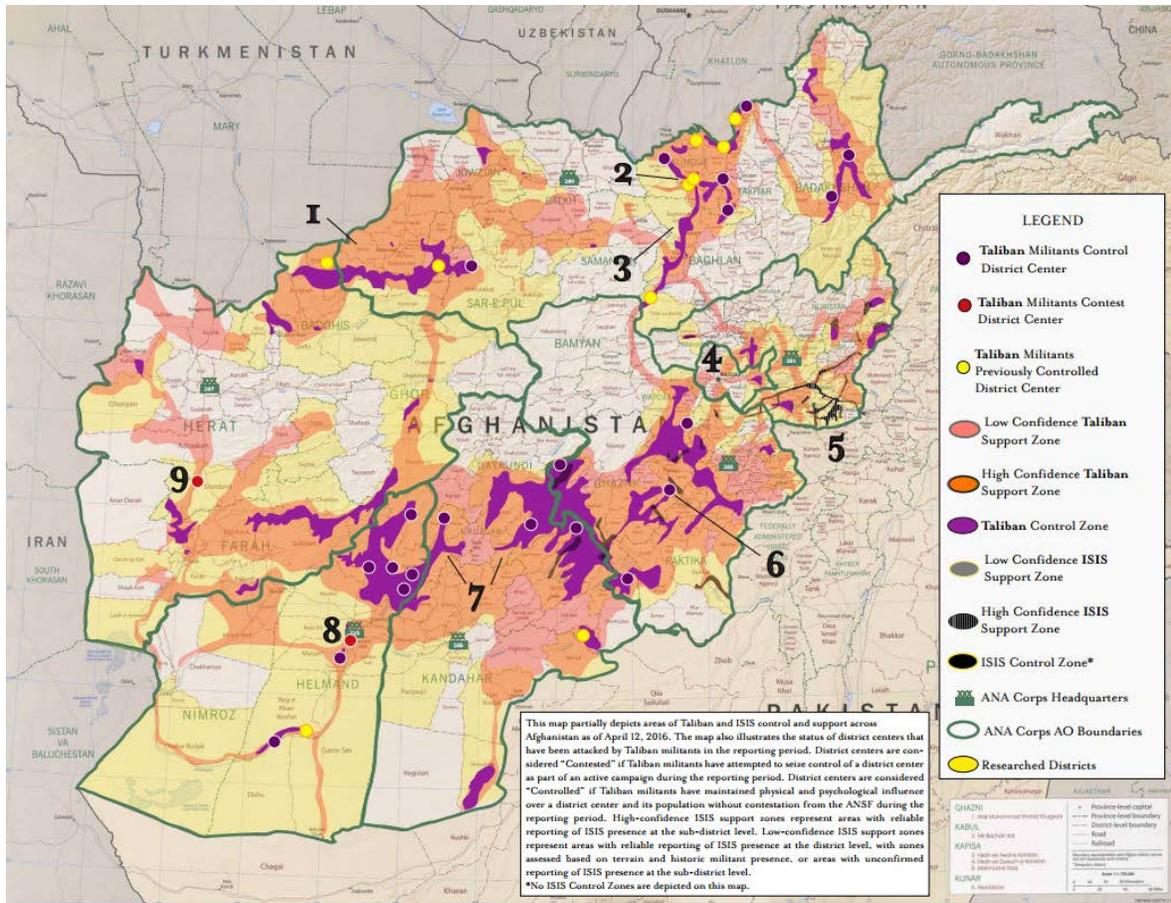


Figure 4. Map of Taliban-Controlled Afghan Territory in April 2016<sup>134</sup>

#### (4) Population

The population under Taliban control is made up of Afghan civilians. Unlike many other groups examined in this thesis, the Taliban is not known for its recruitment of foreigners (this is not to suggest, however, that foreigners have not joined the Taliban). While the Taliban is mostly made up of Pashtun Afghans, the group's scope of control is not limited to Pashtun civilians. In the years after the reinstatement of the Karzai government, the Taliban has pursued an information campaign against the government to dissuade potential collaborators. Johnson and Mason discuss the methods used: "The simple message they deliver in person or by 'night letter' is one of intimidation: 'The

<sup>134</sup> Caitlin Forrest, "Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment as of June 30, 2016," Institute for the Study of War, June 30, 2016, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/afghanistan-partial-threat-assessment-june-30-2016>.

Americans may stay for five years, they may stay for ten, but eventually they will leave, and when they do, we will come back to this village and kill every family that has collaborated with the Americans or the Karzai government.”<sup>135</sup> In this way, the Taliban sows fear in potential adversaries both by the message and method of delivery. Also of note, the Taliban does not consider the Shia legitimate Muslims. The organization has carried out many costly massacres against Shia Muslims over the years.<sup>136</sup>

## **(5) Recruitment**

The Afghan Taliban primarily recruits from the populations within its span of control and Pakistan’s border region. This organization has demonstrated little in the way of recruitment of foreign fighters when compared with Islamist organizations whose ideologies focus on the establishment of a global Islamist caliphate. Membership within the Taliban’s ranks has increased since its fall of governmental control over large swaths of Afghanistan. Estimates indicate that the Taliban grew from 25,000 to 60,000 between 2009 and 2014.<sup>137</sup> According to Johnson and Mason, the group “has a virtually infinite number of guerilla recruits pouring out of Deobandi madrassas and growing up in Pashtun Afghan refugee camps in northern Pakistan. It could sustain casualties of 10,000 or more guerillas a year for twenty years without any operational impact.”<sup>138</sup> This is not indicative of a diminishing organization. Additionally, reports in 2016 indicate that the Taliban has begun a targeted recruitment campaign against Afghan children. Human Rights Watch explains: “The establishment of training centers in madrassas in the Taliban’s expanded zone of control in Kunduz also led to increases in child soldier recruitment. Kunduz residents told Human Rights Watch that the Taliban had recruited and deployed more than 100 children from Chahardara district alone in 2015.”<sup>139</sup> The Taliban’s willingness to employ children indicates just how early indoctrination begins.

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<sup>135</sup> Johnson and Mason, “Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan.”

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> “Taliban,” Counter Extremism Project, accessed August 17, 2016, <http://www.counterextremism.com/threat/taliban>.

<sup>138</sup> Johnson and Mason, “Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan.”

<sup>139</sup> “Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges,” Human Rights Watch, February 17, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/17/afghanistan-taliban-child-soldier-recruitment-surges>.

## **(6) Governance**

When the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, the Taliban enjoyed nearly complete control of Afghanistan—an estimated 90 percent.<sup>140</sup> It governed and imposed laws, which blended Islamic Sharia law and Taliban jurisprudence. Taliban law “was drawn from the Pashtuns’ pre-Islamic tribal code and interpretations of Sharia colored by the austere Wahhabi doctrines of the madrassas’ Saudi benefactors.”<sup>141</sup> This blend likely made the new laws acceptable to the local Pashtun population.

The Afghan Taliban has capitalized on three main issues to garner support for its cause from the local population. First, the mistreatment of the Pashtun people who make up 40 percent of the population of Afghanistan is a source of major dissent. Second, a growing mistrust of the international coalition has been garnered over the last few years; according to Dorronsoro, “Graphic pictures on TV of civilian corpses (women, babies) killed by the international coalition (IC) have resonated with Afghans who remember the Soviet occupation.”<sup>142</sup> Finally, the corruption in the Afghan government has driven people toward other rulers, including the Taliban. Afghans have a culture that strives for justice and truth. Therefore, the “fairness” offered by Sharia law imposed by the Taliban would appear preferable to the corrupt Afghan justice system. While harsh by Western standards, Taliban governance has provided a system of justice that is respected by the majority of the Afghan population.

## **(7) National Relations**

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates provided the Taliban with legitimacy by officially recognizing it as the governing body of the nation of Afghanistan<sup>143</sup> Saudi Arabia provided monetary support to madrassas in an effort to spread the message of Wahhabism in the Afghan–Pakistan region, sometimes directly

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<sup>140</sup> “The Taliban,” Council on Foreign Relations.

<sup>141</sup> Zachary Laub, “The Taliban in Afghanistan,” Council on Foreign Relations, July 4, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/taliban-afghanistan/p10551>.

<sup>142</sup> Dorronsoro, *The Taliban’s Winning Strategy in Afghanistan*.

<sup>143</sup> “The Taliban,” Council on Foreign Relations.

funding the Taliban. Pakistan still provides the Taliban safe haven within its borders in order to strengthen its influence in Afghanistan and curtail Indian efforts<sup>144</sup>

In 2013, the Taliban installed a diplomatic office in Qatar. *The Guardian* elaborates: “It remains to be seen whether the Taliban just use their office to project the image of a government in waiting or whether in the dialogue they pursue a compromise with non-Taliban Afghans. Despite the widespread desire for peace, many residents of Kabul are for the moment highly skeptical of Taliban intentions.”<sup>145</sup> This move may be a step toward a peaceful solution in Afghanistan on the part of the Taliban; however, it may still be too late to assume that this is the plan.<sup>146</sup>

Even the United States opened talks with the Taliban. According to Kenneth Katzman, “The Clinton Administration opened talks with the Taliban after it captured Qandahar in 1994 and continued to engage the movement after it took power. However, the Administration was unable to moderate the Taliban’s policies, and the United States withheld recognition of Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, formally recognizing no faction as the government.”<sup>147</sup> However, recognition is not part of the Montevideo Convention’s criteria for statehood; only the capacity to enter into relations with other governments is required.

## **(8) Relations with Other Militant Organizations**

Significant effort has been made by the Islamic State to make Afghanistan part of its caliphate. It appears to be the Islamic State in Khorasan’s strategy to step into the power vacuum left by the Taliban when the United States invaded as quickly as possible before the Taliban is able to fully reestablish itself. The Taliban and the Islamic State find themselves as rivals in that the Taliban not only remains allied with al-Qaeda but also

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<sup>144</sup> Laub, “The Taliban in Afghanistan.”

<sup>145</sup> “The Taliban’s Qatar Office Is a Positive Step, but Not a Prologue to Peace,” *Guardian*, June 19, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/19/taliban-qatar-office-positive>.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* (CRS Report No. RL30588) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 2015), <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf>.

ideologically rejects foreign powers from intervening in Afghanistan. It has challenged the Taliban's supremacy and therefore strengthened the relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaeda.<sup>148</sup>

## **B. CASE STUDY RESULTS**

Table 5 contains the results of the Afghan Taliban case study regarding both statehood and the organization's will and capacity to affect U.S. homeland security. The statements in Table 5 are used in Chapter VII to indicate the extent to which the Islamist militant organizations have evolved from the traditional model of terrorist groups into entities that resemble state governments. The answers in Table 5 are derived from the information within this chapter.

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<sup>148</sup> Thomas H. Johnson, "Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS)-Khurisan (Da'ish) in Afghanistan CENTCOM Brief," March 2016.

Table 5. Afghan Taliban Case Study Results

Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
Borders	X		Formerly had control of Afghanistan and is again gaining control of regions
Permanent Regional Population	X		
Governmental Capacity	X		
Foreign Relations	X		
Relations with Militant Groups	X		
Apocalyptic		X	
Regional Recruits	X		
Precursor	X		Anti-Soviet mujahideen arguably a precursor
Overthrowing Existing Regime	X		
Maoist Model Warfare	X		
Primarily Political	X		
Extra-Regional Violent Ops		X	
International Jihad		X	
Religiously Based	X		
Sectarianism	X		

The four Montevideo Convention criteria for statehood appear at the top of the list. The indicators of militant statehood (or progression toward statehood) proposed in this thesis follow.

## **C. CONCLUSION**

Of the case study groups in this thesis, the Taliban is the only organization that has fulfilled every one of the criteria set forth by the Montevideo Convention to describe a functioning state. While the Taliban may not currently meet the entire criteria set, it did before the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001. The reemergence of the Taliban and its resurgence show the organization's resiliency. While it does not share the apocalyptic views of the other case study groups in this thesis, an extremist Taliban government reemerging in Afghanistan could be destabilizing to the region into the near future. The Taliban's ability to leverage the current government's shortcomings to destabilize it as well as its relationship with al-Qaeda are causes for concern.

## VII. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

This thesis used a comparative case study to analyze the ways in which five Islamist militant organizations have progressed toward statehood. To accomplish this, criteria and questions were developed to measure how closely the organizations match the internationally recognized definition of a state or government. Other criteria were incorporated to provide an analysis of how the evolution of terrorist organizations has changed the threat of these groups to the United States. This chapter examines the potential implications of Islamist militant organizations becoming more state-like versus remaining independent, disconnected cells—the al-Qaeda model—without a centralized platform from which they operate.

The case studies have revealed that most of the terrorist organizations have not achieved the full criteria of statehood outlined in the Montevideo Convention. Those criteria include the following:

- The organization must have a permanent population under its control.
- The organization’s territory must have defined borders.
- The organization must be capable of conducting governance.
- The organization must be capable of engaging in relations with other nations.

This study was undertaken to examine the efforts by Islamist militant organizations to establish themselves as regional governments in the Middle East and to indicate any change in the threat picture that could occur as a result. Each case study answered a predetermined set of questions.

### A. FINDINGS

The answers to the list of criteria established in Chapter I are presented and analyzed in the following sections. In order to adequately compare the results of the case studies, an answer of either “yes” or “no” is provided for each criterion by organization. The following section analyzes why some organizations are progressing toward either statehood or control of a state and how their behaviors are similar. Following the analysis

section are implications of the trend of Islamist militant groups becoming national political entities similar to states. Results from each of the case studies in the preceding chapters are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Comparative Case Study Results

Criteria	Islamic State	Jabhat Fatah al-Sham	Al-Shabaab	Hezbollah	Taliban
Borders					X
Permanent Regional Population	X	X	X	X	X
Governmental Capacity	X	X	X	X	X
Foreign Relations				X	X
Relations with Militant Groups	X	X	X	X	X
Apocalyptic	X	X	X		
Regional Recruits	X	X	X	X	X
Precursor	X	X	X	X	X
Overthrowing Existing Regime		X	X		X
Maoist Model Warfare	X	X	X	X	X
Primarily Political	X			X	X
Extra-Regional Violent Ops	X		X	X	
International Jihad	X		X		
Religiously Based	X	X	X	X	X
Sectarianism	X	X	X	X	X

The four Montevideo Convention criteria for statehood appear at the top of the list. The indicators of militant statehood (or progression toward statehood) proposed in this thesis follow.

## **B. ANALYSIS**

Of the five case studies examined in this thesis, the Afghan Taliban is the only group that has fully achieved each of the Montevideo Convention's requirements for statehood. Hezbollah has come close to meeting all the requirements, but it would be a stretch to say that the group has defined borders since it remains a political party and is not the sole governing body of Lebanon. Although the Islamic State, al-Shabaab, and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham adhere to the Montevideo criteria of establishing governance and having permanent populations, they fall short on the requirements of defined borders and the ability to develop relations with other countries.

Despite so few of the case studies fitting all the requirements of statehood, the adherence of militant groups to some of the Montevideo criteria should not be discounted. These case studies have implications for the United States and the West regardless of whether or not the groups can be classified as full nation-states. It would be unwise for the United States and the West to discount progress toward statehood simply because these organizations do not yet fit the requirements as defined by the Montevideo Convention. It is possible that one day these hybrid terrorist governments will meet the rest of the criteria.

### **(1) Causes**

There are two primary reasons why Islamist organizations strive for regional control: religion and environment. Religion supplies the leadership of these organizations with the belief that establishing a state under their form of Islam is a divine mission. This is especially true of Wahhabi organizations like the Islamic State, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, and al-Shabaab. While ideology plays a significant role in the process of progressing from a terrorist organization to a state, equally important for success are the physical and political environments in which the terrorist organizations operate. These groups succeed in areas where the government has either already failed or has so neglected its population that it may as well be a foreign occupation.

## **(2) Ideology**

In each of the case studies, the evolution of the terrorist group to a government entity centers on the organization's ideology. The Islamic State, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, and to a certain extent al-Shabaab believe that development of a global Islamic caliphate that mirrors the one created by the Prophet Muhammad is part of their religious duty. Though each of these groups is Sunni, its ideology varies due to cultural difference. The Islamic State, for example, believes itself the global caliphate while al-Shabaab and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham are building emirates to become part of a global caliphate when it is established.

Nationalism also plays a part in some Islamist groups. The Taliban, al-Shabaab, and to an extent Hezbollah have created their own political systems because the governments of their claimed territories have failed the citizens by almost any metric of government success. Notably, each of these groups has a religious purpose for attempting to build a state government. Nationalist-leaning organizations Hezbollah and the Taliban are deeply tied to their religions, and reasons for developing a government originate in a blend of nationalism and religion.

## **(3) Political Systems**

Regional political systems in failed states are a key consideration in examining why terrorist groups shift into a governing role. In Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Lebanon, the official governments either have failed or do not support the population and are considered by many "failed states." In these cases, terrorist groups with the religious or nationalist drive to wield governance have used their resources to win the hearts and minds of the local population by providing protection, justice, water, food, and other services on a level with which the government cannot compete. In many cases, the organizations have been successful, and the populations trust the terrorist organizations more than the official governments.

#### **(4) Foreign Relations**

While rumors persist that the Islamic State has made deals with the Turkish government and with the Assad regime in Syria, only two groups have initiated relations with foreign nations. Hezbollah in Lebanon has a longstanding relationship with Iran and the Syrian government. The Afghan Taliban entered into relations with as many as six foreign nations and had been formally recognized by three before the United States occupied the region. Interestingly, the two organizations closest to statehood are the two that seem to pose the least threat to the international community.

#### **(5) Borders**

This thesis makes the case that, of the organizations analyzed, only the Afghan Taliban and Hezbollah have come close to having defined borders. The Taliban had defined borders because it was the official government of Afghanistan before it was supplanted during the U.S. invasion in 2001. Hezbollah, on the other hand, is a political party in Lebanon; arguably, the borders of Hezbollah are the defined borders of Lebanon. Interestingly, Hezbollah and the Afghan Taliban have both made it clear that protecting Afghanistan and Lebanon, respectively, from foreign powers is the primary objective of their campaigns. Neither of these groups has participated in global jihad and, therefore, has not directly threatened the West.

### **C. IMPLICATIONS**

#### **(1) Reclassification**

While only one of these case studies met all Montevideo Convention criteria for full statehood, there are significant differences between each of the case studies and typical terrorist organizations. The case studies do not fit the model of disassociated networks of cells that carry out asymmetric attacks on civilians around the world. Therefore, in order for the international community to properly counter these organizations, they should be redefined as “militant states.” This is because the international community currently runs the risk of treating militant states like the Islamic

State the same way it has been treating groups with al-Qaeda's structure. The West's counter-terrorism tactics may no longer be appropriate for militant states.

The definition of a militant state comprises four criteria. Militant states are groups that

- establish governance,
- govern a permanent population,
- control regional territory, and
- initiate relations with other militant states.

This reclassification may help Western leaders customize policies to accurately take action against these organizations.

## **(2) Apocalyptic Ideology**

Notably, many Islamist militant organizations adhere to a belief system wherein Islam will arise out of battle vanquishing all other religions until Islam stands as the religion of the entire world. Many Wahhabists believe those who adhere to other religions must be killed to fulfil the aforementioned prophesy. This extremist ideology is bad enough from a terrorist organization, but a state with that type of ideology is genuine cause for concern. Such a nation would likely be willing to use weapons of mass destruction on enemy nations. It would take little to provoke that nation into a costly confrontation.

Al-Shabaab and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham hope that, by establishing national control over Somalia and Syria, they can create an emirate of a greater Islamic caliphate that will one day take over the world. The Islamic State believes that it is the reestablished global caliphate. It believes itself the nation to bring about the Mahdi in the fields around the village of Dabiq and topple the infidel armies in one final battle.

This ideology raises serious concerns from a political science standpoint. Establishing statehood better equips organizations to reach beyond their borders to strike at the West, which these groups blame for the deaths of Muslims throughout the Middle East. Their ideology does not allow for tolerance of any other religions. Therefore, even

though Jabhat Fatah al-Sham and al-Shabaab do not appear to threaten the West currently, if they establish governance in Syria and Somalia, they will likely present a threat greater than any other Islamist organization has yet posed.

### **(3) Recruitment**

Unlike organizations operating under al-Qaeda's disassociated network model, recruitment efforts among militant states are not limited to recruiting foreign fighters for growth of the organization. Those organizations that are still operating under the al-Qaeda model are by nature comprised of foreign fighters. The advantage to those organizations is that they have the ability to go undercover into whatever country best suits their needs. It then rests on the heads of Western nations to employ strategies to locate the organizations.

While militant states still employ foreign fighters and go to great lengths to recruit them, foreign fighters serve as a tactic rather than as the primary member corps. Establishing governance over a region as terror states do affords them the advantage of a captive local population from which to recruit. In each case study, even the foreign fighter-heavy groups were made up primarily of local citizens. The local population is a great advantage to militant states over traditional al-Qaeda networks.

The recruitment advantage of militant states is bought at a cost to the group. The centralized nature of the militant state is also a strategic weakness, as the group is unable to disappear from the attention of international coalitions as al-Qaeda has done in the past. This leaves the militant state open to airstrikes and other military operations, which makes it vulnerable.

### **(4) Projection of Power**

Militant states that have taken control of a region or country will be better equipped to influence the international community from a centralized seat of power in the Middle East. The use of conventional forces against other regional or global powers by militant states will likely be more devastating and costly than traditional typical terrorist attacks. Without a need to hide their leadership, militant states will become more brazen

and forthright with their calls for action, threats, and operations. These states will eventually become a homeland for extremists, thereby building nationalist pride on the part of the fighters. This will provide them more reason to carry on the global jihad on top of their devotion to radical Islam.

According to the findings, the Islamic State, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, and al-Shabaab adhere to ideology similar to al-Qaeda's, which holds semi-apocalyptic aspirations of destroying all other religions aside from Islam. If a militant group with ideology like this is allowed to take control of a country, the group may turn its attention from internal strife against the now non-existent rival groups and refocus its efforts against the neighboring regional powers and the international community.

### **(5) Legal Issues**

The evolution of terrorist organizations will cause the West, and particularly the United States, problems within the legal system as well. The perceived "statehood" of these organizations has already begun to come up in courts. If militant states become settled in their regions, more courts will have to consider if the suspect should be charged with terrorism or with providing material support to terrorist organizations. This is because militant states now barely resemble terrorist organizations.

In the trial of three Minnesota citizens charged with providing materiel support to a terrorist organization, the defense attorneys made the case that their clients could not be charged because, "when a terrorist group controls an entire territory, simply being in that country would effectively become, under the current charges, support to the terrorist group. But when services are provided, it's no longer possible to describe that territory as being part of a terrorist state."<sup>149</sup> The U.S. legal system can expect similar arguments in the future as similar organizations become militant states.

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<sup>149</sup> "Lawyers for Minnesota Jihad Suspects Say Islamic State Not Terror Organization," *Jihad Watch*, accessed July 1, 2016, <https://www.jihadwatch.org/2015/08/lawyers-for-minnesota-jihad-suspects-say-islamic-state-not-terror-organization>.

## **(6) Risks of Military Action**

While the international community should answer the threat posed by militant states, taking overt military action against them could prompt an unfavorable outcome. If militant states begin to lose territory, the organizations will likely revert to operating like traditional terrorist groups. The international community could see an increase of suicide and lone-wolf attacks. These attacks will probably happen for two reasons. First, asymmetric terrorist attacks are the only way for these groups to hurt superpowers like the United States. Second, these organizations need to show their foreign supporters that they remain strong and able to fight.

## **D. CONCLUSIONS**

Many Islamist militant organizations have begun an evolutionary shift. Many have reprioritized their focus into building nations and emirates while still maintaining terrorist operations abroad. According to the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, in order to be a state, an organization must have a defined population, defined borders, an ability to govern, and an ability to enter into relations with other nations. All the case study organizations analyzed in this thesis have permanent populations and have established governance within the regions they control. Hezbollah and the Afghan Taliban also have defined borders to some extent and have the capacity to enter into relations with foreign nations. To mitigate the threat posed by these groups, the international community must properly identify them. Once that happens, policies to counter their efforts that have been customized for the particular threat they pose can be undertaken.

With the exception of the Afghan Taliban, none of the case study organizations in this thesis can fully be considered states. Because they have become more than terrorist organizations but also do not fit the definition of a state, a third classification should be defined. Classifying these hybrid organizations as militant states could enable the international community to meet the threat posed by these groups in the future. The international community must not continue to ignore the efforts made by these groups toward statehood simply because their tactics and form of justice are brutal and

unseemly. The apocalyptic views of these groups remain a serious consideration. The extent to which they are embedded in their respective regions will continue to provide them a base of operations from which to strike at the West and countless potential recruits.

Yet the international community must be cautious; overt military action could provoke more traditional terrorist attacks, particularly with the rise of social media as a propaganda platform. In order to combat these organizations, the West must understand them; in order to understand them, it must listen to them. Islamist militant organizations are trying to build and control states. It is unwise to ignore the efforts these groups have undertaken simply because they do not yet meet all the criteria for statehood. It is unlikely that current policies will remain relevant as militant organizations become more than terrorist groups and similar to states.

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