

POLS 429: International Terrorism

Lecture 25 (03.27.2020): Global Jihadi Terrorism: Al Qaeda & ISIS

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Overview

- 1 Quick review
- 2 AQ-Introduction
- 3 Franchising
- 4 ISIS-Introduction
- 5 ISIS and Global Jihad
- 6 Extra Material

Review

WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- The security-civil liberties debate.
- The tradeoff: public support for government actions to enhance security in exchange for actual loss of civil rights.
- Davis and Silver (2004): threat perception and trust in government.
- Higher national threat perception and trust in government increase propensity to forgo civil liberties.
- Experiments support for survey findings: also account for CT policy effectiveness.
- Piazza (2015): extreme interrogation measures are mostly unacceptable, but detention practices are accepted for Arab/Islamic suspects compared to right-wing.

Questions??

Al Qaeda 1979-2001

ORIGINS AND BACKGROUND

- "Al Qaeda" - "the Base".
- Soviet invasion to Afghanistan (Dec. 1979): Muslim insurgency ("Mujahideen") fighting a holy war (Jihad) versus the foreign aggressors.
- Osama Bin Laden (Saudi fighter) and Abdullah Azzam (Palestinian scholar and preacher).
- 1990's: Bin Laden shifts AQ's goals to attack the West (led by the US).

Al Qaeda 1979-2001

ANTI-US CAMPAIGN

- Famous attacks:
 - Somalia (1993).
 - New York, WTC (1993).
 - Saudi Arabia, US military base (1995).
 - Kenya and Tanzania, US embassies (1998).
 - Gulf of Eden, *USS Cole* (2000).
- 1998: Bin Laden's "Fatwa" (a religious decree) calling for global holy war against the west.
- September 11, 2001: attacks in NYC and Washington.

Al Qaeda in 2019

Challenges of Transnational organization:

- Structure of international system.
 - Global system → state-based.
 - Easier to relate identity with states.
 - Self-determination is much harder.
 - Cost: loss of cohesive ideology and transnational identity.
- Principle-Agent problem.
 - Security concerns complicate executing an effective terrorism campaign.
 - Forces delegation of authority to regional managers who may pursue their own agendas and strategies.

Al Qaeda in 2019

Adopting to a new reality

- Al-Qaeda: established as a transnational group.
- Contemporary dilemma: incompatibility between the universal vision and the reality of operating within a state-based order.
- AQ weakened by the global campaign against terrorism.
- Structural: the Arab Spring.
 - Internal struggle of public across Arab world served as a blow to AQ and its global anti-US strategy.
 - Seem irrelevant as local Arab leaders faced growing internal pressure.
- Organizational: the rise of ISIS.

Al Qaeda in 2019

FRANCHISING TERRORISM

- Main organizational feature of AQ: franchises.
- Local affiliates in various places, mostly the Middle-east, but also in Africa and Asia.
- Those franchises are linked to AQ, but should not be seen as "force multiplier": the organization is much less cohesive today than it was in the past.

Franchising - Localization

Mendelsohn (2018)

- Origins: 2003, Al-Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Iraq branch (joining local group led by al-Zarkawi).
- Main objectives: increase attacks against US forces in Iraq while most of AQ's leadership was trapped (Afghanistan).
- Benefits of Franchising:
 - 1 Access to Iraq.
 - 2 Claim success and remain relevant in its struggle with the US.
- Examples for franchising: Algeria (2006), Yemen (2009), Somalia (2010), Syria (2011).

Franchising - Localization

Risks

- Delegation - strong local affiliates but inability to 'control'.
- Diverging goals: local groups vs. central leadership (promoting sectarian internal struggle instead of anti-US strategy).
- Status: AQ's image and position within global Jihadi movement (local have free reign to operate under the "umbrella" of AQ).
- Reputation costs: links to atrocities executed by local groups and risk of losing local support (Iraq and links to al-Zarkawi).

Franchising - Localization

- Franchising has clear ideological implications for AQ.
- Weakens one the greatest achievements of AQ: creation of a transnational entity based on religious affiliation, multinational and resist national orientation.
- Franchising: more effective resource allocation and use as part of the struggle of the group and its quest for survival.
- Comes at the expense of the global, transnational agenda.
- Over time → may lead to fragmentation and disintegration of the (original) group.
- Examples: ISIL (Iraq); Jabhat al-Nusra (Syria).

Franchising - Localization

Countering localization

- ① Avoid from the "nationalism trap": names of 'local' branches (AQ in Somalia *al-Shabaab*; (AQAP).
- ② Local branches actively seek to expand beyond national borders:
 - AQ in Maghreb - AQIM (Algeria) expanded operation to West Africa and surrounding areas, recruiting operators from those countries.
 - 'Al-Shabaab' began operating in Kenya and expanded its pool of recruits from these locations.

Al Qaeda in 2019-2020: Looking ahead

Revival

- The demise of ISIS → access to recruits and resources.
- Overall pool of recruits has diminished due to the extended CT campaign and the Syrian civil war.
- The weak Arab governments provide opportunities and greater freedom of action.
- The US withdrawal provides additional freedom to operate in areas such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Yemen etc.
- The rise of right wing movements in the west as more social and political divisions are more evident.
- Anti-Muslim rhetoric validates AQ's message, helps in recruitment and making local Muslim communities less willing to cooperate with law enforcement efforts.

ISIS: Background and Origins

- AQI: AQ's Iraq affiliate (2004).
- 2006: AQI promotes sectarian war in Iraq targeting the (majority) Shi'a community.
- 2013: al Baghdadi renames the group ISIL/ISIS and joins forces with former AQ affiliate in Syria (Jaabat al-Nusra).
- Not global jihad but ultra-violent approach to mobilize the Muslim 'civil society'.
- Executes a strategy of conquering land, inspire migration of supporters to these lands and further expansion.

ISIS: Expansion

- Objective: establishing a Muslim society that lives in separation and outside the control of western values.
 - Requires certain organizational infrastructure.
 - In all conquered territory, establishing societal functions (schools and banking systems, courts, hospitals).
 - Responsible for many social services.
- Internal 'ultra-violence': forcibly collecting 'taxes' from population in conquered territory, and ensure acquiescence using brutal force against civilians.
- 2014-15: vast territorial gains in Syria and Iraq.
- June 2015: ISIS declares the creation of a caliphate with Baghdadi as its main authority.
- Online campaign of fear: videos showing beheading of foreigners, many of them Americans.

ISIS: West Counter-offensive

- Summer 2015: A multi-national coalition is established (includes Arab states like Jordan).
- October 2015: US increase its involvement in the coalition by sending more troops.
- ISIS executes a series of attacks outside of the Syria-Iraq war zone (Turkey and Bangladesh, Europe).
- 2016 - 18: coalition forces are able to liberate most of the previously held territory in Iraq and Syria. [▶ Territory](#)

ISIS and Global Jihad

Clarke and Moghadam (2019)

- A 'bipolar world': ISIS and AQ fight over power and influence.
- Despite the counter-offensive, ISIS is not in any phase of demise, and experts expect it to re-emerge in Iraq or Syria.
- Today, ISIS has reduced to a medium size insurgency force, yet highly capable, that centers its operation in North-west Iraq and the Syrian eastern border area.
- Adopting a low-profile tactic is part of the group's understanding of the way to prepare and face challenges.
- Despite losses, many of the most crucial personnel for running the organization are still loyal.

ISIS and Global Jihad

Clarke and Moghadam (2019)

- ISIS excels in its ability to evolve and learn.
- Central tool: expanding presence and usage of the media.
- The "Virtual Caliphate": tailors messages to Western audiences to elicit sympathy while urging revenge.
- Remain relevant by staying central to the news cycle: encourage Muslims to commit acts of terror in its name.
- Support recruitment of new members who revere the generations that came before them and was able to establish successfully a true Islamic Caliphate.

ISIS and Global Jihad

Clarke and Moghadam (2019)

- Enabling structural factors: civil wars, sectarianism, weak regimes, economic hardships and external intervention by states.
- Leverage social and political grievances of citizens in these countries, mostly Sunnis in Iraq and Syria.
- Further support is 'bought' using money and coercion from many tribes in these areas (as it has done before, 2014-15).

Resurgence in Syria

Clarke and Moghadam (2019)

- Conditions in Syria provide ISIS with space and freedom to regain control and consolidate its power.
- Most groups in Syria are busy attacking one another, allowing ISIS to regain power with an insertion of operatives and connecting cells and supply lines.
- The Assad regime is focused on fighting opposition elements and pays little attention for the growing strength of ISIS.

Future Trends

(1) Persistence of ideology

- powerful ideology remains a tool to recruit support and justify operations.
- Why? The ability to adjust ideological prescriptions and prophecies to changing circumstances.

(2) Decentralized structure

- No single "nerve center" for the global jihad.
- Crucial for survival:
 - Recruits can join any group out of a large supply of options participating in various insurgencies.
 - Recruits may choose other paths as non-violent Daawa.
 - Recruits can join the growing cyber forces of Jihad.

Future Trends

(3) strategic and tactical adaptation

- 'Substitute' targets and audiences.
- Adjust the level of violence.
- Shift between cooperation or competition with other groups.
- Divergent capabilities: can seize and hold territory, use military and non-military tactics (terrorism, guerrilla and conventional warfare).
- Example: ISIS shifted its operations to terrorism only after losing most of its territory.

(4) enabling conditions

- Syria offers ample opportunities to sustain the conditions of radicalization and recruitment.
- Structure: poverty, lack of education, sectarianism, and limited state capacity.

Future Trends

Using media and information operations

- Objective: spread propaganda towards the target population and the group's followers around the globe.
- Facilitate low cost and effective attacks in the West: using vehicles to ram into civilians in busy streets (Barcelona, August 2017, Nice, July 2016).
- Emphasize recruiting individuals with the skills and background in production, editing, and graphic design.
- "Virtual planner model" for external operations: operatives remotely direct attacks around the world using internet connection and encryption technology.
- Use criminals to execute attacks.
- Paris 2015 as an example.

Recommended readings

More studies on Jihadi terrorism:

- ① Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower* (2007), Ch. 5-20.
- ② Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Winter 2010/11), pp. 53-94.
- ③ Watts, Clint. "When the Caliphate Crumbles: The Future of the Islamic State Affiliates." *War on the Rocks* (June 2016).
- ④ Zachary Laub and Jonathan Masters, "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria," *Council on Foreign Relations Background Report*, (August 8, 2014). Available online.

ISIS territorial gains and losses

