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ISLAMIC JIHAD:
SECTARIAN FACTORS IN COMBATING TERRORISM

by

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Biography

Lieutenant Colonel Michael Moyles is assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. Previously, he has commanded both communications and logistics readiness squadrons, and most recently served as Deputy Group Commander for the 628th Mission Support Group at Joint Base Charleston, South Carolina. A cyberspace operations officer with over 20 years of Active Duty Service, Lieutenant Colonel Moyles has spent the majority of his career designing, planning, and operating satellite communications networks, including direct support to Operation ALLIED FORCE in Kosovo and Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE, arranging communications support to those devastated by the Asian tsunami in 2004. He graduated in 2006 from the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey with a Master's Degree in Space Systems Engineering, adding to his Master's Degree in Information Systems Management from Webster University and another Master's in Christian Apologetics from Biola University.

Abstract

The United States has been fighting a war against terror for over a decade, yet still lacks a clear understanding of its enemy. Various presidents and academics have labeled the foe as either terrorists or insurgents, with speculations about motivation ranging from economics and unemployment to tribal conflict or sectarian violence. Careful research reveals we are fighting an explicitly Islamic adversary, motivated almost exclusively by religion. However, these militant Muslims are not representative of mainstream Islam, instead they share a very unique and discernible religious interpretation with a long history. Understanding this history, and the violence it motivates, is essential to effectively prosecuting the war on terror.

Islam is a vast religion with a long history not always characterized by violence. At various times in its history, individual Muslims have advocated a particularly militant interpretation of Muslim doctrine, almost always rejected by broader Islam. In the 13th Century, Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Halim Ibn Taymiyya advocated global jihad, only to have his views rejected but adopted 400 years later by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. This eventually led to the foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood, producing Osama bin Laden and others like him. Across the board, nearly every militant Muslim comes from one hyper-literal interpretation of Islam, from a single legal school, from one sect of over a billion Muslims. These militants, a small percentage of Islam, continue work for global jihad despite the consistent rejection of the doctrine throughout the centuries. To effectively combat this lethal and elusive enemy, the United States must abandon its realist, nation-state power politics tendencies, and instead embrace constructivism, in order to better understand the mindset and the worldview of the militants.

Introduction

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 catapulted terrorism into the mind of every American. While the attacks surprised many, to some they were simply the logical result of fundamentalism that had been brewing for centuries. Who attacked us, why, and what can we do to prevent it from happening again? Serious discussion of these questions has been relegated mainly to those who study military strategy and international relations theory within the halls of academia. Yet the answers are absolutely critical, and getting them wrong risks either placing the blame on those who are *not* the enemy or failing to target those who intend to harm America. Most importantly, it potentially exposes us to another similar attack – or worse. This paper argues that thus far, we have largely mischaracterized our enemy and the reasons they attacked us. As a result, we are at great risk of another attack unless we shift our focus to target the real enemy of America – the ideology of Islamic jihadi fundamentalism.

Sun Tzu famously said, “Know the enemy, know yourself, and you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.”¹ This wise quote should drive every military strategist to ask, “Who is our enemy?” Four consecutive U.S. presidents have expressly denied that our foe’s motivations are fundamentally religious, and various theorists have proposed that the battle is economic, political, tribal, ethnic, and/or cultural. However, an examination of terrorist attacks on Americans in the last 50 years shows that our “Global War on Terror” is neither global, nor is it simply a war on terrorism; it is a war on a very specific type of terrorism – *Islamic* terrorism. There are terrorists in dozens of countries around the world, including Europe, Asia, South America, and Africa, with whom we are not at war.² In contrast, a simple examination of the attacks in Beirut, the U.S.S. Cole, Khobar Towers, the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the Bali nightclub, the World Trade Center, the London bombings in July 2005, and

the recent attacks in Sydney and Paris reveal that the attackers are not just generic terrorists, they are overtly *Islamic* terrorists who justify their actions in explicitly religious terms. To divorce the terrorist from his motivation under the guise of political correctness is to mischaracterize our enemy and place ourselves at greater risk.

The threat we face is very real, and very religious. While these jihadis represent a very small subset of over a billion Muslims, their beliefs and actions are an immediate and significant threat to Americans. If we are to learn from Sun Tzu's dictum, we must understand these militants, their motivations, their history, and the context which generates their fervor to harm America and its allies.³ First, this will involve a working knowledge of sectarian factors in the history of Islam. Second, it requires an understanding of where they fall within the broader scope of their religion. Finally, it will force us to re-examine the international relations theory that has guided our approach to this conflict, with an eye toward constructivism.

Thesis

Our adversary in the war on terrorism is a small sect of Islam, motivated by overtly religious intentions but acting in direct violation of the religion they claim. To effectively combat this foe, we must understand their developmental history and where they fit within broader Islam, and then use that information in a constructivist approach that favors information and diplomacy over military options.

Islamic Terrorism in Religious Context

Theories abound regarding what motivates Muslim terrorists. Political scientist David Ronfelt has suggested their reasons are primarily tribal in nature,⁴ and Bathsheba Crocker from the Center for Strategic and International Studies at MIT believes that it is due to economic instability and high unemployment rates.⁵ If this is correct, it does little to explain the fact that those who conducted the London attacks were mostly middle-class workers who grew up in England, including a graduate student and a restaurant owner. Moreover, the 9/11 attackers were all well-educated and employed.⁶ Others have suggested that our presence in the Middle East and support to Israel are the motivating factors.⁷ If so why did Sayyid Qutb's violent call-to-arms focus solely on the United States in the 1950s, more than a decade before we aligned militarily with Israel?⁸ Others have suggested that the battle is really just a centuries-old conflict between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims that has spilled over their borders, or an artifact of the Crusades, or imperialism.⁹ Politically, the United States has resisted making a direct connection between the terrorists and their religion.¹⁰ Within a few days of the attacks on 9/11, President Bush addressed Congress, stating, "The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends...our enemy is a radical network of terrorists."¹¹ More recently, President Obama vehemently denied that the members and actions of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) were Islamic.¹² Yet, when we look at the evidence presented by the terrorists themselves, it is clear that the threat we face is not economic, tribal, or political – it is religious.

A Religious War

Even if Americans are hesitant to label these attacks as religiously motivated, the attackers have no such qualms. In her book *Knowing the Enemy*, Dr. Mary Habeck says:

The consistent need to find explanations other than religious ones for the attacks says, in fact, more about the West than it does about the jihadis. Western scholars have generally failed to take religion seriously. Secularists, whether liberals or socialists, grant true explanatory power to political, social, or economic factors but discount the plain sense of religious statements made by the jihadis themselves...we must be willing to listen to their own explanations. To do otherwise is to impose a Western interpretation on the extremists, in effect to listen to ourselves rather than to them.¹³

The Council on Foreign Relations agrees, saying “The West’s increasing intellectual distance from most thing religious hinders us from grasping the ISIS worldview.”¹⁴ Fortunately, when it comes to expressing their motivation, the jihadis have been anything but silent. In February 1998, the Arabic newspaper *Al-Quds al-‘Arabī* printed the full text of the “Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders,” which concludes, “...to kill Americans and their allies, both civil and military, is an individual duty of every Muslim who is able...we call on every Muslim who believes in God and hopes for reward to obey God’s command to kill the Americans and plunder their possessions wherever he finds them.”¹⁵ Osama bin Laden himself clearly stated, “We will continue this course because it is part of our religion.”¹⁶ One of Bin Laden’s chief deputies and the current leader of Al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, published a declaration of war against the United States, in which he stated, “The rule is that the entire earth must be subject to the religion of Allah...if by religious law it is permitted to punish a Muslim, it is all the more permitted to punish a Harbi infidel in the same way.”¹⁷ Abd al-Aziz al-Rantisi, the late leader of Hamas, said that attacking the United States “...is the moral and national duty [of all Muslims]...but above all, the religious one.”¹⁸ No doubt terrorists have a variety of reasons for their actions and targets – some of which may be economic, political, or tribal – but the primary motivation is religious. “To ignore the justifications offered by jihadis themselves for what they do is a fatal mistake,” says Habeck,

“because they claim to have chosen every strategy, tactic, and target in their war with the United States based on religious principles.”¹⁹

The United States government has not been completely blind to this fact. The State Department Bureau of Counterterrorism tracks every terrorist attack on the United States. The Bureau reports over 2,000 terrorist attacks against the United States in 2013, of which as many as 85% were carried out by overtly Islamic terrorist organizations; the numbers in prior years are similar.²⁰ Indeed, in 2011 the report concluded, “Sunni extremists accounted for the greatest number of terrorist attacks and fatalities for the third consecutive year. More than 5,700 incidents were attributed to the Sunni extremists, accounting for...about 70 percent of all fatalities.”²¹ The most recent report lists 54 Foreign Terrorist Organizations, 39 of them (72%) expressing overtly religious motivations.²² Based on the expressed sentiments of the terrorists and the research from the State Department, we can safely conclude that our foe is motivated almost exclusively by religion, specifically militant Islam. Fortunately, the religion promulgated by these jihadis reflects only one small subset of Islam.

The Sectarian Adversary: Sunni, Hanbali, Wahhabi Islam

Characterizing the jihadis is no easy task. Islam is a complex mesh of complementary and occasionally competing authorities, interpretations, sources, and ideologies requiring some degree of historical investigation to fully comprehend. When the Prophet Muhammad died in 632, he left no successor or instructions for determining who would serve as the central authority in Islam. Within a generation, competition arose surrounding the line of succession, followed shortly by sectarianism as Muslims aligned themselves with their favorite candidate. The primary schism was between those who believed that Muhammad’s father-in-law Abu Bakr was

the rightful heir, and those who believed that his son-in-law Ali was the divinely-ordained caliph. Summarizing centuries of warfare and strife, today the Sunni Muslims are those who aligned with Abu Bakr, and the Shi'ites are those who favored Ali.²³ Yet this primary divide hardly begins to describe the various sects and sub-sects within Islam, or why some of these sects are motivated to violence and others are not.

In addition to this primary divide, Islam also recognizes four different sources of authority: first, the Qur'an is the divine word of Allah, infallible and immutable, and binding on all Muslims. Second, Muhammad's followers gathered his sayings into multiple volumes known as the *hadith*,²⁴ which carry nearly the same weight as the Qur'an.²⁵ As Islamic culture and society developed in Medina in the centuries after Muhammad's death, Muslims found that the Qur'an and *hadith* did not address every area of concern. A Medinan scholar named Malik ibn Anas developed a procedure he called *ijma*²⁶ in which he elevated those *hadith* that were agreed upon by all Medinan scholars, relying on a statement from Muhammad stating that a community of scholars "shall never be unanimous in error."²⁷ Many Muslims still recognize the consensus of scholars – the *ijma* – as a third legitimate source of authority on topics where the Qur'an and *hadith* are silent. Finally, 8th-century Islamic scholar Abu Hanifa emerged as an advocate of reasoning by analogy (*qiya*) as a source of law to fill any remaining gaps. Today, all Muslims recognize the authority of the Qur'an and the *hadith*, and many also recognize the authority of the *ijma* or the *qiyas* or both. Understandably, these various sources of authority resulted in four distinct legal schools within the Muslim community: the Hanbali, Hanafi, Shafi'i, and Maliki,²⁸ all within the Sunni sect,²⁹ each placing varying degrees of emphasis on the four sources of authority. This results in occasionally dramatic differences in what is permissible under Islamic law (*shari'a*).³⁰

Among these schools, the Hanbali is by far the most literal and restrictive. Contributing to the Hanbali school of thought are several *ulema* (Muslim leaders) whose writings and opinions on the Qur'an and *hadith* support and inflame the violence of nearly every jihadi. After 700 years of comparatively stable existence, and with little violence after Muhammad's initial conquests, in the early 14th century a Hanbali Muslim named Ahmad Ibn 'Abd al-Halim Ibn Taymiyya wrote a series of severe interpretations of the *shari'a*. He argued that true Islam required Islamic rule, and any Muslim living in a country not ruled by Muslims was not a Muslim at all, but an infidel deserving of death.³¹ He concluded it was the duty of every Muslim to fight until all others were either Muslim or dead, and that any Muslim who tried to avoid participation in his definition of *jihad*³² was to be killed. Interestingly, Ibn Taymiyya's writings gained little attention, and were entirely rejected (at least ignored) for about 400 years.

In the late 18th century, with the Ottoman Empire facing its decline, another Sunni Hanbali jurist from the Arabian peninsula named Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab resurrected Ibn Taymiyya's interpretations, added his own, and like Ibn Taymiyya tried to gain a following for far-reaching *jihad*. Again these extreme views were rejected, and Abd al-Wahhab was exiled. Undaunted, Abd al-Wahhab allied with Muhammad Ibn Saud, the leader of a prominent clan on the Arabian Peninsula, and together they spread their new interpretation of Islam with violent force. Abd al-Wahhab declared *jihad* against all non-Muslims as well as the Sufi, Shi'a, and every other sect of Islam that had developed since the initial split shortly after the Prophet's death. For Wahhabis, there is only man, God, Mohammed, and the Qur'an. Affirming any part of over a thousand years of doctrinal development, jurisprudence and interpretation was a death sentence. When Muhammad Ibn Saud died, an equally fervent Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud, who became the first king of Saudi Arabia, replaced him.³³ Combining the religious extremism of al-

Wahhab with the military power of Arabia's largest and most powerful tribe seemed a perfect recipe for violent fundamentalist revival.

Wahhabis and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood

Even with the support of the entire Saudi nation, militant Islam remained only one interpretation (Wahhabi³⁴) from one legal school (Hanbali) of one sect (Sunni) of Islam. Toward the end of the 18th century, the Turkish Sultan (who considered himself the Caliph) crushed the ambitious military exploits of the Wahhabi, executing their ruler,³⁵ and the Wahhabi line of reasoning was relegated to almost complete obscurity for another two hundred years. It wasn't until a Wahhabi uprising in Saudi Arabia at the turn of the 20th century that Wahhabism became firmly established as the religion of the region in both name *and* practice. During this conflict, a young Egyptian follower of Abd al-Wahhab named Hassan al-Banna gained a following by calling all Muslims to *da'wa*, a "calling" or "mission." The term was originally used by the Prophet Muhammad to call unbelievers to recognize Allah, but al-Banna used it in reference to Muslims, calling them to return to the original faith established by Muhammad, and to the establishment of an Islamic State. According to al-Banna, the means to *da'wa* was *jihad*, reclaiming all Muslim lands from foreign rule, then – going a step farther than al-Wahhab – pursuing the infidels into their own country, and claiming it for Allah.

This goal of national Islamic domination, turned regional and eventually global, became the driving force behind a small number of militants initially under the leadership of Abul-Aziz ibn Saud, calling themselves the *Ikhwan* (The Brotherhood). These were some of the most fanatical followers of Wahhabi teachings, who were motivated by the leadership of al-Banna and the military and political power of ibn Saud. Dissatisfied with the leadership in Egypt and

elsewhere in the Muslim world, in 1927 the Young Men's Muslim Association teamed with the *Ikhwan* and asked al-Banna to lead an effort to restore "authentic" Islam in the Middle East.

Hassan al-Banna agreed, calling them the "Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin," or "The Muslim Brotherhood."³⁶ Generating a large following, in 1947 al-Banna sent several tracts to the kings of Egypt and Sudan and many other religious and political leaders throughout the Arab world, sharply criticizing the Westernization of many Arab nations, and calling for a global Islamic state:

Islam has extended the domain of the Islamic fatherland...according to Islamic understanding, the fatherland comprises: (1) the particular country first of all; (2) then it extends to the other Islamic countries...(3) then it proceeds to the first Islamic Empire...(4) then the fatherland of the Muslim expands to encompass the entire world.³⁷

After establishing the extent of His desired reach, al-Banna outlined 50 key points for the religious and political leaders to consider, defining The Muslim Brotherhood's vision for a world completely subjected to Islam and *shari'a* in every respect – political, judicial, administrative, social, educational, and economic.³⁸ Al-Banna considered these 50 points the "...principal goals of reform grounded in the spirit of genuine Islam...this is the message of the Muslim Brotherhood."³⁹ The last of the tracts, *On Jihad*, applies these goals to all mankind, and imposes a divine responsibility of *jihad* on every Muslim, from which there is no evasion or escape.

Fueled by al-Banna's ambitious goals and call to *jihad* and following an embarrassing defeat by Israel in 1948, the Brotherhood placed Egyptian Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi al-Nuqrashi in its lethal sights, assassinating him that same year. The Egyptian government officially dissolved the Muslim Brotherhood, and Egyptian agents killed al-Banna three weeks later. This obviously did little to quell the jihadi fire, whose torch was picked up by the charismatic new leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb. Qutb had spent considerable

time in America, and returned to Egypt committed to rescuing Islam from the two great evils of modernity and colonialism. Like al-Wahhab and al-Banna, Qutb believed that Islam was the answer to the world's economic, social, educational, and political problems. He was a brilliant expositor of the Qur'an and the *hadith*, using it to support his particular interpretation of *jihad*. One key was the jihadi acceptance of the concept of abrogation, believing that the latter portions of the Qur'an "overruled" the earlier portions of the book.⁴⁰ Thus, there is no longer a need to tolerate the "people of the book" (Jews and Christians), instead they only have the choice to convert, submit to Muslim rule, or die.⁴¹ Polytheists (such as Hindus) only have the choice to convert or die. Apostates (those who were Muslims but left Islam) have no choice, they must be killed. This view, with its roots in Wahhabism, al-Banna, and finely articulated by Qutb, is what drives most jihadis today.

Our adversary is overtly and admittedly religious, and clearly Islamic. Generally characterized, it is a small band of Sunni jihadis from the Hanbali legal school, following the narrow interpretive teachings of the Wahhabis, The Muslim Brotherhood, and Sayyid Qutb. This label would accurately describe Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri (the current leader of al-Qaeda), Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (founder and leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq), Mohammed Mullah Omar (leader of the Taliban), Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (mastermind of the attacks on 11 September 2001), and even the current leader of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.⁴² The same characterization applies more broadly as well, encompassing al-Qaeda, the Taliban, ISIS, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and hundreds of other "splinter groups" within Islamic jihad.⁴³ Sun Tzu's dictum is satisfied. The enemy is now known. Fortunately, they are a comparatively small subset of broader Islam, and most Muslims reject their narrow interpretations of Muslim doctrine.

Militant Jihadis Among the Muslims

There are an estimated 1.6 billion Muslims in the world today.⁴⁴ For decades, scholars have tried to pin down what percentage of them shares the particular terrorist ideology described above. The Pew Research Forum conducted an in-depth study of the Islamic faith in 2012, examining multiple issues across the faith, but did not investigate specifically militant perspectives or jurisprudence affiliations.⁴⁵ The State Department's Bureau of Counterterrorism tries to track these numbers, but the individual terrorist organizations obviously don't keep detailed membership rolls, nor do they report their demographics to the State Department. Using the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations in the 2013 terrorism report and the estimated membership of each, the number may be as small as 184 thousand,⁴⁶ though other scholars have estimated the number to be as many as 3 percent of Muslims – a disconcerting 48 million militants.⁴⁷

The truth probably lies somewhere between 184 thousand and 48 million. Even if the number is in the millions, these militants still represent only a small minority of the world's second-largest religion. This contention is supported by a landmark Gallup poll, in which researchers interviewed tens of thousands of Muslims in over 35 different Muslim-majority countries. The interviews revealed that 93% considered the 9/11 attacks completely unjustified.⁴⁸ Pew Research polling finds that in most Muslim-majority nations, "...support for suicide bombing and other acts of violence in defense of Islam has declined significantly," with some Muslim nations reporting as few as 15% supporting the use of violence to defend Islam.⁴⁹ These statistics were summarized well in the words of Muslim scholar A.G. Noorani, "To most

Muslims, the contention of Osama bin Laden and his followers that God has ordered Muslims to kill Americans is not only silly, but presumption bordering on heresy.”⁵⁰

The charge of heresy may not be far from the truth, as a reasoned examination of Muslim doctrine will reveal. Contrary to popular belief, *jihad* is not one of the five Pillars of Islam, though it is still seen as a religious duty of practicing Muslims. However, the fact that it is a religious obligation is not a license for unbridled violence – on the contrary, *because* it is a religious obligation, it is strictly regulated and extensively detailed in the Qur’an, the *hadith*, and the *shari’a*.⁵¹ These authoritative documents contain meticulous regulations governing who can be attacked, what weapons may be used, how to treat prisoners and noncombatants, and nearly every other aspect of warfare.

Interestingly, almost every terror tactic we face in the battle against Islamic terrorism is strictly forbidden by mainstream Muslim doctrine. In stark contrast to suicide bombs and IEDs that frequently target nightclubs and marketplaces, the *hadith* explicitly forbids those engaged in *jihad* from killing women and children, and despite the recent beheadings, the *shari’a* commands Muslims to “treat prisoners well”.⁵² S.K. Malik, a Pakistani jihadi leader, support this contention:

The Qur’an imposed a total ban on the inhuman methods of warfare practiced in Arabia and elsewhere, prior to Islam...all cruel and torturous ways of killing the enemy are prohibited. The killing of women, minors, servants and slaves...is also not allowed. The Muslim armies must also spare the blind, monks, hermits, the elderly, the physically deformed and the insane or the mentally deficient. Forbidden also is the decapitation of the prisoners of war, the mutilation of men and beast...the killing of...those who do not take part in the actual fighting is also not allowed.⁵³⁵⁴

The *hadith* and the restrictions on *jihad* imposed by Muslim doctrine forbid suicide,⁵⁵ indiscriminate killing, targeting noncombatants, mistreating prisoners, and murder. To

paraphrase Noorani, the violent behavior we see from ISIS and others is not just legalistic, it is heresy.

Islamic Jihad and Constructivism

We have defined our foe as a sectarian, legalistic Muslims, and placed them in context as a small minority within their own faith, acting in direct violation of the very authorities they advocate. The United States' history of denying the overtly religious nature of the enemy and mischaracterizing his motivations has potentially weakened our approach to combating and preventing attacks. As a superpower nation-state, the United States has consistently and understandably exhibited a tendency to view all conflict in realist terms, focusing on nation-state power politics. In recent history, realism has become the de-facto view in American international relations theory – to many, it is a doctrine immune to critique and synonymous with the study of national security.⁵⁶ This realist tendency to view every conflict in nation-state, balance-of-power, political terms is reflected by the national strategy of every president since the start of the Global War on Terror.

Realist Presuppositions in United States Strategy

In 2007 President George W. Bush gave a speech at The Heritage Foundation, saying, “We must take the words of the enemy seriously...hear the words of Osama bin Laden last year: ‘Death is better than living on this Earth with the unbelievers among us.’ History teaches that underestimating the words of evil, ambitious men is a terrible mistake.”⁵⁷ President Bush then compares fighting the ideology of al-Qaeda to fighting the communist ideology of Stalin and Lenin. But these men were leaders of a nation-state, even a superpower. We cannot so easily

translate our strategy against a massive nation-state to our strategy against an adaptive and elusive non-state actor, and expect similar results. Six months after that speech, President Bush again addressed the nation: “But in the long run, defeating the terrorists requires an alternative to their murderous ideology. And there we have...[an] advantage in our strong belief in the transformative power of liberty.”⁵⁸ Unfortunately, the terrorists don’t aspire to freedom or liberty; it holds no great attraction to them. They desire to see Islam spread, and whether the country has free elections or values individual liberty is completely irrelevant to the jihadis. Just prior to this speech Bush admitted that, “We were attacked by a brutal enemy that despises freedom.”⁵⁹ This clear non-sequitur – admitting that our enemy despises freedom, then suggesting that creating a free society and espousing liberty will combat that enemy – is indicative of an administration that doesn’t understand the enemy it faces. On the contrary, creating the very kind of society the militants despise will only inflame their hatred and spur them into action. It is shockingly naïve to believe that exporting into their back yard the very values they so despise will somehow appease their hatred or diminish their violence.

Our current administration has made similar errors. Faced with the terror of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), President Obama addressed the nation in September 2014 to outline his strategy for addressing this threat. He stated four objectives:⁶⁰

1. Conduct airstrikes targeting weapons and leadership
2. Support opposition forces on the ground with weapons
3. Cut off its funding
4. Provide humanitarian assistance

Examined in international relations terms, the first three of these objectives are clearly realist, and the last is liberal idealist. For a decade or more, the United States’ strategy has focused on

clear realism⁶¹ – attacking leadership, funding, supply lines, headquarters – but this approach translates poorly to the battle against Islamic jihad. They are not a nation-state with clearly defined borders, government, an economy, or a reliable and “targetable” infrastructure. We watch Milosevic, Qaddafi, and Hussein fall, demonstrating that when the dictator falls, the regime falls – then naively assume that when bin Laden is killed, al-Qaeda will fall.⁶² This may prove true in nation-state realism, but not al-Qaeda – when bin Laden falls, Ayman al-Zawahiri steps in and the terror network lives on. They recognize no borders, and their leadership and logistics are fluid and highly mobile. Making matters worse, death and destruction are attractive to these militants, and continued airstrikes may be giving them precisely what they desire. “The choice to use military force empowers this enemy,” reports the Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Al-Qaeda and ISIS not only do not seem to mind that they are hunted; they seem to thrive because of it...terrorist groups feed on the instability and economic decimation that warfare brings.”⁶³ To be effective in this struggle against jihadis, the United States should refocus its entire strategic approach to constructivism rather than realism.

A Call to Constructivism

Abandoning faulty assumptions and application of realist nation-state power politics upon non-state actors, the United States must consider approaching the Islamic terror threat from a constructivist perspective. The constructivist theory emphasizes the relationships between people, focusing on the jihadi desire to create the world they want through their interactions with each other and the world. The jihadis have particular ideas and understandings about society and interpersonal (rather than international) relationships, believing that Islamic language, culture, values, and religion should define the world. These core tenets are not tied to any supply line,

funding source, or figurehead, they stem from a history of sectarianism and literalist interpretations of Islamic doctrine.

While they are definitely a minority, attacking or, even better, *changing* these beliefs is no simple task. Jihadi culture, values, and “core tenets” are not subject to change with bombs or bullets – we cannot change ideology or religion with firepower. A constructivist approach would involve more information-based warfare, patient interaction, diplomacy, research into jihadi motivations, and negotiation with other Muslims and Muslim nations to establish a relationship based on understanding. With weakening support, ineffective recruiting, and a discredited ideology, militant Islam will decline into the “ash heap of history.”⁶⁴ This approach does not equate to implementation of *shari’a* law across the Middle East, nor does it mean abdicating our commitment to Israel. However, negotiations must be approached with these issues in mind, as they are likely factors in the jihadi mindset and motivation. Borrowing from the Council on Foreign Relations, “Victory in the war on terror will come only when the ideology they are fighting loses support...the ideology will not have been destroyed by U.S. military power, but its adherents will have decided that the path they chose could never lead them where they wanted to go.”⁶⁵

Conclusion

Who attacked us? A small contingent of Muslim literalists – with few exceptions, this foe is Sunni, Hanbali, Wahhabi Islam acting in clear violation of the very doctrines they claim to support. Why did they attack us? They believe their narrow interpretation of jihad and the religious “call to arms” of a few isolated and largely rejected leaders requires it. They clearly believe and have repeatedly stated that the conflict is religious, and to deny it is to

mischaracterize our enemy and thereby place our nation at greater risk. What can we do to prevent another attack? We can accurately characterize the enemy, shift our focus to the diplomatic, informational, and cultural elements of the DIME-C model, and embrace constructivism. Our adversary is a non-state actor manifest in multiple militant groups throughout the world, and we cannot enact a strategy against them that reflects traditional, realist, nation-state power politics, nor can we continue a purely kinetic strategy that is both wasteful and ineffective. Rather, the United States must rethink its strategy to a constructivist focus on personal relationships, interactions, and mutual understanding. With the enemy clearly defined, rightly contextualized, and an adjusted constructivist strategy, we may yet win this war on terror. (4942)



Notes

¹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Lionel Giles (translator), electronic version available at <http://suntzusaid.com>, 18 [accessed 22 October 2014].

² This includes Basque and Irish terrorists in England and Ireland, the Aum Shinrikyo in Japan and China, the Liberation Tigers in Sri Lanka, and dozens of others (a good list can be found on Weimann 51, as well as other sources).

³ Interestingly, some military historians have attributed our struggles in battling counter-insurgency to a failure to understand the enemy, his culture, beliefs, and reasons for fighting. Rovner provides sufficient detail, dissecting the insurgencies in the Philippines, Malaya, Vietnam, and Iraq, finding that key defense officials planning these campaigns were "...profoundly ignorant about the social and cultural bases" of the respective insurgencies (Rovner 222). This same point could be applied to the jihadis. Rovner also advocates turning insurgent warfare by cultivating charismatic and capable local leaders (similar to the constructivist recommendations later in this paper).

⁴ David Ronfelt, "Al-Qaeda and Affiliates – A Global Tribe Waging Segmental Warfare," *Information Strategy and Warfare*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 41 – 50.

⁵ Bathsheba Crocker, "Reconstructing Iraq's Economy," *The Washington Quarterly*, Volume 27, Number 4, Autumn 2004, 73 – 93.

⁶ Stewart Patrick of the Council on Foreign Relations also conducted an in-depth study, published in his book *Weak Links*, analyzing the factors that motivate violent non-state actors. Among the factors he considered was the suggestion that weak or failing states generate violent non-state actors. He concludes that it is "striking...how little empirical analysis has been undertaken to document and explore the connection between state failure and transnational security threats." He follows his analysis with "...the links between state weakness and [terrorism] are more complicated and tenuous than often assumed...it is obvious that not all (or even most) weak and failed states are afflicted by terrorism...weak capacity cannot explain why terrorist activity is concentrated in the Middle East and broader Muslim world. Clearly, other variables and dynamics – political, religious, cultural, and geographical – shape its global distribution" (Patrick 9 – 10). This proposed connection between a failing economy and terrorism also fails to explain how the breeding ground and one of the largest financiers of terrorism is also one of the wealthiest and most stable states in the Middle East – Saudi Arabia.

⁷ Jeffrey Record, "Why the Bush Administration Invaded Iraq: Making Strategy After 9/11," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Summer 2008, (Montgomery, AL: Air University Press, 2008), 84.

⁸ Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 6.

⁹ Ibid., 1 – 3.

¹⁰ In addition to the quotes that follow from the last two presidents (George W. Bush and Barack Obama), President Clinton also denied that our enemy is Islam in a speech on 20 August 1998, just after the attacks on the American Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania

(<http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1703146/posts>). President George H.W. Bush also denied that our opponent is Islam in the buildup to the Gulf War, including a clear statement to the Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs on 1 March 1991 (<http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/quotes/george-h-w-bush-on-the-gulf-war-and-islam-in-news-conference>)

¹¹ George W. Bush, “Address to the Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” 20 September 2001, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?166196-1/presidential-address> [accessed 22 September 2014].

¹² Barack Obama, “Statement by the President on ISIL,” 10 September 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/statement-president-isil-1>, [accessed 22 September 2014].

¹³ Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy*, 7.

¹⁴ Ed Husain, “Until We Understand ISIS, We Cannot Hope to Defeat It,” Financial Times, 30 October 2014, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/624d8d48-603e-11e4-88d1-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3LolIayrK> [accessed 13 December 2014].

¹⁵ Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*, (New York: Random House, 2003), xxvii.

¹⁶ Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, The New Challenges*, (Washington: Institute of Peace Press, 2006), 56.

¹⁷ Ibid., 68 – 69.

¹⁸ Ibid., 87.

¹⁹ Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy*, 18.

²⁰ Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism*, U.S. Department of State Publication (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000 – 2013). Publications for each year report the total number of attacks on the United States, categorized by terrorist organization, country, and casualty numbers. Available at <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/index.htm> [accessed 9 Oct 2014].

²¹ Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2011, National Counterterrorism Center Annex of Statistical Information*, U.S. Department of State Publication (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 2012), 4, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/195768.pdf> [accessed 9 October 2014].

²² Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013*, U.S. Department of State Publication (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2014), 266 – 314, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/225886.pdf> [accessed 9 October 2014]. Non-Islamic groups included those such as the Shining Path in Peru, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the Irish Republican Army, and the Tamil Liberation Tigers in Sri Lanka.

²³ The names of these primary sects betray this initial schism, with *sunna* meaning “orthodoxy” (the true followers of Muhammad), and *shi’a* serving as a shortened form of *shi’at Ali*, or “the party of Ali.”

²⁴ Literally “communication,” the *hadith* were all collected many years after Muhammad’s death, usually by friends, relatives, and other Muslim contemporaries. Each *hadith* is supposed to be supported by a chain of authority back to Muhammad himself. The *hadith* consists of literally tens of thousands of sayings and phrases, with the most commonly used edition of the *hadith* (compiled by al-Bukhari) encompassing nine thick volumes. The first six books are considered authentic by the Sunni, with each one of the 7,500 sayings traceable back to Muhammad. Other editions of the *hadith* and other sayings in the al-Bukhari are traceable back to a companion or relative of Muhammad, but not to the Prophet, and therefore do not carry the same significance (Lippman 77 – 79).

²⁵ It should be noted that Sunni and Shi’ite Muslims do not agree on all of the *hadith*, occasionally disagreeing on whether individual sayings were actually uttered by the Prophet or added later by his followers. As a result, the Sunni and Shi’a have different (though overlapping) collections of *hadith*. Despite the differences over individual sayings in the *hadith*, all Muslims agree on the authority contained within them and the Qur’an.

²⁶ *Ijma* literally means “consensus,” and is still a recognized source of authority for many Muslims. When the community of Muslim scholars (the *mujtahids* or *ulema*) convene to discuss an issue, when they reach unanimous agreement, their ruling is considered binding by Muslims that recognize *ijma*. However, many Muslims reject the authority of *ijma*, considering it the equivalent of legislation by man instead of Allah. The Maliki school accepts the *ijma*, but it is rejected by Hanbali. The Shafi’i have a different procedure for arriving at consensus, but recognize its authority (Khadduri 32 – 33).

²⁷ Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), 32.

²⁸ These four schools are distinct, and the separation looks tidy – but in reality, it is still even more complex. Just as in Christianity, there are Lutherans who don’t follow everything Luther taught and Calvinists who depart from Calvin, there are many Muslims who claim allegiance to a given tradition of jurisprudence but don’t agree with everything it teaches. There are also other schools besides these four, but within about 300 years of Muhammad’s death, these four had emerged as the predominant schools that encompassed nearly every view within Sunni Islam (Khadduri 36).

²⁹ The Shi’a subscribe to a separate legal interpretation, the *Jafari* school, which differs significantly from the Sunni tradition.

³⁰ Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), 34 – 41.

³¹ In general, Islam recognizes only two kinds of people – those who fall into the *dar al-Islam* (the House of Islam) and who have submitted to the rule of Allah, and those who belong to the *dar al-Harb* (the House of War), which covers everyone else. From a Muslim perspective – especially ibn Taymiyya – every human being on Earth falls into one of these two “houses.” While those who are practicing Muslims are traditionally considered *dar al-Islam*, ibn Taymiyya said that *dar al-Islam* only exists when living under Muslim rule, thus practicing Muslims under non-Muslim rule are *dar al-Harb*.

³² *Jihad* is one of the most misunderstood concepts in Islam, a single word worthy of its own research paper. It is derived from the Arabic root word for “struggle,” and can mean either a personal struggle while striving toward holiness or an armed struggle against those who oppose Islam. The Prophet Muhammad considered the internal struggle to be the greater of the two definitions, though most jihadis ignore that fact and even ignore the entire concept of *jihad* as an internal struggle. Each of the four legal schools has their own interpretation of *jihad*, including when it can be declared, by whom, and how it Muslims engage in combat (Habeck 107 – 109).

³³ History summarized and condensed from Thomas W. Lippman, *Understanding Islam: An Introduction to the Muslim World*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2002), 147 – 152.

³⁴ In another example of the sectarianism that plagues Islam, many who subscribe to the Wahhabi ideology object to the term “Wahhabi,” preferring the term “Salafi.” Originally two separate movements, the Wahhabis and Salafis have merged significantly in the last decade, making it more and more difficult to distinguish one from the other. Wahhabis reject outright the influences of modernism, whereas Salafis are more inclined to assimilate modernist ideas they see as less harmful, but both have their foundations in the teachings of al-Wahhab and Sayyid Qutb. For the purposes of this paper, whatever label is placed on the individual or the group, the ideology and strict, literal, fundamental interpretation of the Qur’an is identical (Taylor 1).

³⁵ Thomas W. Lippman, *Understanding Islam: An Introduction to the Muslim World*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2002), 149.

³⁶ Alastair Campbell, *An Investigation into Islamic Fundamentalism and an Assessment of its Relationship with the Concept of Jihad*, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: 1992), 70.

³⁷ Hassan al-Banna, *Five Tracts of Hassan al-Banna*, Translated from the Arabic and Annotated by Charles Wendell, (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1978), 110.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 126 – 130.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴⁰ This is still debated within Islam. Most Muslims reject abrogation, since it implies that there are portions of the Qur’an that are no longer correct or that can be ignored. Some Muslims believe only in “external” abrogation, meaning the Qur’an abrogates earlier scriptures (the Torah and the Gospels). A few, including most jihadis, believe in “internal” abrogation, with the later *suras* of the Qur’an abrogating the earlier *suras*.

⁴¹ Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy*, 44.

⁴² The only exception here is that al-Baghdadi is from the Shafi’i legal school.

⁴³ This does not absolve the Shi’a from violence, as there are several Shi’a militant groups as well, with Hezbollah the most well-known and visible. However, the vast majority of terrorist attacks against the United States in recent history have been from Sunni militants, and Shi’a jihadis are limited almost exclusively to Iranian state-sponsored actors and Hezbollah (Lynch 6 – 8).

⁴⁴ Drew DeSilver, "World's Muslim Population More Widespread than you Might Think," *The Daily Number*, July 2013, Pew Research Center Fact Tank, (Washington, DC: The Pew Research Center, 2013), available at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/06/07/worlds-muslim-population-more-widespread-than-you-might-think/#> [accessed 10 November 2014].

⁴⁵ The Pew Research Forum, *The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity*, (Washington, DC: The Pew Research Center, 2012), available at <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2012/08/the-worlds-muslims-full-report.pdf> [accessed 10 October 2014].

⁴⁶ This number is a very broad estimate, based on the number of terrorist attacks my Islamic organizations, the average membership of each organization, and the average number of individuals required to conduct a major terrorist attack.

⁴⁷ Ed Husain, "Until We Understand ISIS, We Cannot Hope to Defeat It," 1. In addition, the Pew Global Attitudes Survey, *Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics*, (Washington, DC: The Pew Research Center, 2005), available at <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/248.pdf> [accessed 10 October 2014]. Averaging the number of people in each country surveyed, who profess some support for violence in the spread of Islam results in an average of about 25% of all survey respondents. However, this must be tempered by the date of the survey (2005), and the fact that many (including 42% of respondents in Pakistan) declined to offer an opinion of this portion of the survey.

⁴⁸ John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*, (New York: Gallup Press, 2007), 69.

⁴⁹ The Pew Global Attitudes Survey, *Islamic Extremism*, 2.

⁵⁰ A.G. Noorani, *Islam and Jihad: Prejudice Versus Reality*, (New York: Zed Books, 2002), 13.

⁵¹ Every version of the *hadith*, for both Sunni and Shi'a, includes at least one lengthy chapter dedicated to the topic of *jihad*.

⁵² Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*, (New York: Random House, 2003), 33.

⁵³ S.K. Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War*, (Lahore, Pakistan: Wajidalis, 1979), 47 – 48, from Laurent Murawiec, *The Mind of Jihad*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 17 – 18.

⁵⁴ Bernard Lewis, Professor Emeritus of Middle Eastern Studies at Princeton and arguably one of the greatest Western scholars on Islam, agrees, "Fighters in *jihad* are enjoined not to kill women, children, or the aged unless they attack first, not to torture or mutilate prisoners, to give fair warning of the resumption of hostilities after a truce, and to honor agreements...at no point do the basic texts of Islam enjoin terrorism or murder, and at no point do they even *consider* the random slaughter of uninvolved bystanders." (Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*, 39).

⁵⁵ Suicide bombing is one of the most deadly tactics employed by *jihadis*, but it is expressly forbidden by all of the authoritative texts of Islam. Suicide (*intihar*) is a mortal sin for which there is no forgiveness, punishable by eternal damnation. The Qur'an specifically states, "Do not kill yourself," (surah 4:29) while the *hadith* maintains that anyone who commits *intihar* is condemned to live in hell, endlessly experiencing their own death over and over again. All Muslim legal schools and jurists interpret these *hadith* to differentiate between death at the hands

of the enemy, which leads to heaven, and death by one's own hand, which leads to hell. Unfortunately, some terrorist leaders have been able to convince their followers that suicide is not *intihar* but *intishhad* (martyrdom). Some of these imams have successfully convinced followers that while Allah punishes the sin, he rewards the martyr. However, in this case, suicide simply becomes homicide, which is also forbidden by both the Qur'an (surah 5:32, 17:33) and the *hadith*.

⁵⁶ Anthony Lott, *Creating Insecurity: Realism, Constructivism, and U.S. Security Policy*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 4.

⁵⁷ "President Bush Discusses Global War On Terror," The White House Archives, (Washington, DC: Office of the Press Secretary, 2007), <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/11/20071101-4.html> [accessed 11 October 2014].

⁵⁸ "President Bush Discusses Global War on Terror," The White House Archives, (Washington, DC: Office of the Press Secretary, 2008), <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/03/20080319-2.html> [accessed 11 October 2014].

⁵⁹ "President Bush Discusses Global War On Terror," The White House Archives, (Washington, DC: Office of the Press Secretary, 2007), <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/11/20071101-4.html> [accessed 11 October 2014].

⁶⁰ "Statement by the President on ISIL," The White House, (Washington, DC: Office of the Press Secretary, 2014), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/statement-president-isil-1> [accessed 11 October 2014].

⁶¹ This point is further buttressed by looking at the speeches by President Bush from 2007 – 2008, as well as those by President Obama from 2010 – 2014. In every documented instance of a stated strategy against terrorism, it reflects a focus on resources – finances, weapons supply, recruiting – and targeting leadership. The assumption that if we kill Osama bin Laden we remove the threat of al-Qaeda, though largely unspoken, exposes another instance of realist thinking applied to a non-state actor. Their hierarchies and leadership is fluid and flexible, in many cases almost entirely unaffected by the loss of a single leader.

⁶² Audrey Cronin makes a similar point in her *Foreign Affairs* article "Why Drones Fail," stating, "Washington is still using [drone strikes] to try to defeat al-Qaeda by killing off its leadership. But the terrorist groups that have been destroyed through decapitation looked nothing like al-Qaeda: they were hierarchically structured, characterized by a cult of personality, and less than ten years old...al-Qaeda, by contrast, is a resilient, 25-year-old organization with a broad network of outposts. The group was never singularly dependent on Osama bin Laden...targeted killings have not thwarted the group's ability to replace dead leaders with new ones." She follows with a recommendation of an alternate, non-kinetic strategy (similar to the one recommended in this paper): "...a more effective way of defeating al-Qaeda would be to publicly discredit it with a political strategy aimed at dividing its followers" (Cronin 2).

⁶³ Samuel J. Brannen, "Counterterrorism Success and Failings," *2015 Global Forecast: Crisis and Opportunity*, (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2014), 59.

⁶⁴ Philip Gordon, "Can the War on Terror Be Won? How to Fight the Right War," *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 86, Issue 6, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2007), 53 – 66.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 53 – 66.



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