A Tale of Two Caliphates
AQ and its Associated Movement vs.
the Islamic State *and its Associated Movement*

William Braniff

Executive Director

The Starting Line

- 3 consecutive record breaking years for #'s of attacks & fatalities globally
- Highly concentrated geographically in states with AQAM (and now ISAM) presence
- 6 – 7 of the most lethal & active groups are part of AQAM or ISAM over last 3 years
- Terrorism theory predicts "outbidding"
- START dataset on group dynamics supports the outbidding theory (BAAD – Asal & Rethemeyer)

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GTD Data: Perpetrator Groups Among Top 20

Group	Total Attacks 2014	Total Fatalities 2014	% Change Total Attacks 2013-2014	% Change Total Fatalities 2013-2014
ISIL/AQI*	1263	9596	**179%**	**411%**
Taliban	1038	4194	**34%**	**53%**
Al-Shabaab	865	1783	**170%**	**141%**
Boko Haram	493	7112	**111%**	**311%**
AQAP	285	889	**99%**	**140%**
TTP	179	974	**13%**	**30%**
Al-Nusra Front*	82	838	**82%**	**19%**
Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (a.k.a, Ansar Jerusalem, Sinai Province of IS)	60	157	**200%**	**50%**

*Given limitations in media coverage in Syria, these are conservative figures

Hypotheses

- Both theory and empirical trends suggest even greater levels of violence from AQAM and ISAM

- Weak nation-states straining under sectarian pressures will not have the will or capacity to marginalize Sunni extremists
  - Sunni nations will be too busy fighting the Shi'a to devote resources (e.g., Yemen and AQAP)
  - Sunni nations will see AQAM as useful when fighting ISAM or the Shi'a (e.g., Jabhat al-Nusra)
  - ISAM will use and exacerbate sectarian tension to its advantage

    (e.g., Iran backs Assad, Iraqi Shi'a militias, Houthis, Hezbollah)

The Finish Line: Some Worst Case Outcomes

- ISAM is able to foment a regional sectarian civil war
  - B/t refugee flows and conflict, borders are erased
- AQAM is perceived as more mainstream & legitimate
  - "The Fringe Effect"
- The Sinai Province carves out enough safe haven to wage a sustained campaign against Israel or Egypt
  - Outbidding Hamas, Hezbollah and AQAM while baiting Israel
  - Winning disenfranchised Egyptian Islamists
- Ever-increasing levels of violence convince "the West" to sever ties with the Muslim world
  - al-Qa'ida's goal with respect to the West all along

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Contours of the Competition

- The Islamic State's (IS) vision for the Caliphate is:
  - Only marginally different from that of al-Qaida (AQ)
  - Born of recent adaptations in jihadist discourse
  - Fostered by developments in social media
  - Enabled by recent conditions specific to Iraq and Syria

However, their vision for the Caliphate is:
  - More destabilizing than that of al-Qa'ida
  - Transferable to future conflict zones

And yet, it
  - May serve to legitimize AQAM over time
  - May differ from aspirations of the "We are all ISIS" crowd

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Jihadism Online: From Ideology to Mobilization

Intellectual Table-Setting

Ideological Accelerant

Individual Mobilization

Images Courtesy of Dr. Jarret Brachman

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Al Qa'ida's Grand Strategy

- **Operations:** Far-Enemy Centric
  - Attack the Far Enemy to *Awaken the Masses*
- **Strategy:** Protracted Attrition Warfare
  - Enable and reorient the violence of others groups
  - Severing ties b/t the West and the Muslim world is a necessary precondition to establishing the Caliphate
- **Strategic Communications:** Social Movement Theory
  - "The Caliphate" as a conceptual master frame to foster alignment among diverse & dispersed violent Islamists
  - Sharia → Da'wa to help reorient hearts and minds

Al Qa'ida's Phased Approach

1. **Awakening the Masses**

2. *Harb Istinzaf* **– A long term war of attrition**

3. Severing Western/Muslim alliances

4. *Tasfiyat Hisabat* – Settling Scores

5. *Idarat al-Tawahush* – Management of Barbarism

6. Establishing Shari`a Law in Muslim States

7. Removal of All Western Influences from the Region

8. Reestablishment of the Caliphate

Sammy Salama and Joe-Ryan Bergoch, "Eight Phases to Restoring the Caliphate: Al-Qa'ida's Long-Term Strategy Against the West," *Terrorism and Political Islam*

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Animating the Strategy

Economy

Propaganda
Trained Fighters
Drugs, etc

Conflict Zone 2

Conflict Zone 3

$, Men, Weapons

Org C

Organizational Infrastructure

AQ

Conflict Zone

Narratives:
- Othering
- Victimization
- Resistance
- **Far Enemy**
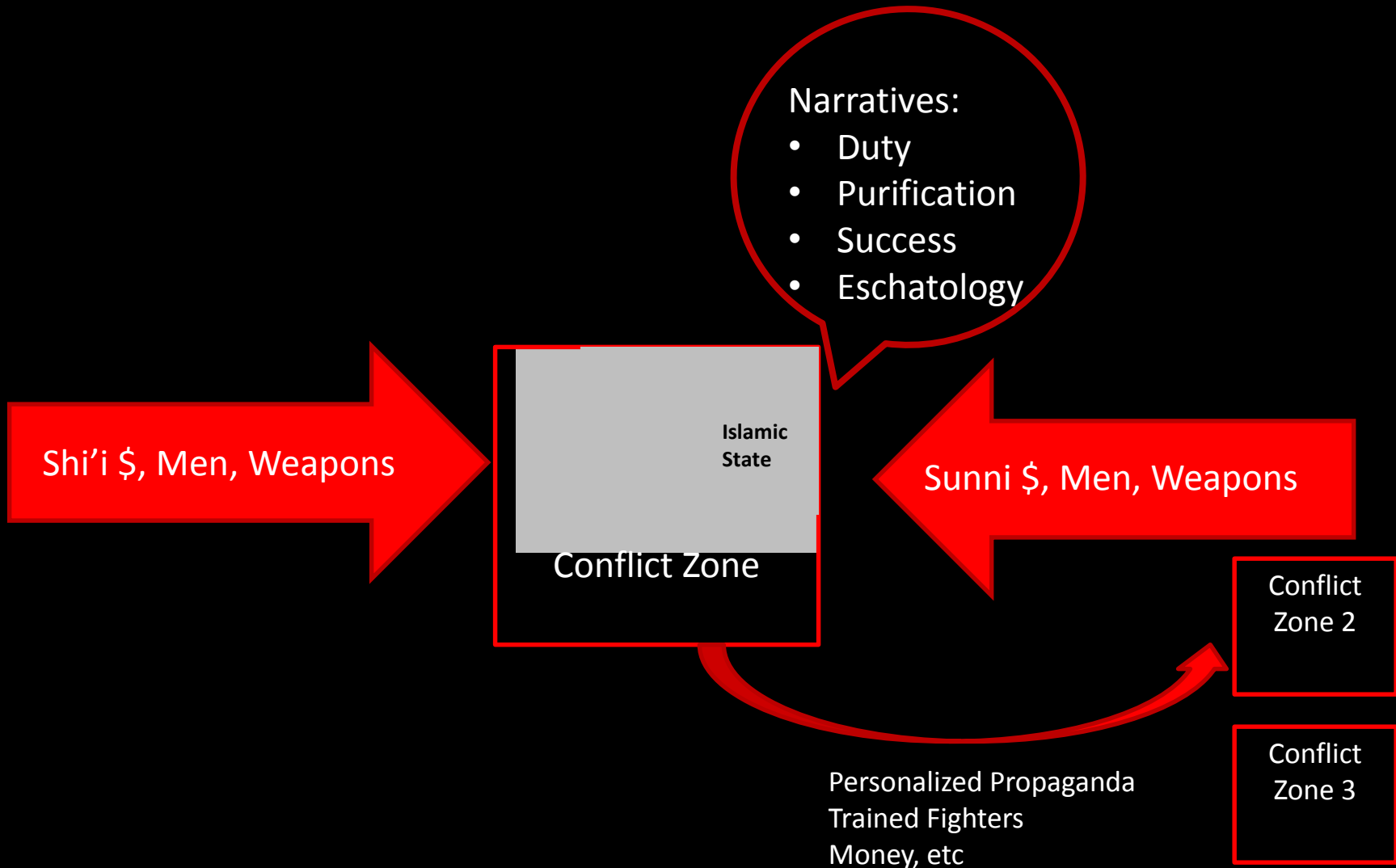
Islamic State's Grand Strategy

- **Operations:** Get *Dar-ul Islam* in order
  - Establish the Caliphate and build its institutions to *Awaken the Masses*
- **Strategy:** Outbid Everyone
  - Use internecine violence to foment instability and foster resource mobilization
- **Strategic Communications:** #Caliphate.Hijra.Now.
  - The Caliphate is a religious obligation (now) and a geo-political reality (now)
  - Sharia → Purification of Islam

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Islamic State's Phased Approach

1. *Hijrah (Emigration)*

2. *Jama'ah (Group)*

3. Destabilize *Taghut (Idolaters/Tyrants)*

4. *Tamkin* (Consolidation)

5. *Khilafah (Caliphate)*

"From Hijra to Caliphate," *Dabiq*, Issue 1

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Animating the Strategy

Implications

- US effort should be geared towards managing sectarianism
  - Sectarian tension is the engine of resource mobilization
  - IS feeds off of and exacerbates this tension
- US effort should help Sunnis marginalize Sunni Extremists
- US efforts should help partners prevent wilayats from taking root
  - Interdict IS veterans, money and influence
- US strategy must recognize that IS can advance AQ's war of attrition
- Both AQ and IS have an incentive to plot 'far-enemy' attacks
  - AQ: Relevance
  - IS:
    - Abu Bakr Naji's "Strategy of Paying the Price (deterrence)
    - Inciting *al-Malhama* (escalation)

Analytical Questions Going Forward

- Reaction to Western intervention in Iraq:
  - When does IS switch from deterrence to escalation wrt the West?
  - If corporate IS conducts a large scale attack in the West, is it intended to precipitate *al-Malhama*?
- Evolution of IS to ISAM
  - How will IS use its wilayats as strategic assets?
  - When IS shifts emphasis to its wilayats or inspired adherents, what does it tell us?
- ISAM as agent of change:
  - If ISAM remains successful, how does AQAM respond?

William Braniff

Executive Director

START, University of Maryland

(301) 405-4022

braniff@start.umd.edu

www.start.umd.edu