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

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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)
**GTD Data: Perpetrator Groups Among Top 20**

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

*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
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
Jihadism Online: From Ideology to Mobilization

Intellectual Table-Setting

Ideological Accelerant

Individual Mobilization

Images Courtesy of Dr. Jarret Brachman
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*
Animating the Strategy

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
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
Animating the Strategy

Narratives:
- Duty
- Purification
- Success
- Eschatology

Shi’i $, Men, Weapons → Islamic State → Sunni $, Men, Weapons

Conflict Zone 1

Personalized Propaganda
Trained Fighters
Money, etc

Conflict Zone 2

Conflict Zone 3
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?
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