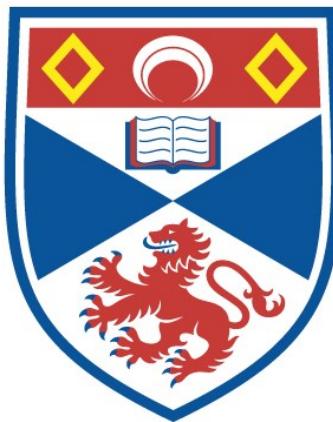


**FORGED IN THE CRUCIBLE OF DEFENSIVE JIHAD:
ARAB FOREIGN FIGHTERS AND THEIR TRAJECTORY TO
INVOLVEMENT IN ISLAMIST TERRORISM**

Roger Patrick Warren

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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Forged in the Crucible of Defensive Jihad:
Arab Foreign Fighters and their Trajectory to Involvement
in Islamist Terrorism

Roger Patrick Warren



University of
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of
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at the
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ABSTRACT

This thesis challenges the conventional wisdom that tends to conflate Arab foreign fighters with Islamist terrorists, and ‘martyrdom operations’ with ‘suicide attacks.’ Overlaps notwithstanding, it aims to draw distinctions between Arab foreign fighters engaged in defensive jihad defending co-religionists against a military foe, and Islamist terrorists engaged in terrorism that indiscriminately targets civilians and non-combatants. Critically, while disaggregating the two transnational cohorts, this thesis also illuminates the nexus between them. It draws on a thesis dataset of 3,010 Arab foreign fighters compiled using biographies, martyrdom eulogies, and postings on ‘jihadi’ websites, in both English and Arabic. This dataset is then used to support three case studies involving the defensive jihads in 1980s Afghanistan, Iraq (post 2003), and Syria (post 2011). It leverages a theoretical framework based on the concept of radicalisation and the language of political Islam, whilst concurrently drawing on theories from psychology and historical military examples of combat, germane to defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism.

The thesis concludes that Arab foreign fighters involved in defensive jihad employ martyrdom operations against military targets, through tactical necessity. Conversely, Islamist terrorists employ suicide attacks against civilians and non-combatants, through ideological necessity. The trajectory between the two transnational mobilisations appears to be broadly underpinned by facets of the *Lucifer Effect* – the situational factors encountered whilst participating in defensive jihad, including but not limited to, the experience of close combat in a war zone; being subjected to ideological indoctrination; and being exposed to charismatic authority and obedience to it. This suggests that subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorism by some Arab foreign fighters is primarily forged in the crucible of defensive jihad. Such findings should result in the crafting of more individualised de-radicalisation and rehabilitation programmes for returning foreign fighters, in both the West and the Arab world.

DECLARATIONS

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I, **Roger Patrick Warren**, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in March 2013 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in March 2014; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2013 and 2017.

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Dedicated to Captain and Mrs F. M. Warren, who made it all possible.

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Chapter 1: Setting the Scene

Introduction

Ahmad Abdullah al-Shaya was born in 1984, in the town of Buraidah in central Saudi Arabia, known to be ‘a pietist community characterised by an extreme social conservatism’ and ‘the heartland of the Saudi Islamist landscape’ (Hegghammer, 2010b: 89, 121).¹ Educationally, he dropped out of school ‘where half the classes were in religious subjects’ (Ballen, 2011: 8), and domestically he endured an abusive father.² After a short time in a gang in an area where ‘at least half of all men under twenty-five were unemployed’ (Ballen, 2011: 19), al-Shaya and notably his cousin and close friend, Adil, both turned to religion and started attending their local mosque.

Their increased religiosity³ happened to coincide with the 2003 US led invasion of Iraq, and a resultant environment in Saudi Arabia where ‘both local imams and some senior clerics were encouraging participation in the Iraqi resistance’ (Hegghammer, 2007: 16). The narrative was of defensive jihad - a ‘defensive struggle … against non-Muslim … enemies in uniform … over territory’ (Hegghammer, 2010b: 7).⁴ A year later (April 2004) the Abu Ghraib prison abuses became public knowledge, and acted as a ‘triggering event’⁵ for both al-Shaya and his cousin. In October 2004 during the Islamic fasting month of *Ramadan*,⁶ al-Shaya and Adil decided to travel to Iraq in order to engage in defensive jihad, as an Arab foreign fighter, ‘to fight the Americans on Noble Jihad’ (Ballen, 2011: 7). From a transcript of his interrogation (conducted later in Saudi Arabia), his ‘objective was to kill the Americans, policemen, national guards and the American collaborators’ (Komarow and al-Anbaki, 2005).

¹ Also, according to Matthiesen (2013: 84) the city of Buraidah ‘lies in the historical heartland of … dissident Islamist movements, including al-Qaeda.’

² Ken Ballen (2011) personally interviewed Ahmad Abdullah al-Shaya in 2008, at a Ministry of Interior Prison Care Centre in Saudi Arabia.

³ The term religiosity is understood to mean ‘the condition of being religious or excessively religious’ (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1995: 1161).

⁴ Hegghammer (2010b: 6) uses the term ‘classical jihad’ to denote defensive jihad.

⁵ A ‘triggering event’ is defined as a ‘significantly provocative event’ (Horgan, 2005: 84).

⁶ The Holy Month of *Ramadan*, one of the five pillars of Islam, is a fasting period for all Muslims. Hegghammer (2007: 4) noted that the most common departure time to Iraq was during *Ramadan*.

However, once he arrived in Iraq, there appeared to be a point of inflection involving ‘sound bites’ of indoctrination, including references to Abu Ghraib prison, revenge, and the benefits of martyrdom. The leader of their group in Iraq demanded to know: ‘How many of you will die to avenge Abu Ghraib? Those most blessed among you in God’s eyes are noble *shaheeds* [martyrs]⁷ ready to go to heaven on a martyrdom mission for Allah Almighty’ (Ballen, 2011: 27). Within less than two months of his arrival, on 24 December 2004, al-Shaya carried out a vehicle-borne suicide attack outside the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad, which killed 12 Iraqi civilians.⁸ He however survived (although badly burnt and missing fingers) and after a series of interrogations, he soon became the ‘poster boy’ of the Saudi rehabilitation programme (Beaumont, 2014), denouncing terrorism in all its forms. It wasn’t until 18 November 2013, that al-Shaya reappeared on an Arabic language Facebook account (Shaghur, 2013), announcing that he was ‘honoured to be a soldier’s soldier of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), having pledged allegiance to [its leader] Shaykh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.’

The Conundrum

The preceding narrative of Ahmad Abdullah al-Shaya reflects a broad conundrum that requires headlining. Specifically, to what extent did his geographic origin affect his initial involvement in defensive jihad, considering thousands of other Saudis were exposed to the same conditions? Did kinship and friendship ties (his cousin, Adil) influence his decision to participate in a defensive jihad? To what extent did religiosity (his exposure to a more pietistic community) affect his initial involvement? Why were non-Iraqi Arabs motivated to participate in a defensive jihad in Iraq as foreign fighters, against the US led coalition? Linking the last two puzzles above – can political Islam⁹ help explain his transnational volunteerism? Was al-Shaya an Arab foreign fighter engaged in a defensive jihad or was he an Islamist terrorist? Are these two categories the one and the same or can boundaries be

⁷ Strictly speaking a *shaheed* is a martyr, while the plural (martyrs) is *shuhadaa*. (Wehr, 1980: 489).

⁸ Global Terrorism Database (GTD) ID:200412240004; Chicago Project on Security and Threats (CPOST) Attack ID: 1006327513.

⁹ Political Islam refers to ‘a religious-cultural-political framework for engagement on issues that most concern politically engaged Muslims’ (Fuller, 2007: 193), and is covered in Chapter 3.

identified and drawn between them? Was al-Shaya's decision go to Iraq due to him being radicalised,¹⁰ or did this process occur in Iraq? Despite him surviving his attack, did al-Shaya conduct a martyrdom operation or a suicide attack? Is there a difference? Why did al-Shaya return to political violence (despite rehabilitation) by travelling to Syria and joining (as it was known then) the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham?

This broad conundrum within the Arab world underpins a more general inquiry that informs the research question: how and why do some Arab foreign fighters cross a threshold to subsequently become involved in Islamist terrorist related activities? Although discussed in greater detail below, Arab foreign fighters are defined for this thesis as ethnically Arab, religiously Sunni Muslim combatants, who participate in defensive jihad, with no apparent link to the conflict other than religious affinity with the Sunni Muslim side.¹¹ Examples of such conflicts include 1980s Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Kashmir, Iraq (post 2003), and Syria (post 2011). The research question seeks to address the 'Western tendency to conflate foreign fighters and international terrorists' (Hegghammer, 2011a: 2). Hegghammer is not alone in this assertion: Gerges (2005: 161) recognised the tendency 'to lump all jihadis together in one category and to overlook important subtleties, nuances, and differences between them,' while Ranstorp (2010) implicitly differentiates between 'terrorist and jihadist movements.'¹²

Yet why does such apparent conflation matter? What does this taxonomic designation allow academics and policy makers to do? What are the implications of branding an individual a foreign fighter or an Islamist terrorist? This conundrum and matter of distinctions are not about merely semantics or intended to be a pedantic typological debate about various transnational cohorts and mobilisations. The need to distinguish between Arab foreign

¹⁰ Radicalisation is defined as the 'social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to [an] extremist political or religious ideology' (Horgan, 2009: 152), that may eventually cross a threshold that leads to violence, and is covered in Chapter 2.

¹¹ This thesis definition is adapted from Hegghammer (2010a: 53) to reflect the sectarian (Sunni-Shia) nature of the contemporary conflicts in Iraq and Syria. The roots of this sectarian divide, according to Gonzalez (2009), are that while 'the Shia contend that the correct line of succession after the Prophet Muhammad's death in AD 632 should have been familial' (p. 6), the Sunni 'accepted Abu Bakr, a close companion of the Prophet Muhammad, as their next political and religious leader' (p. 4).

¹² The very title of Ranstorp's (2010) book *Understanding Violent Radicalisation: Terrorist and Jihadist Movements in Europe*, implies a distinction between terrorist and jihadist.

fighters and Islamist terrorists will facilitate, overlaps notwithstanding, a greater understanding of their respective mobilisations, and the situational factors that influence their respective decisions and actions. It does not appear correct to simply assume that an individual who mobilises to fight abroad in a defensive jihad against a foreign army of occupation, has the same motivation as an individual that conducts a self-sacrificial attack in a Baghdad market against civilians and non-combatants. In addition, by acknowledging those ‘important subtleties, nuances, and differences’ (Gerges, 2005: 161), individualised rehabilitation programmes can be established to better reflect them.

However, perhaps this conflation is understandable given that some Arab foreign fighters do subsequently become involved in Islamist terrorist related activities.¹³ As Chapter 4 will demonstrate, there were veteran Arab foreign fighters involved in the 1993 World Trade Centre (WTC) attack, the 1995 Riyadh attacks, the 1998 East Africa bombings, the 2000 USS *Cole* attack, and finally the 9/11 attacks where four of the hijackers had previously participated in a defensive jihad in either Bosnia or Chechnya.¹⁴ Moreover, this apparent conflation (between Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists) is not just an issue in academia, inasmuch as the United Nations Security Council (2014) passed Resolution 2178 (in September 2014) that introduced another term – ‘foreign terrorist fighters.’¹⁵ In July 2015 at a meeting in Madrid, a United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee (UNSC CTC, 2015a) discussed the threat from ‘foreign terrorist fighters’ including, *inter alia*, those ‘who travelled to Afghanistan during the 1980s ... and to Iraq ... during the 2000s.’ Yet those who travelled to Afghanistan during the 1980s, were labelled by former President Ronald Reagan (1982) as ‘freedom fighters of Afghanistan’¹⁶ In effect, President Reagan was encouraging ‘freedom fighters’ to go to Afghanistan, only to be rebranded subsequently as ‘foreign terrorist fighters,’ ‘foreign fighters,’ or terrorists.

¹³ Hegghammer (2013b: 10) found his data indicated ‘that no more than one in nine foreign fighters returned to perpetrate attacks in the West;’ while Ahmed, Comerford, and El-Badawy (2016: 6) found that 76 percent of their ‘prominent jihadi’ terrorists had been foreign fighters.

¹⁴ The 9/11 Commission Report (2005) surmised that Ahmed al-Ghamdi and Saeed al-Ghamdi had fought in Bosnia (p. 233), while Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi had fought in Chechnya (p. 155).

¹⁵ ‘Foreign terrorist fighters’ were defined on 24 September 2014, in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution (2178: 2) as ‘individuals who travel to a state other than their states of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict.’

¹⁶ Reagan (1982) issued Proclamation 4908 on Afghanistan Day, March 10, 1982.

The irony of such rebranding was also recognised by the actors themselves, as Speckhard and Shaikh (2014: 244) noted:

“those who opposed the Soviets were supported and called ‘freedom fighters’ and many were encouraged to go and fight to throw the Soviets out. So for many, it was hypocritical to now call those who resisted the United States invasion of Iraq, terrorists - rather than freedom fighters.”¹⁷

Finally, it is instructive that the passing of the United Nations Security Council (2014) Resolution 2178 (pertaining to ‘foreign terrorist fighters’ mentioned earlier), did not escape academic scrutiny. Schmid (2015: 5) suggested that “a distinction ought to be made between a ‘Foreign Fighter’ and a ‘Foreign *Terrorist* Fighter’ but the Security Council chose not to do so;” while Malet (2015: 5) argued correctly that ‘the Security Council blurred all analytic distinctions.’

The Argument

The central contention of this study is that, overlaps notwithstanding,¹⁸ the transition between participation in defensive jihad and subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorist related activities, is underpinned by situational factors experienced whilst participating in defensive jihad. The situational factors include, but are not limited to, the personal experience of close combat in a war zone; being subjected to ideological indoctrination (as part of group training and socialisation); and being exposed to charismatic authority and obedience to it – all underpinned by the notion of the *Lucifer Effect*.¹⁹ Implicit in this central argument, is that defensive jihad (involving Arab foreign fighters) is subtly distinct from Islamist terrorism (involving Islamist terrorists). These appear important factors when

¹⁷ The ‘freedom fighter versus terrorist’ labelling is one of the reasons why it is still impossible to arrive at a consensual definition of terrorism. Literature covering the debate includes Kennedy (1999) and Ganor (2002).

¹⁸ Holtmann (2014: 140) recognised that ‘jihad can contain elements of terrorism – in terms of ideology, strategy and tactics.’ The most obvious overlap is where Arab foreign fighters employ terrorist tactics, such as in Iraq and Syria. This is addressed in the respective chapters.

¹⁹ The *Lucifer Effect* is understood as ‘processes of transformation at work when good or ordinary people do bad or evil things [and] may be traced to factors outside the actor, to situational variables … unique to a given setting’ (Zimbardo, 2007: 5-8).

determining the outcome of involvement in defensive jihad, however these theoretical explanations do not necessarily remain constant throughout each defensive jihad, and as the individual case study chapters demonstrate, there are variations.²⁰

Moreover, there is a need to make a distinction between self-sacrificial attacks - martyrdom operations and suicide attacks. This need is predicated on the realisation that, particularly in Iraq (post 2003) and Syria (post 2011), there were/are different tactical imperatives and battlefield goals. For example, Crenshaw (cited in Hafez, 2007: ix) maintained that civilians in Iraq were 'the target of choice' for suicide attacks, while C. Winter (2017b: 1) found that in Syria 'suicide attacks are now primarily ... against *military* targets.' By relying on the definition of civilians and non-combatants enshrined within the ICRC, it is argued that self-sacrificial attacks against enemy combatants (conducted by either transnational cohort) appear more generally akin to martyrdom (*fee sabeel Allah* - in the cause of God²¹), rather than suicide; whereas suicide attacks against civilians and non-combatants (conducted by either cohort) are more generally analogous to terrorism. The ICRC definition of civilians and non-combatants, and the distinctions between martyrdom and suicide, are covered later in this chapter.

Lastly, this study argues that most Arab foreign fighters appeared ordinary men – that they were not necessarily radical in the cognitive sense of being motivated by 'extremist beliefs' (Neumann, 2013: 873) - it was the situational circumstances of being involved in a defensive jihad that appeared to determine their subsequent behaviour. This argument chimes with Horgan (2015) who also found that:

‘there are plenty of terrorists who don’t initially hold radical views but drift into terrorism regardless. In fact, more and more evidence suggests that quite a few terrorists acquire their radical views through ideological training only after they become involved with a recruiter or a group.’

²⁰ Although pertaining to 'belonging to a terrorist group (before engaging in operations)', Horgan (2009: 13) suggested similar situational factors - 'a further set of issues ... including the power of the group, the content and process of ideology, [and] the influence of a particular leader.'

²¹ According to Wehr (1980: 396), *fee sabeel Allah* also means 'on behalf of God and his religion.'

From the perspective of Arab foreign fighters, this thesis will posit that there are plenty ‘who don’t initially hold radical views but drift into defensive jihad,’ suggesting perhaps that they could be considered as mercenaries. Whilst mercenaries fight for a cause or for personal gain,²² Arab foreign fighters appear motivated by a multitude of factors enshrined within the notion of defensive jihad (that involves Sunni Muslim identity and the need to defend co-religionists). Whilst historical examples of mercenaries abound,²³ contemporary examples would include Westerners fighting alongside the Kurds against the Islamic State (Sommerville, 2015), and European volunteers fighting in Eastern Ukraine against the Russians (Allen, 2015). Research for this thesis has not located any discussion or suggestion that these Western mercenaries are radical, or that they were radicalised before their involvement in war zones. This further suggests that ‘[q]uestioning the motivation, radicalization, and *modus operandi* of foreign jihadi fighters is central to understanding contemporary political violence and insurgency’ (Moore and Tumelty, 2008: 412).

The Approach

The approach taken to address the research question relies on analysis of a thesis dataset of 3,010 Arab foreign fighters,²⁴ who were involved in one or more of three case study defensive jihads: 1980s Afghanistan, Iraq (post 2003), and Syria (post 2011). These defensive jihads were selected as they attracted the greatest number of Arab (and other) foreign fighters (compared to other defensive jihads²⁵) thereby offering the largest amount of data for analysis. Whilst the research explores their initial motivational circumstances leading them to participate in a defensive jihad, the main focus is on those who subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities, as a result of the

²² A ‘mercenary’ is broadly defined as a combatant who is hired to fight in a foreign army. It is acknowledged that many (but not all) Arab foreign fighters had no prior military experience.

²³ Historical examples of paid mercenaries include but are not limited to, the German battalion in the French Foreign Legion in the French-Indochina war (Elford, 1971); former British officers who fought in the Dhofar war (Akehurst, 1982); and former British and South African officers who fought in the Rhodesian war (Rogers, 1998). Arguably, Nepalese Gurkhas in the British Army could also be considered mercenaries.

²⁴ Other scholars’ datasets include ‘172 participants of jihad’ (Sageman, 2004); ‘539 Saudi militants’ (Hegghammer, 2010b); and ‘1,175 fighters’ (Perlinger and Milton, 2016).

²⁵ According to Malet (2015: 10) the ‘foreign contingent’ in 1980s Afghanistan was 500-2,000 Afghan Arabs; in Iraq the ‘foreign contingent’ was 3,000-5,000 (in various jihadi groups); and in Syria the ‘foreign contingent’ was 10,000-16,000 (in various jihadi groups). Schmid (2015: 3) estimated that Chechnya attracted 200 – 700 foreign fighters.

situational circumstances they experienced during defensive jihad. To support the analysis, the study leverages a theoretical framework undergirded by the notion of radicalisation, but augmented by the psychological theories of Hannah Arendt, Stanley Milgram, Ervin Staub, and Philip Zimbardo (covered in Chapter 2); the philosophical underpinnings within political Islam²⁶ (covered in Chapter 3); and by the judicious use of historical military examples, in order to provide a richer contextualised account.

This study is bounded and focussed on Arab foreign fighters (with no known prior terrorist links) who initially participated in a defensive jihad, but who subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. It does not attempt to make comparisons with those who became directly involved in Islamist terrorism – in effect the ‘fast track’ route. Similarly, the study does not attempt to draw any conceptual comparisons (between self-sacrificial attacks, defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism) concerning the Palestinian armed resistance to the Israeli occupation of disputed Palestinian land. Such a protracted conflict is so deeply contested, contentious, and complex, as to make it *sui generis*, and beyond the scope of this thesis.

Finally, the approach of this thesis attempts to explore the other broad outcomes as a result of involvement in defensive jihad. Labelled ‘post-return behaviour’ by Hafez (2012b), in addition to involvement in Islamist terrorist related activities, these outcomes include remaining involved in defensive jihad (possibly in another country, for example Chechnya), or reintegrating back into Arab world society (Hafez, 2012b). As Mendelsohn (2011: 194-195) argued, only ‘a comprehensive account based on breaking down the foreign fighters’ experience will allow us to understand the phenomenon’s real significance.’

Key Terms and Concepts

The example of Ahmad Abdullah al-Shaya (introduced at the start of the chapter) highlights a lot of the key concepts that are central to helping answer the research question. The eight

²⁶ The philosophical underpinnings of political Islam include defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism; martyrdom and suicide attacks; *takfir* against Sunni and Shia Muslims; and finally *Sharia* law and the notion of an Islamic state.

key terms and concepts that are consistently referred to in this thesis exist under four groupings: civilians and non-combatants; defensive jihad and foreign fighters; terrorism and Islamist terrorists; and martyrdom and suicide attacks. It is acknowledged that they are not static categories, but evolve over time and are continue to be contested. Their interpretation varies depending on who is using the term(s) and for what purpose. Whilst definitions of key terms and concepts will be offered below, the ‘overarching Islamic philosophy’ and the actors’ (Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists) own interpretation of these terms, will be discussed and developed throughout the case study chapters.

Civilians and Non-Combatants

As part of the argument, by leveraging the targeting patterns of Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists, and by defining civilians and non-combatants, it is suggested that distinctions may be drawn between the two transnational cohorts. First, this thesis is anchored by the ‘revised academic consensus definition of terrorism’ promoted by Alex Schmid (2013a: 86), that includes:

‘direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties.’

This definition is a cornerstone of this study, and is further validated by the US Department of State (2005) definition²⁷ and by Boaz Ganor (2010).²⁸ It is however recognised that this reliance on drawing distinctions between targeting patterns of the two transnational cohorts is not unproblematic, in that defining civilians and non-combatants is challenging. For example, are Iraqi men waiting outside army recruiting centres considered combatants, non-combatants, or civilians, and in whose eyes?

²⁷ US Department of State (2005: 9) defines terrorism as ‘premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents.’

²⁸ Ganor (2010) identified ‘three important elements’ for a definition of terrorism: ‘the essence of the activity - the use of, or threat to use, violence; the aim of the activity is always political; and the targets of terrorism are civilians.’

Unfortunately even under International Law, defining civilians is fraught with difficulty particularly in non-international conflicts.²⁹ According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC, 2015a), in international armed conflicts, civilians are defined ‘as persons who are not members of the armed forces’, however in ‘non-international armed conflicts … the terms civilians and civilian population are used without defining them.’ There is broad agreement however that ‘civilians who do not take a direct part in hostilities are included in the category of non-combatants’ (ICRC, 2015b). What is striking is that the US Department of State (2015: 388) also uses the label non-combatant to mean, ‘in addition to civilians, military personnel (whether or not armed or on duty) who are not deployed in a war zone or a war-like setting.’ Thus, whilst these definitions are the preserve of national and international bodies, they do suggest correctly, that aspiring Iraqi volunteers outside military recruitment centres are civilians (as they are not yet members of the armed forces); and that the 2000 attack on the USS *Cole* in Aden was terrorism - propaganda by the deed - as the sailors were non-combatants in a non-war zone. Whilst contentious, making a targeting distinction explicit is not contrived. Schmid (2013a: 55, 67) noted that many scholars (including Boaz Ganor, Joshua Sinai, Mohammed Hafez, and Ekaterina Stepanova) also highlighted the need to distinguish between ‘civilians / non-combatants’ and combatants from a nation’s standing army. The current scholarly literature on targeting is reviewed in Chapter 2, while such conceptualisations and arguments are developed and tested throughout the three case study chapters.

Defensive Jihad and Arab Foreign Fighters

As noted earlier, the notion of jihad is contested and dynamic in nature, changing in order to remain ‘relevant to new circumstances’ (Cook, 2005: 93). It is important to recognise that there are non-violent as well as violent manifestations of jihad. Non-violent jihad is often considered the greater jihad, while violent jihad is considered the lesser jihad (Bonner, 2008: 13; Cook, 2005: 32). The non-violent jihad is internal and spiritual in nature, possessing great theological depth within Islam. It is instructive that in September 2014, the

²⁹ According to Schmid (2013a: 67), the term ‘non-combatants’ would apply “to terrorism in the context of armed conflict and ‘civilians’ to war – and peacetime terrorism.”

Grand *Mufti* of Egypt (Shaykh Shawqi Allam) and 125 notable Islamic scholars declared in an open letter to the leader of the Islamic State (Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi), that they were all in agreement about the precedence of the ‘greater jihad’ (non-violent) over the ‘lesser jihad’ (Allam, 2014).

Violent jihad - sometimes labelled ‘jihad by the sword’ (Amjad-Ali, 2009: 245), may be offensive and defensive. According to Wiktorowicz (2005a: 83) ‘offensive jihad functions to promote the spread of Islam,’ whereas:

‘defensive jihad … is a widely accepted concept that is analogous to international norms of self-defense and Judeo-Christian just war theory.³⁰ According to most Islamic scholars, when an outside force invades Muslim territory it is incumbent on all Muslims to wage jihad to protect the faith and the faithful … At the root of defensive jihad is a theological emphasis on justness … defending the faith-based community against external aggression is considered a just cause *par excellence*.³¹

By way of example, in the case of Iraq (post 2003), Hegghammer (2007: 4) posited that ‘the US invasion and occupation of Iraq represented a textbook case of defensive jihad and required the participation of all Muslims.’ This notion of a defensive jihad was however exploited by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi who declared in June 2005, that ‘our jihad in Iraq is the same as in Afghanistan, Kashmir, Chechnya, and Bosnia – an honorable jihad’ (Hafez, 2009: 79). This confirms the view that Islamist terrorists often hijack the concept of defensive jihad (Stern, 2001), thus contributing to the conflation of the two activities. It is worthy of inclusion that some scholars (Hegghammer, 2010b: 7; Brown, 2013: 88; Kuehn, Farrall, and Strick van Linschoten, 2014: 14) adopt the label ‘classical jihad’ to denote defensive jihad. As the Arab and wider Muslim world use the term ‘defensive jihad’ (*jihad al-difaa*), that term is used throughout this thesis.

³⁰ For more on just war theory and jihad see Amjad-Ali (2009) and Kelsay (2009).

³¹ Other definitions of jihad include an ‘intense struggle or effort … [a] defence against an armed conflict in consequence of foreign aggression’ (Zaidi, 2009: 21), and ‘a Divine institution of warfare to defend Islam from danger or extend Islam into non-Islamic territories’ (Glasse, 2008: 271).

The key to understanding defensive jihad is that it may be conceptualised as a religiously sanctioned defensive response to foreign (or regime) aggression, that can only be ‘authorized by a legitimate representative of the Muslim community’ (Cook, 2005: 3). Although the notion of a legitimate representative maybe contested (Kelsay, 2009: 155), Abdullah Azzam, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became the perceived legitimate representatives (of most Arab foreign fighters) for the defensive jihads in 1980s Afghanistan, Iraq (post 2003), and Syria (post 2011), respectively.³² The necessity for involvement in a defensive jihad is enshrined within the notion of *fard*, which is:

‘a Divinely instituted obligation ... there is *fard al-ayn*, or essential obligation which is incumbent upon on all Muslims,³³ and *fard al-kifayah*, an obligation which is acquitted in the name of all, as long as it is performed by some’ (Glasse, 2008: 151).

Muslims who participate in a defensive jihad are considered to be *mujahhideen* (in Arabic), and hence Arab foreign fighters could also be considered foreign Arab *mujahhideen*.³⁴ Generic foreign fighters are normally defined as ‘non-indigenous, non-territorialized combatants who, motivated by religion, kinship, and/or ideology enter a conflict zone to participate in hostilities’ (Moore and Tumelty, 2008: 412).³⁵ As noted earlier, Arab foreign fighters are defined for this thesis as ‘ethnically Arab, religiously Sunni Muslim combatants, who participate in a defensive jihad, with no apparent link to the conflict other than religious affinity with the Sunni Muslim side.’ They are essentially Sunni Muslim combatants who are ethnically Arab, who originate from (in the sense of being born in) one of the seventeen countries in the Arab world,³⁶ and who participate in defensive jihad in a foreign space. The sense that they are ‘foreign’ is based on the ‘Western concept of the

³² Whilst true for most Arab foreign fighters, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (IS) and Abu Muhammad al-Golani (Jabhat al-Nusrah) both compete(d) for Arab foreign fighters arriving in Syria.

³³ Perhaps this religious obligation could be conceptualised as similar to the secular NATO Article 5 collective defence, where an attack against one ally is considered as an attack against all.

³⁴ The singular of *mujahideen* is *mujahhid*, defined as a ‘fighter or warrior’ (Hans Wehr, 1980: 143).

³⁵ Malet (2013: 10) defines foreign fighters as ‘noncitizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflicts.’

³⁶ The seventeen Arab countries are the Sultanate of Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Yemen, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt.

state and of citizenship' (Schmid, 2015: 3), rather than Islamic concepts of the *umma*.³⁷

Terrorism and Islamist Terrorists

As noted earlier, as an academic anchor, this thesis employs the 'revised academic consensus definition of terrorism' advocated by Schmid (2013a: 86). The term 'terrorist' could therefore be defined as an individual who is involved in terrorist related activities as defined by Schmid (2013a), however such a definition is perhaps too simplistic and fails to acknowledge 'that involvement and engagement in terrorism is best thought of as a *process*' (Horgan, 2005: 80; Silke, 2009: 29). Therefore drawing on Horgan (2005), Silke (2009), and Schmid (2013a), the term terrorist used in this thesis refers to an individual that is moving through a process of 'initially becoming engaged and/or involved in doing terrorism' (Horgan, 2005: 81), to 'the point of engaging in terrorist events' (Horgan, 2005: 137), or terrorist related activities, that include providing material support.³⁸ Although a terrorist may subscribe to any religion (or be an atheist), this thesis examines Sunni Islamist terrorists from the Arab world, who had had prior involvement in a defensive jihad. The key conceptual point from Schmid's definition is the *modus operandi* of 'targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants,' and it is argued that it is this reoccurring theme that helps to distinguish Arab foreign fighters from Islamist terrorists, and is discussed in detail in the literature review.

The collective term 'Islamist terrorist' deserves a greater explanation. 'Islamist' is used in this thesis in the sense of 'advocating Islam as a political as well as a religious system' (Aboul-Enein, 2010: 2).³⁹ Although there are different shades of Islamist (Wiktorowicz, 2006: 207; Wagemakers, 2012: 57), they broadly promote the need for *Sharia* law, and a greater adherence to Islamic principles. The label 'Islamist' is adopted, fully mindful that

³⁷ According to Glasse (2008: 538) the *umma* are a "people, a community; or a nation, in particular the 'nation' of Islam which transcends ethnic or political definition."

³⁸ According to the US PATRIOT Act Section 2339B, material support is defined as "attempting to provide, conspiring to provide, or actually providing material support or resources, to a foreign terrorist organization, knowing that the organization, has been designated a foreign terrorist organization, or engages, or has engaged, in 'terrorism' or 'terrorist activity.'"

³⁹ Wilkinson (2006: 32-33) uses a variety of labels to denote radical Islamist terrorists, including 'militant Islamists', 'Islamic fanatics' and 'extreme Islamic fundamentalists.'

'Islamist terrorist movements are a small minority compared to the overwhelming majority of Islamist movements which are non-violent' (Dalacoura, 2006: 510).

Finally, the typology of Islamist terrorist related activities also needs explaining, and includes at least three variants. First, there is 'transnational' Islamist terrorism conducted by global terrorists (for example al-Qaeda) who promote 'military confrontation with the United States and her allies, to avenge and deter non-Muslim oppression of Muslims' (Hegghammer, 2009b: 28). Second, there is 'religious nationalist' terrorism (Gerges, 2005: 151) conducted by 'socio-revolutionaries' (for example the Egyptian Islamic Group) against 'a Muslim regime perceived as illegitimate' (Hegghammer, 2010b: 6).⁴⁰ Lastly, the Islamist terrorism perpetrated by Islamic State and al-Qaeda affiliated groups against civilians in both Iraq and Syria, is arguably more ideologically hybrid and could be perceived as 'religious nationalist' terrorism, but with a wider global targeting agenda (against civilians in Western, Asian, or African countries). This may be conceptualised as 'the mixing of ideal rationales for violence and the attendant blending of their associated enemy hierarchies' (Hegghammer, 2009b: 32).

The Islamic Notion of Martyrdom and Suicide Attacks

According to Crenshaw (2007a: 162) the tactic of employing suicide attacks 'is usually treated as though it were a single unified method of violence,' and as a result 'suffers from a lack of nuance' (C. Winter, 2017b: 4). Consequently, it is argued that there is a need to distinguish between the Islamic notion of martyrdom whilst participating in a defensive jihad against military targets, and the practice of suicide attacks targeting civilians and non-combatants. This perceived lack of nuance may be due to Islamic scholars tending to "avoid the question of discrimination on the part of the 'martyr' with regard to the difference between soldiers and civilians" (Cook, 2004: 136). The scholarly literature on martyrdom and suicide attacks (covered in Chapter 2) also tends to avoid making targeting distinctions, suggesting perhaps a tendency 'towards state-centrism' (Jackson, Gunning,

⁴⁰ Hegghammer (2010b: 6) uses the label 'socio-revolutionary,' while Gerges (2005: 151) uses the label 'religious nationalist.'

and Smith, 2007: 7). However leveraging such distinctions is one of the central features of this study and is drawn upon to assist in distinguishing between Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists. Conflating the two tactics could lead to a general misunderstanding of the situational circumstances involving those who prosecute martyrdom operations and those who conduct suicide attacks. The notion of martyrdom in this thesis is defined as the value attributed to ‘those who die in a genuine jihad [and] as such, have special merit, and enter paradise directly’ (Glasse, 2008: 272). It is instructive that before martyrdom and/or suicide attacks became so contextually contested and mired in controversy, over seventy years ago, Rosenthal (1946: 256) maintained that “death as the result of ‘suicidal’ missions … are no suicides in the proper sense of the term.” The broad distinction argued in this thesis is that whilst martyrdom is part of Islamic philosophy, suicide attacks (against civilians and non-combatants) are acts of terrorism (although arguably the label ‘suicide’ trivialises the phenomenon).

It is important to recognise that Islamist terrorist groups “involved in suicide attacks do not use the phrase ‘suicide bombers’ but instead refer to *shuhada* (martyrs)” (Sookhdeo, 2007: 326), and frame such attacks as ‘martyrdom operations’ (*amaleeyaat al-istishhaadeeyaa*). Conceptually this is not supported in the Quran. Without getting into the theological debate, which is beyond the scope of this thesis, the Quran encourages the notion of martyrdom, whilst prohibiting suicide. Examples in the Quran that gives scriptural support to martyrdom include *Al-‘Imran* (3:3), *Al-‘Imran* (3:157), *Al-‘Imran* (3:169-170), *Muhammad* (47: 4-6), and *Al-Baqarah* (2: 154). Examples in the Quran that forbid suicide include, but are not limited to, *An-Nisaa'* (4:29) and *Al-Baqarah* (2:195). The theological content of these Quranic verses is presented in Appendix A.

The key point to establish is that the practice of martyrdom (*fee sabeel Allah*) and suicide, whilst being contested concepts, feature as distinct and separate behavioural acts in the Quran. For example, Syrian ideologue and veteran Afghan Arab, Shaykh Abu Basir al-Tartusi, published a *fatwa*⁴¹ that implied a distinction between suicide attacks and

⁴¹ Also known as Abdul Mun'im Mustafa Halima. His *fatwa - Suspicions of Sin in Martyrdom or Suicide Attacks* – was issued on November 11, 2005.

martyrdom. Al-Tartusi (2005) argued that suicide ‘attacks are closer to suicide [*intihaar*] than to martyrdom [*istishhaad*] and they are forbidden because of sins they may potentially entail … which sow discord between Muslims and their *'ulama'*.’ Pakistani Islamic scholar, Shaykh al-Qudri (2010) also declared that suicide bombers cannot claim their suicide attacks to be acts of martyrdom or defensive jihad, as Islam does not support suicide attacks and attacks which harm civilians. The academic view on this distinction is covered in the literature review (in Chapter 2), and is discussed in context in each of the three case study chapters.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is broken down into eight chapters, with Chapter 1 having set the scene and covered the research question, argument, and key terms/concepts. Chapter 2 covers the literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, and illuminates the thesis dataset. Chapter 3 explores the religious and political context of the Arab world through the lens of political Islam, aware that ‘Islam and politics commingle in almost infinite variety across a vast range of settings, issues, actors, and levels of analysis’ (Mandaville, 2007: 332). Specifically, it illuminates the concepts of defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism; martyrdom and suicide attacks; *takfir*⁴² against Sunni and Shia Muslims; and finally *Sharia* law and the notion of an Islamic state. Chapters 4 to 6 constitute the three case study chapters that examine the trajectories between initial involvement in defensive jihad and subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorism, by leveraging 1980s Afghanistan, Iraq (post 2003), and Syria (post 2011). Finally, Chapter 7 analyses the case study results and findings, while Chapter 8 provides a conclusion and recommendations.

Conclusion

This thesis is concerned with explaining why and how some Arab foreign fighters subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. It builds on previous studies in the field, which have thus far tended to conflate the two transnational cohorts. It

⁴² *Takfir* is ‘the practice of declaring someone an unbeliever’ (Glasse, 2008: 510).

argues that, notwithstanding, the transition between participation in defensive jihad and subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorist related activities, is underpinned by situational factors experienced whilst participating in defensive jihad. These situational factors include, but are not limited to, the personal experience of close combat in a war zone; being subjected to ideological indoctrination (as part of group training and socialisation); and being exposed to charismatic authority and obedience to it – all facets of the *Lucifer Effect*. The thesis has the potential to make an original and important contribution to the study of terrorism, inasmuch that ‘Muslim foreign fighters … fuel international terrorism [and whilst] not all foreign fighters become al-Qaida operatives … most al-Qaida operatives start as foreign fighters’ (Hegghammer, 2011a).

Chapter 2: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the academic literature on Arab foreign fighters, the theoretical framework employed for the study, and the methodology adopted to leverage the thesis dataset. The literature review highlights the current debates pertinent to this study, including the tensions and synergies amongst scholars. The theoretical framework, derived from the notion of radicalisation, is a bespoke framework that was considered most suitable in order to explain the trajectory between Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists – assuming that the latter cohort is more radicalised than the former. Finally, the methodology section explains the adoption of ‘content analysis’ and the composition of the thesis dataset.

Review of the Literature

Scholars who have attempted to examine the explicit presence of a trajectory between Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists are few, resulting in a paucity of literature. Most scholars attempt to explain the motivations behind direct involvement in terrorism;⁴³ Western foreign fighters (Hegghammer, 2010a, 2011a, 2013b; Byman and Shapiro, 2014; Perliger and Milton, 2016); or the circumstances behind Arab foreign fighter involvement in defensive jihad (for example in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Iraq and Syria).⁴⁴ There are other scholars who studied Islamist terrorists, however like Sageman (2004), chose to ‘not include Muslims fighting for … straightforward jihads, like the former Afghan and Bosnia jihads’ (p. 62). This is noteworthy in that, whilst it acknowledged the distinction

⁴³ The principal academics are listed in Schmid (2013a: 11-12).

⁴⁴ While Malet (2010 and 2013) examined foreign fighters from a general historical perspective, Hegghammer (2010a) focussed specifically on Muslim foreign fighters. Scholars who researched Arab foreign fighters in 1980s Afghanistan include Al-Zayyat (2004), Gerges (2005), Rana and Bukhari (2007), Hafez (2009), Tawil (2010), Hegghammer (2010b), Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn (2012), and Hamid and Farrall (2015). Bosnia: Kepel (2008), Kohlmann (2004 and 2006), Schindler (2007), and Hegghammer (2010b). Iraq (post 2003): Cordesman (2005), Krueger (2006), Hegghammer (2007), Hafez, (2007b), Fishman, Bergen, Felter, Brown and Shapiro (2008), and Hewitt and Kelley-Moore (2009). Syria (post 2011): Zelin, Kohlmann and al-Khouri (2013), Zelin (2014a, b, c). Dodwell et al. (2016a); and C. Winter (2017b).

between the two cohorts, it ignored the possibility of a trajectory between them – it is exactly this nexus between veteran Arab foreign fighters and their later involvement in Islamist terrorism that is at the hub of this thesis. Whilst there is no known study that has attempted to explain the trajectory between those who participated in a defensive jihad and those who subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities, there are researchers who have examined discreetly, Arab foreign fighters and/or Islamist terrorists. Such scholars include, but are not limited to, Gerges (2005), Wiktorowicz (2006), Hafez (2007b), Hegghammer (2007), Horgan (2009), Ranstorp (2010), Denoeux (2011), and Mendelsohn (2011).⁴⁵ These studies may be divided into at least three general themes: the conflation of defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism; rationales behind targeting and self-sacrificial attacks; and the existence of radicalisation.

The Conflation of Defensive Jihad with Islamist Terrorism

Scholars who appear to conflate the two transnational cohorts suggest that the term ‘foreign fighters … refers to violent extremists who leave their … states to train or take up arms against non-Muslim factions in jihadi conflict zones’ (Cilluffo, Cozzens and Ranstorp, 2010: 3); or that foreign fighters ‘travel great distances to kill innocent people they have never met’ (Venhaus, 2010: 2-3). More opaque but still arguably confusing is the term ‘terrorist rebel groups’ as used by Fortna (2015). All these caricatures exhibit tensions. First, the term ‘violent extremists’ is deeply subjective and implies the existence of extreme radicalisation, which does not enjoy overwhelming empirical support (and is covered later in the chapter). In the second example, ‘to kill innocent people’ is posited without offering any evidence or a definition of what constitutes ‘innocent people;’ and in the third example, there is conflation of the terms terrorist and rebel, despite any overlaps in their respective tactics.

Such conflation though, may not necessarily demonstrate a lack of academic rigour, rather it may be representative of the more general overlaps between terrorism, guerrilla warfare,

⁴⁵ Hegghammer (2013b: 2) also noted that ‘[s]ome conceptual work has … been done to distinguish foreign fighter activism from terrorism and other forms of militancy’ pointing out the work of Malet (2010), Noonan (2010), Hegghammer (2011a), and Mendelsohn (2011).

civil war, and insurgency. These overlaps are particularly pertinent to the two later case studies, Iraq (post 2003) and Syria (post 2011), as they all co-exist(ed) on the ground. In both these conflicts, the idea that they are going through a civil war is predicated on the definition of civil war as ‘any armed conflict that involves: (1) military action internal to the metropole; (2) the active participation of the national government; and (3) effective resistance by both sides’ (Small and Singer, 1982: 210). A further criterion often used is ‘the requirement that state violence should be sustained and reciprocated and that the war exceeds a certain threshold of deaths (typically more than 1,000)’ (Sambanis, 2004: 816). Since Iraq (post 2003) and now with groups such as the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra operating in Syria (post 2011), the linkage between civil war and terrorism has become increasingly acknowledged in the literature (Kalyvas, 2004: 97; Findley and Young, 2012: 285; Jenkins, 2013; Moghadam, 2014; Fortna, 2015).

According to Findley and Young (2012: 285), there is a ‘substantial overlap between terrorism and civil war generally ... most incidents of terrorism take place in the geographic regions where civil war is occurring and during the on-going war.’ Kalyvas (2004: 97) also argued that ‘extensive empirical evidence suggests that indiscriminate violence in civil war is informed by the logic of terrorism.’ In the case of Syria, Moghadam (2014) argued further to suggest that in addition to the overlaps identified between terrorism and civil war, there is also a connectivity with insurgency – in effect a tripartite relationship. Moghadam (2014) argued that ‘terrorist groups use ... terrorism in conjunction with other tactics, notably guerrilla warfare ... [and] occurs in the context of a broader armed conflict, typically an insurgency and/or a civil war.’ This concurs with Jenkins (2013: 4), who identified both the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra as ‘behaving a lot like classic guerrillas.’ Examined from the top down, perhaps a civil war is a higher-level manifestation of political violence that could also incorporate lower-level manifestations such as defensive jihad, terrorism, insurgency, and guerrilla warfare.

Despite the above noted overlaps, there are various academics,⁴⁶ Islamic scholars,⁴⁷ and

⁴⁶ Other academics who make an implicit (although not explicit) distinction are Sageman (2004: 62), Li (2011), and Duyvesteyn and Peters (2015).

other bespoke groups,⁴⁸ who do recognise the distinction between (defensive) jihad and terrorism, and their perpetrators. They claim correctly that: (1) ‘violent jihad, regardless of its type, level and exact motivations, is by no means a synonym for terrorism’ (Stepanova, 2008: 86); (2) that the definition of foreign fighters ‘excludes terrorists’ (Malet, 2015: 3); (3) that ‘foreign fighters are not necessarily terrorists’ (Byman, 2015: 584); and (4) that ‘not all foreign fighters are terrorists, and not all terrorists are foreign fighters’ (Van Ginkel and Entenmann, 2016: 57). As a case in point, whilst some scholars explicitly recognised the trajectory between veteran Arab foreign fighters of the Soviet Afghan war and the subsequent creation of al-Qaeda (Hegghammer, 2010b: 53; Piazza, 2009: 74; Richardson, 2007: 65; Gerges, 2005: 80; Kuehn et al., 2014: 4), in ‘the literature on jihadism ... foreign fighters have long been conflated with al-Qaeda’ (Hegghammer, 2011a: 2).

In order to better contextualise these tensions (labelled ‘fault lines’ by Brown, 2013), Hegghammer (2010b: 7) makes the critical distinction between the doctrines of classical (defensive) and global jihadism, in effect trying to disaggregate the tactics and practices of those participating in a defensive jihad (including foreign and indigenous fighters), and global Islamist terrorists. He suggested (as noted in Chapter 1) that defensive jihad is a ‘defensive struggle ... against non-Muslim ... enemies in uniform ... over territory.’ This definition is consistent and in harmony with the conflicts in Afghanistan (1980s and post 2001), Bosnia, Chechnya, Iraq (post 2003), and arguably Syria (where Shia and Alawite Muslims are often - although not entirely - considered by many Sunni Muslims to be non-Muslims).⁴⁹ Conversely, he posits that global jihadism⁵⁰ (terrorism conducted globally by Islamist terrorists) ‘was developed by Osama bin Ladin in the mid-1990s [and] called for indiscriminate mass-casualty out-of-area attacks’ (Hegghammer, 2010b: 7). The distinction between (classical) defensive and global jihadists therefore appears to be underpinned by

⁴⁷ According to the Muslim World League (2002), terrorism is defined as ‘any unjustified attack by individuals, groups or states against a human being ... religion, life, property and honour.’ Jihad was defined as a struggle ‘against occupiers and colonial settlers who drive people from their land and against those who help them ... [but] prohibits the killing of non-combatants and innocent women, children and elderly men.’

⁴⁸ As noted in Chapter 1, in a September 2014 open letter to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, 126 senior Islamic scholars declared that ‘jihad in Islam is defensive war’ and ‘it is forbidden in Islam to kill the innocent’ (Allam, 2014).

⁴⁹ For example, the Islamic State *Dabiq* Magazine 7th Issue (pp. 61-62) encourages readers ‘to wage jihad against the ... Nusayriyyah [Alawites].’

⁵⁰ The notion of ‘global jihad’ was first coined by Sageman (2004), and subsequently by Brooke (2013).

concepts including a targeting rationale ('enemies in uniform' versus 'indiscriminate mass-casualties'), a strategic rationale (defensive versus offensive), and the operational area (Muslim territory versus 'out-of-area'). However, despite the conceptual clarity offered by Hegghammer (2010b), Hafez (2009: 85) in his monograph *Jihad after Iraq: Lessons from the Afghan Arabs*, uses the term 'global jihadists' (instead of classical or defensive jihadists) to denote those aiding 'fellow co-religionists in their own struggles,' citing examples of Bosnia and Chechnya. This point perhaps highlights a lack of academic consistency concerning terminology and concepts within Terrorism Studies.

Yet with the contemporary conflict in Syria, and the rise of groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State, perhaps the ideological concepts of 'global jihadism' and 'global jihadist' are perhaps less relevant today. As noted earlier, both these proscribed terrorist groups (United Nations, 2014)⁵¹ are engaged in violence, including terrorism, against fellow Muslims (generally Shia) on Muslim land, whilst also providing inspiration and encouragement to attack 'out-of-area' targets in the West⁵² and the wider Middle East.⁵³ Such a situation appears to represent (as introduced in Chapter 1) the 'the blending of associate enemy hierarchies' (Hegghammer, 2009b: 32). This has become more apparent where the 'enemy hierarchies' for Islamist terrorist related violence, has widened to include both fellow Muslims and Westerners - indeed anyone who does not share their worldview. This thesis maintains however, notwithstanding, that Arab foreign fighters participating in a defensive jihad supporting 'fellow co-religionists in their struggles,' target more generally combatants in uniform, in stark contrast to the Islamist terrorist cohort that primarily targets civilians and non-combatants.

⁵¹ Under the AQ Sanctions List (1267/1989), Jabhat al-Nusra was proscribed as a terrorist organisation on 14 May 2014. The Islamic State (as its name changed) was proscribed 30 May 2013, 14 May 2014, and 2 June 2014.

⁵² The Islamic State *Dabiq* Magazine 6th Issue praised the attacks in Sydney (p. 3); the 7th Issue praised the Paris (Charlie Hebdo) attacks (p. 50); the 8th Issue called for attacks against the West (p. 62); and the 12th Issue praised the bombing of a Russian airliner over the Sinai desert, and the 13 November 2015 Paris attacks (pp. 2-4).

⁵³ The Islamic State has inspired attacks in the Sinai Peninsula against civilians and the Egyptian army, in Tunisia (against tourists), and in Libya (Harris and Youssef, 2015).

Rationales behind Targeting and Self-Sacrificial Attacks

The recurring theme of targeting appears in the literature, but is not comprehensive despite its inclusion in many international treaties (for example International Humanitarian Law), and in most, but not all, definitions of terrorism.⁵⁴ The literature tends to focus more on terrorist targeting (in contrast to foreign fighter targeting) and is often either conceptual (Drake, 1998; Cronin, 2003) or in non-Muslim majority contexts (Libicki, Chalk, and Sisson, 2007; Hegghammer, 2009b; Ramsey and Marsden, 2015; Harris-Hogan, 2015; Perlinger and Milton, 2016). While much of the literature on terrorist targeting focuses on civilians and non-combatants, others including Cronin (2003: 33) muddy the waters by arguing that ‘terrorism deliberately targets the innocent’ - without defining innocent - similar to Venhaus (2010: 2-3) highlighted earlier in this chapter. Drake (1998: 56) makes an important point regarding ideology and ‘legitimate targets’ when he maintained that:

“the ideology of a terrorist group identifies the ‘enemies’ of the group by providing a measure against which to assess the ‘innocence’ or ‘guilt’ of people and institutions. This gives rise to the idea that certain people or things are somehow ‘legitimate targets.’”

This was corroborated by Ramsey and Marsden (2015: 582), who recognised that ‘jihadist [terrorist] ideology has been notoriously consistent in calling for and seeking to legitimate indiscriminate targeting.’ One scholar, Fortna (2015: 522), offers a compelling account on the effectiveness of terrorism, by leveraging the concept of targeting to distinguish between ‘terrorist rebel groups’ who ‘indiscriminately’ target civilians, and those who attack ‘military targets.’ She identified correctly that ‘terrorism by definition, does not target military forces’ (p. 526), but ‘that it deliberately attacks civilians’ (p. 522).⁵⁵ This position has academic ballast, inasmuch as the ‘critical principle of intentional targeting of civilians and non-combatants’ by terrorists, and is emphasised by many scholars including Boaz Ganor, Joshua Sinai, Mohammed Hafez, and Ekaterina Stepanova (Schmid, 2013a: 67), as

⁵⁴ Hoffman (2006: 40) does not identify the physical target of terrorism.

⁵⁵ Fortna (2015: 519) argued that ‘terrorists undermine rather than enhance their military effectiveness by attacking civilians indiscriminately.’

highlighted in Chapter 1. In summary, ‘attacks are ordinarily labelled terrorist attacks only when they are aimed at non-combatants’ Moghadam (2008: 5); ‘against non-military targets’ (Asal, Rethmeyer, Anderson, Stein, Rizo, and Rozea, 2009: 262); or ‘against primarily civilian targets’ (Eppright, 1997: 334).

Somewhat controversially however, but consistent with the thesis argument, Moghadam (2008: 5) also suggested that an attack ‘from a non-state actor … should not be labelled a terrorist attack if it is targeted against members of an army.’ The label ‘members of an army’ is considered to be the same as enemy combatants, and may be conceptualised in a number of ways. They may be viewed as invaders (for example the Soviets in 1980s Afghanistan); possibly as occupiers (for example the US led coalition in Iraq); or as subjugators (for example the Serbian Army in the Bosnian conflict, or the Syrian Arab Army in the Syrian conflict). This conceptualisation could perhaps be expanded to include the employment of unconventional attacks against military targets, such as self-sacrificial attacks.

According to Hafez (2007b: 6), suicide attacks ‘usually target civilians, but they could accompany conventional battlefield attacks against soldiers.’ Because of the explicit war zone setting (in Iraq), this suggestion should not go unchallenged as although it recognises the targeting distinction, it draws no comparative distinction between martyrdom and suicide. As introduced in Chapter 1, this form of attack against soldiers in a war zone that leads to the attacker’s death, could be conceptualised as more akin to martyrdom. It is likely to be within the context of a ‘defensive struggle … against enemies in uniform … over territory’ (Hegghammer, 2010b: 7). Whilst ‘suicide attacks’ against ‘enemies in uniform’ may be considered ‘an especially effective weapon of the weak’ (Hoffman, 2006: 155), the ‘place of ideology in the selection process is crucial’ (Drake, 1998: 54), when deciding to target soldiers, and not civilians and non-combatants. Hafez’s ‘battlefield attack against soldiers’ has more to do with defensive jihad. For instance, in the 1980s defensive jihad in Afghanistan, Saudi veteran Afghan Arab and now academic, Musa al-Qarni, recounted that there were no ‘suicide operations at the time … [although] the young men used to attack tanks and fighter aircraft only with their personal weapons’ (Al-Qarni,

2006a). The key point here is that dying in a defensive jihad against a foreign military force could be conceptualised as more akin to martyrdom, than suicide. Whether Afghan Arabs were fighting ‘tanks only with their personal weapons’ or had attacked them with explosive vests, the likely result in both cases would be achieving martyrdom. Academics have also noted that despite the emphasis on martyrdom, there was no support for suicide attacks within ‘the 1980s Sunni jihad literature concerning Afghanistan’ (Cook, 2002: 8).

Whilst differentiating between combatant and civilian/non-combatant targets may be a crude measure – it does allow for a nuanced understanding of the different intentions and motivations, at both the group and individual level (Pedahzur, 2005: 125, Moghadam, 2011: 27). The measure allows for comparisons to be made between Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists and the trajectory between them, and also assists with differentiating between self-sacrificial attacks: martyrdom attacks against enemy combatants on the battlefield, and suicide attacks against civilians and non-combatants.

Whilst there is broad prohibition of suicide and suicide attacks in the Arab world,⁵⁶ the literature is replete with examples of a desire amongst Arab foreign fighters for martyrdom. Former Egyptian veteran Afghan Arab, Mustafa Hamid (as cited in Hamid and Farrall, 2015), remembered that Afghan Arabs ‘came to join to be martyrs’ (p. 151) and ‘were eager to fight, to be martyred and go to paradise quickly’ (p. 37). By his own admission, Mustafa Hamid inspired Afghan Arabs with the message that ‘the happiest fellows among us are the martyrs. If we are killed, we are happy’ (Hamid and Farrall, 2015: 191). Later, during the defensive jihad defending Bosnian Muslims during the Bosnian civil war, the commander of Arab foreign fighters in Bosnia, Abdul Rahman al-Dosari (Abu Abdul Aziz Barbaros), also admitted that their ‘desire’ was to be ‘killed in the way of Jihad’ (Kohlmann, 2004: 17).

Such eagerness for martyrdom is exploited by radical ideologues and used to support suicide attacks against civilians / non-combatants, arguably resulting in the perpetrators

⁵⁶ In a poll conducted by Pew Research Centre (2013a: 29), ‘roughly three-quarters or more Muslims reject suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilians … in most countries, the prevailing view is that such acts are *never* justified as a means of defending Islam from its enemies.’

believing that their actions are in keeping with their religion and that they (too) will be martyred. However as noted in Chapter 1, martyrs are considered ‘those who die in a genuine jihad … and enter paradise directly’ (Glasse, 2008: 272); while suicide bombers ‘carry or deliver explosives to attack, kill, or maim’ civilians and non-combatants (Hafez, 2007b: 6). Moghadam (2011: 231) stressed in *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, that ‘the willingness to die’ is present in ‘ordinary fighters’ and is ‘not limited to the suicide bomber’ – and it is this willingness to die as a martyr that appears to be exploited by radical ideologues. The martyrdom of ‘ordinary fighters’ could include frontal attacks with only hand-held weapons, or as a self-sacrificial act driving a bomb-laden truck into a military complex. As Bonner (2008: 78) argued correctly, ‘a self-sacrificing charge made by an individual fighter or small group against a powerful enemy force on the battlefield was not identified [by Islamic jurists] with suicide.’

The targeting distinction is important, because as noted earlier, it continues to be central in helping to distinguish between Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists, allowing for analysis of the trajectory between the two cohorts. Such distinctions in the literature on martyrdom and suicide attacks are not always explicit. For example, Merari (2010: 9-10) defines a suicide bomber as one who ‘intentionally kills himself (or herself) for the purpose of killing others, in the service of a political or ideological goal.’ The term ‘others’ in his definition is very broad and would include civilians, non-combatants, and military targets. Whilst very clear, it says little about the philosophy, justification, or context for such acts. As noted earlier, there is no Quranic justification for killing fellow humans (except for just cause) or for committing suicide (see Appendix A), and the protection of civilians is enshrined under International Humanitarian Law (ICRC, 2015d) and the Law of Armed Conflict.⁵⁷ Indeed there is no national or international justification for killing civilians and non-combatants, and when it occurs, it is labelled collateral damage by nation states.

There appears to be only a handful of academics that note the distinction between martyrdom and suicide operations. Beit-Hallahmi (2003: 25) argued in *The Return of*

⁵⁷ According to the UK Ministry of Defence (2004) *The Joint Service Manual of the Law of Armed Conflict* ‘the principle of humanity confirms the basic immunity of civilian populations and civilian objects from attack because civilians and civilian objects make no contribution to military action’ (p. 23).

Martyrdom: Honour, Death and Immortality, that in the light of suicide bombings ‘martyrdom has lost his honour.’ This point is well made in that it recognises the implicit distinction between a genuine desire for martyrdom (*istishhaad*) by Arab foreign fighters whilst participating in defensive jihad against enemy combatants in a war zone; and the ‘martyrdom’ gained through a suicide (*intihaar*) attack against non-combatants and civilians. The two tactics appear discreetly separate, although it is acknowledged that those who conduct suicide attacks label their attacks *istishhaad* and never *intihaar*, which may again explain the apparent conflation. Second, other academics have also recognised the tension between suicide attacks and martyrdom operations: Cook (2002: 35) consciously labelled suicide attacks as ‘martyrdom operations’ - in quotation marks - because he was unwilling ‘to take a stand on the question of whether people who die during the course of these actions are actually martyrs or not;’ and Fierke (2014: 207) used the term ‘suicide/martyrdom’ – in order ‘to highlight the tension in the relationship between the two concepts.’ The position taken throughout this thesis is that self-sacrificial attacks conducted within a defensive jihad against combatants are more akin to martyrdom operations; whilst self-sacrificial attacks conducted against civilians and non-combatants in whatever context, are more akin to terrorist suicide attacks.

Radicalisation

Radicalisation was defined in Chapter 1 as the ‘social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to [an] extremist political or religious ideology’ (Horgan, 2009: 152), that may eventually cross a threshold that leads to violence. However, radicalisation ‘is a contentious term, vulnerable to subjective and retroactive application, which has come to describe highly variable situations of (usually Islamist) violence around the world’ (Beevor, 2016: 3), and is ‘a matter of continued debate among scholars and practitioners’ (Neumann and Kleinmann, 2013: 365). First, much (but not all) of the academic literature on radicalisation is focussed on domestic radicalisation and terrorism in the West (Wiktorowicz, 2004; Bakker, 2006; Nesser, 2008 and 2014; Ranstorp, 2010; Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010; Borum, 2011a; McAllister and Schmid, 2013: 217;

Schmid, 2013b), and generally not on individuals from the Arab world, less for Sageman (2004 and 2008); Hutson, Long and Page (2009); and Hegghammer (2010b).

Second, from the perspective of Arab foreign fighters (and indeed Islamist terrorists) themselves, the label of radicalisation (in Arabic *at-tatarruf*) is not representative of their own interpretation of their engagement in a defensive jihad (nor indeed Islamist terrorism involving suicide attacks). What Arab foreign fighters consider defensive jihad being a doctrinally prescribed duty (*fard*), is often considered in the West as ‘violent radicalism,’ whilst the notion of what is radical is debated between Islamist ideologues themselves.⁵⁸ According to Horgan (2009: 155), the distinction between radicalisation and violent radicalisation is that “the vast majority of those who identify themselves as ‘radical’ do not engage in violent activity.”

Despite the large body of literature covering the radicalisation of Arab foreign fighters (more often labelled as Islamist terrorists), there is still tension as to when this radicalisation takes place – before, during, or after participating in a defensive jihad (and/or before involvement in terrorist related activities). Cilluffo, Cozzens and Ranstorp (2010: 32) argue that ‘radicalization is a key part of the foreign fighter recruitment cycle’ suggesting that they arrive already radicalised in the country of defensive jihad (for example 1980s Afghanistan). This would indicate that later involvement in Islamist terrorist related activities does not necessarily involve a transition, however the problem with this argument is that, like much of the literature involving radicalisation, it appears to be “dominated by ‘conventional wisdom’ rather than systematic scientific and empirically based research” (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010: 889).

There is nevertheless, a growing body of scholars who now argue that radicalisation may occur after having joined a group (albeit a terrorist group). For example, Ranstorp (2010: 7) argued that ‘in some cases *recruitment precedes radicalization* and not the other way

⁵⁸ An example of such an ideological debate would be the correspondence concerning *takfiri* violence in Iraq against Iraqi Shia civilians in 2005. Ayman al-Zawahiri (2005) questioned Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (leader of AQI) about the ‘attacks on the ordinary Shia,’ while Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (Jordanian ideologue) ‘felt it was wrong to do so [as it] hurts the image of Islam’ (Wagemakers, 2012: 47).

around;’ while Horgan (2015) argued ‘more and more evidence suggests that quite a few terrorists acquire their radical views through ideological training only after they become involved with a recruiter or a group.’ This supports the view that Arab foreign fighters may not necessarily be initially radicalised despite their transnational volunteerism. This conceptualisation of radicalisation lends credence to Horgan’s (2005) ‘process model’ that has an incremental quality about it, and may be visualised best as a trajectory. On one end of this trajectory would be the ‘thousands of young Muslims … [who] had no previous links to militants’ yet participated in a defensive jihad (Gerges, 2005: 60), and on the other end, Islamist terrorists. The ends are distinct and consistent with the opinion of former British justice minister Shahid Malik (2014) who argued that ‘we should not jump to conclusions that the young people who want to fight [in Syria] are extremists.’ Whilst acknowledging the definitional challenges including overlaps vis-à-vis radicals, extremists, and terrorists, the research undertaken for this thesis explores the validity of whether Arab foreign fighters were already radicalised (prior to their involvement in a defensive jihad); or were radicalised as a consequence of their involvement in a defensive jihad; or perhaps elements of both over time.

There is further academic consensus (Sageman, 2004; Gerges, 2005; Cilluffo, Cozzens, and Ranstorp, 2010; Mendelsohn, 2011) about radicalisation as a result of the situational circumstances of participating in a defensive jihad, which may have contributed to some Arab foreign fighters later becoming Islamist terrorists. As Mendelsohn (2011: 194) noted, this ‘experience is often a constitutive event that shapes who they are and what they do.’ The nature of the experience appears to have included the fact that the Arab foreign fighters had ‘abandoned their bonds to the outside world’ (Sageman, 2004: 149), and were now exposed to an ‘evolution of ideas and action over time and space’ (Gerges, 2005: 119). Their experience would appear to incorporate the ‘social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to [an] extremist political or religious ideology’ (Horgan, 2009: 152) – the definition of radicalisation. Again, the notion of a trajectory is apparent, with Silke (2009: 94) also arguing that terrorist ‘involvement in political violence is a result of a series of understandable factors which combined result in a process of deepening involvement in violent extremism.’

Gaps in the Literature

On a general level, Schmid (2013a: 27-28) identified many ‘conceptual questions on terrorism [that are] not yet adequately solved’ - in effect highlighting gaps in the current literature. There was broad academic consensus that these conceptual questions included ‘the distinction between terrorism and guerrilla warfare;’ the differentiation between ‘insurgency and terrorism;’ the identification of ‘legitimate targets during resistance against foreign occupation;’ and “the distinction between ‘terrorist groups’ and groups that employ terrorism as one of many insurgent and political strategies.” The research question of how and why some Arab foreign fighters cross a threshold to subsequently become involved in Islamist terrorist related activities, attempts to address some of the above broad conceptual gaps, and thus contribute to the scholarly debate.

On the more specific level relevant to the research question, no single study was identified (for this thesis) that explicitly examined the nexus between Arab foreign fighters engaged in defensive jihad, and their subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorist related activities. This may be due to a variety of reasons. First, the apparent conflation of Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists lends credence to Hegghammer (2013b: 2), who noted that few academics ‘have distinguished analytically between different *types* of violent activism, and even fewer have asked why jihadists fight in different places.’ Second, there appears to be a need to examine the targeting patterns of both Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists in a contemporary environment, particularly involving Iraq (post 2003) and Syria (post 2011). A nuanced examination of the targeting patterns is called for, in order to better understand the motivations and situational circumstances behind them. Third, the contested notion of radicalisation needs to be tested within a contemporary environment, and particularly in relation to trying to explain the trajectory between Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists. Finally, at ‘the heart of the current academic debate is the threat posed by returnees to Western countries’ (Moore, 2015: 1; Cilluffo, Cozzens and Ranstorp, 2010), but should be expanded to include returnees to the Arab world, as there is a ‘need to better understand the process of radicalization and recruitment of individuals joining ISIS from within the Middle East’ (Kilinc and Zeiger, 2014: 2). The thesis focus on the Arab world is

important as ‘the field of militant Islam is dominated by the Middle East’ (Vertigans, 2009: 3), and the fact that the ‘overwhelming majority of foreign fighters who have gone abroad to join the fight in Syria and Iraq have come from the Arab world’ (Byman and Shiptiro, 2014: 2). By focussing this study on fighters from the Arab world, it offers a springboard for later post-thesis comparative studies of individuals from South East Asia and the West.

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

According to Schwartz, Dunkel and Waterman (2009: 538) “no one theoretical perspective can provide an all-encompassing ‘explanation’ of terrorism, [however] it is important to advance theories that can explain *some* aspects or forms of terrorism.” This is echoed by McAllister and Schmid (2013: 202) who proposed that ‘[t]heories of terrorism should, on the one hand, be general enough to address the range of terrorisms, broadly conceived, and narrow enough to usefully analyse a specific aspect of the subject’ – in this case analysing the trajectory between Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists. Specific to the thesis research, Byman and Shiptiro (2014: 5) recognised correctly that ‘no single model exists to explain why foreign fighters turn into terrorists.’ However, aware as a result of the literature review that the situational circumstances of participating in defensive jihad appeared to have a radicalising effect on some Arab foreign fighters, adopting a theoretical perspective that is based broadly (but not exclusively) on the concept of radicalisation, appears entirely appropriate.

Foundation

Despite it being a contested concept, the theoretical framework locates its foundation within the concept of radicalisation, as it acknowledges the possible existence of a progression whereby an individual may move from point *a* (involvement in defensive jihad), and subsequently arrive at point *b* (involvement in Islamist terrorism). The theoretical framework draws on the radicalisation models adopted by Sageman (2004 and 2008), and

Silke (2008). First, Sageman (2004: 69) leveraged ‘sets of variables … explaining why individuals become involved in global terrorism’ within the Arab world. Specifically, he explored various variables (factors) including their geographical origin, age, and friendship and kinship ties. It is instructive that these variables also consistent with those identified by United Nations Security Council, including:

‘environmental and personal factors that may play a role in the incitement and recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters, with particular attention being paid to geographical, age-related and gender-related vulnerabilities of community members’ (UNSC CTC, 2015b).

Beyond the individual data, perhaps the other most significant contribution of Sageman is his concept of a ‘middle-range approach to analysis.’ Enshrined within this approach is the requirement to ‘examine terrorists themselves, fully embedded in their environment’ (Sageman, 2008: 23) – for this thesis that translates as being ‘fully embedded’ in a defensive jihad. Specifically, he recommended that:

‘analysis should focus precisely on how the terrorists act on the ground: how they evolve into terrorists; how they interact with others; how they become motivated to commit their atrocities; how they are influenced by ideas; and how they follow orders from far-away leaders’ (p. 23).

Second, Silke (2008) presented ‘an account of the psychology and motivations … that facilitate and develop violent radicalization.’ He identified *factors* that combined with ‘the culture and the social context … pushes and pulls someone into becoming a terrorist.’ He proposed many factors including: (1) age and gender; (2) education, career and marriage; (3) social identity (the role of religion and group loyalties); (4) marginalization and discrimination; and (5) catalyst events.

Thesis Theoretical Framework

Drawing on Sageman (2004 and 2008) and Silke (2008), the thesis theoretical framework leverages data on Arab foreign fighters' geographical origin, age, friendship and kinship ties, and the influence of political Islam. Researching geographic origin within the Arab world allows this study to exam the social, political and economic landscape therein, and helps explain in the light of these variables, why for example, certain countries may be overrepresented in a particular defensive jihad, or underrepresented when analysing suicide bombers. As Hutson, Long, and Page (2009: 19) observed, radicalisation 'varies according to geography' – an observation also supported by Tankel (2016).⁵⁹ It provides a broad conceptual tapestry that may be used to partially explain, the contextual issues behind initial Arab foreign fighter involvement in a defensive jihad, but more importantly why some subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. Researching age is a very rudimentary variable, yet it may help explain for instance, the 'biographical availability'⁶⁰ of an individual, or suggest vulnerabilities to a radical narrative. For example, is a teenager more likely to accept being a suicide bomber, or is it because he is the youngest of five brothers who are already foreign fighters and/or Islamist terrorists? The inclusion of age whilst basic, adds a certain richness to the overall explanation, and as noted earlier, is a variable considered worthy of research by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC CTC, 2015b).

Next, by drawing upon the precepts of political Islam, it permits analysis of the religious and political ideology involving defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism; martyrdom and suicide attacks; *takfir* against Sunni and Shia Muslims; and finally *Sharia* law and the notion of an Islamic state. In addition, it includes the influence of Islamic ideologues,

⁵⁹ According to Tankel (2016: 2), a 'jihadist group's relationship to its country of origin and domicile ... helps to explain that organization's ideological preferences and alliance behavior.'

⁶⁰ 'Biographical availability' is about whether individuals have 'other commitments' for example responsibility for a family, which may discourage high-risk activism (Wiktorowicz, 2005b: 15), or the 'absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities' (McAdam, 1986: 70).

charismatic authority,⁶¹ and of the annual Islamic festivals (for example the *Hajj* pilgrimage). As noted earlier, this thesis develops and builds on Sageman's model, as many of these situational circumstances exist outside his theory.

One key individual level 'push' factor⁶² that has much currency in the literature is the existence of 'triggering events' (Horgan, 2005: 84), occurring during the period of 'initially becoming engaged' (Horgan, 2005: 81). This 'significantly provocative event' is interpreted by different scholars to include a 'sense of moral outrage' (Sageman, 2008: 75); 'catalyst events' (Silke, 2008: 114); 'cognitive openings' (Wiktorowicz, 2005b); 'direct precipitators of terrorist acts' (Testas, 2004: 260); or according to Crenshaw (2003: 93) 'precipitants,' defined as 'specific events that immediately precede the occurrence of terrorism.' The inclusion of triggering events is based on the fact that arguably, they are possibly more germane to Arab foreign fighters (due to their activities in a defensive jihad), rather than perhaps ordinary Arab citizens who will be less exposed to such events, living in a broadly peacetime environment in their country of residence.

At the group level, and in accordance with the intent of Sageman's 'middle-range analysis,' the research also includes 'information on people and their relationships with other terrorists, ideas, and the social, political, economic, cultural, and technological context' (Sageman, 2008: 25). In effect the research attempts to contextualise the situational circumstances within the three defensive jihad case studies, aware of the 'enormous distortions and misrepresentations that would result from ... ignoring the context' (Neumann, 2013: 884). Relating to group ideology and ideas, the thesis framework will help explain the nexus between the two transnational cohorts by drawing upon the notion of 'culturing' (Wiktorowicz, 2005b: 27),⁶³ and how individuals 'are influenced by ideas' (Sageman, 2008).

⁶¹ The influence of charismatic authority, first illuminated by Max Weber, [1919] (2009), is worthy of inclusion in that Hofmann and Dawson (2014) leveraged the relationship between radicalisation and charismatic authority in their research.

⁶² 'Push' factors include grievances and adverse sociopolitical conditions, whilst 'pull' factors include 'lures,' real and imagined rewards for aligning with a group (Borum, 2011b: 56).

⁶³ Wiktorowicz (2005b: 27) adopts the notion of 'culturing' to portray the transmission of 'information to persuade audiences to change attitudes, preferences, and values.'

It is important to note that as the research progressed and data were collected, particularly concerning the Arab foreign fighters in Iraq (post 2003) and Syria (post 2011), the original thesis theoretical framework appeared to struggle to explain the trajectory of those who subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. This was largely due to the need to study fighters in the context of operating in a war zone (and the leveraging of historical military examples), and not in a peacetime environment in their country of residence (as noted earlier). Consequently, in addition to drawing on historical military contexts, the thesis also began to draw inductively on psychological theories and analyses of Arendt (1994), Milgram (1963), Zimbardo (1971), and Staub (1989). Briefly, but expanded upon throughout the case study chapters, Hannah Arendt (1994), using Adolf Eichmann as a case study, found a connection between normal people and ‘the banality of evil.’ Stanley Milgram (1963) conducted an infamous experiment and concluded that ‘obedience to authority’ could over-rule personal scruples leading an individual to perform acts of extreme violence. Philip Zimbardo (1971) conducted the Stanford Prison Experiment and later concluded that situational rather than dispositional factors could lead to a *Lucifer Effect* - ‘when good or ordinary people do bad or evil things’ (Zimbardo, 2007: 5). These situational factors included obedience to authority, de-individuation, dehumanization, and moral disengagement. Finally, Ervin Staub (1989) found that the roots of evil are often found in factors that include devaluation, the role of authority, moral exclusion, and ideologies. These psychological theories proved, albeit somewhat belatedly, to be invaluable in explaining the nexus between Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists, and in reflecting the situational factors in the crucible of defensive jihad, and the trends and tensions within the Arab world, including the Arab Spring and the rise of the Islamic State.

Research Methodology

Research Population

The research methodology used for this thesis is grounded within a flexible design⁶⁴ adopting content analysis of 3,010 biographies and accounts of Arab foreign fighters, who were involved in one or more of the three defensive jihad case studies. As noted earlier, Arab foreign fighters are not indigenous fighters, thus for example, Iraqis participating in defensive jihad in Iraq were not included in the dataset (involving the defensive jihad in Iraq, post 2003). The Arab foreign fighter breakdown comprises of 369 who travelled to 1980s Afghanistan; 711 who travelled to Iraq (post 2003); and 1,930 who travelled to Syria (post 2011), thus defining the chronological parameters from 1979 to 2016, and allowing for longitudinal analysis. It is also acknowledged that some Arab foreign fighters had previous ‘socio-revolutionary’ experience (Hegghammer, 2010b) in terrorist related activities, particularly the Egyptian Afghan Arabs, for example Ayman al-Zawahiri. As these individuals did not start their activism as Arab foreign fighters, but as terrorists,⁶⁵ they fell below the bar for inclusion, however their often significant influence on Arab foreign fighters is uncovered.

Aware that ‘good data on jihadism are notoriously difficult to obtain’ (Hegghammer, 2013b: 13), these three defensive jihads were selected (as mentioned in Chapter 1) as they attracted the greatest number of Arab foreign fighters (based on the figures provided by Malet, 2015: 10; Schmid, 2015: 3), thereby offering the largest amount of data for analysis. As Robson (2002: 161) noted correctly, ‘the more accurate you want your estimates from your study to be, the larger a sample is needed.’ Also by dealing with such a large quantity of data, it attempts to address the challenge identified by Hegghammer (2010b: 239) whereby there are often ‘too many missing values to allow for meaningful analysis.’ The ethical challenges of assessing such data - be it Arab foreign fighters or Islamist terrorists – were addressed by only using readily available open sources, and by not entering into

⁶⁴ Flexible design research is defined by Robson (2002: 547), as a ‘research strategy where the research design develops during the process of data collection and analysis.’

⁶⁵ A point noted by Sageman (2004: 71).

conversations with any non-state actors (for example on Twitter with Abdullah al-Shaya), or accessing non-state actors' websites that required registration and passwords. This was in stark contrast to an Oxford academic researcher (Aymenn al-Tamimi) who became 'discomfortingly close with some of his sources in the jihadist world' (A. Rosen, 2014).

The primary sources analysed in this thesis included, but were not limited to: 'Martyrs in a time of alienation' (*shuhada' fi zaman al-ghurba*);⁶⁶ the Sinjar Records;⁶⁷ Arabic and English social media (Twitter and Facebook for Syria); the Violations Documentation Centre (for Syria); the Chicago Project on Security and Threats (CPOST) Suicide Attack Database; Guantanamo Bay Detainee Assessments; Dabiq (IS magazine pre-August 2016); Rumiyah (IS magazine post-August 2016); Inspire (AQ magazine); and the Abu Zubaydah diaries.⁶⁸ It should be recognised that the above sources collected data on individuals on the basis of their involvement in both foreign fighting and/or Islamist terrorism, and subsequently any links between their involvement in the two activities were examined. Secondary sources (many but not all peer reviewed) included the 9/11 Commission Report (2005), and studies of contemporary defensive jihads by scholars including Cordesman (2005), Rana and Bukhari (2007), Felter and Fishman (2007), Kepel (2008), Hafez (2009), Hewitt and Kelley-Moore (2009), Hegghammer (2010b), Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn (2012), Hamid and Farrall (2015), and Warren (2015).

Within the flexible design research, content analysis was chosen as it offered the most suitable method involving a large quantity of data. Other academic works, for example involving foreign fighter Internet forums, have also been successfully processed and analysed using content analysis (Hegghammer, 2014). This methodological approach also has the blessing of Robson (2002: 353), who suggested that content analysis 'in the context of a flexible design ... is an entirely appropriate strategy ... it is unobtrusive ... and the data ... can be subject to re-analysis, allowing reliability checks and replication studies.'

⁶⁶ Biographies of foreign fighters killed in Afghanistan and Pakistan between 2002 and 2006, involving 15 veteran Arab foreign fighters from 1980s Afghanistan.

⁶⁷ The 'Sinjar records' were captured by US forces in October 2007 near Sinjar, along the Iraq-Syrian border, and comprised of 707 foreign fighters, including 555 Arabs.

⁶⁸ According to McDermott (2013), the Abu Zubaydah diaries 'contain the most detailed portrait of the interior life of a dedicated jihadi that we have ever seen, and that we might ever see.'

The disadvantage of content analysis includes the fact that ‘documents have been written for some purpose other than for ... research’ (Robson, 2002: 358). For example, martyrdom biographies tend to be slightly hollow sounding accounts of glorious warriors, resulting in the detail and depth of the data being somewhat thin. This can be partially addressed in a number of ways. First, by acknowledging the existence of such a challenge allowed the researcher to be more circumspect during analysis. Second, data may be triangulated with other sources and the analysis conducted by applying good judgement (albeit subjectively and open to challenge). Finally, any findings based on such data are suitably qualified.

Data Collection

The data collection plan was based primarily on those individuals from the Arab world who had participated in one or more of the three defensive jihad case studies (1980s Afghanistan, Iraq - post 2003, and Syria - post 2011). The data collected were often based on availability, and consequently may have created a selection bias that is addressed below. The data collected from the biographies of Arab foreign fighters were broken down into codes⁶⁹ for analysis, and are presented in Appendix B. Macro data included (1) their personal biographical data; (2) the tenets of political Islam and their effect on Arab foreign fighters; and (3) the situational circumstances that may have influenced their subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorism. The micro variables corresponding to the macro data above, included (1) their age, education, migrant status, country of origin, and previous defensive jihad experience; (2) involvement in martyrdom and suicide attacks, and the influence of *takfir*, *Sharia* law and the notion of an Islamic state; and (3) the influence of certain situational factors underpinning Zimbardo’s *Lucifer Effect* - including indoctrination, identification of charismatic authority, and the pledging of allegiance (*baya*) and obedience to it. On the *Lucifer Effect*, there was clearly a need to make an assessment of how ‘ordinary’ (un-radicalised) an individual appeared. Whilst difficult to collect primary data to support such an assessment, subjective normative judgements were employed, and signposted in the thesis, where relevant.

⁶⁹ “Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes are usually attached to ‘chunks’ of varying size – words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting” (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 56).

Other variables included information on the content of the narrative of *fatwas* supporting Islamist terrorism, and the targeting choices in the execution of self-sacrificial attacks. The codes broadly reflected those themes most appropriate to the thesis focus and commensurate with their availability in the individual biographies, eulogies, and primary and secondary literature. As the coding process developed, more themes were identified as they became apparent during the research. For example, ‘targeting choices’ only arose while collecting biographies on Arab foreign fighters in Iraq, some of whom conducted martyrdom attacks against the coalition forces, whilst others conducted suicide attacks against civilians and non-combatants. By using this data, the thesis sought to address both E. T. Hall’s (1976: 213) argument that ‘a way to experience another group is to understand … the way their minds work,’ and Horgan’s (2005: 85) more recent observation ‘that too little [attention] is paid to terrorists’ own account of their activities as a means of constructing a sense of their involvement in terrorism.’ Once the data were collected and entered into Excel spreadsheets (using the coding process), content analysis was conducted electronically by interrogating the spreadsheets to establish patterns of behaviour. Although the coding process produced over 40 categories (presented in Appendix B) that populated the thesis spreadsheet databases, only representative examples of short biographies of specific Arab foreign fighters, extracted from the spreadsheets, are presented in Appendix C, D, and E.

Limitations of the Data

The main limitations of the primary data included the potential propagandistic nature of some of it, missing or incomplete variables, and whether there was any selection bias. First, the use for research of individual biographies, including martyrs’ biographies posted on the Internet (primarily Facebook and Twitter), does present some limitations on the thesis. This challenge was highlighted by Hegghammer (2007: 7) in his paper on Saudi militants in Iraq, whereby:

‘[a]uthors are most often anonymous, and the information cannot always be verified. There are obvious incentives for jihadist propagandists to embellish stories and

inflate numbers of martyrs ... [however] this does not justify the complete dismissal of such biographies as fabrications.'

This thesis, similar to Hegghammer (2007), has attempted to corroborate reports from other sources, particularly where the expansion of the World Wide Web has facilitated greater access to multiple media outlets, jihadi websites and blogs, offering greater opportunities for triangulation. Second, the issue of missing or incomplete variables has been addressed in part due to the research net being cast as wide as possible, and often in two languages. Therefore, although in percentage terms (of the whole) some data may appear incomplete, in numerical ($n=$) terms, they are sufficient in granularity to allow for meaningful analysis and explanation. By the very nature of terrorism research, data collection is a challenge, but the existence of under-represented data does not prevent 'systematic scientific and empirically based research' (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010: 889).

The third limitation of the primary data is selection bias, driven more by availability (open source), than by design. This limitation is well founded, and reflects the reality in terrorism research of accessing reliable data on an activity that is inherently covert by its very nature. Any selection bias in this thesis was partially reduced by using multiple sources including for example, Western sources (GTMO detainee assessments, the Violations Documentation Centre, and the UN 1267 Committee Al-Qaeda List); and Arabic language sources (Arab foreign fighter websites, *In the Hearts of Green Birds*, *Caravan of Martyrs*, and the Sinjar records). This use of multiple sources, in effect triangulation, reduced the effect of, but not entirely eradicated, selection bias.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the academic literature, and presented the theoretical framework and methodology employed in this study. The literature review highlighted that no single study had been identified (for this thesis) that explicitly and systematically examined the nexus between Arab foreign fighters engaged in defensive jihad, and their subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorist related. Other gaps included challenging the trend of

conflating Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists; the need to examine and draw distinctions between the targeting patterns of Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists; and testing the notion of radicalisation within a contemporary Arab world setting. The theoretical framework, derived from the notion of radicalisation, whilst drawing on Sageman (2004 and 2008) and Silke (2008), is augmented by the psychological theories and analyses of Arendt (1994), Milgram (1963), Zimbardo (1971), and Staub (1989). Finally, the methodology section explained the adoption of content analysis and the coding of the thesis dataset of 3,010 Arab foreign fighters.

Chapter 3: The Context – Political Islam in the Arab World

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to contextualise the research question by illuminating the Arab world through the prism of political Islam. A Western conceptualisation (there is no Arabic synonym), political Islam is considered to be ‘a religious-cultural-political framework for engagement on issues that most concern politically engaged Muslims’ (Fuller, 2007: 193). Put another way, it is ‘a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups and organizations that pursue political objectives’ (Ayoob, 2008: 2), and is generally viewed as synonymous with Islamism (O. Roy, 2007: ix; Ayoob, 2008: 2; Dalacoura, 2011: 16; Volpi, 2011: 1). Accepting that involvement in defensive jihad and/or Islamist terrorism (at the individual and organisational level) are religio-political activities, viewing them through the prism of political Islam helps explain ‘the context from which the individual comes’ (Taylor and Horgan, 2006: 592). Also, the use of political Islam to contextualise Arab foreign fighter involvement in defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism is entirely appropriate, as ‘nowhere is the presence of political Islam more apparent than in the Arab world’ (Dekmejian, 1995: 211).

The chapter is broken down into three constituent parts. First a short overview of political Islam in the Arab world is presented, followed by how the key ideological tenets of political Islam evolved through the influence and charisma of its principal ideologues. The key ideological tenets of political Islam include defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism; martyrdom and suicide attacks; *takfir* against Sunni and Shia Muslims;⁷⁰ and finally *Sharia* law and the notion of an Islamic state. These tenets cover the four main areas of contention identified by Wiktorowicz (2005a)⁷¹ between radical and mainstream Islamists. Among the principal ideologues identified are Ibn Taymiyya, Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj, Abdullah Azzam, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and Abu Bakr

⁷⁰ As defined in Chapter 1, *takfir* is ‘the practice of declaring someone an unbeliever’ (Glasse, 2008: 510).

⁷¹ The four areas of contention identified by Wiktorowicz (2005a: 75-76) are whether to label Arab leaders apostates (*takfir*); the nature of defensive and global jihad; the targeting of civilians; and the legitimacy of martyrdom operations.

al-Baghdadi. Thus, rather than study the tenets of political Islam in isolation in a sterile way, examining the ideological relationships between the ideologues, the evolution of their key tenets, and how their charisma influenced Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists, offers a more nuanced and contextualised understanding. The key ideological tenets of political Islam support the theoretical (radicalisation) framework at the ‘middle-range approach to analysis’ in that they include ‘ideas, and the social, political … context’ (Sageman, 2008: 25). Lastly, to enrich the discussion, the view ‘amongst the common folk’ (al-Zawahiri, 2005) of the ideological tenets of contemporary political Islam is also revealed, by harnessing the results of polls and surveys undertaken in the Arab world, such as Gallup, Pew, and Al Jazeera - in effect offering a contemporaneous indigenous view of political Islam.

Overview of Political Islam in the Arab World

Political Islam, the merging of politics and the religion of Islam, appears broadly focussed on gaining political power domestically within the Arab world, and globally within the international arena. Domestically in the Arab world where ruling regimes are widely considered ‘corrupt elites’ (Jansen, 1986: 169; Tayekh and Gvosdev 2004: 14; Gerges, 2005: 36; Wiktorowicz, 2006: 223; Hegghammer, 2009b: 29; Soage, 2012), there is a broad feeling of societal marginalisation. According to Esposito (2003: 142) ‘the most glaring difference between the Muslim world and the West today is the contrast between authoritarian⁷² and democratically elected governments.’ This is supported by Gurr and Marshall (2005: 9) who found that, out of the 16 Arab countries examined (Palestine not included), ten of the countries were ‘full autocratic regimes’ whilst the remaining six were ‘anocracies (countries with governments in the mixed or transitional zone between autocracy and democracy).’

The immediate question arises as to whether ‘political Islam is manifest in the permanence of autocratic regimes’ (O. Roy, 2007: x). There appears to be two conflicting arguments.

⁷² Authoritarianism is defined as the ‘ruthless policing of boundaries of acceptable political practice’ (Heydemann, 2007: 2).

Dalacoura (2011: 11) in her influential book on *Islamist Terrorism and Democracy in the Middle East*, argued that ‘there is no necessary causal link between authoritarianism in the Middle East and terrorism.’ Other studies (Eubank and Weinberg, 2001: 161; Piazza, 2007: 536) have drawn similar conclusions. There is however a counter-argument; research by Gurr (1979) and Rummel (1995) found that ‘autocracies, since they choke off alternative means of political expression, are far more likely to experience civil wars and other types of political violence’ (as cited in Eubank and Weinberg 2001: 156). Esposito (2003: 142) also argued ‘that militant jihad movements and terrorism … are products … of political conditions.’ Finally, Hafez (2003: 21-22) in his seminal book *Why Muslims Rebel*, claimed ‘that Muslims rebel of an ill-fated combination of institutional exclusion and … reactive and indiscriminate repression that threatens the organizational resources and personal lives of Islamists.’

Thus, whilst both arguments have their merits, the narrative of political Islam in the Arab world appears in part to be a response to the authoritarianism, rather than authoritarianism being a necessary cause of terrorism. In effect, the frame of political Islam ‘provides political responses to today’s societal challenges’ (Ayoob, 2008: 2); whilst also having ‘the capability to mobilize the disaffected’ (Tayekh and Gvosdev, 2004: 16). Therefore, although Dalacoura’s argument may be true (for her case studies on Iran, Turkey, Palestine, Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia), regime authoritarianism in the wider Arab world does (at least) appear to contribute to the space that promotes political Islam as ‘an ideology of protest against ruling elites’ (Dekmejian, 1995: 37).

Political Islam in a global context appears most visible as a reaction to, and support for, persecuted co-religionists (for example Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria) while at the same time a feeling of anger due to Western duplicity in their ‘support for hated regimes’ (Lewis, 1990: 52). These feelings of frustration and anger are exploited by Islamists, whereupon political Islam is operationalised through the use of a religio-political narrative,⁷³ in order to

⁷³ According to Wilkinson (n.d.), the ‘agenda is political though it is dressed up in language of Islamic holy war.’

support mobilisation to an Islamist cause. As noted succinctly by Denoeux (2011: 62), this religio-political narrative ‘is to a large extent a political discourse in religious garb.’

It is also important to note that Islam is viewed by many Arabs (and Muslims in general) as ‘an inclusive order that pertains to all aspects of life’ (O. Roy, 2007: 41), and does not differentiate between politics and religion *per se* (Mandaville, 2007: 332). Many scholars acknowledge that ‘Islam has had a political dimension from the beginning’ (A. R. Taylor, 1988: 20), particularly in regard to the succession of the Prophet Muhammad, that eventually led to the two sects within Islam, Sunni and the Shia.⁷⁴ This has led other scholars to be more specific claiming that in ‘Islam … religion and politics are inseparable’ (Husain, 1995: 27).

With this in mind, many of the aims of Islamists (violent and non-violent) such as implementing *Sharia* law within an Islamic country, are not at face value necessarily radical goals. For example, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia in 1992 stressed that ‘the particular Islamic nature of his country … provided the legal and constitutional system appropriate to it’ (Halliday, 2003: 138). A distinction however needs to be drawn between an Islamic country, and an Islamic caliphate (*khilaafah*) such as that established in 2014 within Iraq and Syria. Whilst many religious nationalist Islamists do seek an Islamic country, there has not until recently been a concerted desire to resurrect earlier caliphates such as ‘the era of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs, who ruled immediately after Muhammad’s death in the seventh century … or the Abbasid caliphate, which existed … from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries’ (Danforth, 2015).⁷⁵

With the effects of globalisation and increased connectivity, there has been increased political awareness within the Arab world (Gray, 2003; Lia, 2005; March, 2015), often within an Israeli-Palestinian context, but also an awareness of the plight of Muslims

⁷⁴ Noted in Chapter 1, according to Gonzalez (2009), the roots of the Sunni-Shia divide are anchored on ‘the correct line of succession after the Prophet Muhammad’s death in AD 632’ … the Shia contend it should have been familial (p. 6), while the Sunni accepted a close companion of the Prophet Muhammad (p. 4).

⁷⁵ There is less reference to the Ottoman Caliphate under Turkey, which is often considered ‘a myth’ (Danforth, 2015).

elsewhere, including 1980s Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kashmir, Chechnya, Iraq (due to UN sanctions),⁷⁶ Iraq (post 2003), and Syria (post 2011). The response to the majority of these conflicts, albeit by a Muslim minority, was to participate in defensive jihad, in order to defend co-religionists. This increased global awareness, coupled with a growing frustration directed towards non-elected autocratic Arab regimes (Jansen: 1986: 169), appears to have produced a profound sense of grievance that has helped fuel political Islam.

This however is not a view necessarily shared by acclaimed academics O. Roy (2007) and Kepel (2008), who both predicted ‘the decline’ of political Islam, starting with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990; a prediction that now seems increasingly unlikely, with respect to the Arab Spring, the Syrian Revolution, and the establishment of the Islamic State. Although O. Roy and Kepel made these predictions originally in 1994 and 2000 respectively, when re-examined in 2017, political Islam is likely to remain an influential factor in International Relations during much of the early 21st century.

The Key Ideologues and their Influence on the Tenets of Political Islam

There have been numerous ideologues within the wider Muslim world that have shaped Islamist thinking, however the individuals covered in this chapter were selected as they represent those most influential concerning defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism. They are Ibn Taymiyya, a ‘medieval scholar-activist [who] has had more influence on radical Islamist ideology than’ any other scholar (Esposito, 2003: 45); Hassan al-Banna, who ‘is frequently characterised as the father of contemporary Islamism’ (Euben and Zaman, 2009: 49); Sayyid Qutb, ‘often seen as the godfather of revolutionary Sunni Islam’ (Wiktorowicz, 2005a: 78); Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj, ‘the most influential disciple of Sayyid Qutb’ (Sageman, 2004: 14); Abdullah Azzam who ‘inspired a new generation of radical Islamists’ (McGregor, 2003: 92); Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was ‘the master of the cutting-edge, hard core version of jihad’ (Kazimi, 2005: 59); and finally Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the

⁷⁶ According to United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (2002), UN sanctions in Iraq caused the death of an estimated 500,000 Iraqi children. It is noteworthy, that Osama bin Laden specifically noted ‘the great devastation inflicted on the Iraqi people’ in his 1998 *fatwa* ‘Jihad against Jews and Crusaders - World Islamic Front Statement’ (23 February 1998).

current leader of the Islamic State and a ‘Specially Designated Global Terrorist’ (as of October 4, 2011).

Whilst they are all widely cited ideologues within political Islam, they are not all necessarily scholars (or thinkers) in the academic sense, but this was offset by their apparent influence and perceived authority. According to McCants, Brachman, and Felter (2006a and 2006b), authors of the *Militant Ideology Atlas* that identified ‘the most influential thinkers in the Jihadi Movement,’ Ibn Taymiyya was identified as ‘the most influential Medieval Scholar’ (2006a: 7), and Sayyid Qutb as the ‘most influential Jihadi Theorist’ (2006a: 8) who ‘Jihadis cite more than any other modern author’ (2006a: 10). Hassan al-Banna and Abdullah Azzam were both also identified as ‘most cited modern authors’ (2006a: 13), with Azzam judged to be ‘a role model for the younger generation of Muslims’ (2006b: 287). It is recognised that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi are absent from the *Militant Ideology Atlas* due to the timing of the research undertaken by McCants et al. (2006a and 2006b).

Ibn Taymiyya

The first ideologue, Ibn Taymiyya (1263 - 1328) was an Islamic scholar during the time of the Mongols, and is arguably the most cited ideologue concerning (1) the permissibility of killing Muslim civilians; (2) waging jihad against fellow Muslims who did not apply *Sharia* law (in effect *takfir*); (3) the permissibility of violence against Shia Muslims (again in effect *takfir*); and (4) the individual religious obligation (*fard ayn*) of defensive jihad in defence of Muslims. First, the permissibility of killing Muslim civilians (within the context of collateral damage) was sanctioned by Ibn Taymiyya in his *Majmua al Fatawa* 28/537 in which he declared:

‘The Islamic scholars have unanimously agreed that when the *kaffir* [unbeliever] takes Muslims as human shields, and the Muslims fear defeat if they do not attack, then it becomes permissible to fire, but we aim at the *kaffir*.’ (Wiktorowicz and Kaltner, 2003: 90).

The setting of his *fatwa* was clearly concerned with using Muslim civilians as human shields, however it has since been removed from its original context, often to support the arbitrary killing of Muslim civilians and non-combatants. Contemporary Islamist terrorists also draw upon Ibn Taymiyya vis-à-vis attacking non-Muslim civilians in response to the killing of Muslim civilians by the West,⁷⁷ arguing ‘that when the infidel kills Muslim civilians it becomes permissible to attack their civilians in kind’ (Wiktorowicz, 2005a: 89). This position has some Quranic justification: ‘And the one who attacks you, attack him in like manner as he attacked you’ (Quran 2:194).

Second, Ibn Taymiyya was a proponent of *takfir* – ‘one of the most potent weapons in the arsenal of Islamism’ (Lynch, 2013: 170). His permissibility of waging jihad against fellow Muslims (*takfir*) was based on the logic that:

‘since the Mongols (who had previously converted to Islam) continued to follow the ... code of Genghis Khan instead of *Sharia law*, they were not real Muslims, but apostates who should be punished with death according to the *Sharia*. It was the right, indeed the duty, of Muslims to wage jihad against them’ (Sageman, 2004:9).

Accordingly, as noted by Sivan (1990: 99), Ibn Taymiyya advocated that any ‘ruler who neglects or transgresses Islamic law is *ipso facto* an ... apostate, hence the object of jihad.’

From a sectarian perspective, Ibn Taymiyya also took issue with Shia Muslims and whilst reluctant to condone *takfir* against them, he would prescribe it as a last resort (Dekmejian, 1995: 39). In his *Majmua al Fatawa* 3/157 (al-Hashimi, n.d.), Ibn Taymiyya wrote that Sunni Muslims:

⁷⁷ This would include, but is not limited to, Western bombings, drone strikes, and post 1991 UN Sanctions against Iraq.

‘love the people of the household of the Messenger of Allah … [but] they reject the way of the *raafidi*⁷⁸ [*Shia*] who hate the *sahabah*⁷⁹ and slander them, and they reject the way of the *naseebis*⁸⁰ [*Shia*] who insult *ahl al-bayt*⁸¹ in words and deed.’

What is particularly striking is that the terminology used by Ibn Taymiyya over seven hundred years ago, has resurfaced in Islamist circles and has been adopted by radical Sunni Islamists to refer to the Shia in Iraq and the *Alawites* in Syria - it appears to have a timeless quality. For example, in *Dialogue with Shaykh Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi*, al-Zarqawi (2006) refers to the Iraqi *Shia* as *raafidi* more than seventy times, whilst IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (2012) refers to *Shia* Muslims as ‘malicious *raafidi*.’ This consistency in terminology appears to create a linkage between medieval and contemporary Islamist narratives, and consequently by drawing on Ibn Taymiyya, it generates a greater degree authenticity and resonance. It is also instructive that this sectarian terminology was not in general use prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, not even by al-Qaeda.⁸²

Regarding defensive jihad, Ibn Taymiyya is widely quoted by modern day Arab foreign fighters. Translated in 1966, Ibn Taymiyya (1966: 138) declared that ‘*jihad* is the best of all voluntary actions … it is better than the grand pilgrimage (*Hajj*) … prayer (*salat*) … [and] fasting (*Ramadan*).’ Concerning the religious obligation/duty to participate in defensive jihad, Ibn Taymiyya (1966: 146-147) declared:

‘if … the enemy decided to attack the Muslims, then to repulse that enemy would be a personal duty on all, both those against whom the attack was made and those not

⁷⁸ The Arabic term *raafidi* is ‘abusive in tone, given by the Sunni Muslims to the Shia Muslims.’ Literally means ‘repudiators’ because the *Shia* repudiate the validity of the Caliphs (causing the Sunni/Shia divide (Glasse, 2008: 431). It also has the meaning of ‘apostate’ (Wehr, 1980: 349).

⁷⁹ The Arabic term *sahaba* is a Sunni Muslim term given to ‘those followers of the Prophet Muhammad who were closest to him in his lifetime’ (Glasse, 2005: 117).

⁸⁰ Historically the Arabic term *naseebis* is a Sunni Muslim derogatory term used to refer to those who expressed enmity towards the House of the Prophet. More recently, the term is also used by Shia polemicists as a derogatory term for Sunni Muslims.

⁸¹ The Arabic term *ahl al-bayt* is normally used by Sunni Muslims to refer to ‘descendants of the Prophet Muhammad … referring to the Quraysh tribe’ (Glasse, 2005: 31).

⁸² Noted in Chapter 2, Al-Qaeda’s deputy al-Zawahiri (2005) wrote to al-Zarqawi discouraging his use of *takfir* against Shia Muslims, asking ‘why kill ordinary Shia … what loss will befall us if we did not attack the Shia?’

directly affected by it ... a war to defend the Religion [is] obligatory fighting (*fard al-ayn*)’.

Ibn Taymiyya’s declaration challenged the broad understanding at that time among Islamic scholars, in that participation in a defensive jihad (within *Sharia* law) was not an individual religious obligation (*fard ayn*) upon all Muslims, but rather a collective obligation (*fard kifayya*)⁸³ upon only those directly affected by it (Gerges, 2005: 81; Musallam, 2005: 180; Hegghammer, 2010b: 28), in order to defend Muslim land and the religion of Islam. To include defensive jihad as an obligation for ‘those not directly affected by’ an attack, challenged the mainstream position of Islamic scholars. This apparent contradiction is explained by Wiktorowicz (2005a: 83), who noted that Ibn Taymiyya’s contribution ‘to the ideology of jihad has more to do with the religious and moral elements of jihad rather than legalistic issues.’ Thus, while not getting into the theological or jurisprudential debate which is beyond the scope of this thesis, Ibn Taymiyya’s ‘religious and moral’ argument remained fairly dormant until after the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate in the early 1920s. Shortly afterwards in 1928, contemporary political Islam (re)surfaced by the founding of the Society of Muslim Brothers (*Ikhwan al-Muslimeen*) in Egypt, by Hassan al-Banna (Soage, 2008: 21; March, 2015: 104).

Hassan al-Banna

The ideological founder of *Ikhwan al-Muslimeen*, an Egyptian named Hassan al-Banna (1906 – 1949), was motivated to establish the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) due to the ‘political circumstances’ and ‘the humiliation of foreign domination’ in Egypt (Euben and Zaman, 2009: 49-51). Al-Banna is probably best known for his ‘epistles’ (*al-rasaa’il*) the content of which provided the ‘well-known components of the Islamist lexicon’ for future generations (Euben and Zaman, 2009: 52). According to Soage (2008), these components included (1) reversing ‘the abandonment of Jihad’ (p. 30); (2) ‘the importance of religious identity’ (p. 23); (3) the implementation of *Sharia* law; (4) the establishment of an Islamic state (both within Egypt and the wider Muslim world), and (5) the rejection of *takfir*.

⁸³ Wehr (1980: 706).

Regarding defensive jihad, in his Epistle 4 (Peace in Islam), al-Banna (1948a) explained that defensive jihad ‘is for the sake of stopping an aggressor, self-defence, achieving justice, and helping the wronged among the believers.’ In his Epistle 10 (*al-Jihad*), al-Banna (1948b) explained that ‘if the enemy invades one of our territories, its population is obliged to repel them with all their force’ - in line with the notion of *fard kifayya* (collective obligation) – and consistent with broad scholarly opinion, as noted earlier during the time of Ibn Taymiyya. In Epistle 4 (Peace in Islam), al-Banna (1948a) stressed the nobility of participating in defensive jihad:

“One will not find in any Islamic text the word fighting or *jihad* (struggle) not accompanied by the phrase ‘in the cause of Allah’ [*fee sabeel Allah*]. This is because Allah has declared the prohibition of all forms of fighting that have an ignoble motive behind them.”

It was a powerful narrative, offering religious legitimacy to the concept of defensive jihad (*fee sabeel Allah*), while also affording dignity to those who participated in it.

Next, the ‘importance of religious identity’ was articulated by al-Banna (in 1943) by stressing the centrality of Islam encompassing all worldly affairs:

‘Islam is a comprehensive system, concerned with all aspects of life. It is country and nation, government and *umma*. It is ethics and power, mercy and justice. It is culture and law, science and judiciary’ (Soage, 2008: 26).

It is clear that al-Banna was an advocate of *deen wa dawla* (religion and country) seeing no advantage of living as a Muslim in a secular country (that was not under *Sharia* law). The context to this politicization of Islam was due in part to the fact that Egypt was ‘still under British occupation and whose parliamentary system was completely discredited due to palace interference, party corruption and an increasing resort to violence’ (Soage, 2008: 26). In effect, al-Banna’s ‘*ikhwanism*’ was a response to the prevailing circumstances at that time of ‘Egyptian political paralysis’ (Euben and Zaman, 2009: 134) – circumstances

that could be conceptualised as *preconditions* ‘that set the stage for terrorism over the long run’ (Crenshaw, 2003: 93).

Next, in his further Epistle 7 (Between Yesterday and Today), al-Banna (1948c) discussed the notion of an Islamic caliphate (*khilaafah*), defining it as a:

‘complete social and political unity ... from making the Qur’anic order and its’ language universal, beneath the flag of the *khilaafah* ... all act[ing] according to a single creed and a unified and comprehensive control.’

Al-Banna (1948c) mourned the demise of the *khilaafah* (particularly after the First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire), noting that as many Arab states gained independence from their colonial masters, they still focussed on ‘localised nationalism ... and purposely ignored the idea of unity’ as a *khilaafah*. Al-Banna (1948c) identified ‘two fundamental goals: freeing the Islamic homeland from all foreign authority, [and] the establishment of an Islamic state within this homeland.’ It is important to recognize therefore, that whilst al-Banna’s Islamic focus was ‘within’ Egypt, his wider and longer term intention was more geo-political – the re-establishment of a global Islamic *khilaafah*.

Finally, despite al-Banna targeting enemy ‘apostates’ (in addition to ‘unbelievers’), Kraemer (2009: 103) argued that ‘he explicitly rejected *takfir*.’ This appears to be a grey area, for as noted earlier, al-Banna rejected the Egyptian ‘parliamentary system’ – a rejection that may have contributed to the 1948 assassination of Egypt’s Prime Minister⁸⁴ by Muslim Brotherhood members. Al-Banna himself was eventually killed in 1949, ostensibly by the Egyptian government in retaliation for the assassination of their Prime Minister. Despite al-Banna’s death, he left a legacy ‘that Islam is a comprehensive way of life’ and the need for an ‘armed fight against unbelievers’ (Euben and Zaman, 2009: 52).

⁸⁴ Mahmood al-Nuqraashi Basha.

Sayyid Qutb

The next ideologue, another Egyptian, was Sayyid Qutb (1906 – 1966) considered ‘the main ideologue of modern Muslim Sunni fundamentalism’ (Jansen, 1997: 49), who had ‘stepped into a political arena that had already been reshaped by al-Banna’ (Euben and Zaman, 2009: 134). He continued the philosophy of al-Banna and ‘*ikhwanism*’ (he was also in the Muslim Brotherhood) but was more specific, and breaking with Islamic tradition, Qutb insisted ‘that jihad is an [*fard ayn*] individual obligation’ (Musallam, 2005: 180) against the Egyptian regime. Although Qutb advocated jihad to establish an Islamic state in Egypt (Wiktorowicz, 2005a: 79; Musallam, 2005: 155), he explicitly used ‘the concept of *takfir* to condemn the rulers of [Egypt] … on religious grounds’ (Wagemakers, 2012: 61).⁸⁵ In particular Qutb ‘argued that the regime of Gamal Abdul Nassir, since it had tortured and imprisoned pious Muslims, was not a Muslim state but a regime of pre-Islamic ignorance (*jahiliyya*)’ (Beinin and Stork, 1997: 6). It is instructive that ‘according to Yusuf al-Qaradawi⁸⁶ the *takfir* theory took its present shape during the cruel persecutions that the Muslim Brothers suffered at the hands of the Nassir government’ (Jansen, 1986: 153). In effect it was again a response to the brutality of President Abdul Nassir’s regime (1956 - 1970). Thus while in Qutb’s narrative ‘*jihad* was a central theme’ (Musallam, 2005:155), it was aimed at co-religionists - the ‘near enemy’ - a term not yet in circulation in his time. Such discourse however, particularly in his infamous 1964 book, *Milestones on the Road*,⁸⁷ broke with Islamic tradition due to the increased likelihood of *fitna* (sedition).⁸⁸ Although not universal, Islamic tradition broadly holds that ‘criticism of rulers or any other issue in Muslim society should not be expressed in the form of political action or violence [as] it will only bring more evil and lead to *fitna*’ (Wagemakers, 2012: 76-77).

Although Sayyid Qutb was an advocate of *takfir* (against the Egyptian regime), he introduced a contradiction in that he never ‘argued that civilians could be targeted during

⁸⁵ According to Wiktorowicz (2005a: 79), Sayyid Qutb’s book, *In the Shade of the Quran*, ‘provides the cornerstone for declaring rulers apostates and waging jihad.’

⁸⁶ Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1926 -) is a ‘leading Islamist scholar’ (Baroudi, 2014: 2).

⁸⁷ According to Musallam (2005:155), *Milestones on the Road* ‘is the founding text for the jihadist Islam.’

⁸⁸ The definition of *fitna* includes ‘sedition, riot, discord, dissension, civil strife (Wehr, 1980: 696).

combat and war, and there was little discussion about the subject until the 1990s' (Wiktorowicz, 2005a: 87) – thus implicitly he rejected terrorism *per se* - predicated on the revised academic consensus definition of terrorism (Schmid, 2013a: 86). It is interesting that the 9/11 Commission Report (2005: 51) found that Osama bin Laden 'relie[d] heavily on the Egyptian writer Sayyid Qutb ... permitting him and his followers to rationalize even unprovoked mass murder' – a finding that is not entirely persuasive,⁸⁹ based on his written work. Despite being sentenced to death in August 1966, his legacy is firmly rooted in an indigenous religious nationalist setting involving jihad and *takfir* against a *jahiliyya* Arab regime - an agenda that never advocated attacks outside the Arab world, or against civilians.

Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj

The next key ideologue, Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj (1954 – 1982) was greatly influenced by Sayyid Qutb (Wiktorowicz, 2005a: 80). Faraj like Qutb was also an Egyptian and an advocate of 'jihad against apostate governments' (Cook, 2007: 142). In his well-known pamphlet, *The Absent Religious Obligation* (*al-fareeda al-ghaa'iba*) - also widely translated as *The Neglected Duty* - Faraj argued that 'the rulers of Egypt in the 1970s ... should be condemned as apostates and infidels and fought by means of jihad' (Wagemakers, 2012: 62). This ideology still has currency, particularly in Syria (post 2011) where 'the absent obligation of jihad' has been stressed by ISIS in their magazine Dabiq Issue 1 (p. 35). According to Wiktorowicz (2005a: 79), 'Faraj drew on Ibn Taymiyya⁹⁰ to argue for the centrality of jihad in faith,' and that it was 'an individual duty of every Muslim' (Jensen, 1986: 200). This support for *takfir* was based on 'Qutb's argument that rulers who do not implement Islamic law are unbelievers and must be removed from power' (Wiktorowicz, 2005a: 79). Faraj labelled 'apostate Muslim regimes' as the 'near enemy,' and (implicitly) Israel as the 'far enemy' (Jansen, 1986: 192), based on a desire to liberate Jerusalem. What

⁸⁹ Zimmerman (2004: 242) also argued that 'we can be certain that [the 9/11 hijackers] were immersed in the ideas of Sayyid Qutb.' Perhaps this is based on Ayman al-Zawahiri, who in his *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, called Sayyid Qutb 'the most prominent theoretician of the fundamentalist movements' (Wiktorowicz, 2005a: 80).

⁹⁰ In Faraj's *The Absent Religious Obligation*, he cites Ibn Taymiyya 27 times.

is also important about Faraj is his support for martyrdom, in the theological sense, fighting *fee sabeel Allah*. As Cook (2007: 142) observed correctly, Faraj ‘realizes that fighting will create martyrs [however] it is crucial for the martyr to die for the right cause … of raising the word of God to the highest … against apostate governments [in order to] establish a Muslim state.’ It is illuminating that the notion of martyrdom conceptualised by Faraj, did not involve suicide attacks against civilians and non-combatants.

Of equal importance in the work of Faraj is that he addressed the issue of targeting civilians and non-combatants. Relying on religious texts to buttress his argument, he argued against killing non-combatants (in daytime) however at night, so long as non-combatants were not specifically targeted, there was no objection (Jansen, 1986: 217). This narrative echoes with Ibn Taymiyya’s ‘human shields’ ruling, and offered a degree of legitimacy to more radical Islamists who wanted to target Muslim, and later non-Muslim civilians and non-combatants. Faraj was executed by the Egyptian regime in 1982, for his alleged involvement in the 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Muhammad Anwar as-Sadat.

Abdullah Azzam

At about the same time as Faraj’s execution, a Palestinian ideologue named Abdullah Yusuf Azzam (1941 - 1989) was becoming ‘the single most important individual behind the mobilisation of Arab volunteers in Afghanistan’ (Hegghammer, 2010b: 39), to fight the Soviet occupation. His motivational significance is echoed by Wiktorowicz (2005a: 84), who identified him as ‘the most important figure to resurrect active participation in classical defensive jihad’ against the Soviets. Academic consensus on his role is not universal, with distinguished scholars like Gerges (2005: 135) claiming that ‘Azzam was not an ideologue,’ and yet his writings⁹¹ and ideological guidance operationalised ‘the abstract promises of Qutb and Banna, to fight an unequivocal battle for Islam’ (McDermott, 2005: 94). More generally, Azzam was widely viewed as ‘the father of the Afghan Arabs … and a preeminent theoretician’ (Kepel and Milelli, 2008: 97). Arguably more

⁹¹ Abdullah Azzam authored many ideological books including his *Defence of Muslim Land* (1983), *Join the Caravan* (1987), and *The Lofty Mountain* (1989).

important than his ideological credentials, was his largely undisputed charismatic authority amongst the Afghan Arabs (Bergen, 2002: 54; McGregor, 2003; Gerges, 2005: 134; Ingram, 2013: 152), which is covered in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Perhaps the most influential publication of Abdullah Azzam was his 1983 *Defence of Muslim Lands*, where he argued that ‘one of the most important lost obligations is the forgotten obligation of fighting ... [it] is the most important of the compulsory duties and arises [when] the *kuffar*⁹² enter a land of the Muslims’⁹³ (A.Y. Azzam, 1983). The notion of a ‘forgotten obligation’ demonstrates the ideological cohesion between Azzam and Faraj, a point recognised by McGregor (2003: 97), who noted that Azzam was ‘well acquainted with *The Neglected Duty*.’ Azzam also had ideological solidarity with Ibn Taymiyya, whom he referenced 12 times, to support his argument that ‘if a piece of Muslim land the size of a hand span is infringed upon, then jihad becomes *fard ayn* on every Muslim’ (A.Y. Azzam, 1983), and not just the Afghans.

Azzam’s interpretation of defensive jihad being an individual religious obligation for all Muslims (*fard ayn*) appeared (like that of Ibn Taymiyya) to challenge the accepted Islamic mores, although interestingly scholarship is divided on this matter. First, according to Wagemakers (2012: 57), ‘Azzam’s importance with regard to jihad ... lies not in any new ideas but in his ability to use his writings ... to mobilise Arabs for the Afghan cause, based on a version of jihad that had existed long before.’ Yet Hegghammer (2010b: 41) argued that ‘the mainstream position of religious scholars at the time was that jihad was only an individual duty for the Afghans, not for all Muslims.’ Therefore, with the local Afghan *mujahhideen* fully engaged in defensive jihad against the Soviets (O. Roy, 1990), any outside help, for example from the Arab world, was the lesser *fard kifayya*. This broadly agrees with the analysis of Gerges (2005: 81) who argued that ‘a consensus then existed among Muslim clerics and scholars that doing jihad against the Russian invaders was

⁹² *Kuffar* refers to the plural of ‘an atheist’ (Glasse, 2008: 305).

⁹³ It seems that Abdullah Azzam was echoing Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj’s concept of ‘the neglected duty’ of jihad, but in the context of evicting ‘the *kuffar*’ from Muslim lands (as opposed to the prevailing ‘jihadi current’ of the early 1980s which was focussed on religious-nationalist causes, against local Arab regimes). The term ‘*jihadi current*’ is a term widely employed by Jordanian ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi’ (Hegghammer, 2009a: 253).

legitimate and could be considered a collective duty' (*fard kifayya*). The truth is probably somewhere in between, as Abdullah Azzam had by his own admission, changed the 'mainstream position among Muslim clerics, and had actually gained the support of Shaykh Abdul Aziz bin Bazz,⁹⁴ Shaykh Muhammad bin Salah bin Uthaymin,⁹⁵ and 'more than one hundred scholars from the entire Islamic world' (A.Y. Azzam, 1983). Thus, perhaps what is arguably more accurate is that the defensive jihad in Afghanistan being an individual religious obligation for all Muslims (*fard ayn*) was a point of inflection, unravelling nearly fourteen hundred years of Islamic understanding of defensive jihad being a collective religious obligation (*fard kifayya*), and once unravelled, appeared to become accepted doctrine among many contemporary Islamists.

According to McGregor (2003: 92), Abdullah Azzam's 'militant interpretation of the Islamic doctrine of jihad contributed to the success of the Afghan mujahidin' for it resonated within the Arab world, as one later Saudi foreign fighter recounted: Azzam's 'basic motive in jihad was to defend Muslim lands' (al-Bahri, 2005a). This is the same broad doctrinal message that resonated again in the Arab and wider Muslim world for the defence of Muslims in Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan (post 2001), Iraq (post 2003), and Syria – although the last two conflicts have become more nuanced and sectarian in nature.

Whilst he supported defensive jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan, Abdullah Azzam strongly 'opposed the waging of *takfir* ... arguing it would lead to permanent infighting among Arabs just at a time when Arab unity was needed above all else' (Moghadam, 2011: 65). Indeed, he felt so strongly on the issue, that he 'was known to have ridiculed the revolutionary jihadis' (Wagemakers, 2012: 91), who were predominantly Egyptian Islamic Jihad members. It is instructive to note that within the Afghan Arab cohort, the 'Egyptians brought with them radical ideologies and a penchant for proselytizing [and] in particular, were at the forefront of introducing the *takfiri* ideology' (Hafez, 2009: 77). In effect the

⁹⁴ Shaykh Abdul Aziz bin Bazz (1910 - 1999) was the Grand *Mufti* of Saudi Arabia and the highest religious authority in the country. He proclaimed that 'jihad in Afghanistan an individual duty on every Muslim' (Trofimov, 2007: 244).

⁹⁵ Shaykh Muhammad bin Salah bin Uthaymin was one 'of Saudi Arabia's most famous scholars' (Lia, 2009: 284).

Egyptian influence in Afghanistan, possibly relying on the *takfiri* ideology championed by Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj, appeared to be another point of inflection in the evolution of a more radical political Islam – one that appeared more akin to Islamist terrorism rather than to defensive jihad. In his own words in *fee Dhilal Surat at-Tawbah* (In the Shade of the Quranic Chapter ‘The Repentance’), Abdullah Azzam (n.d.) believed the concept of *takfir* held by more radical individuals to be the result of ‘their lack of knowledge, they are simply youth with much zeal, and the hearts of these youth were made to follow their desires’ (p. 104). However, in contradiction to his own discourse, Abdullah Azzam (1987) actually viewed Arab regimes as *tawagheet* (tyrants). Whilst the label *tawagheet* is a Quranic term,⁹⁶ in jihadist literature it is understood to signify ‘the near enemy, meaning oppressive regimes in Muslim countries’ (Kepel and Milelli, 2008: 302). Thus, although Azzam may not have supported *takfir* (during the defensive jihad in Afghanistan), his view that Arab regimes were *tawagheet* does offer some indication had he lived, of his possible future intentions. Olivier Roy (1995: 37) argued correctly that the lack of agreement over the employability of concept of *takfir* ‘is the watershed between moderate and radical Islamism’ where the latter ideology approves the killing of ‘a ruler who claims to be a Muslim but does not rule according to Islam.’⁹⁷

Perhaps however an even greater watershed between moderate and radical Islamism is the interpretation of the notion of martyrdom. Abdullah Azzam authored several missives on martyrdom including *Martyrs: The Building Blocks of Nations*,⁹⁸ where he argued that:

‘History does not write its lines except with blood. Glory does not build its loft edifice except with skulls; honour and respect cannot be established except on a foundation of cripples and corpses. Empires, distinguished peoples, states and societies cannot be established except with examples. Indeed those who think that they can change reality, or change societies, without blood, sacrifices and invalids,

⁹⁶ The dictionary definition of *tawagheet* (singular *taghoot*) signifies ‘a tyrant, oppressor, despot, or an idol’ (Wehr, 1980: 561).

⁹⁷ Lynch (2013: 170) also argues that *takfir* … ‘is a key ideological line of division in contemporary Islamism … a stark line of doctrinal distinction between’ moderate and radical Islamism.

⁹⁸ Another example was *Virtues of Martyrdom in the Path of Allah*, both missives are undated.

without pure, innocent souls, then they do not understand the essence of this *deen* [religion]’ (A.Y. Azzam, n.d.)

Moghadam (2008: 59) argued succinctly that

“Azzam understood martyrdom not as involving suicide missions *per se*, but as the death of any ‘true’ Muslim waging jihad. Such martyrdom would wash away the jihadi’s sins and bestow glory upon him.”

Cognisant that Azzam’s view of waging defensive jihad was predicated on the ‘defence of Muslim lands,’ indicates that the act of dying whilst defending Muslim lands was viewed as martyrdom (*fee sabeel Allah*), and entirely consistent with the views of ‘scholars from all ideological persuasions’ (Wiktorowicz, 2005a: 93). The other interpretation of martyrdom, involving suicide attacks by Islamist terrorists, pays little attention ‘to constructing a theological argument justifying such attacks’ and only focusses ‘on extolling the virtues of martyrdom’ (Wiktorowicz, 2005a: 92). Despite Abdullah Azzam being assassinated in 1989, according to McGregor (2003: 92), he had already ‘inspired a new generation of radical Islamists, including Osama bin Laden.’

Osama bin Laden

Despite the burgeoning literature on Osama bin Laden, his inclusion is pivotal in that he became the leader and ideologue of the al-Qaeda organisation that was built on the ashes of the Afghan Arabs. Although Bin Laden was considered a charismatic leader and ideologue (Reeve, 1999; Bergen, 2002 and 2006; Bodansky, 2001; Landau, 2002), one of his former bodyguards Nassir al-Bahri (2013: 74), was perhaps more nuanced: ‘Bin Laden wasn’t particularly charismatic, but his historical legitimacy assured him of everyone’s respect. He was simple. He ate with us. He chatted with us.’ In effect he had great credibility, particularly after his involvement in the 1987 battle of Jaji in Afghanistan (Bergen, 2006: 56; Tawil, 2010: 18-20). After the assassination of Abdullah Azzam, Bin Laden took over as *de facto* leader of the Afghan Arabs, and was considered by the Jordanian cleric Abu

Muhammad al-Maqdisi, as ‘the imam of the mujahidun in this age’ (Wagemakers, 2012: 74).

Ideologically, it appears that Bin Laden did not support the notion of *takfir*. According to Gerges (2005: 257), ‘Bin Laden reportedly was not in favor of civil strife between Shiites and Sunnis lest it detract from the focal confrontation against the Americans.’ The idea of attacking the Americans (and the West in general) was a new ideological conceptualisation that moved away from the near enemy to that of the far enemy. By judicious use of religious rhetoric (Ranstorp, 1998: 324; Wilkinson, 2003: 124; Hoffman, 2006: 93), he was able to call ‘for indiscriminate mass-casualty out-of-area attacks’ (Hegghammer, 2010a: 7). In his 1998 *fatwa*, Bin Laden relied heavily on the work of Ibn Taymiyyah and deliberately used the term *fard ‘ayn*: ‘the ruling to kill the Americans and their allies - civilians and military - is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it.’ Through the prism of political Islam, although Bin Laden adopted the label ‘jihad’ in his 1996 and 1998 *fatwas*, Kuehn et al. (2014: 4) argue strongly that ‘jihad is not synonymous with the goals, strategies or objectives of al-Qaeda.’

Finally, it is important to include the swearing of allegiance (*baya*) to Bin Laden. Although generally offered to ‘only 10 to 30 percent of … trainees’ (Sageman, 2004: 121), it was a binding verbal agreement that once made, arguably demanded blind obedience to him. According to Nassir al-Bahri (2013: 124), who himself swore *baya* to Bin Laden, he declared:

‘I swear before God to help and support you, putting aside my personal concerns and ideas, for better or for worse, and putting my own well-being behind me, I promise not to question your command.’

The swearing of allegiance to Bin Laden has some interesting corollaries. It is instructive, that research in psychology has suggested that ‘the disappearance of a sense of responsibility is the most far-reaching consequence of submission to authority … once they are locked into a subordinate position’ (Milgram, 1974: 8). The role of ‘submission to

authority' may partly explain the subsequent trajectory of some veteran Afghan Arabs to participate in Islamist terrorist related activities, and is expanded upon later in the thesis. Bin Laden was killed by the US in May 2011, in a raid on his compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (1966 - 2006) arrived in Afghanistan in 1989, and is generally remembered as 'the leading ideologue of jihad,' who sanctioned the 'unselective targeting of Shia civilians' (Kazimi, 2005: 60) in Iraq between 2004 and 2006 - perhaps creating a further watershed in political Islam. It appeared more than just a break with Islamic tradition; it was according to Hafez (2013: 32), a 'most extreme position.' In a 2004 letter⁹⁹ al-Zarqawi (2004a) explicitly singled out Iraqi Shia Muslims as 'the insurmountable obstacle, the lurking snake, and the crafty and malicious scorpion.' He warned that 'the danger from the Shia is greater than the Americans ... and fighting against the Shia is the way to drag the *ummah* into the battle.' It appears that al-Zarqawi's targeting policy was specifically sectarian in nature, and focussed on Iraqi Shia Muslims in general, that included civilians, non-combatants, police and the military. Iraqi civilians and non-combatants were particularly badly hit, perhaps due to them being 'soft targets' lacking any degree of physical protection (armour and blast walls). Al-Zarqawi's selective targeting is important in that it permitted the indiscriminate use of terrorism, often involving suicide attacks, against any Shia Muslim - regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or whether he/she worked for the (predominantly Shia dominated) Iraqi government.

On 18 May 2005, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi issued a *fatwa* that aimed to 'clarify the position of the *Shari'a* regarding such incidents in which Muslims are killed incidentally.' According to al-Zarqawi (2005):

⁹⁹ The letter was seized by US forces in Iraq on January 23, 2004, and after translation, was released by the Coalition Provisional Authority in February 2004.

‘The legitimacy of … killing a number of Muslims even if it is known that they are likely to be there at the time … is justified under the principle of *daroorah*¹⁰⁰ due to the fact that it is impossible to avoid them and to distinguish between them and those infidels against whom war is being waged … it is permissible to commit this evil – indeed, it is even required – in order to ward off a greater evil, namely, the evil of suspending jihad.’¹⁰¹

This ideology that killing fellow Muslims was more important than ‘suspending jihad’ suggests that al-Zarqawi’s violence was rationale, from his perspective. However, the terrorist violence in Iraq against Shia civilians and non-combatants cannot be labelled a defensive jihad – it fails the criteria of being a ‘defensive struggle … against non-Muslim … enemies in uniform … over territory’ (Hegghammer, 2010b: 7). What appears more accurate is that the tactic of terrorist violence, although part of the defensive jihad, was more representative of a civil war and is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. It is instructive that despite the ideology being logical and rationale to al-Zarqawi, Ayman al-Zawahiri (al-Qaeda’s deputy leader in 2005) wrote to him in July 2005, concerned that:

“many of your Muslim admirers amongst the common folk are wondering about your attacks on the Shia’ and ask ‘why kill ordinary Shia considering that they are forgiven because of their ignorance?’ And what loss will befall us if we did not attack the Shia?” (al-Zawahiri, 2005).

It wasn’t only Ayman al-Zawahiri who was concerned, indeed al-Zarqawi’s former mentor Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, also expressed his concerns about al-Zarqawi’s ‘widespread use of suicide bombings, indiscriminate violence and *takfir* of entire groups of people because it is wrong to do so and hurts the image of Islam’ (Wagemakers, 2012: 47).

However, al-Zarqawi issued a rebuttal in June 2005 declaring ‘our jihad in Iraq is the same as in Afghanistan, Kashmir, Chechnya, and Bosnia – an honorable jihad’ (Hafez, 2009: 79).

¹⁰⁰ The Arabic word *daroorah* means ‘necessity’ (Wehr, 1980: 538).

¹⁰¹ Al-Zarqawi (2005). *The Return of Ibn Al-'Alqami's Grandchildren*.

He was inferring that the violence in Iraq was a defensive jihad against occupying foreign forces – except that by 2005 it had morphed from defensive jihad to Islamist terrorism, and the targeting was largely against fellow Muslims, generally Shia, and predominantly civilians. Al-Zarqawi (2004a) also issued a statement blurring the distinction between martyrdom and suicide, when he declared:

‘the [Islamic] nation cannot live without the aroma of martyrdom and the perfume of fragrant blood spilled on behalf of God, and that people cannot awaken from their stupor unless talk of martyrdom and martyrs fills their days and nights.’

Perhaps this conceptual merging of martyrdom (*fee sabeel Allah*) and suicide, however convoluted, also contributes to the dialectic between defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism. Despite the lack of theological support for both Islamist terrorism and suicide attacks, the rhetoric of al-Zarqawi found fertile ground in the Arab world (and beyond), leading to thousands of Arab foreign fighters going to Iraq (Schmid, 2015: 3; Malet, 2015: 10). It is instructive that this fertile ground appeared to be sown with al-Zarqawi’s largely undisputed charismatic authority amongst the Arab foreign fighters in Iraq (Brisard and Martinez, 2005: 36; Gerges, 2011: 112; Bunzel, 2015: 13; Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 8).

Lastly, al-Zarqawi was a proponent for establishing an Islamic state within Iraq, with longer term ambitions to expand beyond Iraq’s borders (Bunzel, 2015: 15). The establishment of an Islamic state was also an aspiration of al-Qaeda’s leadership, thus from October 2004 (the forming of al-Qaeda in Iraq - AQI), there was a convergence of ideology. It appears that political Islam in Iraq went through a series of inflection points, and situated itself on the threshold of ‘new’ ideological concepts: the ‘acceptability’ of suicide bombings (against Muslim civilians and non-combatants), the specific targeting of Shia Muslims, and the establishment of an Islamic state within Iraq. The notion of *takfir* within political Islam, as understood by Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Faraj against domestic Arab Sunni regimes, was now imported into Iraq and operationalised by al-Zarqawi within a specific sectarian context. However al-Zarqawi was killed in June 2006, being succeeded by Abu Ayoob al-Misri (for three months), followed by Abu Omar al-

Baghdadi, who renamed AQI (in October 2006) the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). He too was subsequently killed in 2010, and was succeeded by a man called Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (b.1971), an individual known to be influential and a charismatic leader (Gerges, 2016: 136; Beevor, 2016: 17).

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

A year after taking over the ISI, and once the US withdrawal from Iraq was complete in December 2011, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed:

‘I direct my call to all the Muslim youth and men all over the world, and call them to make *hijrah* [migration] to us to consolidate the pillars of the State of Islam and perform jihad against the *raafidi* – the Shia’ (al-Baghdadi, 2012).

Intent on reinvigorating Arab foreign fighter participation in a so called defensive jihad in Iraq (and later in Syria), his core tenets were (1) the permissibility of *takfir* against an identifiable enemy – both Shia and Sunni Muslims; (2) the need to (re)establish an Islamic state where *Sharia* law would be dominant; and (3) the individual religious obligation (*fard ayn*) to participate in defensive jihad.

First, the permissibility of *takfir* against an identifiable enemy was situated at both the micro and macro levels. At the micro level (in Iraq), al-Baghdadi (2012) specifically identified the plight of Muslim prisoners, and called for the ‘liquidation of their butchers from the judges and interrogators, to their henchmen and their guards’ and that these individuals be ‘at the head of the targeting list’ (al-Baghdadi, 2012). As these individuals were Iraqi government employees, they were most likely to be Shia Muslims, demonstrating his sectarian hatred and also acceptance of *takfir*. Targeting at the global macro level, al-Baghdadi (2014b) also turned his attention to Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Egypt. For Saudi Arabia, his suggested targeting priorities included: ‘deal with the *raafidi*

(Shia) first ... then *al-Salool*¹⁰² (Saudi regime) and their soldiers, before the Crusaders and their bases.' For Yemen, he advised his supporters to 'be harsh on the Houthi *raafidi* for they are *kuffar* apostates. Fight them and overcome them.' For Egypt, he reminded his audience of 'the obligation of jihad against the *tawagheet* of Egypt.' Finally, he called on his global followers to 'erupt volcanoes of jihad everywhere. Light the earth with fire upon on the *tawagheet*, their soldiers and their supporters' (al-Baghdadi, 2014b). Although much of al-Baghdadi's targeting is aimed at Shia Muslims, more globally, his 'need for fratricidal warfare – or *fitna* between and among Sunni Muslims – remain[s] a hallmark of al-Baghdadi's leadership' (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 119-120).

Second, al-Baghdadi's resurrection of a *khilaafah* (caliphate) that would impose *Sharia* law, whilst in line with al-Banna (1948c), differed from that sought by Qutb and Faraj, who had only imagined an Egyptian Islamic nation. In June 2014 during the fasting month of Ramadan, al-Baghdadi appeared in a mosque in Mosul to announce the establishment of the *khilaafah*, and declared himself to be the *khaleefah* (caliph). In his *khutbah* (sermon) he preached about the 'duty to establish an Islamic State' and the need for defensive jihad to fight 'the enemies of Allah' (al-Baghdadi, 2014a). Al-Baghdadi saw the fasting month of Ramadan as the appropriate time to establish the *khilaafah* in that he considered it the 'month wherein the marketplace of *jihad* is set up [to attain] reward, dignity, loftiness and honour' (al-Baghdadi, 2014a).

The establishment of a *khilaafah* is not however without controversy. First, renowned Islamic scholar Muhammad Nassir al-Albani explained in a lecture in 1977 that all 'Muslims agree on the need to establish an Islamic state, but they differ on the method to be employed to attain that goal' (Lacroix, 2009: 69) – violent or non-violent. Second, there is a view that 'neither the Book of God (the Qur'an) nor the Hadith (Traditions of the Prophet) unequivocally refers to the concept of the Caliphate' (Haddad, 1993: 26). Although not

¹⁰² The term *al-Salool* is an interesting theological label, referring to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, when Abdullah bin Ubayy bin Salool, a chief from the tribes in Medina, converted to Islam. He was never fully accepted as a Muslim due to his continual disagreements with the Prophet Muhammad, and was thus considered a polytheist (*mushrikoon*). The term *al-Salool* used to represent the Saudi regime, is thus derogatory in nature believing them to be polytheists.

getting into the theological debate, research shows there are actually 47 references to a ‘caliphate’ in *Hadith Bukhari*. Finally, as noted in Chapter 1, it is instructive that the Grand *Mufti* of Egypt (Allam, 2014) and 125 notable Islamic scholars declared in an open letter to the leader of the Islamic State (Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi), that he had ‘misinterpreted Islam into a religion of harshness, brutality, torture and murder.’ These scholars also alluded to the fact that he is creating *fitna*¹⁰³ within the Arab world – the opposite of an all-encompassing Islamic caliphate.

Al-Baghdadi’s third core tenet is the individual religious obligation (*fard ayn*) to participate in defensive jihad. In November 2014, al-Baghdadi (2014b) declared that jihad was ‘the best of deeds and the peak of Islam’ and that is ‘obligatory upon each individual’ (*fard ayn*). Whilst this declaration appears to chime with that of Abdullah Azzam, in fact the contexts are entirely different: fighting a non-Muslim (Soviet) invasion of Muslim land (Afghanistan), compared to fighting the elected (broadly defined) Arab regimes of Iraq and Syria. Perhaps the context defines the method of resistance, defensive jihad or Islamist terrorism, however he appeared vague in his support for suicide attacks, and whilst appearing to conflate the two, he declared in the imperative: ‘love martyrdom for the sake of Allah and wish for it, but you have to work for and seek victory, and not specifically martyrdom’ (al-Baghdadi, 2012). This rather vague declaration differs greatly from al-Zarqawi, and as will be demonstrated in Chapter 6, the majority of ISIS attacks that result(ed) in the death of the attacker(s), were/are not aimed at civilians, but at Syrian regime forces or other armed groups.

The View of Political Islam in the Arab World

The Sunni Arab world view of the key ideological tenets of political Islam is possibly best captured by gauging the view ‘amongst the common folk’ (al-Zawahiri, 2005), in order to gauge whether involvement in defensive jihad or Islamist terrorism has grassroots support in Sunni Muslim-majority countries in the Arab world. After all, it was ‘the common folk’ in the Arab world who were ‘wondering about [the] attacks on the Shia’ in Iraq (al-

¹⁰³ As noted earlier, *fitna* includes ‘sedition, riot, discord, dissension, civil strife (Wehr, 1980: 696).

Zawahiri, 2005). Also, as Horgan (2005: 33) noted, one ‘can never separate terrorism from society because it is embedded in it.’ Therefore, based on available data, the Sunni Arab attitudes towards defensive jihad, suicide bombing, *Sharia* law (within an Islamic state), and the so called Islamic State, are examined using polls and surveys.

Support for defensive jihad against the al-Assad regime in Syria was strong across the Arab world. An *Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development* (2011) poll¹⁰⁴ found that 86 percent of Arabs supported ‘the rebels seeking government change’ in Syria. This is arguably not a surprise, defensive jihad against foreign or domestic oppressors appears to resonate widely across the Arab world, although supporting the notion of activism (in this case defensive jihad) may not necessarily translate to actual involvement.

According to the Pew Research Center, support for terrorism in the Arab world, in particular suicide bombings, varied between countries. In their first survey, Pew (2013a: 70) found that 40 percent of Palestinians, 29 percent of Egyptians, 15 percent of Jordanians, 12 percent of Tunisians, and seven percent of Iraqis say that ‘attacks against civilians in defence of Islam can often/sometimes be justified.’ In their second survey, Pew (2013b: 3) confirmed their earlier results and also found that 26 percent of Lebanese Sunni Muslims believed that ‘suicide bombings can often/sometimes be justified.’ Of particular interest is the contradiction of Tunisia, where Pew (2013b) found that 77 percent of Tunisians believed ‘that suicide bombing and other acts of violence that target civilians can *never* be justified in the name of Islam.’ However, the data obtained for this thesis finds that Tunisians are second only to Saudis in prosecuting suicide attacks in Syria against civilians, and secondary sources also show that ‘around 40 percent of foreign jihadists in Syria hold Tunisian nationality’ (Hamedi, 2013). This apparent discrepancy is explained by Horgan (2009: 148) who suggested that while “an individual community that is ‘represented’ by a terrorist movement may condemn and reject an atrocity that is conducted in its name, members of that community may still remain *broadly* supportive of the terrorist group.”

¹⁰⁴ Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey conducted under the University of Maryland. It involved 3000 Arabs from Egypt, the UAE, Morocco, Jordan, and Lebanon.

Support for the ‘strict application of *Sharia* law in every Islamic country’ appeared also to resonate strongly among certain Arab countries. A World Public Opinion (2009: 29) report found that 81 percent of Egyptians and 76 percent of Moroccans desired a ‘strict application of *Sharia* law.’ In a later poll, Pew (2013a: 15) found 91 percent of Iraqis, 89 percent of Palestinians, 83 percent of Moroccans, 71 percent of Jordanians, 56 percent of Tunisians, and 29 percent of Lebanese, supported ‘making *Sharia* the official law in their country.’ The reasons behind these strong showings are beyond the scope of the thesis, but they do demonstrate that many countries in the Arab world support one of the key tenets of political Islam – the implementation of *Sharia* law.

As the implementation of *Sharia* law underpins much of the ideology of the Islamic State, a poll examining support for the organisation would be instructive. One particular example was an Al-Jazeera (2015a) poll conducted in May 2015. The results showed that 81 percent of 56,881 Arab respondents ‘considered the progress of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria good for the region/area.’ This result contrasted greatly with the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (2015) that found that ‘a clear majority of 85 percent of the Arab public¹⁰⁵ expressed an overall negative attitude towards ISIL’ (p. 19), while only 11 percent of Arabs have a positive view’ (p. 22). In another survey, David Pollack (2015) found that “around 95 percent - of key Arab publics¹⁰⁶ have a negative view of ISIS. A mere 2 percent to 4 percent of people in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, or Kuwait had even a ‘fairly positive’ view of that organization today.” Again this indicates a potential contradiction within the Arab world, in that many surveyed Arab populations demonstrated broad support for *Sharia* law (a key Islamic State platform), yet near universal rejection of the Islamic State (as a group). Although *Sharia* law and the Islamic State are not one and the same, it still perhaps represents a disconnect or lack of synergy within the Arab world. This potential contradiction was also acknowledged by D. Pollack (2015), who whilst noting that 95 percent of key Arab publics have a negative view of ISIS, he also found that 80 percent of

¹⁰⁵ According to the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (2015: 19), this ‘majority was visible in the results from all of the surveyed countries and population groups, and followed this order of precedence: Lebanon, Iraq, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, amongst Syrian refugees, Jordan and Palestine (in that order).’ Each country had 600 respondents.

¹⁰⁶ Each country had 1000 respondents.

the same respondents thought it would *not* (author's emphasis) be 'a good idea to interpret Islam in a more moderate, tolerant, or modern way.' Chapter 7 returns to this contradiction, in an effort to understand the Islamist philosophies of both Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists.

Summary

This chapter has attempted to contextualise the research question by illuminating the Arab world through the prism of political Islam. By examining the evolution of the key ideological tenets of political Islam, it provides a deeper conceptual understanding of Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists. The key ideological tenets provide support to the theoretical (radicalisation) framework at the 'middle-range approach to analysis' by the way of ideas, and the political and religious context. The chapter identified the evolution of four critical ideological points of inflection within political Islam: the involvement in defensive jihad becoming an individual religious obligation for all Muslims (*fard ayn*); the permissibility of terrorist suicide bombings (against civilians and non-combatants); embracing the widespread tactic of *takfir* against Sunni and Shia Muslims; and the resurrection of a *khilaafah* (caliphate). It may be that analysis of the trajectory of these four points of inflection offers explanatory value as to why some Arab foreign fighters subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities.

The chapter also found a degree of universal normality towards the notion of defensive jihad and martyrdom (*fee sabeel Allah*) within the Arab world, whilst involvement in Islamist terrorism that includes suicide attacks had less support. It also identified an apparent disconnect within Arab world opinion – vis-à-vis the reality in Syria (for example, Tunisian suicide bombers), and also concerning support for a less moderate interpretation of Islam (yet rejection of the Islamic State's interpretation). It perhaps begs the question whether Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists do actually represent Arab society. These conundrums are all teased out during analysis of the three case study defensive jihads. The next chapter attempts to explain why some veteran Arab foreign fighters from 1980s Afghanistan, subsequently became involved (physically or ideologically) in Islamist

terrorism, including the 1993 WTC attack, 1995 Riyadh attack, the 1998 East Africa attacks, the 2000 USS *Cole* attack, and the 9/11 attacks.

Chapter 4: Veteran Afghan Arabs and their Involvement in Islamist Terrorism

Introduction

This chapter is the first of three case studies examining why and how some Arab foreign fighters subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. It examines those who participated in the defensive jihad in 1980s Afghanistan by leveraging a dataset of 369 Afghan Arabs (representing as a minimum, 18 percent of the total Afghan Arab cohort),¹⁰⁷ the radicalisation framework presented in Chapter 2, and the language of political Islam outlined in Chapter 3. Using these tools, the chapter intends to demonstrate how situational circumstances at both the individual and group level were central to the veteran Afghan Arabs' post-jihad behaviour.¹⁰⁸ The label 'Afghan Arabs' (also known as 'Arab-Afghans')¹⁰⁹ is defined in this thesis in time and space as an Arab male, predominantly from the Arab world,¹¹⁰ who became involved in the defensive jihad in Afghanistan starting from December 1979 (the Soviet invasion) until April 1992, when 'the first Afghan jihad really came to a close' (Hegghammer, 2010b: 46).¹¹¹ This chapter situates itself within the defensive jihad in 1980s Afghanistan and the subsequent Islamist terrorist attacks, including the 1993 WTC attack, 1995 Riyadh attack, the 1998 East Africa attacks, the 2000 USS *Cole* attack, and the 9/11 attacks. It is the nexus between veteran Afghan Arabs and their subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorism that constitutes the hub of this chapter.

The key finding in the chapter is that the vast majority of Afghan Arabs (who had no known pre-existing terrorist links) identified in the thesis dataset, were not radicalised prior

¹⁰⁷ Based on the figures of Malet (2015: 10) of between 500 - 2,000 Afghan Arabs (1979-1989).

¹⁰⁸ This thesis uses the label 'post-jihad behaviour' in preference to 'post-return behaviour' (Hafez, 2012a), to recognise that many surviving veteran Afghan Arabs could not return due to dictatorial Arab regime restrictions. This issue of reintegration is covered in detail later in the chapter.

¹⁰⁹ Scholars who use the label 'Arab-Afghans' include Lia (2008b) and Hamid and Farrall (2015).

¹¹⁰ Although the majority of the Afghan Arabs came from the Arab world, the thesis dataset includes 17 percent (62) who were Arab expatriates living in a country other than their country of birth.

¹¹¹ This also conforms to the definition of Afghan Arabs used by Muhammad Hafez (2009: 74) in that it 'refers to Arabs who volunteered to aid the struggle of the Afghan Mujahidin against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979–1989) and the subsequent toppling of the communist regime of Muhammad Najibullah (1989–1992)'.

to participating in defensive jihad in Afghanistan, yet many eventually became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities, including the six Islamist terrorist attacks mentioned earlier.¹¹² The primary finding suggests that subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorist related activities were underpinned by situational factors experienced by the Afghan Arabs during the defensive jihad, including real and perceived grievances (against the near and far enemy); terrorist training and indoctrination; the influence of those with pre-existing terrorist links; and finally comradeship ties developed in the mountains of Afghanistan, and in the markets of Peshawar (Pakistan).

The chapter is broken down into two sections. The first analyses the broad ‘setting events’ (Taylor and Horgan, 2006: 592)¹¹³ - education, age, and geographic origin - by using the thesis data on 369 Afghan Arabs, in order to demonstrate their ordinariness and contextualise their initial involvement in defensive jihad. The second part, and core of the chapter, examines the situational circumstances that led some veteran Afghan Arabs to become involved in Islamist terrorist related activities, while others remained involved in a defensive jihad (for example in Bosnia) or reintegrated back into Arab world society. This allows for some form of comparative analysis, particularly in trying to explain why some chose not to subsequently engage in Islamist terrorism, despite being exposed to the same situational circumstances.

Analysis of the Data

Overview

The 1980s defensive jihad in Afghanistan has been covered by many scholars including but not limited to al-Zayyat (2004), Gerges (2005), Rana and Bukhari (2007), Hafez (2009), Tawil (2010), Hegghammer (2010b), Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn (2012), and Hamid

¹¹² It is instructive that Ahmed, Comerford, and El-Badaway (2016: 15) also found ‘that the internationalisation of Afghanistan’s conflict in the 1980s was the single most important event in shaping global jihadism up until the rise of ISIS.’

¹¹³ According to Taylor and Horgan (2006: 592) whilst setting events “cannot be said in any meaningful way to ‘cause’ or result in choices of a particular set of actions ... they clearly contribute to the behavioural choices of an individual, and may provide important direction and motivation.”

and Farrall (2015). Broadly speaking, the Afghan Arabs travelled to Peshawar (in Pakistan on the border with Afghanistan) and became involved in the defensive jihad either as combatants having crossed the border (Hamid and Farrall, 2015) into Afghanistan, or in a humanitarian capacity (Lia, 2008b: 78; Hafez, 2009: 75) in Pakistan or Afghanistan. From the thesis dataset, they were well represented educationally and career wise: 52 (14 percent) of the 369 Afghan Arabs had a university education; there were nine medical doctors and six engineers, with ten of them having gained their degrees in the US – a finding that echoes with previous studies.¹¹⁴ Some Afghan Arabs were married; many had religious credentials; some joined with family members and/or friends; while many lived as expatriates (and discussed later). Age wise, based on the available data of 102 Afghan Arabs, they varied between 11 and 65 years of age,¹¹⁵ with 51 percent of them under 22-years-old. The average age was 23 and the median was 24-years-old. This finding chimes well with the scholarly literature particularly as it ‘is already well established in other spheres that young males are associated with a multitude of dangerous and high-risk activities’ (Silke, 2008: 105); and broadly matches the finding by Sageman (2004: 92) whose ‘Core Arab cluster’¹¹⁶ average age was 23.75 years.

The overview presented suggests that those Afghan Arabs (with no known prior terrorist links) were ordinary Arab men, in the sense of being ‘regular, normal, customary, usual’¹¹⁷ individuals, lacking the notions of radicalisation or extremism. They appeared to be broadly representative of their societies, of mixed social economic and educational levels, and a spectrum of ages. In the context of the Arab world, Bayat (2010: ix) defines ‘ordinary people’ as ‘the globalizing youth and other urban grass roots.’ The label ‘ordinary’ when referring to ‘ordinary people’ and ‘ordinary men’ has academic ballast, being used effectively by scholars such as F. E. Katz (1993) and Browning (1998), respectively. This

¹¹⁴ According to Li (2011: 15), the ‘Arabs travelled to Pakistan and Afghanistan to work as engineers, doctors, journalists, teachers, preachers, and fighters.’

¹¹⁵ Algerian national Adil Hadi al-Jaziri Hamlili was involved from the age of 11, going to Afghanistan in 1986 with his father, brother and second cousin (JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment. Adil Hadi al-Jaziri Hamlili. 8 July 2008). The oldest Afghan Arab was an Egyptian national Shaykh Abdul Aziz Ali (aka Abu Osama al-Misri) ‘who went to Afghanistan during the late 1980s, even though by then he was sixty-five’ (Lia, 2008b: 42).

¹¹⁶ The Core Arab cluster consists of individuals from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen and Kuwait (Sageman, 2004: 70).

¹¹⁷ The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1995: 960).

picture of ordinariness (the lack of radicalisation and/or extremism) of the Afghan Arab on mobilisation is important, due to the fact that subsequently, some became involved in Islamist terrorist acts, and confirms the suggestion that ‘plain folk … ordinary people … have contributed to extraordinary evil’ (F. E. Katz, 1993: 1-10).

The Afghan Arab mobilisation¹¹⁸ was not an instantaneous reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Drawing on the accounts of 148 Afghan Arabs on whom data are available, mobilisation was a gradual process that only really accelerated in the late-1980s, as represented in Figure 4.1.

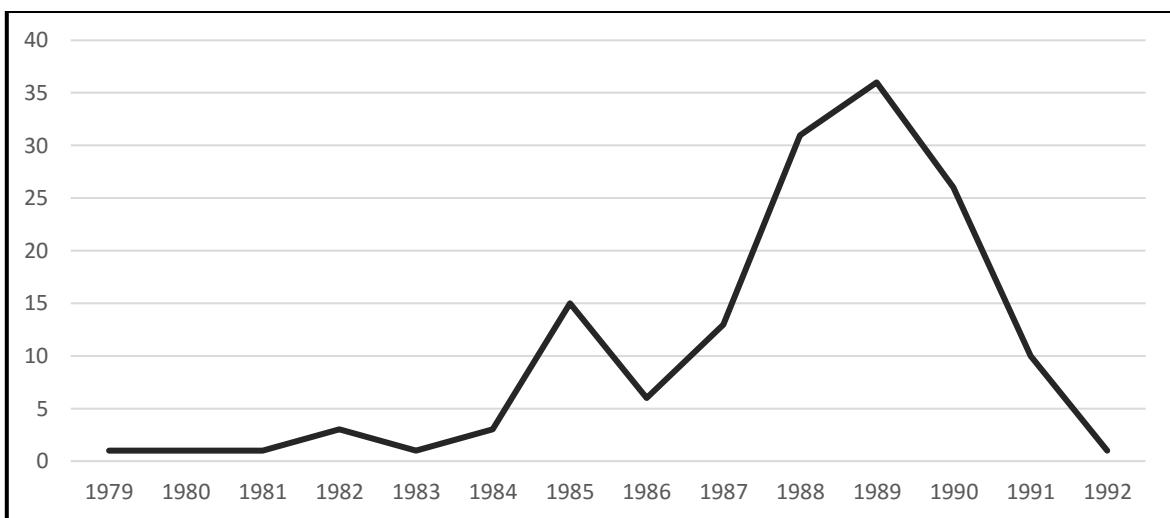


Figure 4.1: Afghan Arab Years of Mobilisation (n=148)

Figure 4.1 supports the ‘historical evidence … which strongly suggests [that] only a few tens of fighters made it to Afghanistan before 1984 … and did not go to Afghanistan in significant numbers until the mid-late 1980s’ (Hegghammer, 2010b: 38); and that ‘the number of Arab militants decreased after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan’ (Rana and Bukhari, 2007: 11). In effect Figure 4.1 resonates with history and the scholarly literature, thus adding an additional degree of validity to the Afghan Arab dataset compiled for this thesis.

¹¹⁸ The term ‘mobilisation’ is used in the context of ‘organising for service or action (especially troops in time of war)’ (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1995: 874). The term is used by scholars including Gerges (2005), Sageman (2008: 23), Hegghammer (2009c, 2010b), and Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn (2012).

Geographic Origin

The breakdown of the geographic origin (in the sense of being born in) of the 369 Afghan Arabs from the dataset is presented in Figure 4.2.

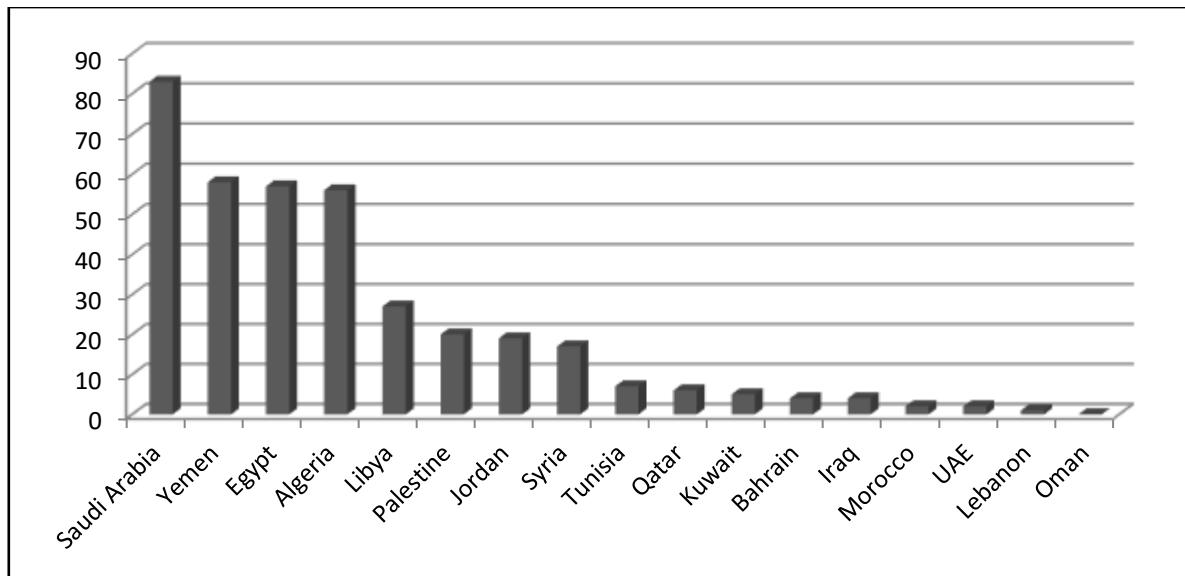


Figure 4.2: Afghan Arab Geographic Origin (n=369)

The dataset confirms the major contribution of countries like Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Egypt. A brief analysis of these geographic origins offers an insight into the contextual societal level (or structural) circumstances that may have promoted involvement (or not) in the defensive jihad in Afghanistan. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the greatest driver for the mobilisation was regime and religious support. Former Arab foreign fighter and later Osama bin Laden's bodyguard, Nassir al-Bahri, remembered that during the Afghan war 'all Saudi clerics and shaykhs were urging jihad and collecting contributions for jihad' (al-Bahri, 2005c: 3). Additionally, allegedly on one occasion, 'Saudi Prince Salman bin Abdul Aziz paid seventy percent of Ali Hamza al-Bahlul's travel expenses to Afghanistan.'¹¹⁹ The case of Yemen is less obvious. During the 1980s they were split as a country, one half being the communist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), and the other the Yemen Arab Republic (aka North Yemen). From the limited data available, it appears the

¹¹⁹ JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment. Ali Hamza al-Bahlul. 15 November 2007, pp. 2-3.

majority of Yemeni Afghan Arabs came from the Yemen Arab Republic (Ibb, Marib, Sanaa, Khirash, and Hudaydah), which had a sectarian complication, in that the ‘Sunni Shafi’is of southern North Yemen … resented the rule of the Shia Zaidis to the north’ (M. N. Katz, 1986: 8). The data suggest that the majority originated from within the ‘Sunni Shafi’is of southern North Yemen.’ Finally, 21 percent (12) of the Yemeni Afghan Arab cohort (58) were actually expatriates, the majority living and working in Saudi Arabia, which being away from family roots and living in a country that was promoting the narrative of defensive jihad in Afghanistan, may have contributed to their mobilisation.

Finally, the substantial involvement of Egyptian Afghan Arabs can be broadly explained by two push factors¹²⁰ orchestrated by the Egyptian regime. First, after the 1981 assassination of President Muhammad Anwar as-Sadat, the Egyptian regime crackdown on Islamist groups led many individuals to flee to Afghanistan (Sageman, 2004: 32; Kepel 2008: 148). Second, many Egyptian Islamists were ‘encouraged by the regime to join the Afghan jihad’ (Kepel, 2008: 279), as ‘a convenient way of disposing of their home-grown jihadis’ (Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012: 51), in order to ‘divert jihad outside their own bloody borders’ (Gerges, 2005: 62). As will be demonstrated later, the Egyptian Afghan Arabs with known pre-existing terrorist links, particularly to Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) and the Egyptian Islamic Group (EIG), greatly influenced those Afghan Arabs who had no such prior affiliations.

Afghan Arab Motivations and Circumstances

Introduction

According to Hafez (2009: 75), the motivations for involvement in defensive jihad of the Afghan Arabs were ‘seeking religious fulfilment, employment opportunities, adventure, safe haven, and military training.’ Using the thesis dataset, the three main documented situational circumstances identified were a religious (Islamic) influence (98), expatriate

¹²⁰ As noted in Chapter 2, ‘push’ factors include grievances and adverse socio-political conditions (Borum, 2011b: 56).

status (65), and prior terrorist links (51). It must be noted that some individuals were influenced by more than one motivation and/or circumstance. Diagrammatically this is represented in Figure 4.3.

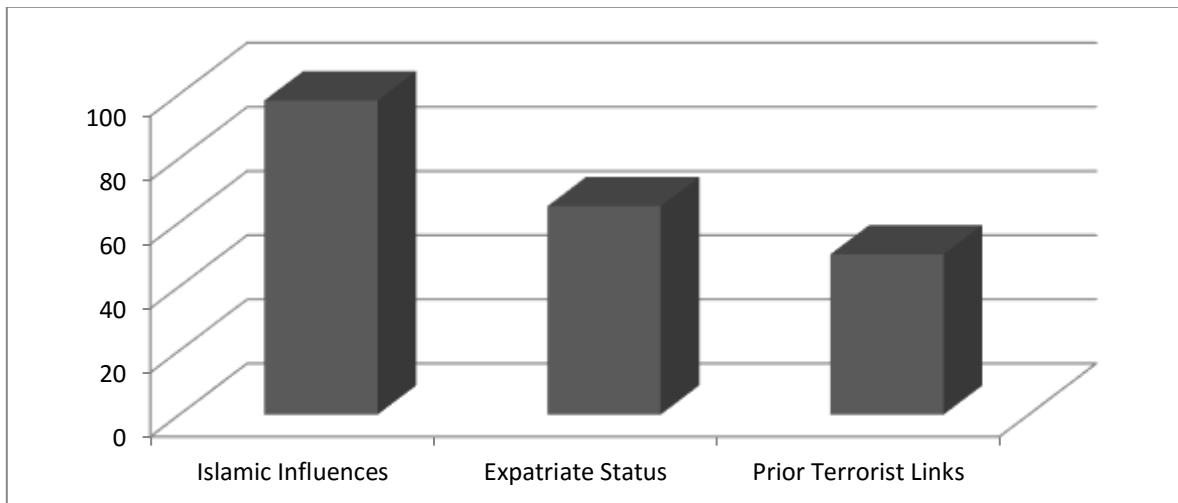


Figure 4.3: Afghan Arab Situational Circumstances (n=138)

It is reassuring to note some corroboration between the thesis findings and those identified by Hafez (2009). For example, ‘Islamic influences’ speaks to Hafez’s ‘seeking religious fulfilment,’ and ‘prior terrorist links’ speak to Hafez’s ‘safe haven’ (having been ‘pushed’ by a regime’s security apparatus for alleged involvement in Islamist activism). The three circumstances identified by this study that appeared to shape the Afghan Arab cohort’s initial involvement in defensive jihad in 1980s Afghanistan are briefly discussed below with an eye on their wider influence and applicability vis-à-vis their subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorism.

Islamic Influences

Perhaps the greatest influence that motivated the mobilisation of the Afghan Arabs was the notion of piety and the need to assist oppressed fellow Muslims in Afghanistan. The data are compelling: 71 percent (98) of the 138 Arab foreign fighters on whom information was documented, had been influenced by a combination of an ideologue, a religious *fatwa*, attendance at a mosque, or piety as a result of a formal Islamic education. As Hegghammer (2007: 4) observed, ‘clerics inspired many recruits.’ The Yemeni Arab foreign fighter and

later Bin Laden's bodyguard, Nassir al-Bahri (2005a), admitted to being 'influenced by the sermons delivered by some speakers in the mosques in Jeddah about jihad in Afghanistan,' adding that 'the call to jihad in the Friday sermons, the tape cassettes, the magazines, and other media ... influenced him greatly.' According to Hegghammer (2010b: 39), the 'single most important individual behind the mobilisation of Arab volunteers for Afghanistan' was Abdullah Azzam. Again, al-Bahri (2013: 18) recalled:

'I carried Abdullah Azzam's books and cassettes around with me. In them he talked about Paradise, the glory of jihad and what lies beyond death. His talks described the mysterious powers of the mujahid, who feels no pain as he dies a martyr from his injuries.'

Abdullah Azzam's interpretation of defensive jihad under the rubric of political Islam was covered in Chapter 3. What was central to his narrative was that he promoted both defensive jihad and martyrdom 'in the cause of God' (*fee sabeel Allah*), but at no time did he support a global or religious nationalist terrorist agenda (Gerges, 2005: 135; Hegghammer 2010b: 69; Lia, 2008b: 91; Stenersen, 2011: 184; Hamid and Farrall, 2015). His narrative, as discussed in Chapter 3, was that 'if a piece of Muslim land the size of a hand span is infringed upon, then jihad becomes obligatory (*fard ayn*) on every Muslim' (A.Y. Azzam, 1983). Additionally, he highlighted the injustices being inflicted upon Afghan co-religionists, in particular that 'Afghan children are being slaughtered, women are being raped, the innocent are killed and their corpses scattered' (A.Y. Azzam, 1983). Azzam's narrative raises three points. First, the injustices inflicted upon the Afghan people were 'important drivers of individual decisions to become involved in militant activism' (Silke, 2008: 114). Second, from a similar angle, the notion of 'identifying with co-religionists' is widely considered 'a risk factor' (Horgan, 2009: 12) for involvement in militant activism (including Islamist terrorism or defensive jihad). Third, as noted in Chapter 3, Azzam's narrative resonated with aspiring Afghan Arabs due to his undisputed charismatic authority at that time (Bergen, 2002: 54; McGregor, 2003; Gerges, 2005: 134; Ingram, 2013: 152).

Expatriate Status

Being an Arab expatriate living, studying, or working in a country away from their home, family, friends, and culture, appears in some cases to have influenced their decision to become Afghan Arabs. Out of the 369 biographies nearly 18 percent (65) had been Arab expatriates. Their biographies demonstrate the context of the 1980s: many Palestinians had immigrated to Jordan (due to the Palestinian Israeli conflict); many Algerians and Egyptians had resettled in the West (claiming political asylum); many Yemenis had resettled in Saudi Arabia (to seek employment as noted earlier); and finally, 15 had been studying in Western academic institutions. Examples of these circumstances include Algerian national Khalid Mustafa (Rana and Bukhari, 2007: 119), and Syrian national Abu Anas (Rana and Bukhari, 2007: 43) who both had lived in the West but felt isolated and were drawn to the defensive jihad in Afghanistan.

The thesis dataset shows that many were largely ‘deracinated Arab youth, cut off from their families, feeling the sting of discrimination, and looking for some colourful purpose to orient their drifting lives’ (Dalacoura, 2011: 56). This is confirmed by Silke (2008: 112), who noted that:

‘Research has shown that most members … joined the jihad while they were living in a foreign country or when they were otherwise isolated from older friends and family. Often these individuals were expatriates – students, workers, refugees – living away from home and family.’

Finally, although pertaining to Islamist terrorists, Sageman (2004: 92) also identified in his study that ‘70 percent joined in a country where they had not grown up. They were expatriates … away from home and family.’ The impact on the individual of such an existence can lead to feelings of ‘social isolation’ and ‘relative deprivation’ which, according to Sageman (2004: 95), ‘is probably a necessary condition’ for involvement in Islamist terrorism. Perhaps a more nuanced account would suggest that expatriate status

may contribute to expatriate involvement in Islamist activities, violent and non-violent, where violent activities would include both defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism.

Known Prior Terrorist Links

The presence of Afghan Arabs with known prior terrorist links in the Afghan jihad exposes the dichotomy between defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism. Although in percentage terms (drawn from the thesis dataset) the number was small (14 percent), ideologically those Afghan Arabs with pre-existing terrorist links were more focussed on religious nationalist terrorism than on defensive jihad, and this is well established in the literature (Gerges, 2005: 57; Kepel, 2008: 148; Hafez, 2009: 78). As noted earlier, many Egyptian Afghan Arabs had been ‘pushed’ from Egypt, in effect ‘deflecting the problem onto others’ (Orton, 2016). The notion of Afghan Arabs with pre-existing terrorist links implicitly assumes that they had already been radicalised in their home countries, prior to their arrival in Afghanistan. They had already experienced the process of ‘initially becoming engaged and/or involved in doing terrorism’ (Horgan, 2005: 81), potentially to ‘the point of engaging in terrorist events’ (Horgan, 2005: 137). Although Sageman (2004: 71) argued that Egyptian Afghan Arabs ‘were already dedicated terrorists before coming to Afghanistan,’ a more empirically based finding reveals that actually less than half (42 percent) of Egyptian Afghan Arabs (extracted from the thesis dataset) were either in EIJ (28 percent) or EIG (14 percent). What is instructive, and will be demonstrated later, is that Afghan Arabs with pre-existing terrorist links, despite their modest size, were to have a disproportionate influence over those Afghan Arabs without such links.

The Defensive Jihad in 1980s Afghanistan

Introduction

Although there is no definitive pattern (outside those exhibited in Figure 4.3) as to why certain individuals became involved in the 1980s Afghan jihad, having become involved, it is clear that their futures included, but were not limited to, later involvement in Islamist

terrorism; continued involvement in defensive jihad; reintegration back into society; or death (or some combination therein). The situational circumstances of the 1980s Afghan jihad need illuminating in order to understand the Afghan Arabs' subsequent post-jihad behaviour. Were the Afghan Arabs already radicalised prior to arriving in Afghanistan? Was the Afghan jihad actually Islamist terrorism where civilians and non-combatants were targeted? Was martyrdom in the Afghan jihad actually a synonym for suicide attacks? If the answer to these questions is in the affirmative, then it would broadly undermine the research question – however the evidence suggests otherwise. It is instructive therefore to briefly examine the defensive jihad in 1980s Afghanistan, through the eyes of those who were actually there, in order to answer the above questions.

To do this, the narratives of six particular Afghan Arabs are used: Abdullah Anas is an Algerian who 'was one of the most high-ranking Arab fighters in Afghanistan' (Lia 2008: 70); Mustafa Hamid¹²¹ is an Egyptian, who 'was among the first Arabs to join the jihad against the Soviets' (Hamid and Farrall, 2015); Musa al-Qarni is a Saudi intellectual and former Afghan Arab 'who once led the incitement to jihad in Saudi Arabia and travelled to Afghanistan in the early days of jihad against the Russians' (al-Hayat, 2006); Tameem al-Adnani was a Palestinian and the Director of the Afghan *Mujahideen* Services Office;¹²² and Noman Benotman¹²³ is a Libyan veteran of the Afghan jihad and former member of the *Shura* Committee of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) (Abedin, 2005). Finally, Abu Zubaydah was a Palestinian expatriate living in Saudi Arabia who maintained a personal diary of his experience as an Afghan Arab¹²⁴ - an account that does not suffer from *post-hoc* rationalisation. They were selected due to open source availability, the senior positions they held during the Afghan jihad, and the content of their narrative that appears broadly devoid of rhetoric. Whilst not necessarily being representative of the rank and file of the Afghan Arab cohort, their narratives are illuminating and instructive.

¹²¹ Mustafa Hamid is also known as Abu Walid al-Misri.

¹²² Tamim al-Adnani was Palestinian Afghan Arab who died in London in 1989, who was considered the 'second in command' to Abdullah Azzam (Hegghammer, 2008a: 95).

¹²³ Noman is a Muslim name meaning 'blood' (Rahman, 2010: 64), and Benotman is an unusual phonetic pronunciation of Ben Uthman, as shown in his Twitter account (@nbenotmen).

¹²⁴ Al Jazeera America released the diaries on 7 November 2013. See Zubaydah (1991 and 1992).

Defensive Jihad and Terrorism in 1980s Afghanistan

The ‘most pronounced reason’ for participating in defensive jihad in Afghanistan was that it ‘was a formally and religiously sanctioned war to defend the country and the land’ (Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012: 58). It was enshrined within the rhetoric of political Islam first espoused by Ibn Taymiyya, and reinforced by Abdullah Azzam (although not by Egyptians al-Banna and Faraj, who were focussed on fighting the Egyptian regime). According to Mustafa Hamid the majority ‘of those who fought in Afghanistan were youths who went thinking they were fighting for a fair and just cause’ (Hamid and Farrall, 2015: 313), indicating that they were not radicalised in the sense of being committed to an ‘extremist political or religious ideology’ (Horgan, 2009: 152). This may help explain why the Afghan Arabs (without known pre-existing terrorist links) eschewed terrorist related activities. Certainly, Tameem al-Adnani (1989) stressed that ‘hijacking planes … killing innocent people, women, and civilians … is not jihad.’ He argued that in 1980s Afghanistan, ‘jihad was fighting for the sake of Allah … fighting those who fight you … the men … the Russians.’ This was echoed by two further Afghan Arabs: Abdullah Anas (2014) argued that the Afghan Arabs were ‘not bloodthirsty people, the jihad was focused, and the philosophy of hatred and bloodshed did not exist;’ while Musa al-Qarni (2006a) noted that ‘many Arab young men who had joined the Afghan jihad … had only come to fight’ the Soviet invaders.

This suggestion that the majority (though not all) of Afghan Arabs were neither radicalised nor terrorists prior to their involvement in defensive jihad, is broadly (but not entirely) supported in the scholarly literature. According to O. Roy (1990: 233), the Afghan Arabs ‘did not come from the more radical milieu,’ whilst Rana and Bukhari (2007: 21) argued that they ‘came to Afghanistan just to fight jihad in support of their Afghan brethren.’ Despite this finding, academics such as Dalacoura (2011: 42) still paint the Afghan Arabs as ‘Islamic radicals fighting the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.’ Whilst perhaps misleading and unrepresentative, such labelling is consistent with the wider political and academic trend of ‘associating the noble religious concept of jihad with illegitimate violence’ (Heghammar, 2009a: 246).

There is however some evidence (Kepel, 2008; Williams, 2011), possibly anecdotally, that atrocities (akin to terrorism by non-state actors) did take place during the 1980s Afghan jihad. Maybe these atrocities were conducted by more extreme Afghan Arabs with pre-existing terrorist links, however in 1989 a group of Afghan Arabs did massacre some Afghan Communist troop prisoners near Jalalabad (Kepel, 2008: 148; Williams, 2011: 220). Perhaps therefore it was no coincidence that ‘it was after Jalalabad that the western media started to call [the Afghan Arabs] terrorists’ in Afghanistan (Hamid and Farrall, 2015: 168). Finally, veteran Afghan Arab Abdullah Anas (2015) while comparing the 1980s Afghan jihad with the atrocities perpetrated in the Syrian conflict, also argued that ‘the word jihad has been stolen, hijacked … jihad will continue until the hereafter, but the challenge is, in what context, what circumstances, who declared the jihad, with who, when?’

In order to gain a first-hand account of one Afghan Arab’s journey, it is instructive to draw upon the diary of Abu Zubaydah. A week after his arrival in Afghanistan (19 January 1991) he remarked that the ‘spiritual atmosphere here is good; youth and elderly have given their souls to Almighty God, they traded off life and everything in it for jihad … the idea of settling here is enticing me’ (Zubaydah, 1991: 36). Less than three months later (2 April 1991) his diary entry revealed: ‘I feel settled down due to being mentally determined to be engaged in jihad. Jihad is the future and my future is jihad’ (Zubaydah, 1991: 46). Finally, in the week 18-25 April 1991, he noted the conceptual development of defensive jihad within himself: ‘the idea of jihad for Allah’s cause in its meaning and perception is revealing itself to me and becoming more refined [and] now is an individual duty’ (Zubaydah, 1991: 55-56). It is perhaps instructive that Zubaydah’s ‘idea of jihad for Allah’s cause’ is more akin to the notion of martyrdom within the setting of a defensive jihad, rather than suicide attacks as part of an Islamist terrorist campaign.

Martyrdom and Suicide in 1980s Afghanistan

BBC reporter Saira Shah visited Afghanistan in 1986 and reported that ‘the Arab volunteers in Afghanistan … don’t mind strapping explosives to themselves to become martyrs’ (Shah as cited in Williams, 2011: 220); whilst Dalacoura (2011: 51) suggests that ‘not all Arab

Afghans ... were suicidal' - implying that some were. These caricatures maybe compelling but are not persuasive, and appear to misunderstand the nature of martyrdom in 1980s Afghanistan. As noted in Chapter 3, whilst the post 9/11 political landscape tends to perceive the Islamic concept of martyrdom as synonymous with suicide attacks, it is instructive that 'Afghan Arabs did not engage in suicide attacks per se' (Hafez, 2012a) – a suggestion that is supported by the biographies in the thesis dataset. These biographies indicate that the status of *shaheed* (martyr) was revered and achieved by dying fighting the Soviets (in the path of God) – as advocated by Abdullah Azzam (1983), and consistent with the prevailing current of political Islam in the 1980s.

In the obituary of Saudi Afghan Arab Yahya Senyor al-Jaddawi¹²⁵ - considered the first 'martyr' from the Arabian Gulf to have been killed in action against the Soviets in Afghanistan in 1985, it refers to the Quranic view of martyrdom: 'Think not of those who are killed in the Way of Allah as dead. Nay, they are alive, with their Lord, and they have provision' (Quran 3:169). Many Afghan Arabs sought martyrdom, such as Saudi national Abu Zubair al-Madani¹²⁶ who 'always used to speak and think about one thing, which was martyrdom.' He survived Afghanistan but had his wish fulfilled in 1992, defending Muslims near Sarajevo in Bosnia. Another case was Yemeni Afghan Arab Abu Uthman who participated in the defensive jihad in Afghanistan, because he 'wanted to be a Muslim martyr.' His wish was fulfilled at Shakardara, Afghanistan (Rana and Bukhari, 2007: 150). These personal accounts of martyrdom (and not suicide) are also supported in the literature. According to O. Roy (1990: 218), the Arab foreign fighters 'were generally courageous, even fanatical fighters,' and as noted in Chapter 2, Al-Qarni (2006a) recalled that 'there were no suicide operations at the time. The young men used to attack tanks and fighter aircraft with their personal weapons.' This zeal and fanaticism displayed by the Afghan Arabs should not be confused with that of contemporary suicide bombers, for whilst the Afghan Arabs developed a culture for martyrdom (Hafez, 2009: 77; Hamid as cited in Hamid and Farrall, 2015: 315), based on the evidence from the thesis dataset, they only sought martyrdom *fee sabeel Allah* fighting the Soviets in a conventional sense. That is not

¹²⁵ Caravan of Martyrs (Afghanistan 1985): Yahya Senyor al-Jeddawi.

¹²⁶ Caravan of Martyrs (Bosnia 1992): Abu Zubair al-Madani.

to say that as a result of the situational circumstances experienced in the defensive jihad in Afghanistan, that some veteran Afghan Arabs did not subsequently adopt ‘suicide attacks’ – indeed the data suggest that many did, and being central to the research question, is addressed later in the chapter.

Abu Zubaydah’s View of Martyrdom

Interestingly, less than three months after his arrival in Afghanistan (8 April 1991), Abu Zubaydah’s desire for martyrdom becomes apparent, and is quoted in full:

‘Martyrdom for Allah’s cause. I become dreaming of it because of all I hear about its virtue and standing by Almighty God ... sometimes I wish for a bullet or a swift shell to take me to meet my Lord as a martyr ... I cannot wait: I want to be a martyr for Allah’s cause quickly’ (Zubaydah, 1991: 46).

The two key points concerning martyrdom emanating from his diary are the religious (Islamic) basis or underpinning of such a desire, and the explicit lack of a suicidal interpretation. It is clear from his diary that Abu Zubaydah and many of his cohort of Afghan Arabs were seeking martyrdom through defensive jihad, unequivocally in the cause of Allah. He also expressed no desire to commit suicide, in the sense of becoming a suicide bomber, which conforms to the interpretation of martyrdom championed by Abdullah Azzam (Moghadam, 2008: 59), as noted in Chapter 3.

To establish a baseline for the remainder of the chapter, it must be reinforced that based on research undertaken for this study, Afghan Arabs eschewed terrorism and suicide attacks: there is no evidence of a single suicide attack (targeting civilians or non-combatants), or an expression to commit one, during the Afghan jihad. This suggests that those Afghan Arabs (with no known prior terrorist links) were neither radicalised nor terrorists. However, having participated in the defensive jihad, their circumstances were very different from the general public in the Arab world – their start point for later involvement in Islamist

terrorism was in Afghanistan, as Afghan Arabs, not as ordinary citizens in their home countries in the Arab world.

The Radicalisation of Afghan Arabs: How and Why?

Introduction

Despite the Afghan Arabs eschewing terrorism and suicide attacks during the defensive jihad in 1980s Afghanistan, some (who had no known prior terrorist links) did eventually become involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. These activities included global Islamist terrorism (including those presented in Figure 4.4)¹²⁷ and religious nationalist terrorism (such as involvement with the GIA in Algeria).

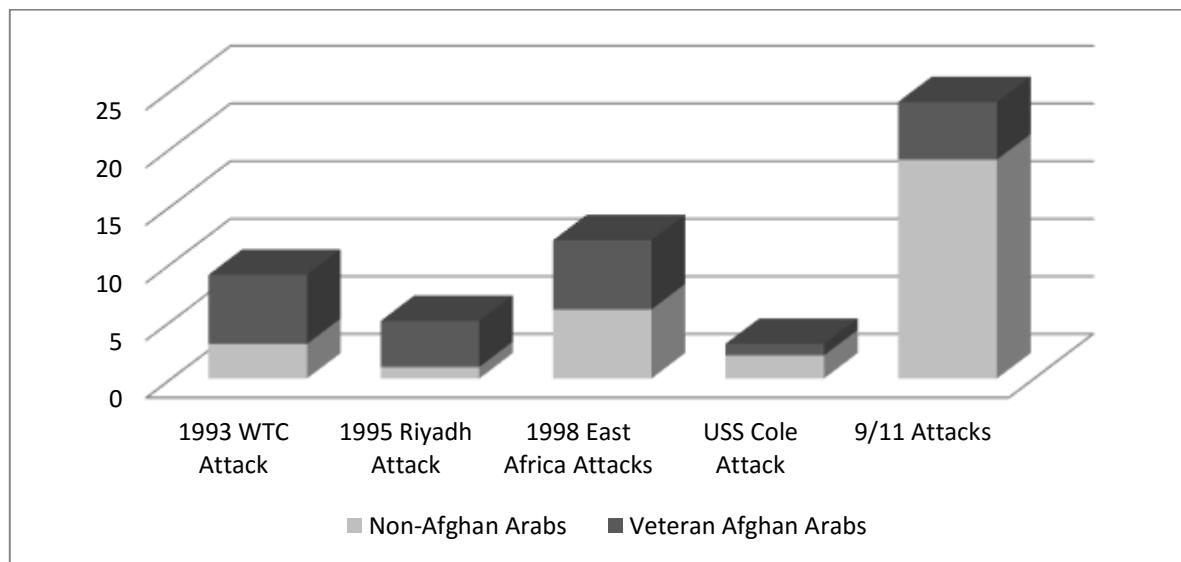


Figure 4.4: Veteran Afghan Arab Involvement in Global Islamist Terrorist Attacks (n=18).

By way of definitional reinforcement and clarity, global Islamist terrorists fight the far enemy - ‘the West by all means and in all places’ (Hegghammer, 2010b: 6), whilst religious

¹²⁷ Piazza (2009: 74) noted that ‘many of the key figures in the al-Qaeda groups ... are veterans of the Soviet Afghan war of the 1980s;’ and Rabasa et al. (2006: 29) noted that ‘below Bin Laden was the consultative committee, made up of veterans from the Soviet-Afghan war.’

nationalist terrorists¹²⁸ fight the near enemy - dictatorial Arab regimes in their home countries. It is revealing from Figure 4.4 that the 18 veteran Afghan Arabs involved in the global Islamist attacks amounted to 37 percent of the 48 perpetrators, and arguably their actual role of leadership and organisation hides a more important facet (see Appendix C for Afghan Arab involvement in global Islamist terrorism). It is equally recognised that other Afghan Arabs were also involved in many of these attacks (for example Ayman al-Zawahiri), but they had known prior links to Islamist terrorism – the influence of which is discussed later in the chapter. Before examining why so many Afghan Arabs became involved in Islamist terrorism, a short explanation of these attacks is offered below.

The vehicle bombing of the WTC occurred on 26 February 1993, killing six and injuring 1,042 civilians.¹²⁹ Although Gunaratna (2002: 24) and Post (2007: 197) claimed that al-Qaeda was responsible, there is little evidence to support this. According to the 9/11 Commission Report (2005: 60), ‘Bin Ladin’s involvement is at best cloudy,’ while Sageman (2005: 42) concluded that the ‘extent of al Qaeda’s involvement in this plot is unclear.’¹³⁰ What was clear however, according to the Joint Terrorism Task Force, was that ‘a disparate group of Afghan Arabs … formed the bulk of the group behind the bombing’ (Reeve, 1999: 55).

The next Islamist terrorist attack occurred in November 1995, and was also perpetrated by ‘a disparate group of Afghan Arabs’¹³¹ consisting of four Saudi nationals involving a ‘car bombing of the US Training Mission to the Saudi National Guard in central Riyadh, in which five Americans and two Indians were killed’ (Hegghammer, 2008a: 20). Although the ‘Saudi government arrested four perpetrators, who admitted being inspired by Bin Laden’ (the 9/11 Commission Report, 2005: 60), again there is no compelling evidence that

¹²⁸ As noted in Chapter 1, Hegghammer (2010b: 6) uses the label ‘socio-revolutionary’ while Gerges (2005: 151) uses the label ‘religious nationalist.’

¹²⁹ Veteran Afghan Arab (with no prior terrorist links) involvement in the 1993 WTC attack involved Omar Abdul Rahman, Ramzi Yusuf, Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, Osama Azmairi, and Ahmad Ajaj.

¹³⁰ According to the 9/11 Commission Report (2005: 472), ‘in February 1995, the government filed a confidential court document listing Osama Bin Laden and scores of other people as possible co-conspirators in the New York City landmarks plot.’

¹³¹ Veteran Afghan Arab (with no prior terrorist links) involvement in the 1995 Riyadh attack involved Abdullah al-Hudhayf (who initiated a pre-attack), Khalid al-Sa’id, Riyadh al-Hajiri, and Muslih al-Shamrani.

al-Qaeda was behind the attack (Hegghammer, 2010b: 71; the 9/11 Commission Report, 2005: 60; al-Bahri, 2005d: 5).¹³² Again, the common denominator of significance was that the terrorists were veteran Afghan Arabs.

The next attacks in August 1998, involved two near simultaneous bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 213 and 11 civilians, respectively.¹³³ In the intervening years since the 1995 Riyadh attacks,¹³⁴ Osama bin Laden had been evicted from Sudan (19 May 1996);¹³⁵ issued his August 1996 *fatwa*¹³⁶ declaring war against the Americans; and issued his 1998 *fatwa*¹³⁷ calling on Muslims to ‘kill the Americans and their allies.’ Out of the 19 Arabs¹³⁸ involved in the East Africa attacks, six were veteran Afghan Arabs (with no prior links to terrorism); five were veteran Afghan Arabs with known pre-existing terrorist links;¹³⁹ and eight were Arabs (with no foreign fighter experience).¹⁴⁰

The fourth Islamist terrorist attack included in this chapter occurred in October 2000 in the Yemeni port of Aden. According to the 9/11 Commission Report (2005: 190), ‘al Qaeda operatives in a small boat laden with explosives attacked … the USS *Cole* … killing 17 members of the ship’s crew and wounding at least 40.’ Again, a veteran Afghan Arab (Abdul Rahim al-Nashiri)¹⁴¹ was considered ‘the field commander’ of the attack (the 9/11 Commission Report, 2005: 190). Finally, the involvement of five veteran Afghan Arabs¹⁴²

¹³² According to Nassir al-Bahri (2005d: 5) ‘Shaykh Osama had nothing to do with these operations.’

¹³³ Veteran Afghan Arab (with no prior terrorist links) involvement in the 1998 East Africa attacks involved Osama bin Laden, Wadih al-Hajj, Abu Faraj al-Libi, Muhammad Odeh, Muhsin Musa, and Musafa Hamood.

¹³⁴ The only other major global terrorist attack was the June 1996 Khobar Towers attack in Saudi Arabia, ‘carried out principally, perhaps exclusively, by Saudi Hezbollah’ and not by al-Qaeda (The 9/11 Commission Report, 2005: 60).

¹³⁵ The 9/11 Commission Report (2005: 63).

¹³⁶ *Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places* (1996).

¹³⁷ *Jihad against Jews and Crusaders*. World Islamic Front Statement (23 February 1998).

¹³⁸ In addition there were three Kenyans, two Tanzanians, and one Sudanese.

¹³⁹ The five were all EIJ members: Ayman al-Zawahiri, Muhammad Atif, Saif al-Adil, Abdullah Ahmad Abdulla, and Ibrahim Eidarous

¹⁴⁰ For example, Jihad al-Harazi - the cousin of Abdul Rahman al-Nashiri – was one of the suicide bombers involved in the attack on the US Embassy in Nairobi.

¹⁴¹ Due to his interest in maritime terrorism, al-Nashiri was nicknamed ‘Prince of the Sea’ (Lehr, 2016: 211).

¹⁴² Despite having been involved in previous Islamist terrorist attacks (1993 WTC, 1998 Embassy attacks), the five were Osama bin Laden, Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, Abu Faraj al-Libi, Abdul Rahman al-Nashiri, and Muhammad Zammar, who had arrived in 1980s Afghanistan with no prior terrorist links.

in the 9/11 attacks was crucial to their success, acting as the planners and ideologues. Although no veteran Afghan Arab physically participated in the 9/11 attacks, four veteran Arab foreign fighters (introduced in Chapter 1) from other conflicts were 9/11 hijackers: two appeared to have participated in defensive jihad in Bosnia¹⁴³ and two in Chechnya.¹⁴⁴ This again suggests some form of linkage between participation in defensive jihad and subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorist related activities.

Overview

The gradual shift from involvement in defensive jihad to one of involvement in Islamist terrorist related activities is arguably easier to conceptualise as a result of having physically participated in close combat in Afghanistan, rather than having watched videos or listened to radical preachers. In tandem, it is also arguably easier to contextualise the notion of radicalisation - the ‘social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to [an] extremist political or religious ideology’ (Horgan, 2009: 152), as a result of close combat in the Afghan jihad, rather than the ‘videos and preachers’ analogy above. The immediacy and intimacy of battle involving the killing of Soviet troops, or witnessing fellow comrades being killed or badly wounded, was unlikely not to have affected the Afghan Arabs, albeit differently. However, was there really a radicalising effect during, and as a result of, the Afghan jihad that subsequently encouraged and supported the killing of civilians and non-combatants? Why was there a subsequent willingness on behalf of some Afghan Arabs, to kill civilians and non-combatants, when during the Afghan jihad, the Soviet soldier was the identifiable combatant and the legitimate target, within the context of a defensive jihad, as noted by O. Roy (1990: 22)?

Existing scholarship does recognise the presence of a radicalising effect in the 1980s Afghan jihad, but it tends to lack depth or empirical support. Gerges (2005: 60) suggested that many Afghan Arabs were ‘transformed by the baptism of blood and fire,’ and

¹⁴³ Saudi nationals Khalid Muhammad Abdulla al-Mihdhar and Nawaf Muhammad Salim al-Hazmi (The 9/11 Commission Report, 2005: 155).

¹⁴⁴ Saudi nationals ‘Ahmed al Ghamdi and Saeed al Ghamdi were identified by Moore and Tumelty (2008: 423) as ‘two of the 9/11 hijackers’ who had fought in Chechnya.

Richardson (2007: 66) maintained that they were ‘hardened and radicalized by the experience.’ Also, while Li (2011: 16) noted the presence of “a sort of extraneous ‘radicalizing’ variable,” Fishman et al. (2008: 27) believed that ‘there is no debate: the anti-Soviet Jihad radicalized thousands of Islamist activists.’ These observations do little to explain the process of radicalisation, other than it occurred ‘in a conflict zone where they learned about Islam in a context of violence’ (Wiktorowicz, 2005a: 83).

It is difficult to recreate the ‘context of violence’ within the Afghan jihad, however personal involvement in it appeared to affect some participants. One veteran Afghan Arab, Muhammad Loay Bayazid (aka Abu Rida al-Suri), reflected on his experience:

‘I went to Afghanistan with a blank mind and a good heart ... everything was totally strange. It was like I was born just now, like I was an infant, and I have to learn everything new. It was not so easy after that to leave and go back to your regular life’ (Wright, 2006: 109-110).

Interestingly, perhaps there is a close parallel with British soldiers who fought in the First World War, where according to D. Winter (1979: 167), ‘they were disconcerted to find how their outlook had drifted away from those who had stayed behind.’ Arguably one of the best studies on the psychological impact of war was authored by Lord Moran (1945) about his experiences during the First World War, where he convincingly recalled how ‘the soldier is alone in his war with terror’ (p. ix) and how ‘all men feel fear’ (p.11). Although further comparisons between regular and irregular combatants are beyond the scope of this thesis,¹⁴⁵ it is reasonable to tentatively suggest that some Arab foreign fighters’ outlooks may have changed as a result of their situational circumstances participating in defensive jihad (Keegan, 1986; Grossman, 2009). This suggestion clearly applies more directly to Afghan Arab combatants rather than the support staff (administrative, logistical, educational, or ideological), however the role of Afghan Arab combatants in the Afghan jihad appears shrouded in myth.

¹⁴⁵ Comparing the impact of close combat (including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) on regular soldiers and on irregular combatants such as Arab foreign fighters would make a fascinating thesis.

First, evidence suggests that the vast majority of Afghan Arabs did not actually engage in close combat with the Soviet army. The literature (Gerges, 2005: 84; Kepel, 2008: 147; Lia, 2008b: 78; Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012: 57; Hamid and Farrall, 2015: 36) is united in agreeing that ‘only a fraction had significant exposure to … combat’ (Hegghammer, 2010b: 47), whilst ‘the vast majority of volunteers did not go inside Afghanistan, let alone fight there’ (Hafez, 2009: 76). One Afghan *mujahhideen* leader, Commander Akhtarjhan, held a similar view: ‘We had some Arabs who were with us for jihad credit. They had a video camera and all they wanted to do was to take videos. They were of no value to us’ (Jalali and Grau, 1998: 396).

That is not to say that the Afghan Arabs did not fight – indeed the thesis dataset has documented 221 fatalities, which supports the scholarly view that many (although perhaps not all)¹⁴⁶ became involved in the Afghan jihad in order to successfully become martyrs (Hafez, 2009: 77; Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012: 57; Al-Bahri, 2013: 16; Hamid and Farrall, 2015: 37). However, a close examination of the 18 veteran Afghan Arabs who became involved in the global Islamist terrorist attacks (in Figure 4.4 and Appendix C), and the 37 who became involved in religious nationalist terrorism (see Appendix D), reveals that only three¹⁴⁷ appeared to have been involved as combatants. The others could be divided into two cohorts: either they had been in leadership or support positions, or had arrived after 1988 as the Soviet army was beginning its withdrawal. Perhaps counter-intuitively, in the case of 1980s Afghanistan (and not Iraq and Syria as demonstrated later), this would indicate that any radicalisation appears to be more as a result of other factors, rather than as a result of the experience of combat. Examining the thesis dataset, the theoretical framework, and the scholarly literature, these other factors include grievances and ideology, terrorist training, indoctrination, the influence of Afghan Arabs with pre-existing terrorist links, and comradeship ties and friendships.

¹⁴⁶ As noted earlier, Saudi Afghan Arab, Abu Zubair al-Madani ‘used to speak and think about one thing, that was martyrdom’ (Caravan of Martyrs: Bosnia, 1992).

¹⁴⁷ The three were Abdullah Anas who was in Afghanistan from 1984; Abu Sariyya who was involved in the battle of Khost and later nicknamed ‘the Lion of Khost;’ and Osama bin Laden who was involved in the battle of Jaji. For various contradictory and conflicting accounts on the battle of Jaji, see Bergen (2006: 56) and Tawil (2010: 18-20).

Grievances and Ideology

The notion of grievances and ideology are nestled together due to their relationship with radicalisation (Neumann, 2011). Research undertaken for this study suggests that grievances and ideology appeared to have contributed to the subsequent radicalisation of some veteran Afghan Arabs. As noted earlier, many Afghan Arabs had been involved in Islamist activism (including terrorism) in their home countries against their regimes, such as Ayman al-Zawahiri, who felt that ‘over-throwing the near enemy must take priority over everything else’ (Gerges, 2005: 94). Aware of this, regimes took action (arrest and persecution) to prevent their return and reintegration, which resulted in further grievances against their regimes. Their ideology was primarily *takfiri* in nature, and by the early 1990s after the Soviet withdrawal, they refocussed again on the near enemy, the result of which was ‘that armed jihad against rulers of these countries began to rise to the primary interest for trainees and Arab camps’ (Hamid and Farrall, 2015: 140).

According to Lia (2008b: 87), ‘Peshawar around 1990 seemed a fertile ground for new ideas about jihadism,’ however the actual lack of congruence was remarkable. Abu Zubaydah in his diary entry (for 28 August 1992) recalled that ‘in the past we thought there were only simple differences among jihadist parties, but now the communist regime has collapsed in Afghanistan, it has resulted in fierce fighting amongst the Arab jihadists’ (Abu Zubaydah, 1992: 128). According to Hafez (2009: 78) after the Soviet withdrawal, the new Afghan Arabs became exposed to a:

‘range of political beliefs along the Islamist spectrum. Invariably, some were attracted to the more radical factions. Peshawar was truly an open market place of ideas without bounds or censors, and young men had plenty of time on their hands to read, discuss, and argue the finer points of jihadi politics.’

Despite the infighting, it appears that the most enduring ideological current within political Islam in the early 1990s was still aimed at local Arab regimes (Al-Zayyat, 2004: 62; Gerges, 2005; Lia, 2008b: 92; Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012: 69; Hamid and Farrall, 2015:

140) – and in harmony with the narrative of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj. This led many Afghan Arabs to re-direct their violence against the near enemy and ‘fight for state power against a Muslim regime perceived as illegitimate’ (Hegghammer, 2010b: 6). As Crenshaw (2011: 44) argued, ‘if terrorists perceive the state as unjust, morally corrupt, and violent, then terrorism may seem legitimate and justified.’ Certainly, this perception was prevalent among the veteran Afghan Arabs, and was summed up by Abu Zubaydah (1992: 94): ‘The truth is that all the rulers of the Islamic and Arab, especially Arab states, are traitors who work against their religion. That’s the reason there are fundamentalists who demand for Islamic law to rule.’

Grievances and Ideology against the Near Enemy

The appeal of the focus on the near enemy is demonstrated within the dataset that shows that 37 of the 119 Afghan Arabs who survived the Afghan jihad (and who had no known prior terrorist links), became religious nationalist terrorists (see Appendix D). They came from six countries: Algeria, Libya, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Tunisia, as represented in Figure 4.5.

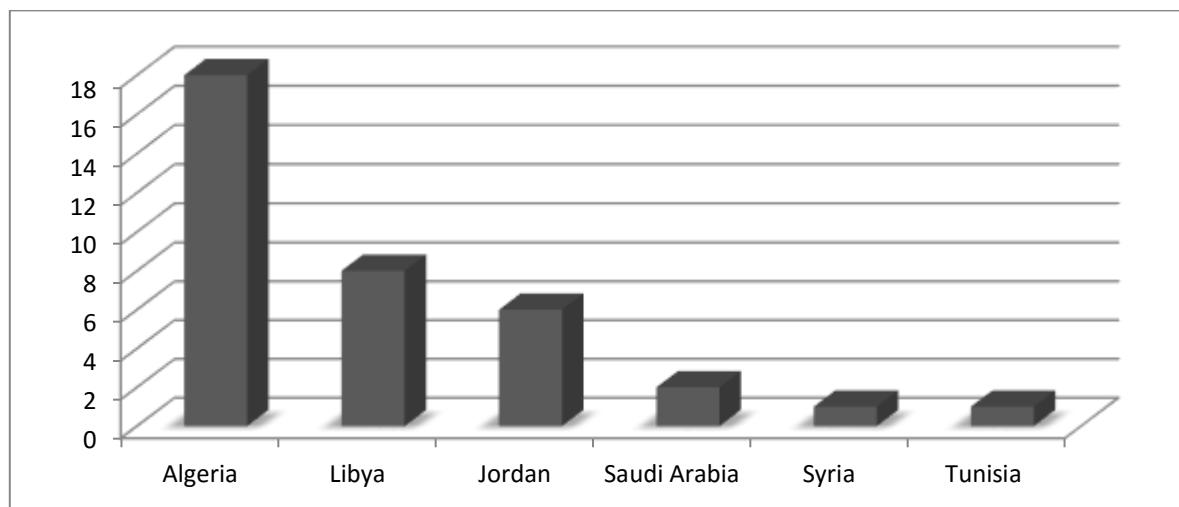


Figure 4.5: Afghan Arab Involvement in Religious Nationalist Terrorism (n=37)

These statistics should not come as a surprise as according to Rana and Bukhari (2007: 22), during ‘the Afghan-Soviet war, these Arabs were also preparing themselves for jihad in their own countries.’ For example, the thesis dataset reveals that the majority (68 percent)

of Algerian veteran Afghan Arabs returned home and established the GIA,¹⁴⁸ a finding supported by Bruce (1995), Rubin (1997: 199), and Testas (2002: 163); while 50 percent of the Libyan veteran Afghan Arabs, returned home and established the LIFG (Tawil, 2010: 52). Interestingly, the majority of those who returned to Algeria had arrived in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal, with the express desire of gaining training prior to returning to Algeria. Their motivation to go to Afghanistan appears to have been to seek training (as noted earlier), in order to return and overthrow the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi (Hafez, 2009: 75), and establish an Islamic country ruled by *Sharia* law. The path taken by these individuals suggests that they may not necessarily have been radicalised in Afghanistan, but may have had some pre-existing links to Islamist (not necessarily terrorist) groups.

A key question in the analysis is that considering 14 percent (51) of Afghan Arabs had arrived in Afghanistan with pre-existing terrorist links, did those who survived the defensive jihad, later return to their home countries to continue their involvement in Islamist terrorist related activities? The evidence from the dataset suggests that in fact, the vast majority (who had known pre-existing terrorist links) did not return to their countries to continue a religious nationalist agenda.¹⁴⁹ This was in large part due to their regimes banning them from returning (Gerges, 2005; Atwan, 2006: 48; Lia, 2008b; al-Bahri, 2013: 57; Hamid and Farrall, 2015). It appears that it was those Afghan Arabs who arrived in Afghanistan with no known pre-existing terrorist links, who returned to their countries to engage in religious nationalist terrorism. Again, it seems that many Afghan Arabs went to Afghanistan more focussed on terrorist training, than participating in defensive jihad. This desire for terrorist training in Afghanistan, particularly by religious nationalist terrorists, is discussed later in the chapter.

¹⁴⁸ Apart from one (Abu Musab) who died in Bosnia, the remaining 32 percent of Algerians were later involved in al-Qaeda related activities, and subsequently ended up in Guantanamo Bay prison.

¹⁴⁹ This is caveated by noting that some veteran Libyan Afghan Arabs (see Appendix D) had been Islamist activists (but not necessarily involved in terrorism) prior to their arrival in Afghanistan. They subsequently did return to Libya and formed the LIFG.

A good example where grievances against the near enemy contributed to a specific Islamist terrorist attack, was the November 1995 Riyadh car bombing against a Saudi-US joint facility (the 9/11 Commission Report, 2005: 60). With Saudi Arabia ‘at the forefront’ of the *takfiri* ideological current (Hamad and Farrall, 2015: 140), perhaps this attack was not unexpected. At the time of the Riyadh attack, Saudi Arabia was clamping down on the reformist political opposition (the *Sahwa*) in the kingdom. This naturally led to a lot of arrests and widespread torture (Hegghammer, 2010b: 74). In response to such brutality, a veteran Afghan Arab named Shaykh Abdullah al-Hudhayf, ‘threw acid in the face of a police officer to avenge the arrest of the leaders of the [Sahwa]’ (Hegghammer, 2008a: 20). Al-Hudhayf was subsequently arrested and ‘tortured to death by vengeful security officers, a suspicion that is probably not unfounded, for his body was never returned to his family’ (Hegghammer, 2010b: 72). Four friends of al-Hudhayf, three of them veteran Afghan Arabs (Riyad al-Hajiri, Muslih al-Shamrani, and Khalid Sa’id) decided to avenge his untimely demise.

According to a former bodyguard to Osama bin Laden, Nassir al-Bahri (2005d: 5), the motivation behind the 1995 Riyadh attacks was solely because ‘Muslih al-Shamrani called to avenge the death of Shaykh Abdullah al-Hudhayf.’ The notion of revenge is an interesting concept, and has been identified by terrorism scholars¹⁵⁰ as one of many possible motivations for terrorist violence. According to Silke (2008: 36), the ‘desire for revenge and retribution is an extremely common motive for joining terrorist groups.’ Although it appears that the motivations behind the 1995 Riyadh bombing included grievances against the Saudi regime, an ideology of anti-Americanism, and a desire for vengeance (Hegghammer, 2010b: 71), it does raise the question of why veteran Afghan Arabs perpetrated the attack. There is little publicly available evidence because the Saudi regime promptly executed the alleged perpetrators after they gave a televised confession, ‘no doubt under duress’ (Hegghammer, 2010b: 73). Nevertheless, the common denominator was that three of the alleged terrorists were veteran Afghan Arabs. This strongly suggests that previous comradeship ties that were developed during the Afghan

¹⁵⁰ See Schmid and Jongman (1988); Richardson (2007); Silke (2008); McCauley and Moskalenko (2008); and Schmid (2013a).

jihad played a role, as does prior explosive training in order to construct the car bomb. These two factors of comradeship ties and terrorist training are discussed in detail later in the chapter.

Reintegrating Back into Arab Society

One particularly strong grievance against the near enemy pertained to issues concerning reintegration, and the inability of many Afghan Arabs to return home due to restrictions placed upon them by their respective Arab regimes. The widespread Arab regime policy of national self-preservation - denying the return and reintegration of veteran Afghan Arabs - was ultimately to result in the creation of a cohort of 'rootless but experienced operatives' (The 9/11 Commission Report, 2005: 59), who 'were left with little other choice' regarding their futures (Kuehn et al., 2014: 2). It was not just those with known pre-existing terrorist links, but also those whose regimes knew had been involved in the defensive jihad in Afghanistan (Hamid as cited in Hamid and Farrall, 2015: 313). According to veteran Afghan Arab, Abu Zubaydah (1992: 94), 'too many of them could not go back to their home countries because they had been documented as terrorists in every state without exception.' A possible exception was Saudi Arabia, where 'the Saudi jihadis had a standing offer from the Saudi authorities to repent and return home to their families' (Lia, 2008b: 279). There is of course a contradiction with the Saudi position, in that the Afghan jihad was strongly supported by the Saudi regime both financially and ideologically (through the state controlled clergy), yet Saudi veteran Afghan Arabs were required 'to repent.' Quite what they were repenting for, remains unclear.

Most other veteran Afghan Arabs were well aware that by 'returning to their home countries meant certain arrest, torture, and likely death' (Kohlmann, 2006: 197) - a view corroborated by Hegghammer (2010b: 190). To reinforce this critical point, Kohlmann (2004: 118) quoted a Tunisian foreign fighter who stated that 'to become a *mujahid* is something very serious, a sacrifice. You cannot return home once your government there knows what you are. Instead, we must follow the eternal path of jihad.' Empirically this is supported by the thesis dataset, in that only six veteran Afghan Arabs were identified as

having reintegrated back into their home countries.¹⁵¹ The circumstances of these six veteran Afghan Arabs (albeit a small sample) are examined at the end of the chapter in order to examine why, given the same situational circumstances, these individuals chose to dis-engage from defensive jihad after Afghanistan.

Returning to those who were denied re-entry, the case of Egyptian veteran Afghan Arabs is instructive. In the early 1990s the Egyptian regime fully appreciated the possible threat posed by returning Afghan Arabs, particularly those who had prior terrorist experience in EIG or EIJ, and were now ‘ready to move their armed operations to Egypt to fight the regime’ (Al-Zayyat, 2004: 61). However, as Al-Zayyat (2004: 55) further noted:

‘Egypt had already started taking security measures against the Arab Afghans by trying them before military courts in absentia and issuing harsh sentences, including death sentences for the elite of the Arab Afghans, as well as sentences of life imprisonment for others.’

In effect, Egypt had closed its borders to returning Afghan Arab nationals, and as Nassir al-Bahri remembered, even Osama bin Laden himself ‘explained that the Egyptians were obliged to stay in Afghanistan … they simply had no other place to go since they were wanted men back home in Egypt’ (al-Bahri, 2013: 57). Looking at the thesis dataset, it is worth briefly examining the future trajectories of the surviving 38 Egyptian veteran Afghan Arabs. First, 21 had pre-existing terrorist links, thus justifying in part the Egyptian regime’s concern of Afghan Arab returnees. Interestingly, none of those 21 Egyptians with pre-existing terrorist links returned to Egypt voluntarily¹⁵² after the Afghan jihad, with the vast majority (76 percent) joining al-Qaeda.¹⁵³ Of those who joined al-Qaeda, five were

¹⁵¹ These include Saudi Musa al-Qarni, Jordanian Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, and four Syrians who are now involved in the Syrian jihad: Abu Faris al-Suri (*Jabhat al-Nusrah* spokesman); Muhammad Ayman Aboul-Tout (ideologue for *Ahrar ash-Shaam*); Baha Mustafa al-Jughl (*Ahrar ash-Shaam*); and Muhammad Haydar Zammar (ISIS, although some reports suggest *Ahrar ash-Shaam*).

¹⁵² Egyptian Abu Talal al-Qaseemi was a member of EIG, a veteran of the Afghan and Bosnian jihads. He was abducted in Bosnia by the CIA in September 1995 in a case of extraordinary rendition and involuntarily returned to Egypt. He was sentenced to death (Kohlmann, 2004: 150).

¹⁵³ According to al-Bahri (2013: 57) Osama bin Laden admitted that ‘most of the brothers around me are Egyptian’ and that the majority of the ‘al-Qaeda top brass’ (p. 96) were Egyptian. The future of the remaining

involved in the East Africa embassy bombings (three of whom were also involved in planning the 9/11 attacks), and two were involved in the 1993 WTC attack. The remaining 17 Egyptian veteran Afghan Arabs, who despite having had no known prior terrorist links, were now known to Egyptian authorities and therefore reluctant to return to Egypt, whereupon ten subsequently joined al-Qaeda (two of whom were involved in the East Africa embassy bombings), and five were later killed participating in defensive jihad in Bosnia and/or Chechnya.¹⁵⁴

This broad security policy adopted by Arab regimes, whether intentionally or unintentionally, contributed to the deflection, exportation, and spreading of Islamist terrorism (and defensive jihad) beyond Arab regime borders. Despite the data collected for this thesis on Afghan Arabs, there is no similar canon of data on the ethnic background of other foreign fighters in 1980s Afghanistan let alone their post-jihad behaviour. However, with so many different ethnicities now (2017) fighting in Syria, governments would be wise to study the post-Afghan jihad legacy of the ‘disgruntled and dispossessed of the Islamic world’ (Dobbs, 2001). This legacy includes the historical policy consequences of denying re-entry to veteran Afghan Arabs (and suspected terrorists); the lack of reintegration programmes;¹⁵⁵ and the ideological reorientation of many veteran Afghan Arabs to attack the ‘foreign supporters’ of authoritarian Arab regimes (Lia, 2008b: 92) - the far enemy.

Grievances and Ideology against the Far Enemy

There has been a plethora of scholarly literature on why the far enemy, as represented by ‘the US and her allies’ (Wagemakers, 2012: 72), became the target for attacks from Islamist terrorists. Gerges (2005: 131) argued that it was the failure of Islamist terrorists to topple their own ‘pro-Western Muslim regimes’ that led them to attack Western interests. Perhaps

five Egyptians (without pre-existing terrorist links) included two killed in the Bosnian jihad; two were imprisoned and one (Abu Talal al-Qaseemi) sentenced to death in Egypt.

¹⁵⁴ The trajectories of the remaining two Egyptian Afghan Arabs are unknown after the Afghan jihad.

¹⁵⁵ It is acknowledged that since the 9/11 attacks, some Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Yemen, have started reintegration programmes for Arab foreign fighters (and Islamist terrorists), and are discussed in Chapter 7.

more empirically based, Bin Laden (1996) articulated his grievances against ‘the Zionist-Crusader alliance’ by employing diagnostic framing¹⁵⁶ that included the American occupation of Saudi Arabia (after the 1991 Gulf war); American support for Israel; Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands; the Israeli 1996 massacre in Qana, Lebanon; and UN sanctions against Iraq that had killed thousands of children.¹⁵⁷ Whether these were real or perceived grievances it led to prognostic framing¹⁵⁸ and an ideology that supported and encouraged attacks against the far enemy. Despite such prognostic framing promoting terrorism, within the narrative of political Islam it was still viewed as defensive jihad by the Islamist terrorists; it was only ‘the definition of the enemy’ that had changed (Gerges, 2005: 14).

Many of the grievances held by veteran Afghan Arabs that later spawned global Islamist terrorist attacks against the far enemy, may be explained by the perpetrators themselves. First, the 1993 WTC attack, according to Egyptian Omar Abdul-Rahman (1996),¹⁵⁹ the spiritual leader of the bombing, ‘America is the worst enemy of Islam’ (p. 16); it ‘has surrounded Iraq and they have starved its Muslim people (p. 19);¹⁶⁰ it ‘preserves Israel (p. 16); and it ‘loved President Mubarak’ (p. 17). Khalid Shaykh Muhammad (2006: 11) explained the 1993 WTC attack motivation was ‘to make US citizens suffer, especially economically, which would put pressure on the US government to change its policies.’ Finally, Ramzi Yusuf (1998), the leader of the WTC bombing, explained the attack motivation was ‘against the United States Government and against Israel, because [these countries] are more than terrorists.’ Summed up, ‘the root of the WTC bombers’ intent ...

¹⁵⁶ Embedded within diagnostic framing is the concept of ‘injustice frames’ that are ‘generated and adopted by those who come to define the actions of an authority as unjust’ (Benford and Snow, 2000: 615). The notion of injustice resonates widely across the Arab world, and includes ‘several key regional conflicts (such as Chechnya, Iraq, Kashmir and the Palestinian territories), that exposes Western double standards’ (Ranstorp and Herd, 2007: 6).

¹⁵⁷ By the time of the 1993 WTC attack, Richard Garfield, a Columbia University nursing professor, estimated there were 345,000-530,000 Iraqi deaths over the 1990-2002 UN sanctions period.

¹⁵⁸ Prognostic framing ‘involves the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem, or at least a plan of attack, and the strategies for carrying out the plan’ (Benford and Snow, 2000: 616). This framing advocates a plan commensurate with the prognosis. It may entail militant activity, propaganda, or at the macro level, however delusionary, the total destruction of the United States.

¹⁵⁹ Omar Abdul-Rahman died (of natural causes) in a US jail on 18 February 2017.

¹⁶⁰ See also Footnote 156. This was arguably a real grievance. On 12 May 1996, Madeleine Albright (then US Ambassador to the UN) was interviewed by Stahl (1996) on *60 Minutes*, and asked ‘we have heard that half a million children have died ... you know, is the price worth it?’ Albright replied ‘we think the price is worth it.’

was a strong desire to punish, to seek revenge, and to underscore the dignity of Muslims' (Parachini, 2000: 203).

Looking briefly at the other attacks, al-Bahri (2005b) recounted that the perceived motivation behind the 1998 East Africa US embassy attacks was based on Bin Laden's perception that:

‘the two American embassies ... were just big American detention centres in Africa. They were the plotting minds behind the events that took place in Rwanda, where more than 80,000 Muslims were killed ... they were feeding that struggle.’

The motivation behind the USS *Cole* attack, according to al-Bahri (2005a), was ‘to damage the USA's reputation in the naval arena, to raise the morale of the Muslims, and to prove to the Islamic nation that its sons are capable of striking the nation's enemies wherever they may be.’ At a higher level, it was conducted in order to provoke ‘U.S. military retaliation’ (The 9/11 Commission Report, 2005: 191) – but actually ‘provoked no retaliation from America’ (Geltzer, 2010: 101).

Although many of these terrorist motivations appeared to be based on real and perceived grievances against the US, it is instructive that the US Department of State (1993: 1)¹⁶¹ predicted correctly ‘the likelihood that US interests increasingly will become targets for violence from former mujahidin.’ The report added that such attacks may happen ‘should the US appear to be supporting the increasingly repressive policies of these [Arab] regimes’ (p. 4) – thus there is a degree of synergy and corroboration between US policy makers, academia, and the Islamist terrorists themselves. The real and perceived grievances against the far enemy articulated by diagnostic framing are naturally contentious (Lewis, 1990), but they do appear to have contributed to the radicalisation of veteran Afghan Arabs. However, what was unique about the involvement of veteran Afghan Arabs?

¹⁶¹ US Department of State (1993). *The Wandering Mujahidin: Armed and Dangerous*.

As noted from Figure 4.4, veteran Afghan Arabs had a disproportionate influence on five of the major global Islamist terrorist attacks, providing in the case of the 1993 WTC attack, 75 percent of the terrorists. The 9/11 attack involved ‘only’ 30 percent of veteran Afghan Arabs yet may be explained by the requirement to use younger and fitter men. However, further analysis involving the foreign fighter experience beyond 1980s Afghanistan reveals that arguably 59 percent of those directly or indirectly involved in the 9/11 attacks had some form of foreign fighter experience.¹⁶² Perhaps what was unique about veteran Afghan Arab involvement in targeting the interests of the far enemy was their own biographical availability¹⁶³ due to their inability to return home (making the near enemy inaccessible); grievances against the far enemy (due to their support of the near enemy); a more extreme ideology that expanded the concept of defensive jihad and sanctioned the killing of civilians and non-combatants; and the training they received in Afghanistan.

Terrorist Training, Indoctrination, and the Influence of Prior Terrorist Links

Central to the radicalisation of some Afghan Arabs was the existence of terrorist training camps, alongside camps where the training was still focussed on defensive jihads ‘at open fronts such as Chechnya’ (Kuehn et al., 2014: 34). In the terrorist training camps, the recruits ‘underwent four important and interlinked processes: violence acculturization, indoctrination, training and relations-building’ (Hegghammer, 2006: 46). The presence of terrorist training camps in Afghanistan appears to undercut the very ideology enshrined within defensive jihad. If it is true, and not ‘more myth than reality’ (Kuehn et al., 2014: 2), then the Afghan jihad was used partially as a pretext for future terrorist training, rather than defending co-religionists. Hafez (2009: 76) makes a compelling argument to suggest that ‘by 1989, after the complete withdrawal of Soviet forces, Pakistan and Afghanistan were flooded with Arab volunteers seeking training in guerrilla warfare.’ Certainly Abu Zubaydah admitted in his diary (6 January 1991) that he had specifically gone to

¹⁶² The additional uplift (as noted earlier in the chapter) included two Arab foreign fighters from the Bosnian jihad; two from the Chechen jihad; and the four 9/11 pilots who had gone to Afghanistan to train for defensive jihad in Chechnya, but were persuaded to get involved in the 9/11 attacks.

¹⁶³ Referred to in Chapter 2, ‘biographical availability’ refers to the ‘absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities’ (McAdam 1986: 70).

Afghanistan ‘to receive training,’ while Libyan Afghan Noman Benotman went ‘to develop our fighting skills in anticipation of the day we would return to Libya to fight the Gadhafi regime’ (Abedin, 2005). The training included ‘urban sabotage, car bombings, anti-aircraft weapons, sniper rifles and land mines’ (Hafez, 2009: 77), which according to veteran Afghan Arab Mustafa Hamid (as cited in Hamid and Farrall, 2015: 136), ‘were not needed by Arab *mujahideen* in Afghanistan.’

It seems therefore that by 1989, the language of political Islam was in itself readjusting to the prevailing political landscape, and justifying the conflation of defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism, both global Islamist and religious nationalist. The climate experienced by many Afghan Arabs who arrived after 1988 and subsequently became involved in global Islamist terrorism, appears focussed more on terrorist training than defensive jihad. US Court transcripts of evidence given by veteran Algerian Afghan Arab Ahmad Ressam (2001),¹⁶⁴ confirmed that training in Khaldan Camp¹⁶⁵ in Afghanistan included explosives and sabotage against ‘electric plants, gas plants, airports, railroads’ (p. 550) and assassinations (p. 551), which is corroborated by Abu Zubaydah in his diary (5 February 1990). In the Darunta Camp training involved ‘making explosives and electronic circuits’ (Ressam, 2001: 555).¹⁶⁶

The existence of terrorist training camps in Afghanistan was recalled by veteran Afghan Arab, Mustafa Hamid (as cited in Hamid and Farrall, 2015), who claimed that a ‘power vacuum’ formed after the battle of Jalalabad in 1989 resulting in the formation of a ‘Jalalabad School of jihad … characterised by impetuous youth with extreme Salafi thoughts’ (p. 165). Hamid also maintained that the ‘Jalalabad School pioneered attacking America and planted the idea of 9/11 with Bin Laden’ (p. 322), and that former ‘students’ were involved in the 1995 Riyadh attack (p. 169). It is illuminating that the ‘Jalalabad School’ also included Ramzi Yusuf and Khalid Shaykh Muhammad (involved in the 1993

¹⁶⁴ Ahmad Rassam, nicknamed the ‘Millennium bomber’ was an al-Qaeda terrorist imprisoned for his role in planning to blow up Los Angeles International Airport on 31 December 1999.

¹⁶⁵ According to Hamid and Farrall (2015: 166), Khaldan Camp recruited ‘students who took a tighter doctrinal approach and a political path that was more violent in nature.’

¹⁶⁶ Jacquard (2002: 263-267) contains a declassified British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) document on training camps in 1990s Afghanistan.

WTC attack); Osama Azmarai (involved in the 1995 ‘Bojinka’ plot in Asia);¹⁶⁷ and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Farrall as cited in Hamid and Farrall, 2015: 301) – the subsequent leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq.

The thesis dataset supports the notion that some Afghan Arabs in the late 1980s were focussed more on Islamist terrorist training than defensive jihad. First, as Figure 4.1 demonstrates, the majority of Afghan Arabs arrived in Afghanistan after the Soviets started their withdrawal (in May 1988). More fine grain analysis also reveals that 53 (80 percent) of surviving (veteran) Afghan Arabs arrived in Afghanistan in 1988 or thereafter, where training was beginning to be focussed more ‘on outside work’ (Hamad and Farrall, 2015: 166), and where the debate centred on ‘who the enemy was, and how to fight it’ (Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012: 92). Of these late Afghan Arab arrivals, 58 percent (31) became fully involved in Islamist terrorism (GIA, AQ, AQAP); 30 percent (16) remained in defensive jihad, whilst 12 percent are unknown.

Second, the thesis dataset also demonstrates that for example, the three main 1993 WTC bombers Ramzi Yusuf, Mahmood Abu Halima, and Ahmad Ajaj, all travelled to Afghanistan in order to receive training (in Khaldan Camp) between 1988 and 1992. Reeve (1999: 138) noted that Ahmad Ajaj ‘went to Afghanistan in April 1992, specifically for militant training.’ Also, many of the Arabs (as opposed to Africans) involved in the 1998 East Africa attacks were trained in Afghanistan in the 1990s. For example, Jerrold Post testified in (Nairobi bomber) Muhammad Odeh’s defence in 2001, that ‘he went to Afghanistan for training, but also ideological conditioning, which meant that Muhammad was indoctrinated beyond his first inchoate ideas to help suffering Muslims’ (Jerrold Post cited in Bergen, 2002: 111). Thus, although Muhammad Odeh’s initial ideology may have been more consistent with the tenets of defensive jihad, it was only after he had arrived in Afghanistan, that he received training and ‘lectures more sophisticated than those … heard previously’ (Sageman, 2008: 70). This rather loose term ‘sophisticated’ is more accurately conceptualised by Hafez (2009: 78) as being part of the ‘ideological socialization’ whereby

¹⁶⁷ The 1995 ‘Bojinka’ plot involved assassinating Pope John Paul II, blowing up 11 aircraft from Asia to the US, and crashing a plane into the CIA building in Virginia.

Afghan Arab trainees were subjected to ‘Islamic history, theology, and politics from an extremist point of view’ – in effect indoctrination.

The existence of indoctrination in the Afghan training camps as claimed by Hegghammer (2006: 46), does appear to have academic and empirical support. As noted in Chapter 2, conceptually there is broad (but not universal) academic consensus regarding the existence of the notion of indoctrination (Crenshaw, 1994; Moghaddam, 2005; Wiktorowicz, 2005b; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008; Schmid, 2013b). In addition, the existence and influence of charismatic authority has scholarly support (Eatwell, 2006; Hofmann and Dawson, 2014; Beevor, 2016; Ingram, 2016; Hofmann, 2016), which in the case of Afghan Arab subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorism, included Bin Laden (Gerges, 2005: 36; Bergen, 2006: 258; Mockaitis, 2010: 69). There is evidence however of many instances of persuasion whereby volunteers, according to Kuehn et al. (2014), were ‘diverted from their desire to get training or undertake armed jihad at an open front, to join al-Qaeda’ (p. 60), whereby ‘al-Qaeda’s radicalisation program [included] convincing people to become martyrdom operatives’ (p. 72). For example, the 9/11 pilots, who had initially gone to Afghanistan for training in order to ‘wage jihad in Chechnya’ in defence of fellow Muslims, never eventually went to Chechnya, as ‘al Qaeda quickly recognized their potential and enlisted them in its anti-U.S. jihad’ (The 9/11 Commission Report, 2005: 160). This also happened to Egyptian Afghan Arab Sabri-al-Attar who ‘considered going to Chechnya but his mentors opposed the idea [and instead he] received extensive indoctrination in their radical ideology’ (Hafez, 2009: 85). Hegghammer (2010b: 189) also found that many Saudis, ‘having been indoctrinated in training camps’ in Afghanistan, returned to Saudi Arabia ‘with a more global, anti-American and intransigent ideological vision.’ Although it is difficult to identify all individuals who were indoctrinated from the dataset, as noted earlier, it is instructive that 58 percent of surviving (veteran) Afghan Arabs (with no known pre-existing terrorist links) who arrived in Afghanistan in 1988, became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities.

Although beyond the scope of this thesis, terrorist training and recruitment continued well after the April 1992 collapse of the Soviet backed communist regime (Ressam, 2001), with

some trainees later becoming involved in the US embassy bombings in East Africa, the USS *Cole* attack, and the 9/11 attacks (Hamid and Farrall, 2015: 232). Thus although this chapter focusses only on veteran Afghan Arabs (1979-1992), it is instructive that unstable countries (such as Afghanistan after 1992) provided safe havens for terrorist training, that spawned future Islamist terrorists.

Influence of Prior Terrorist Links

Needless to say, the main protagonists for the change in emphasis from defensive jihad to terrorist training were largely the Afghan Arabs who had known pre-existing terrorist links (Rubin, 1997: 196; al-Zayyat, 2004; Wiktorowicz, 2005a: 83; Gerges, 2005: 119; Rana and Bukhari, 2007: 15). Extracted from the thesis dataset, 14 percent (51) of Afghan Arabs had known pre-existing terrorist links, whilst 86 percent had no documented linkage. As noted earlier in the chapter, Egyptians with pre-existing terrorist links appear to have had a disproportionate influence upon their less experienced Afghan Arab comrades (Tawil, 2010: 29; Brown, 2013: 91; al-Bahri, 2013: 213),¹⁶⁸ possibly because in Egypt ‘Islamist movements were at their most militant’ (Kepel, 2008: 81). Particularly notable Afghan Arab members of EIJ include Ayman al-Zawahiri, the current leader of al-Qaeda; Saif al-Adil who has a \$5M reward on the US Rewards for Justice (2017) programme; Abu Khabab al-Misri (d. 2008) who became responsible for the al-Qaeda biological and chemical weapons programme; and five members involved in the 1998 East Africa embassy attacks.¹⁶⁹ Notable Afghan Arab members of EIG include Omar Abdul Rahman (d. 2017) and Mahmood Abu Halima, who were both involved in the 1993 WTC attack, and Mustafa Hamza who was involved in the 1997 Luxor massacre (Kohlmann, 2004: 150).

It appears that many Afghan Arabs with pre-existing terrorist links were generally in Afghanistan to consolidate their position, recruit and train more religious nationalist

¹⁶⁸ According to al-Bahri (2013: 213), Egyptian Afghan Arabs with previous terrorist links held ‘six out of the nine key al-Qaeda’ posts. Other nationalities with prior terrorist links included Libyans (7), Syrians (5), Jordanians (3), and Algerians (5).

¹⁶⁹ Ayman al-Zawahiri, Saif al-Adil, Muhammad Atif (Abu Hafs al-Misri), Abdullah Ahmad al-Alfi, and Ibrahim Husayn Abdul Hadi Eidarous.

terrorists, prior to returning to their home countries (Gerges, 2005: 57; Kepel, 2008: 139; Hafez, 2009: 78). Again, through the prism of political Islam, these Afghan Arabs with prior religious nationalist terrorist links saw terrorism as more akin to defensive jihad (Brown, 2013: 89; Hafez, 2013: 28), inasmuch as they ‘see themselves to be engaged in *defensive warfare* in the defensive sense of the word … under attack by their own leaders’ (Lahoud, 2011: 140). This in turn contributes to the academic conflation of Islamist terrorism and defensive jihad (Moghadam and Fishman, 2013: 245).

Interestingly, as with the influence exerted by Afghan Arabs who had pre-existing terrorist links, veteran Afghan Arabs were also to become ‘capable … religious ideologues, and military commanders that would lead future struggles in places like Algeria, Egypt, Bosnia, Chechnya, and Iraq’ (Hafez, 2009: 82). Some had gained charismatic authority as a result of the Afghan jihad, and were to command new and less experienced Arab foreign fighters. This is corroborated by the thesis dataset that finds that in Bosnia, Saudi Afghan Arab Abu Sulaiman al-Makki (aka Khalid al-Harbi)¹⁷⁰ was ‘the most celebrated of men’ (Kohlmann, 2004: 29); in Chechnya, Saudi Afghan Arab Thamir Salih Abdullah al-Suwailam (aka Khattab) was to become the leader of Arab foreign fighters; in Iraq, Jordanian Afghan Arab Abu Musab al-Zarqawi became the leader of Arab foreign fighters (and al-Qaeda in Iraq); and in Syria, Syrian Afghan Arab Abu Firas al-Suri became the official spokesman for Jabhat-al-Nusrah. See Appendix E listing veteran Arab foreign fighter further involvement in defensive jihads including in Iraq (post 2003) and/or Syria (post 2011).

Comradeship Ties and Friendships

The link between the process of radicalisation and socialisation in 1980s Afghanistan was recognised by Kepel (2008: 148), who identified that:

‘For the international jihadists, the journey to Peshawar was above all an initiation, a socialization of the Islamist networks; thereafter, for some of them, it turned into a

¹⁷⁰ Former Afghan Arab, Abdul Aziz Barbaros (aka Abdul Rahman al-Dosari) was also a prominent ‘Arab’ foreign fighter in Bosnia. Born in 1942 in Saudi Arabia, he was ethnically Indian, not Arab.

radicalization process, as they came into contact with militants who were much more extreme.'

It is important to reiterate that the scholarly literature (Sageman, 2004; Paz, 2005; Horgan, 2009; Hegghammer, 2010a; Atran, 2010) is replete with examples of the importance of friendship and kinship ties concerning initial involvement in terrorism. For example, Hafez (2009: 90) argued that 'friendship and kinship ties are salient features of terrorist radicalization and recruitment.' Whilst this argument appears to hold true for direct recruitment from the general Arab population, this study found that 'comradeship ties' were more influential in deciding whether veteran Afghan Arabs subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities.

It is suggested that 'comradeship ties' appeared to supplant any pre-Afghan jihad ties (friendship and kinship) – less for those based on pre-existing terrorist links. The new friendships that developed and blossomed during the Afghan jihad, appeared to be based on shared hardships, in a hostile environment, that produced a military form of comradeship. The idea of 'comradeship ties' developed as a result of situational circumstances in a war zone, are not unprecedented in military history: Guy Sajer (1971: 83-84) recounted his experience during the Second World War on the Eastern Front, and how 'friendships counted for a great deal ... consolidating men on the same side in friendships which never would have broken through the normal barriers of ordinary peacetime life.' Fitroy Maclean (1950: 329) also recounted how, during the Second World War with Tito's Partisans in Yugoslavia, the 'common experience of hardships and dangers had overcome all differences of class or race or temperament and forged between them lasting bonds of loyalty and affection.'

Examples of notable 'comradeship ties' developed during the Afghan jihad include Ramzi Yusuf befriending Mahmood Abu Halima and Ahmad Ajaj in a militant training camp in Afghanistan, that US investigators later believed led directly to the 1993 WTC attack (Reeve, 1999: 138). Second, Wadih al-Hajj and Mahmud Abu Halima developed 'comradeship ties' in Afghanistan which were rekindled in 1989 at an Islamic conference in

Oklahoma City (Zill, 2001), eventually contributing to Wadih al-Hajj's role in the 1998 East Africa embassy attacks. Finally, it is instructive to recognise the 'comradeship ties' that developed during various defensive jihads by Abdul Rahim al-Nashiri, who planned the 2000 USS *Cole* attack (The 9/11 Commission Report, 2005: 190). He developed 'comradeship ties' with 9/11 hijacker Hamza al-Ghamdi¹⁷¹ and USS *Cole* conspirator Walid Muhammad bin Attash¹⁷² in 1992 (in Tajikistan), Abu Zubaydah¹⁷³ in 1993, and Bin Laden in 1994 - both in Afghanistan.¹⁷⁴ Then in 1998 he formally joined al-Qaeda 'after learning of his cousin Jihad Harazi's suicide bombing of the US Embassy in Kenya.'¹⁷⁵ This last example perhaps suggests that the broad socialisation that occurs in a war zone, including friendship, kinship, and 'comradeship ties,' all played their part and contributed to the subsequent involvement in terrorist related activities by some veteran Afghan Arabs.

The Reintegration Circumstances of Veteran Afghan Arabs

Finally, it is worth examining briefly the seven veteran Afghan Arabs who did return home, in order to examine why, given the same situational circumstances, these individuals chose to reintegrate back into their societies, and in theory dis-engage from defensive jihad. The first, Saudi veteran Afghan Arab, Musa al-Qarni, returned to Saudi Arabia in 1992. According to Al-Qarni, he had been a fighter and a *Sharia* law ideologue, but left Afghanistan before the Taliban took over, and despite reintegrating back into Saudi society, he retained very strong views on the need for defensive jihad in Iraq (post 2003) in order to defeat the 'infidel occupying armies of the US and other countries' (Al-Qarni, 2004). He stressed 'that the jihad waged by Muslims in Iraq in order to drive out the enemies from among the Jews and the Christians ... is legal' (Al-Qarni, 2005). What is clear from his own narrative is that whilst he resettled back in his native country, his ideology (whilst not supporting Islamist terrorism) appeared to continue to support defensive jihad.

¹⁷¹ Hamza al-Ghamdi was one of the 9/11 hijackers on United Airlines Flight 175.

¹⁷² Walid Muhammad bin Attash is a Yemeni JTF-GTMO detainee, who was a senior AQ lieutenant. He participated in jihad in Tajikistan in 1996 (against the Russians) and in Afghanistan (against the Northern Alliance). He was involved in supporting the attack on the USS *Cole* in 2000. He was to be a suicide hijacker for the cancelled SW Asia portion of the 9/11 attacks.

¹⁷³ Abu Zubaydah has been widely referenced (through his diaries) in this chapter.

¹⁷⁴ JTF-GTMO Combat Status Review Tribunal (8 December 2006). Abdul Rahim al-Nashiri; p.2.

¹⁷⁵ JTF-GTMO Combat Status Review Tribunal (8 December 2006). Abdul Rahim al-Nashiri; p.3.

The second, Jordanian/Palestinian Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi departed Afghanistan and returned to Kuwait, in time to be evicted (with all other Palestinians) by Kuwait at the end of the 1991 Gulf war (for Palestinian support to Iraq). He moved back to Jordan, where due to his political agitation, he was imprisoned from 1994 until 1999. Al-Maqdisi continues to be a salafist ideologue, living in Jordan, intermittently in and out of jail (Wagemakers, 2012: 29-50). From a purist perspective, arguably he has not actually reintegrated back into Jordanian society.

Lastly, five Syrian veteran Afghan Arabs returned to Syria. Whilst there is little information about the intervening years, they are now deeply involved in the Syrian jihad. Abu Faris al-Suri is now the spokesman for Jabhat al-Nusrah; Muhammad Ayman Aboul-Tout is now an ideologue for Ahrar ash-Shaam; while both Baha Mustafa al-Jughl and Muhammad Haydar Zammar are/were both members of Ahrar ash-Shaam. Finally, Abu Basir al-Tartusi has been an ideologue, particularly concerning martyrdom (al-Tartusi, 2005). What is instructive about these five Syrian Afghan Arab veterans is that whilst they appeared to re-integrate back into Syrian society in the early 1990s, it also appeared that the ideology of defensive jihad remained dormant, only to resurface over 20 years later. This somewhat begs the question whether a veteran Arab foreign fighter ever completely readjusts, and relates to the notion of ‘disengagement’ whereby an ‘individual may leave a movement, but may express the same cognitions that suggest a close commitment to the social, political and organisational context to terrorist activity’ (Horgan, 2009: 152).

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a compelling case that, for the most part, Afghan Arabs (who had no known pre-existing terrorist links) were not necessarily radicalised prior to their mobilisation to participate in the defensive jihad, nor did they employ terrorist tactics against civilians and non-combatants. In addition, their notion of martyrdom was dying in battle in the path of God (*fee sabeel Allah*) against the Soviets, and not as a result of suicide attacks, against civilians and non-combatants. Moreover, despite the relatively small research sample, it is also illuminating that the seven veteran Afghan Arabs who did

reintegrate back into their societies, all retained to some degree, the ideology of defensive jihad.

The chapter found that subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorist related activities was underpinned by situational factors experienced by Afghan Arabs during the defensive jihad, including real and perceived grievances (against the near and far enemy); terrorist training and indoctrination; the influence of those with pre-existing terrorist links; and finally comradeship ties developed in the mountains of Afghanistan, and in the markets of Peshawar (Pakistan). The grievances were multi-faceted but were broadly either against their own Arab regimes, or against the West for the support they provided to those regimes. In addition, the inability of many Afghan Arabs to return home and reintegrate back into society appeared to play a part in their radicalisation, and arguably contributed to their biographical availability. These grievances in turn helped to create a more extreme ideology that expanded the concept of defensive jihad; sanctioned the killing of civilians and non-combatants; and operationalised the notions of the near and far enemy, first proposed by Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj in 1981.

It seems axiomatic that terrorist training, indoctrination, and the presence of Afghan Arabs with pre-existing terrorist links, would influence the future trajectories of many Afghan Arabs. It appears that the defensive jihad in Afghanistan was ‘hijacked’ - in the words of Afghan Arab Abdullah Anas (2015) - at least by the late 1980s when the Soviets started to withdraw. The men behind the change of emphasis (from defensive jihad to Islamist terrorism) were again perhaps unsurprisingly, largely those Afghan Arabs who had known pre-existing terrorist links. Finally, the ‘comradeship ties’ that were developed over time in the markets of Peshawar and the mountains of Afghanistan, appeared to surpass the kinship and social ties that are often seen as important factors in direct terrorist recruitment. These ‘comradeship ties’ seemed to provide the trust and loyalty needed by small groups who are intent on carrying out Islamist terrorist attacks.

Chapter 5: From Defensive Jihad to Islamist Terrorism in Iraq

Introduction

This chapter, the second of three case studies, examines why and how some (non-Iraqi) Arab foreign fighters in Iraq became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. Unlike the veteran Afghan Arabs whose involvement in Islamist terrorism was distinct from the Afghan jihad in both time and space, the Arab foreign fighters in Iraq became involved in defensive jihad and/or Islamist terrorism at the same time and in the same space. In many ways, such overlaps represent a textbook insurgency, broadly defined as ‘a hybrid form of conflict that combines subversion, guerrilla warfare and terrorism ... [in] an internal struggle in which a disaffected group seeks to gain control of a nation’ (Mockaitis, 1990: 3). Identifying and separating the two cohorts, despite their obvious overlaps, was required in order to answer the research question. The chapter examines the Iraq insurgency and those who participated in defensive jihad by leveraging a dataset of 711 Arab foreign fighters (representing between 14 and 23 percent of the total cohort based on figures provided by Malet (2015: 10)¹⁷⁶ - not including indigenous Iraqis; the radicalisation framework presented in Chapter 2; and the language of political Islam outlined in Chapter 3. Arguably, the originality of the research is underpinned by these tools, alongside the central argument of the influence of situational factors experienced whilst participating in the defensive jihad in Iraq. These included the personal experience of insurgency warfare; the presence of grievances and ideology; and being subjected to ideological indoctrination during group training. The research period starts from the occupation of Iraq (23 March 2003) by US led coalition troops, until December 2009, by which time all UK troops had departed, and US casualties were at an all-time low (based on Iraq Coalition Casualty Count for 2009 provided by *iCasualties.org*).

The key findings in the chapter included the realisation that the vast majority of Arab foreign fighters were not necessarily radicalised in the sense of being committed to an

¹⁷⁶ Malet (2015: 10) estimated that there were about 3,000 - 5,000 foreign fighters (including non-Iraqi Arabs) in Iraq between 2003 and 2009.

‘extremist political or religious ideology’ (Horgan, 2009: 152), but went to Iraq to participate in defensive jihad in response to foreign aggression against their co-religionists. The second finding was the need to disaggregate the labels of martyrdom operations and suicide attacks, in order to better understand the targeting preferences of the two cohorts (Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists). This resulted in the suggestion that martyrdom operations targeted largely military forces under the auspices of defensive jihad, whilst suicide attacks targeted largely civilians and non-combatants under the auspices of Islamist terrorism. The chapter found how grievances translated into a more radical ideology that promoted *takfir* - the excommunication of Muslims as apostates (Sageman, 2008: 39), and how terrorist training and indoctrination in Iraq reinforced this ideology. Finally, the chapter highlights the unique nature of the Iraqi insurgency, where the once broadly distinct notions of defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism that existed during the Afghan jihad, began to overlap and coalesce.

The chapter is broken down into two sections. First there is analysis of the broad ‘setting events’ (Taylor and Horgan, 2006: 592) - education, age, and geographic origin, in order to contextualise their initial involvement in defensive jihad in Iraq. This is accompanied by a brief overview of the Iraqi jihad, aware that it has been covered by many scholars including, but not limited to, Cordesman (2005), Krueger (2006), Hegghammer (2007), Hafez, (2007b), Fishman, Bergen, Felter, Brown and Shapiro (2008), and Hewitt and Kelley-Moore (2009). The second section, and the core of the chapter, offers a detailed interpretative analysis of Arab foreign fighters in Iraq, and explains why and how some of them subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. In order to differentiate between their respective ‘rationales’ (Hegghammer, 2009a), their grievances, ideology, and targeting preferences are examined. Finally, terrorist training and indoctrination in Iraq are examined in order to further explore the trajectory between Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists.

Background to the 2003 Iraq War

The contemporary history of Iraq includes the rise to power of then-President Saddam Hussein and his Sunni orientated Baath Party in 1979, and a continuation of the trend of a Sunni Muslim minority (32-37 percent) governing the Shia Muslim majority (60-65 percent).¹⁷⁷ In 1980, Saddam Hussein led his country into an inconclusive eight-year war with Iran, followed two years later by invading Kuwait. This resulted in a 1991 US led coalition war that forced the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, with two repercussions. First after the Gulf war, the US were invited to station some troops in Saudi Arabia, a decision that later contributed to Osama bin Laden's 1996 *fatwa*.¹⁷⁸ The second repercussion (as noted in Chapter 3) was the subsequent UN sanctions (Resolution 687) against Iraq that resulted in the death of an estimated 500,000 Iraqi children.¹⁷⁹ This death rate was acknowledged by US administration officials¹⁸⁰ and provided the ideological justification for much of the anti-American sentiment amongst many Islamists in the Arab world.¹⁸¹ After the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent dismantling of the al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan, Iraq again came into the spotlight. Despite 'only some anecdotal evidence link[ing] Iraq to al Qaeda' (The 9/11 Commission Report, 2005: 334); the lack of credible evidence of WMD in Iraq (Iraq Survey Group, 2004); and the lack of a legal basis for invading Iraq (Kofi Annan, 2004),¹⁸² the US decided on regime change.¹⁸³ Whatever the actual intentions of the US led invasion of Iraq, it resulted in 'a textbook case of defensive jihad. Foreign military forces occupied Muslim territory after what was widely perceived as an unjustified aggression' (Hegghammer, 2007: 9).

¹⁷⁷ US Central Intelligence Agency. (2014). The World Fact Book: Iraq.

¹⁷⁸ *Declaration of War against the US Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places*.

¹⁷⁹ United Nations Children's Fund (2002).

¹⁸⁰ As noted in Chapter 4, Madeleine Albright (the then US Ambassador to the UN) thought the 'price of half a million children' dying in Iraq due to UN sanctions believed 'the price [wa]s worth it' (Stahl, 1996).

¹⁸¹ Osama bin Laden 'spoke of the suffering of the Iraqi people as a result of sanctions imposed after the Gulf War' (The 9/11 Commission Report, 2005: 49).

¹⁸² In September 2004, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, said of the Iraq invasion: 'from the UN Charter point of view, it was illegal' (Annan, 2004). In November 2008, UK former Lord Chief Justice Lord Bingham, described the war as 'a serious violation of international law' (Bingham, 2008).

¹⁸³ Although beyond the scope of this thesis, it is acknowledged that some Arab (and non-Arab) foreign fighters fled from Afghanistan in 2001, and that some under Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (*Ansar al Islam*) did base themselves in northern Iraq – but beyond the influence of Saddam Hussein.

Analysis of the Data

Setting Events - Overview

The data used in this chapter have been taken from primary and secondary sources including martyrdom biographies and previous studies including Cordesman (2005); Kohlmann (2005a); Paz (2005); the Sinjar records;¹⁸⁴ Hafez (2006b and 2007b); and the Chicago Project on Security and Threats (CPOST) Suicide Attack Database,¹⁸⁵ resulting in a dataset of 711 Arab foreign fighters (not including Iraqi fighters who were defending their homeland). It is acknowledged that data which include martyrdom biographies ‘are by no means perfect sources of information … the evidence they offer is fragmentary and replete with propagandistic narratives’ (Hafez, 2012a: 187).¹⁸⁶ That said, they still offer an interesting insight into the possible individual motivations for involvement in both defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism in Iraq. The research net was cast far and wide in order to attempt to dilute any biases in particular datasets,¹⁸⁷ such as Cordesman (2005) who only examined Saudis, in order to produce a broad and representative sample. Also by including individuals who died as a result of self-sacrificial attacks within the thesis dataset, the analysis could appear skewed towards the notion of martyrdom and suicide. Whilst this may be true, it arguably facilitates perhaps the most important conceptual debate over the martyrdom of Arab foreign fighters participating in defensive jihad, and the ‘martyrdom’ achieved involving Islamist terrorist suicide attacks.

The Arab foreign fighters in Iraq were well represented educationally and career wise: 87 (12 percent) of the 711 Arab foreign fighters had a university education, with five of them qualified as medical doctors. Whilst these findings are in harmony with those of the Afghan

¹⁸⁴ Introduced in Chapter 2, the ‘Sinjar records’ comprised of 707 foreign fighters, including 555 Arabs.

¹⁸⁵ Use of the CPOST Suicide Attack Database is made, aware that it employs a fairly loose definition of a suicide attack: ‘an attack in which an attacker kills himself or herself in a deliberate attempt to kill others.’

¹⁸⁶ Hegghammer (2007: 14) also noted that ‘the biographies on jihadist websites … are repeated in standardised phrases, to the extent that one sometimes wonders about their sincerity.’

¹⁸⁷ Potential biases include data that largely reflects a single country (due to availability, an author’s interest, or that certain nationalities - or groups - have greater access to social media).

Arab cohort in Chapter 4,¹⁸⁸ they hide an interesting facet. Of those 87 with a university education, it is instructive to find that actually 66 (76 percent) were university students who cut short their education in order to go to Iraq and participate in defensive jihad. Deeper interrogation of the thesis dataset reveals that 42 percent were Saudis and 21 percent were Libyans, of which 32 percent of Saudi students came from Mecca, and 50 percent of Libyan students came from Durna. The importance of Mecca and Durna are discussed below under ‘geographic origin.’

Age wise, based on 283 Arab foreign fighters where data were available, they varied between 15 years and 54 years, with 49 percent of them 23-years-old or under. The average age was 24 and the median was 28. Again, these findings correlate well both with the Afghan Arab cohort in Chapter 4,¹⁸⁹ and the scholarly literature (Sageman, 2004: 92; Silke, 2008: 105). The notion of age offers at least two interesting interpretations for involvement in defensive jihad in Iraq: biographical availability (McAdam, 1986) and ‘age-related vulnerabilities of community members’ (UNSC CTC, 2015b). First, the young age of nearly 50 percent of the Arab foreign fighters suggests that their youth indicated the ‘absence of personal constraints … such as marriage and family responsibilities’ (McAdam 1986: 70). Later the chapter tests the assertion by R. Hassan (2009), that ‘most suicide bombers are both young and male.’ Second, as noted in Chapter 4, the notion of age-related vulnerabilities ‘is already well established in other spheres that young males are associated with a multitude of dangerous and high-risk activities’ (Silke, 2008: 105), and is discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

The Geographic Origin of Arab Foreign Fighters in Iraq

A brief overview of the nationalities of Arab foreign fighters in Iraq offers the opportunity to examine the broad social, political, and religious context from where the individuals originated. The top three countries of origin were Saudi Arabia (44 percent), Libya (16

¹⁸⁸ Chapter 4 found that 52 (14 percent) of the 369 Afghan Arabs had a university education, with five qualified as medical doctors.

¹⁸⁹ Chapter 4 found that 60 percent of the Afghan Arabs varied between 11-years-old and 65-years-old, with 51 percent of them 22-years-old or under. The average age was 23 and the median was 24.

percent), and Syria (eight percent). Four Gulf countries (the Sultanate of Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, and the UAE) appeared to have no citizens involved in the Iraqi jihad. The breakdown of the geographic origin of Arab foreign fighters in Iraq from the thesis dataset, is presented in Figure 5.1.

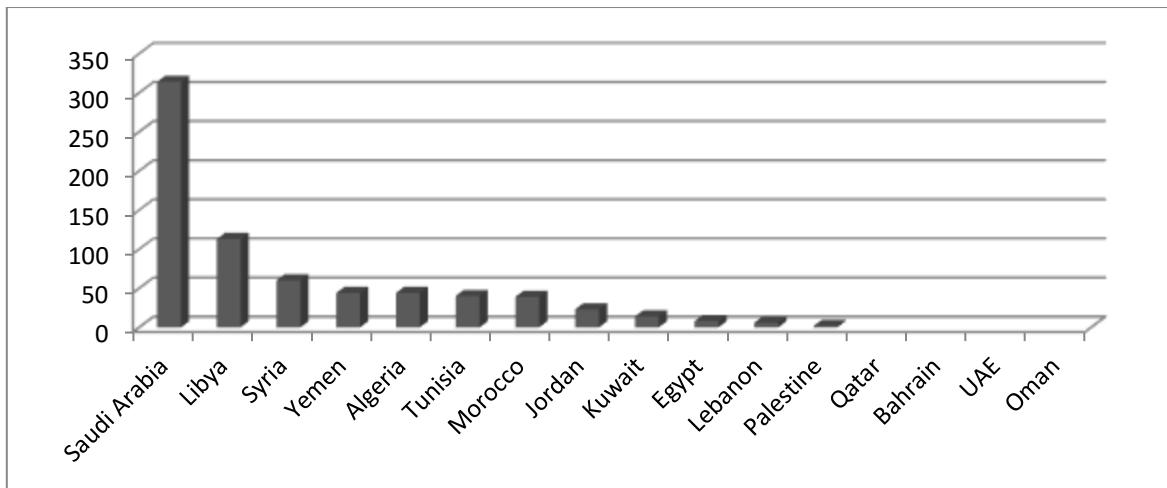


Figure 5.1: The geographic origin of Arab foreign fighters in Iraq (n=711).

Saudi Arabia being the predominant country of origin was identified by other scholars (al-Shishani, 2005b; Felter and Fishman, 2007: 7; Hewitt and Kelley-Moore, 2009),¹⁹⁰ and is largely explained by Saudi state and clerical support for the defensive jihad in Iraq.¹⁹¹ Saudi Arabia was more than simply a permissive environment - arguably it was an encouraging one, actually promoting the notion of defensive jihad in Iraq. According to Paz (2005: 5), the ‘support for violent Jihad in Iraq against the Americans was encouraged by the Saudi Islamic establishment,’ whilst Cordesman (2005: 9) noted that ‘interrogations of nearly 150 Saudis suspected of planning to join the Iraqi insurgency indicate that they were heeding the calls of clerics and activists.’ Such evidence of support includes a *fatwa*¹⁹² (addressed to the Iraqi people) supported by 26 Saudi clerics, that stressed the legality of

¹⁹⁰ The only study to challenge these assessments was Cordesman (2005) who found that ‘the number of Saudi volunteers in August 2005 was around twelve percent of the foreign contingent.’ This observation does not conform to the multitude of other studies on Arab foreign fighters in Iraq.

¹⁹¹ A lesser factor was the spill over from a failed AQAP campaign, that was defeated by early 2006 (Hegghammer, 2010b), freeing up a greater pool of politicised and militarised individuals. The Global Terrorism Database shows four confirmed AQAP attacks against the Saudi state in 2004, with the last confirmed attack on 24 February 2006.

¹⁹² *Open Sermon to the Militant Iraqi People* (given on 5 November 2004).

the resistance in Iraq, and Saudi cleric (and veteran Afghan Arab) Yusuf al-Uyayri, ‘who co-wrote his arguably most influential work, *The Crusade in Iraq Series*, advising Iraqi and Arab foreign fighters on how to resist the Americans (Hegghammer, 2010b: 173).

It is also worth briefly exploring whether religiosity¹⁹³ within Saudi Arabia was a factor that may explain the large contingent of Saudi foreign fighters in Iraq. It is broadly accepted that Saudi Arabia follows ‘the rigorously conservative and strict interpretation of the Salafi … school of the Sunni branch of Islam’ (US Department of State, 2004),¹⁹⁴ often labelled *Wahhabism*. There appears to be a tentative link between Saudi Arabia and this ‘puritanical sect of Islam’ (International Centre for Religion and Diplomacy, 2013: 3), and the suggestion that ‘more religious societies do produce more jihadists’ (Hewitt and Kelley-Moore, 2009: 219). That said, according to Canetti, Hobfoll, Pedahzur, and Zaidise (2010: 575), the ‘relationship between religion and support of political violence only holds true when mediated by deprivations and psychological resource loss.’ As will be demonstrated later, religiosity was a common motivating circumstance for many Arab foreign fighters, but in the Saudi specific case, explicit state and clerical support¹⁹⁵ for defensive jihad in Iraq, appeared to be the dominant factor.

Although Libya was the second most predominant country of origin, it actually had the highest involvement per capita (20 per million). The explanation for the relatively large participation by Libyan foreign fighters is threefold. First, as noted in Chapter 4, there was a tendency for Arab regimes to either export militants abroad or if already abroad, to prevent their return. In the case of Libya, ‘local Salafi-jihadist movements [were] in conflict with their government … forcing fighters to search for new havens’ (al-Shishani, 2005b). The second explanation is that the eastern towns of Durna and Benghazi have long been associated with Islamic militancy in Libya, particularly in the mid-1990s involving the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) (Felter and Fishman, 2007: 10). This is supported

¹⁹³ Introduced in Chapter 1, the term religiosity is understood to mean ‘the condition of being religious or excessively religious’ (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1995: 1161).

¹⁹⁴ The report reflects the religious environment at the time of the Iraqi jihad, highlighting Saudi ‘denunciations of non-Muslim religions from government-sanctioned pulpits.’

¹⁹⁵ It was only later that Saudi ‘government-affiliated clerics such as Abdul Muhsin al-Ubaykan … declared that the insurgency in Iraq amounts to *fitna* [sedition] and is illegitimate’ (Hegghammer, 2007: 9).

by the thesis dataset that reveals that Libyan foreign fighters from either Durna or Benghazi made up 64 percent of the Libyan fighters, and ten percent of all Arab foreign fighters in Iraq. Concerning Durna, R. Hassan (2009) argued that the reasons why so many came from this town included a ‘local tradition of resistance and religious fervor.’ Third, the LIFG that formed in 1995, publically supported the October 2006 al-Qaeda declaration of an Islamic State of Iraq, and later officially merged with it.¹⁹⁶

Finally, the substantial involvement of Syrian foreign fighters has two broad explanations: regime support and geographic proximity. Syrian regime support was in a similar vein to that of Egypt during the Afghan jihad - getting ‘rid of thousands of the most aggressive Salafists with a taste for jihad, packing them off to a foreign war from which many would never return to pose a threat’ (Neumann, 2014: 19). This was to lead to Syria being ‘one of the leading state sponsors of both Baathist and al-Qaeda terrorism in Iraq’ (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 25). This support included arranging ‘buses to ferry fighters … the issuing of documentation … discount on passport fees’ (Abdul-Ahad, 2005), and also ‘the chance to receive military training and fight against Coalition forces in Iraq’ (Neumann, 2014: 20). This level of Syrian regime support was recognised by the US led coalition, resulting in an October 2008 raid on the Syrian border town of Abu Kamal that resulted in the killing of the Syrian al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) logistics coordinator, Abu Ghadiya (Gerges, 2016: 66).¹⁹⁷ The second point concerning the large involvement of Syrian Arab foreign fighters is the geographic proximity of Syria with Iraq, and their largely porous 599 km border that facilitated the movement of both Syrian and other Arab foreign fighters. This suggestion could however be countered in that Jordanian foreign fighters made up less than three percent of the cohort of 711 Arab foreign fighters, yet Jordan and Iraq share a 181 km border. This point more generally demonstrates the lack of a single reason why one nationality may be more involved in defensive jihad than another.

¹⁹⁶ The merger between al-Qaeda and LIFG occurred on November 3, 2007, through an announcement by Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Layth al-Libi (Springer, Regens, and Edger, 2009: 267).

¹⁹⁷ In addition, the Iraqi border town of Sinjar was an entry point for Arab foreign fighters coming from Syria, and the target for the October 2007 US raid that produced the ‘Sinjar records.’

The apparent non-involvement in the Iraqi jihad of citizens of four Gulf countries (the Sultanate of Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, and the UAE) deserves comment, all the more in that it is in stark contrast to their fellow Gulf neighbour, Saudi Arabia. Arguably a more moderate religiosity (than Saudi Arabia) may have played a part, although as noted earlier, religiosity is a widely discredited factor particularly unless associated with deprivations (Canetti et al., 2010) – deprivations that these four small oil rich Gulf countries (and indeed Saudi Arabia) are generally not known to suffer. Perhaps the most plausible explanation is that these four Gulf countries have no notable history in Islamist militancy (including involvement in defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism), or links to organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood. The apparent lack of involvement in the defensive jihad in Iraq by nationals from these four Gulf countries, was also noted in Chapter 4 vis-à-vis their lack of involvement in the defensive jihad in 1980s Afghanistan.

Finally, it is instructive that unlike the majority of expatriate Afghan Arabs who had been living in other Arab countries, the majority (90 percent) of expatriate Arab foreign fighters in Iraq had been living in the West.¹⁹⁸ Although a small overall number, only three percent out of 711, the fact that they mobilised from Western countries may be explained by the fact that it was a highly controversial Western inspired invasion of an Arab country. It may have made them uncomfortable to remain living and working in the West, particularly in Muslim immigrant communities. The most common two Western countries were France and Italy, with perhaps unsurprisingly, Arab migrants from mainly Algeria and Tunisia respectively. Anecdotally, Cherif Kouachi, a French national of Algerian parentage, who was arrested in Paris whilst attempting to go to Iraq in 2005, was later involved in the 2015 Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks in Paris (Callimachi and Yardley, 2015).

The Lack of Radicalisation in Arab Foreign Fighters Travelling to Iraq

This section of the chapter makes the case that the majority of Arab foreign fighters who arrived in Iraq were not necessarily radicalised prior to their decision to participate in

¹⁹⁸ Out of the 22 Arab expatriates, 20 were living in the West, and two three were uprooted Palestinians working in Jordan. In a separate study, Paz (2005) identified one Moroccan foreign fighter had been living in Spain, and one Lebanese foreign fighter had been living in Denmark.

defensive jihad. This debate is necessary in order to establish a baseline understanding of those who went to Iraq, in order to then examine why and how some ostensibly unradicalised individuals subsequently become involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. It is often implicit in the scholarly literature that individuals who depart their country of residence in order to participate in defensive jihad, in defence of their co-religionists, are somehow already radicalised and/or already Islamist terrorists (Rubin, 1997: 179-206; Edwards, 2002: 266-71; Dalacoura, 2011: 42). Moreover, even the United Nations Security Council (UNSC CTC, 2015a) labels such individuals as ‘foreign terrorist fighters.’ This perception is taken notwithstanding the fact that despite ‘the numerous endeavours in academia ... no metrics exist to gauge radicalisation’ (Coolsaet, 2011: 260). As Napoleoni (2005: 132) argued succinctly, ‘what in the West is commonly defined as terrorist activity is regarded in the Arab world, including in Iraq, as national resistance against an occupying power.’

In the specific case of Iraq, academic consensus on whether Arab foreign fighters were radicalised is mixed. In a study of Saudi foreign fighters in Iraq, one of its primary conclusions was ‘the unsettling realization that the vast majority of Saudi militants who ... entered Iraq were not terrorist sympathizers before the war’ (Cordesman, 2005: 5). Atwan (2006: 206) also ‘discovered that the majority of foreign fighters were not jihadis before the war.’ Finally, Gerges (2005: 268) noted that prior to the Iraq invasion, Arab foreign fighters ‘had not been politicized [and] had not joined any Islamist, let alone paramilitary organization.’ From the thesis dataset, over 98 percent of Arab foreign fighters involved in Iraq had no documented pre-existing terrorist links, perhaps indicating the establishment of a new generation of young Arab male fighters.

Naturally there were some Arab foreign fighters in Iraq that did have known pre-existing terrorist links, the most notable individual arguably being Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Others include al-Zarqawi’s brother-in-law Khalid al-Aruri (a member of Jund al-Sham); Abu Ayoob al-Misri (a member of EIJ); and Abu Faraj al-Libi (a member of al-Qaeda). Other Arab foreign fighters with pre-existing terrorist links who influenced but did not enter Iraq,

include Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Musa al-Qarni – present and past members of al-Qaeda. The influence of these individuals is covered later in the chapter.

Perhaps more analytically useful than examining what the majority of Arab foreign fighters were not (i.e. radicalised), is exploring what they were, for example the suggestion that ‘many of the volunteers were deeply religious’ (Hashim, 2006: 148). Extracted from the thesis dataset (that includes the Sinjar records), it is possible to demonstrate that religiosity appeared to play a role in the travelling date of Arab foreign fighters to Iraq. During the 12 month period from September 2006 to August 2007, 55 percent of Arab foreign fighters travelled to Iraq during, or after, one of the four notable occasions in the Sunni Islamic calendar: the fasting month of Ramadan (23 September - 22 October 2006); Eid al-Fitr (23 - 24 October 2006); the Hajj pilgrimage (28 - 31 December 2006); and Eid al-Adha (30 - 31 December 2006). By noting the travel dates of Arab foreign fighters, the favourite three travel months in 2006 correlate directly to these annual Islamic occasions – in effect periods of increased religiosity. The most prolific month (October 2006) corresponds to Ramadan, the second most prolific month (January 2007) corresponds to the Hajj and Eid al-Adha, and the third (November 2006) relates to Eid al-Fitr. This is presented in Figure 5.2.

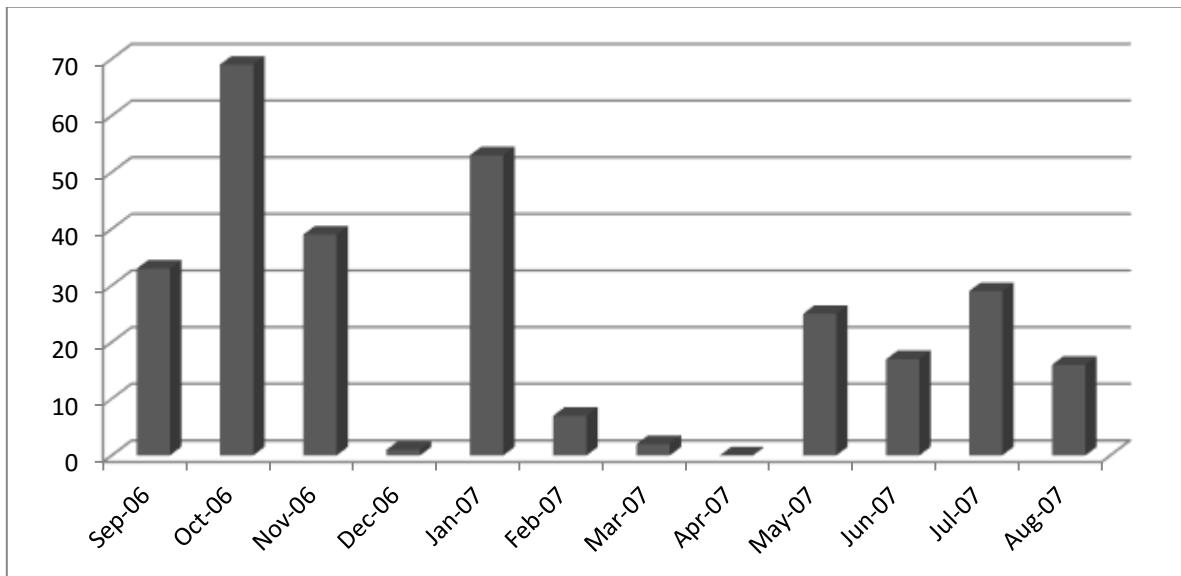


Figure 5.2: Arab foreign fighter deployment months to Iraq: 2006-2007 (n=291).

Many Arab foreign fighters appeared to travel to Iraq only after having participated in one of these Islamic events, except for Ramadan, where the evidence shows that they often deployed throughout the fasting month. Fasting during Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam, and compliance is rewarded. In the *Hadeeth Bukhari*, it is said that ‘whoever observes fasts during the month of Ramadan out of sincere faith … all his past sins will be forgiven.’¹⁹⁹ This may help explain a keenness to participate in all or some of Ramadan, prior to participating in defensive jihad in Iraq. In effect participation appeared to be a form of absolution or self-purification. As noted in Chapter 1, it was during Ramadan that Ahmad Abdullah ash-Shaya (and his cousin Adil) decided to travel to Iraq in order to participate in defensive jihad. Although this appears to be the first empirical study to explicitly highlight this phenomenon, Hegghammer (2007: 17) had recognised that ‘a striking number of people travelled during or around the month of Ramadan.’²⁰⁰

The annual Hajj pilgrimage also featured in the accounts of Arab foreign fighters as did the *umra*, which is considered ‘the lesser pilgrimage … a rite that requires several days to accomplish’ (Glasse, 2008: 540). The Hajj pilgrimage is another of the five pillars of Islam, and attendance offers a similar form of absolution. In the *Hadeeth Bukhari* it narrates that the Prophet Muhammad said that ‘whoever performs Hajj for Allah's pleasure … then he will return (after the Hajj) free from all sins as if he were born anew.’²⁰¹ The influence of the Hajj pilgrimage appears to have been twofold. First, it was used by those already committed to participating in defensive jihad in Iraq, as a form of absolution. Second, it appears that some young Arab nationals were targeted and recruited by individuals whom they met during the Hajj.²⁰²

Whilst the Hajj pilgrimage is in the Islamic calendar, the *umra* can be performed at any time of the year. Individuals who performed the *umra*, also appeared to do so as a form of

¹⁹⁹ *Hadeeth Bukhari*. Book 2 (Belief). 1:36 - 1.37: Narrated by Abu Huraira.

²⁰⁰ Interestingly, CNN reporter Jomana Karadsheh (2006) also reported that ‘with the Islamic holy month of Ramadan under way, insurgent attacks in Iraq have risen in the past two weeks.’

²⁰¹ *Hadeeth Bukhari*. Book 26 (Hajj Pilgrimage). 2.596: Narrated by Abu Huraira.

²⁰² Examples include a 21-year-old Saudi student Adil Mastoor Yahya al-Kaabi; a 21-year-old Tunisian student Ali Omar al-Kuki; and a 21-year-old Saudi national Ahmad Mustafa Mufleh al-Kaabi (al-Hazli), who were all motivated as a result of conversations during the Hajj pilgrimage.

absolution prior to travelling to Iraq, but anecdotally the few that did appeared to be already committed to Islamist terrorist related activities including suicide attacks. Examples include Jordanian national Raa'id al-Banna who having performed the *umra*, blew himself up one month later (on 28 February 2005) in Iraq killing 120 civilians. Also fellow Jordanian and radical ideologue Omar Yusuf Juma, a veteran Arab foreign fighter of 1980s Afghanistan and Bosnia, insisted on performing the *umra*, before travelling to Iraq and serving alongside Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The fact that the *umra* can be performed at any time of the year as noted above, suggests that there was a degree of urgency and an unwillingness to wait for the next Hajj or Ramadan, which could have been up to ten months away (according to the Islamic calendar).

Whilst this thesis is not proposing a cause-effect relationship, it is striking that 55 percent of Arab foreign fighters in 2006/7 travelled during, or after, one of these Islamic practices. The deduction is that involvement in these annual events in the Sunni Islamic calendar may have stimulated their feelings towards their co-religionists in Iraq, whilst at the same time gaining a degree of solace aware of the possible realisation that they may not return alive. Such a belief may be equated to British soldiers attending Christian services in the Kuwaiti desert, prior to the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. As a journalist embedded with the Royal Marines, Tim Butcher (2003) noted that ‘the unit's chaplain has been a particularly busy man. The number of soldiers attending his services has grown steadily over the past few weeks as the seriousness of what many of them might face in the coming days steadily became apparent.’

The emphasis on the religious (Islamic) rather than the radical nature of the Arab foreign fighters in Iraq has additional academic ballast, in the form of state and clerical support. Hegghammer (2007: 16) noted ‘that both local imams and some senior clerics were encouraging participation in the Iraqi resistance.’ Musa al-Qarni (2006b), a Saudi intellectual (and veteran Afghan Arab and former AQ member), argued ‘that fighting the Americans on the land of Iraq is jihad, that the Americans are aggressors, and that the [fighting] of Iraqis and Muslims against the Americans in Iraq constitutes a legitimate and obligatory defence.’ It is therefore not surprising that many Arab foreign fighters

‘volunteered out of a sense of religious duty and a sincere desire to defend fellow Muslims from non-Muslim invaders’ (Hafez, 2007b: 178).

Such religious support resulted in the mobilisation of individuals such as Tunisian foreign fighter Walid Muhammad al-Masmudi, who ‘readily admitted that the … exhortations of clerics were the primary influences on his decision to go to fight in the jihad’ (Hashim, 2006: 144). It is instructive that the father of one Saudi foreign fighter (Muqrin al-Utaybi), who was killed in Fallujah in November 2004, blames the clerics who ‘corrupted the minds of young men’ by calling for ‘jihad against the occupiers as a duty for all who are able’ (The Guardian, 22 November 2004). The emphasis on a religious underpinning for involvement in defensive jihad in Iraqi appears to have academic support. The themes include the revulsion of Arab and Muslim land being occupied by non-Muslims (Cordesman, 2005: 9; Hegghammer, 2007: 14); the humiliation of Muslims at the hands of non-Arabs (Hashim, 2006: 147; Hegghammer, 2007: 15); and the need to fight in defence ‘of one’s land, coreligionists and honour’ (Hafez, 2012a: 190).

To conclude this section, it appears that the majority of Arab foreign fighters (with no known previous links to terrorism) who travelled to Iraq to participate in defensive jihad in defence of fellow Muslims against US led coalition forces, were not necessarily radicalised in the sense of being committed to an ‘extremist political or religious ideology’ (Horgan, 2009: 152). Whilst their motivation had a political and religious dimension, as explained above, it was not ‘extremist.’ As with Ahmad Abdullah al-Shaya introduced in Chapter 1, their initial intention for going to Iraq was simply ‘to fight the Americans on Noble Jihad’ (Ballen, 2011: 7). If Arab foreign fighters were generally not radicalised prior to participating in defensive jihad in Iraq, why and how did this change in order for some to subsequently get involved in Islamist terrorist related activities?

The Radicalisation of Arab Foreign Fighters in Iraq: How and Why?

Introduction

To empirically test the argument that the original rationale behind Arab foreign fighter involvement in defensive jihad in Iraq was largely to fight the US led coalition, it is worth examining their targeting patterns in Iraq from 2003 onwards. As noted earlier, this will permit a determination of the ‘relative importance of the different rationales in the ideology’ (Hegghammer, 2009a: 260) of Arab foreign fighters. The challenge to such research however is that the data on conventional attacks (shootings, mine and IED attacks) that targeted coalition troops rarely mention the perpetrator, let alone record whether he/she was an Iraqi national or an Arab foreign fighter. Such a challenge may be overcome by examining martyrdom operations / suicide attacks instead, which often identify both the targets and the perpetrators. Despite the existence of overlaps and the challenge of defining civilians and non-combatants (as noted in Chapter 1), research that includes the disaggregation of targets may offer a more nuanced understanding of the two tactics (martyrdom operations and suicide attacks), and the two cohorts (Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists) who adopt them. This concept is not entirely new, for example, one study on suicide bombers in Iraq conducted by Seifert and McCauley (2014: 803) argued that ‘suicide attacks must be disaggregated by target in order to understand these attacks as the expression of different insurgent priorities.’

Whilst Seifert and McCauley (2014: 803) argued for the disaggregation of targets of suicide attacks, perhaps they were responding to Crenshaw (2007a: 162) who first recognised the ‘over-aggregation’ of the tactic of suicide attacks:

‘The tactic is usually treated as though it were a single unified method of violence. All types of suicide attacks are merged together, despite their serving different instrumental purposes: destroying military targets … killing enemy civilians, or massacring co-religionists in factional struggles. For instance, why do some groups

target civilians and others military assets or individual officials? Why should the manner of violence matter more than the target or the purpose?’

Such support for the disaggregation of targets offers academic ballast to the thesis suggestion that, whilst both tactics in Iraq involved an attacker who ‘does not expect to survive the mission’ (Pape, 2005: 10), ‘martyrdom operations’ largely targeted military forces under the auspices of defensive jihad, whilst ‘suicide attacks’ largely targeted civilians and non-combatants under the auspices of Islamist terrorism. As noted in Chapter 2, Moghadam (2011: 5) also argued that a martyrdom operation should ‘not be labelled a terrorist attack if it is targeted against members of an army, because attacks are ordinarily labelled terrorist attacks when they are aimed at non-combatants.’ Finally, the motivation or intent of the self-sacrificial attack should be considered. For example, the 2000 suicide attack against the USS *Cole* was intended as a symbolic act of terror to elicit an over-reaction by the USA, and not an act of jihad or guerrilla warfare intended to whittle down the US Navy’s fighting capability. Therefore, aware of the ‘lack of a common definition of the concept of suicide terrorism’ (Crenshaw, 2007a: 135), at least drawing a broad distinction between ‘martyrdom operations’ and ‘suicide attacks’ offers a degree of conceptual clarity when examining the perpetrators.

The idea of linking ‘martyrdom operations’ with defensive jihad resonates within the understanding of the Islamic concept of martyrdom in the language of political Islam, in that it acknowledges losing one’s life in the path of God (*fee sabeel Allah*) defending fellow Muslims against (normally foreign) military aggression, whilst participating in a defensive jihad. In its simplest form, a ‘martyrdom operation’ could involve a lone fighter armed with only a rifle or hand grenade attacking a heavily armed enemy position. Perhaps in an even more intentionally self-destructive or sacrificial form, the battle of Dien Bien Phu in French Indo-China (now Vietnam) is instructive. According to Jules Roy (1965: 72), ‘every [Vietminh] soldier’s ambition was to sacrifice himself’ permitting Vietminh battalions to be ‘preceded by a group of dynamiters with orders to make openings in the barbed-wire defences and destroy the blockhouses, blowing themselves up with them’ (p. 119). Arguably the Vietminh were also participating in their version of defensive jihad (against

foreign occupiers) and were using martyrdom operations (against military targets) where (as noted above) they did ‘not expect to survive the mission’ (Pape, 2005: 10).

As noted in Chapter 2, it is illuminating however that some scholars, including Cook (2002) place the term ‘martyrdom operations’ inside quotation marks, being unwilling ‘to take a stand on the question of whether people who die during the course of these actions [suicide attacks] are actually martyrs or not’ (Cook, 2002: 35).²⁰³ Within the context of Iraq, by distinguishing between suicide attacks and ‘martyrdom operations’ through the disaggregation of targets, continuing the argument from Chapter 4, this thesis suggests that ‘martyrdom operations’ which targeted foreign and Iraqi troops (within the understanding of defensive jihad), may be more usefully conceptualised as martyrdom operations outside quotation marks, a position adopted throughout the remainder of the chapter, and thesis.

The inverse is also true. Suicide attacks that target civilians and non-combatants are more akin to acts of Islamist terrorism, and should not be understood as ‘militant heroic martyrdom’ (Singh, 2011: 88), despite some groups (for example HAMAS) potentially framing it that way within the language of political Islam. Martyrdom (*fee sabeeel Allah*) is more easily understood as being achieved under the auspices of defensive jihad, rather than Islamist terrorism. This leads to the notion of radicalisation, and whether Arab foreign fighters who conducted martyrdom operations against coalition troops in Iraq were radicalised or not. The position taken earlier in the chapter was that the majority of Arab foreign fighters (with no known previous links to terrorism) who participated in defensive jihad in defence of fellow Muslims against US led coalition forces, were not necessarily radicalised. This could lead to the conclusion that Arab foreign fighters who conducted martyrdom operations against coalition and Iraqi troops in Iraq, whilst demonstrably committed, were also not necessarily radicalised.

²⁰³ It was also noted in Chapter 2, that Fierke (2014: 207) used the term ‘suicide/martyrdom’ – in order ‘to highlight the tension in the relationship between the two concepts.’

The Data

Based on the idea that the defensive jihad in Iraq was a struggle to defend fellow Muslims from subjugation, it would be reasonable to expect that the primary target for engagement by Arab foreign fighters would be US led coalition forces. The casualty statistics for coalition forces and Iraqi civilians, extracted from *iCasualties* and *Iraq Body Count* respectively, whilst identifying casualties, unfortunately do not allow for a nuanced disaggregation of the perpetrators, in order to identify Arab foreign fighters.²⁰⁴ However by using data on martyrdom operations and suicide attacks, it permits analysis of the actors (Arab foreign fighters or Islamist terrorists) and the opportunity to examine the trajectory between them. It is assumed that as Arab foreign fighters ‘constituted the bulk of suicide bombers’ (Moghadam, 2011: 223),²⁰⁵ the majority of martyrdom operations and suicide attacks were conducted by Arab foreign fighters / Islamist terrorists, and not Iraqis (Crenshaw, 2007b: ix). This was confirmed by Hashim (2006: 209), who noted that Iraqi nationalist insurgents were reluctant to engage in suicide attacks, and disliked ‘the barbaric and provocative behaviour of the foreigners.’ One explanation offered by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (2004a), was that ‘the Iraqi brothers still prefer safety and returning to the arms of their wives, where nothing frightens them.’²⁰⁶

Extracted from the thesis dataset, Figure 5.3 suggests that the initial targeting by Arab foreign fighters was aimed at US led coalition forces involving martyrdom operations, however the targeting soon switched to Iraqi civilians and non-combatants, involving suicide attacks.

²⁰⁴ For Iraqi civilian casualties, perpetrators are listed as (1) any perpetrators; (2) US led coalition, no Iraqi state forces; (3) US led coalition, including Iraqi state forces; (4) Iraqi state forces without coalition, (5) anti-government / occupation forces; (6) unknown actors. For US led coalition casualties, the perpetrators are not identified.

²⁰⁵ In May 2007 US General Petraeus also confirmed that ‘80 to 90 percent of the suicide bombers come from outside Iraq’ (Partlow, 2007).

²⁰⁶ This letter was captured by US forces in Iraq on 23 January 2004, and after translation, was released by the Coalition Provisional Authority in February 2004.

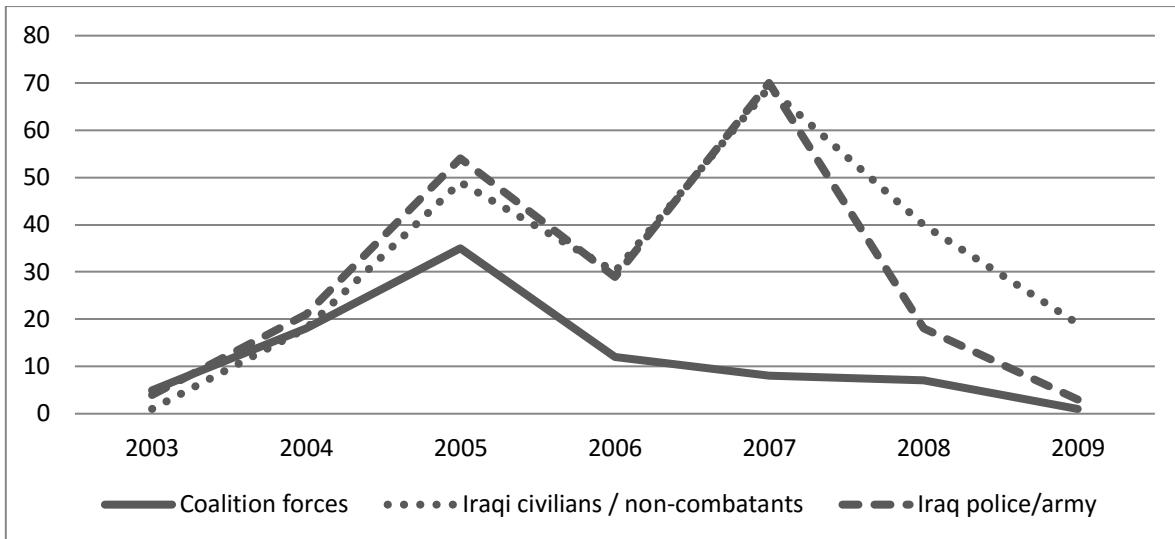


Figure 5.3: Targeting comparison of self-sacrificial attacks in Iraq (2003 – 2009). n1=86 martyrdom operations perpetrated by Arab foreign fighters targeting the US led coalition troops. Source: Thesis dataset (incorporating CPOST, iCasualties, and GTD); n2=226 suicide attacks (by unknown perpetrators, but assumed non-Iraqi Sunni Arabs) targeting Iraqi civilians and non-combatants. Source: GTD database,²⁰⁷ n3= 200 martyrdom operations perpetrated by Arab foreign fighters targeting Iraqi police and army units. Source: GTD database.

The reliability of the data in Figure 5.3 is supported by other academic studies: the peak in 2005 is also present in the analysis conducted by Hafez (2007b), while both peaks in 2005 and 2007 are present in the findings by Seifert and McCauley (2014). Also, by using the data on the number of actual attacks as opposed to the number of casualties, it removes a potential distortion in the analysis, as civilian casualties were vastly higher than coalition and Iraqi troops, due to their lack of protection and hence viewed as ‘soft targets’ (Piazza, 2009:63). What was apparent in Iraq from 2005, was that civilians were ‘the target of choice’ (Crenshaw, 2007b: ix).

Figure 5.3 shows the point of inflection (in 2004) that resulted in the strategic shift to increase suicide attacks against Iraqi civilians / non-combatants, and Iraqi police and soldiers, with a corresponding reduction (in 2005) of martyrdom operations against coalition troops. It suggests that the initial targeting of coalition troops was consistent with the notion of a defensive jihad, whilst the later targeting of Iraqi civilians and non-

²⁰⁷ GTD Search Criteria: ‘Years: (between 2003 and 2009); all incidents regardless of doubt; including only suicide attacks; Country: (Iraq).’ It is noted that the GTD does not include a definition of a ‘suicide attack’ in the 2015 GTD Codebook.

combatants was consistent with the notion of *takfir*, within the context of Islamist terrorism. It is also suggested that whilst the almost parallel targeting of Iraqi police and soldiers (with that of Iraqi civilians and non-combatants) was consistent with the notion of *takfir*, such targeting (of Iraqi police and soldiers) was more within the context of a defensive jihad. Regarding Iraqi civilians and non-combatants, the pendulum within political Islam had swung from defensive jihad to Islamist terrorism, although ideologically the rhetoric of political Islam was the same – it remained framed under the rubric of a defensive jihad. What is also demonstrated in Figure 5.3 is the coexistence of the notions of defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism, which may also explain their widespread conflation, intentional or not, in academia, the media, and among policy makers.

A further extraction from Figure 5.3 produces Figure 5.4, which specifically disaggregates the targets of attacks that involved both martyrdom operations and suicide attacks.

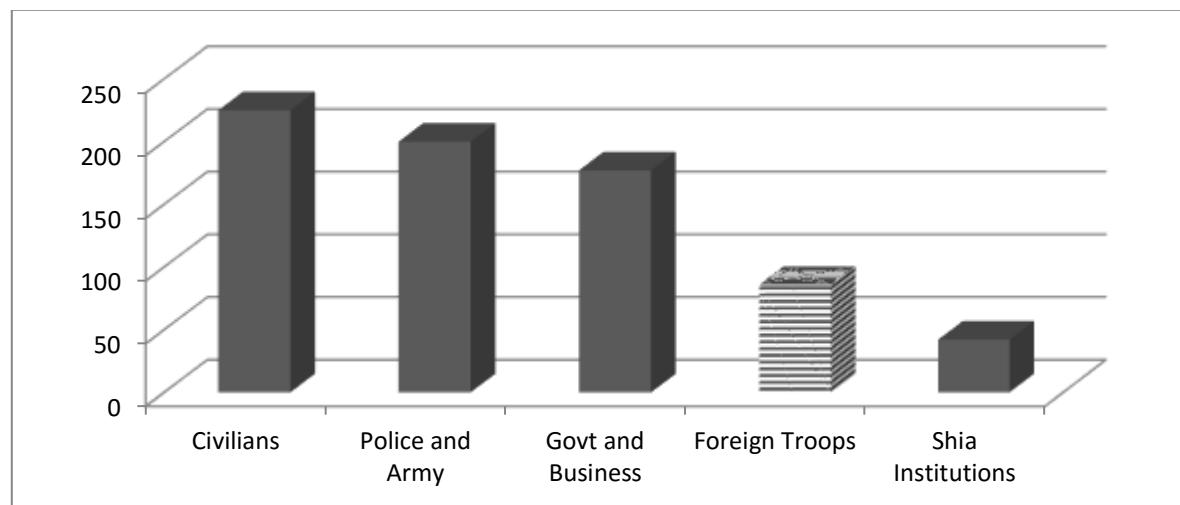


Figure 5.4: Targeting Comparison of 731 self-sacrificial attacks in Iraq (2003 – 2009). n1=86 ‘martyrdom operations’ targeting foreign troops. Source: Thesis dataset (incorporating CPOST, iCasualties, and GTD); and n2=645 martyrdom / suicide attacks targeting Iraqi police and army, Iraqi civilians and non-combatants, Iraqi government, Iraqi businesses, and Shia institutions. Source: GTD database.

Figure 5.4 represents the targets that were killed by each martyrdom operation or suicide attack, rather than the possible intended target, which would have been largely speculative. In a study of suicide attacks in Iraq, Seifert and McCauley (2014: 808) claimed to have ‘identified the intended target of each suicide attack’ and coded accordingly. The research conducted for this thesis found such identification is, in reality, largely subjective. At best,

research can generally only identify the cluster of targets, a policy adopted by GTD, for example ‘Government (General); Military; Private Citizens & Property; Religious Figures/Institutions.’²⁰⁸ Such target groupings despite the obvious overlaps, reveals that 37 percent of attacks involved Iraqi civilians and non-combatants including Shia religious figures; 24 percent involved Iraqi government and businesses; 28 percent involved Iraqi police and troops; and only 11 percent involved foreign troops.

Although touched on in Chapter 1, it is worth clarifying that Iraqi police or military ‘recruits’ are considered civilians and/or non-combatants, and that attacking them is an act of Islamist terrorism. For example, the GTD database records that on 11 February 2004, a ‘suicide bomber driving a car targeted Iraqi military recruits waiting outside an army recruitment centre in Baghdad.’²⁰⁹ However the label ‘recruit’ is potentially misleading as they were in fact Iraqi civilians - ‘job-seekers’ (Ani and Murphy, 2005). This would also apply to Iraqi police recruitment centres where individuals are ‘recruits in the process of signing up to work for the Iraqi police.’²¹⁰ This disaggregation (between civilians looking for work, and members of Iraq’s armed forces) also conforms to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC, 2015a), in that civilians are defined ‘as persons who are not members of the armed forces.’ Iraqi volunteers outside army or police recruitment centres would thus be considered civilians, and attacking them would reasonably be considered a terrorist act.

Accepting that most Iraqi government posts including the police and army were made up of Iraqi Shia (al-Shishani, 2005a), research suggests that 89 percent of all self-sacrificial attacks in Iraq targeted Iraqi Shia Muslims – in effect confirming the *takfiri* ideology of the perpetrators. The ideology supporting the 61 percent of attacks that targeted Iraqi businesses (24 percent), civilians and non-combatants (37 percent), are best understood as terroristic and *takfiri* in nature, in that it justified suicide attacks against fellow Muslims. The ideology supporting the remaining 39 percent of attacks that targeted coalition and

²⁰⁸ For example the 30 April 2005 suicide attack in Baghdad. GTD ID: 200504300006.

²⁰⁹ Conducted by Lebanese suicide bomber (Abbas Hassan) on 11 February 2004, in Baghdad, (CPOST Attack ID 1225780728; GTD Database Incident ID 200402110004).

²¹⁰ For example, the 4 May 2005 suicide attack in Irbil (GTD Database Incident ID 200505040004).

Iraqi armed forces is more consistent with martyrdom operations (*fee sabeel Allah*), despite 28 percent being Iraqi forces and consistent with *takfir*. Overlaps notwithstanding (particularly *takfiri* martyrdom operations against the Iraqi police and military), this conceptualisation permits the disaggregation of Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists in the unique context of the Iraq insurgency.

Using the thesis data and working within the conceptual parameters outlined above, the Arab foreign fighters who crossed the radicalisation threshold from defensive jihad to Islamist terrorism, by targeting Iraqi civilians and non-combatants, appeared to be driven by ‘many alternative causal paths to the same outcome’ enshrined within the notion of ‘equifinality’ (George and Bennett, 2005: 10). These alternative paths appeared to merge being influenced of situational factors experienced whilst participating in the defensive jihad (insurgent violence) in Iraq. These included the presence of grievances and ideology, and being subjected to ideological indoctrination during group training.

Grievances and Ideology

The notion of grievances and ideology are again nestled together due to their relationship with radicalisation (Neumann, 2011), in that they appear to have been central to the radicalisation of many Arab foreign fighters in Iraq. In effect they mirror the philosophy of ‘diagnostic framing and prognostic framing’ proposed by Benford and Snow (2000).²¹¹ The two macro-level factors embedded within political Islam that include ‘grievances and ideology’ are the concept of *takfir*, and the ideology supporting suicide attacks against Iraqi civilians and non-combatants.²¹² Importantly, these macro-level factors are broadly consistent with *salafi jihadism* – an ideology that supports ‘violence and revolution’ (Wiktorowicz, 2006: 208). According to Moghadam (2008: 62), *salafi jihadis* ‘engage in

²¹¹ First raised in Chapter 4 (Footnote 155), according to Bedford and Snow (2000), embedded within diagnostic framing is the concept of ‘injustice frames’ which are ‘generated and adopted by those who come to define the actions of an authority as unjust’ (p. 615); while prognostic framing ‘involves the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem, or at least a plan of attack, and the strategies for carrying out the plan’ (p. 616).

²¹² There were of course micro-level grievances including the 2003 ‘massacre’ of Iraqi civilians in Fallujah, and the 2004 Abu Ghraib prison abuses, which motivated some Arab foreign fighters to travel to Iraq (Hafez, 2007b: 44; Duyvesteyn and Peters, 2015: 19).

takfir ... condone the targeting of civilians ... and support the use of suicide operations.' Some may argue that in Iraq (as opposed to a Western context) the concept of *takfir* and the employment of suicide attacks targeting Iraqi civilians and non-combatants are one and the same, bearing in mind (as noted earlier) that 99 percent of Iraqis are Muslims.²¹³ However overlaps notwithstanding, *takfir* and the use of suicide attacks (against Iraqi civilians and non-combatants) are disaggregated in this chapter in an attempt to gain a more nuanced understanding of the situational circumstances that inspired Arab foreign fighter involvement in Islamist terrorist related activities in Iraq.

Takfir against Iraqi Shia Muslims

The grievances against Iraqi Shia Muslims became more pronounced after the transfer of sovereignty to an Iraqi interim government on 28 June 2004. This led to an ideological switch from targeting the far enemy (the US led coalition) to the near enemy (Iraqi Shias), a switch that was recognised by Hegghammer (2013a),²¹⁴ and supported by the 2004 inflection point in Figure 5.3. The grievances against the Shia, articulated by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (2004a), included their 'control of the institutions of the state;' their 'reign over the army and police apparatus;' and their desire to 'establish a Shia state stretching from Iran through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.' These grievances amounted to the 'suppression' and 'liquidation' of the Sunnis (al-Zarqawi, 2004a). His ideological solution was *takfir* against the Shia in that 'fighting against the Shia is the way to drag the *ummah* into the battle' (al-Zarqawi, 2004a). On the ground in Iraq and demonstrated in Figure 5.3, this led to an almost parallel upsurge in violence directed against Iraqi Shia civilians, non-combatants (including those who were in the process of signing up to work in Iraq's security forces), and operational Iraqi police and army units. This became the watershed or point of inflection of the Iraq insurgency where the defensive jihad against the US led coalition, whilst now including Iraqi forces, also began to morph into Islamist terrorism by targeting civilians and non-combatants, under the overarching Islamist ideology of *takfir*.

²¹³ US Central Intelligence Agency. (2014). The World Fact Book: Iraq.

²¹⁴ According to Hegghammer (2013a), initially in 'Iraq post 2003 ... the declared motivations of foreign fighters ... suggest that anti-Americanism was a much more important motivator than anti-Shiism.'

It is instructive that al-Zarqawi's former mentor, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, expressed his concerns about the 'indiscriminate violence and *takfir* of entire groups of people because it is wrong to do so and hurts the image of Islam' (Wagemakers, 2012: 47). In response, al-Zarqawi formally announced the establishment (in May 2005) of the Al-Baraa bin Malik Brigade comprising of a 'specialised cell of suicide bombers within al-Qaeda in Iraq' (START, 2012), and issued a *fatwa* (dated 18 May 2005) in order to 'clarify the position of the *Shari'a* regarding such incidents in which Muslims are killed incidentally.'

Covered in Chapter 3, but repeated here for completeness, al-Zarqawi (2005) argued that:

'The legitimacy of ... killing a number of Muslims even if it is known that they are likely to be there at the time ... is justified under the principle of *daroorah* [necessity], due to the fact that it is impossible ... to distinguish between them and those infidels against whom war is being waged ... it is permissible to commit this evil ... in order to ward off a greater evil, namely, the evil of suspending jihad.'

Although at first glance, it appears difficult to fully comprehend the logic behind this *fatwa*, and arguably supports the view that al-Zarqawi had 'few intellectual inclinations' (Brisard and Martinez, 2005: 11), and was 'theologically illiterate' (Gerges, 2016: 90). Yet on closer inspection, al-Zarqawi's use of the Arabic word *daroorah* is in complete harmony with the 'doctrine of necessity' (Cooper, 1977), whereby terrorism may be 'justified as a response to something even more unsavory' (p. 26), which in al-Zarqawi's case, was the 'evil of suspending jihad.' As Cooper (1977: 17) argued, an 'understanding of this viewpoint, whether acceptable or not, is essential to an understanding of the terrorist.' The result, as Figure 5.3 demonstrates, was that Iraqi Shia civilians and non-combatants were heavily targeted in 2004 and 2005 by Islamist terrorists to the extent that al-Qaeda's deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri (2005) wrote to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (in July 2005) concerned that 'many of your Muslim admirers amongst the common folk are wondering about your attacks on the Shia ... what loss will befall us if we did not attack the Shia?'

The main concern articulated by al-Zawahiri (2005) was losing 'the popular support of the Muslim masses in Iraq.' Just over 20 percent of the thesis dataset has information on how

Arab foreign fighters and/or Islamist terrorists died in Iraq.²¹⁵ It shows that out of the 66 individuals on whom data are available, 77 percent died fighting the US led coalition (in gun battles or martyrdom operations), while the remaining 23 percent died targeting Iraqi civilians and non-combatants. This finding however conflicts with the earlier finding that 61 percent of attacks targeted Iraqi businesses, civilians and non-combatants. It is suggested that these figures perhaps expose the challenges of terrorism research, where the perpetrators are often intentionally anonymous or unknown. The view taken in this thesis is that despite the apparent anonymity of many of the attackers, as noted earlier in the chapter, it is reasonably assumed that they were Arab foreign fighters turned Islamist terrorists. Therefore, the 23 percent who died targeting Iraqi civilians and non-combatants maybe considered representative of the larger cohort responsible for the 61 percent of attacks that targeted Iraqi businesses, civilians and non-combatants.

The Ideology Supporting Suicide Attacks against Civilians and Non-Combatants

There have been many studies examining the motivations and circumstances of suicide bombers in Iraq including, but not limited to, Hafez (2006b, 2007a, 2007b, 2009), Moghadam (2011), and Seifert and McCauley (2014). Despite the inclusion of impressive data and evidence of academic rigour, they still tend to aggregate military targets (coalition and Iraqi forces) and civilians and non-combatants. Hafez (2007b: 95) argued that the circumstances behind the suicide bombings were the ‘humiliation of Muslims at the hands of foreigners, impotence of official Muslim governments in the face of hegemonic powers, and redemption through faithful sacrifice.’ Moghadam (2011: 230-231) believed that the circumstances included ‘anger at the United States … a belief in the need to defend a religion that is perceived to be under attack … and reaping the benefits of martyrdom.’ In both findings the common grievance is against the US and an ideology of action

²¹⁵ This 20 percent represents 143 Arab foreign fighters. This is broken down to 77 who died in self-sacrificial attacks (but critically their intended target was not identified). The remaining 66 Arab foreign fighters are broken down to 33 who died in conventional combat against US led coalition forces; 18 who died in martyrdom operations against US led coalition forces; and 15 who died in suicide attacks against Iraqi civilians and non-combatants.

underpinned by martyrdom and redemption, yet the grievance(s) and ideology arguably do not explain why Iraqi Muslim civilians and non-combatants were targeted.

What appears particularly contradictory in the assessment by Moghadam (2011), is that ‘the need to defend a religion’ translated into attacks aimed at co-religionists, notwithstanding the sectarian context in that they were Shia Muslims. Therefore arguably, perhaps it would have been more accurate to say ‘a belief in the need to defend Sunni Islam that is perceived to be under attack.’ Contextually, attacking Shia Muslims would then help to explain the emergence of the notion of *takfir* in Iraq, with the June 2004 transfer of sovereignty to a Shia led government.

According to Hafez (2007b: 117), suicide attacks on Shia civilians were based on ideological (conspiratorial worldviews) and theological (legitimisation of killing civilians) justifications. This was based on the perception that the Shia led Iraqi government was seen to be helping the ‘infidel Americans,’ thus the whole Shia community were ‘guilty’ of apostasy. This rationale appeared to support the ideological overlap justifying suicide attacks (against the Shia), and the notion of *takfir*. Therefore, according to the ideology, fighting the ‘apostates’ would take ‘precedence over fighting the original infidels’ (Hafez, 2007b: 127), leading to the 2004 point of inflection identified in Figure 5.3.

Although Cordesman (2005: 5) noted correctly that ‘the vast majority of Saudi militants who have entered Iraq were not terrorist sympathizers before the war,’ he does not explain how Saudis were ‘overrepresented among suicide bombers’ (Hegghammer, 2007: 4) - a finding corroborated by Fishman et al. (2008: 56), Hafez (2006b: 616), and Moghadam (2011: 225). Again, whilst it is broadly accepted that ‘most Saudi recruits genuinely did hold a deep belief in and desire for martyrdom’ (Hegghammer, 2007: 14), this desire for martyrdom should not necessarily be conflated with suicide attacks. First, by examining the thesis dataset, although Saudis were overrepresented among suicide bombers on a numerical basis, they were not on a *per capita* basis (2.16 per million), trailing Kuwait at 5.13 per million. Second, by disaggregating martyrdom operations and suicide attacks, only

54 percent of attacks by Saudi nationals targeted Iraqi civilians (with the remaining 46 percent targeting coalition troops).

Istishhaad or Intihaar in Iraq

As noted in Chapter 1, Syrian ideologue and veteran Afghan Arab, Shaykh Abu Basir al-Tartusi, published a *fatwa* (*Suspicions of Sin in Martyrdom or Suicide Attacks*) making the distinction between suicide attacks and martyrdom operations. Al-Tartusi (2005) argued that suicide ‘attacks are closer to suicide [*intihaar*] than to martyrdom [*istishhaad*] and they are forbidden because of sins they may potentially entail … which sow discord between Muslims and their ‘ulama.’ However, al-Tartusi (2005) supported the notion of martyrdom gained through *inghimasi* operations (covered in detail in Chapter 6), conducted by ‘plunging into enemy lines … not to kill one’s self, but rather to enter into situations where one is killed by the enemy.’

One influential study on Arab foreign fighters in Iraq that arguably conflated the notion of being a martyr (*fee sabeel Allah*) with that of a suicide bomber, was authored by Felter and Fishman (2007) under the title *Al Qaeda’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records*. Despite the written records in Arabic showing *istishhaadi* - ‘one who desires martyrdom’ (Wehr, 1980: 489), the authors “coded all such individuals ‘suicide bombers’ in an effort to avoid confusion” (Felter and Fishman, 2007: 18). Based on this arguably reductionist coding, Felter and Fishman (2007) found that “85.2 percent … of Libyan fighters listed ‘suicide bomber’ as their work in Iraq” (p. 19), and therefore concluded that ‘Libyan fighters were much more likely than other nationalities to be listed as suicide bombers’ (p. 27).²¹⁶ Perhaps equally surprising, is that other scholars have referenced and regurgitated these findings uncritically, including Moghadam (2011: 227), Malet (2015: 14), and Dodwell, Milton, and Rassler (2016b: 22).

²¹⁶ Even in their subsequent analysis of the Sinjar Records, Fishman et al (2008: 6) still concluded that “Libyan and Moroccan nationals registered as ‘suicide bombers’ at a higher rate than their Saudi counterparts.” This finding is only true on a *per capita* basis (which was not mentioned) for Libya (9.14 per million); Saudi Arabia second (3.03 per million); and Jordan third (1.47 per million).

Based on the data collected on 110 confirmed self-sacrificial attacks in Iraq (martyrdom operations and suicide attacks),²¹⁷ Libyans do not appear to feature so strongly, appearing only ninth equal in comparison with other Arab countries, as presented in Figure 5.5.

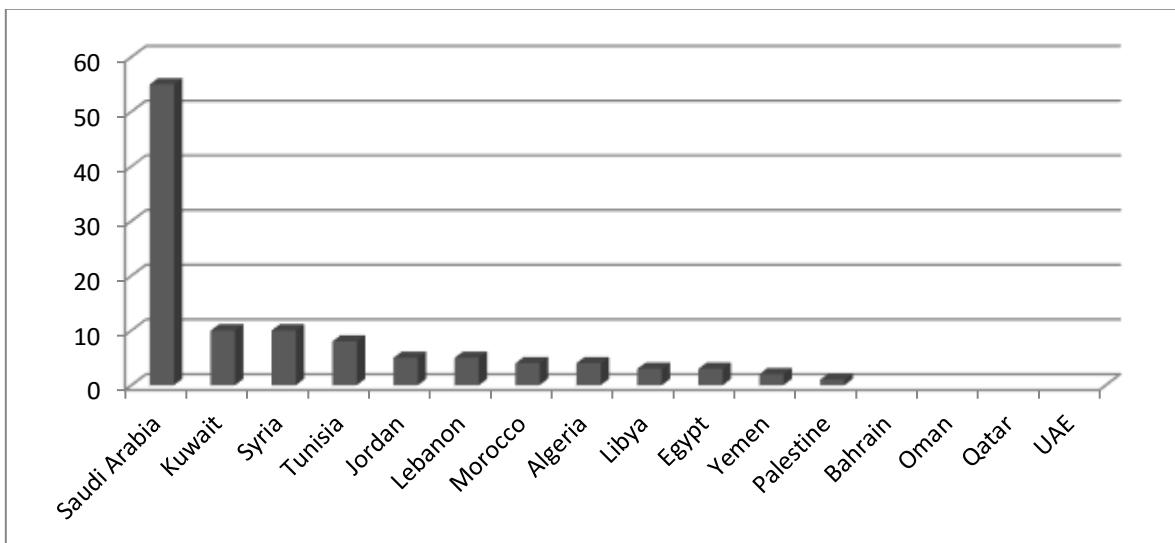


Figure 5.5: Country of origin of perpetrators of self-sacrificial attacks (n=110).

Examined another way, one would also expect Libyans as a percentage of the overall Libyan cohort to be more strongly represented as martyrs and/or suicide bombers, in line with the finding of Felter and Fishman (2007). Again this appears not to be the case. Using the data on the perpetrators of martyrdom operations and suicide attacks in Figure 5.5, and the data on the geographic origin of all 711 Arab foreign fighters in Iraq (in Figure 5.1), the country of origin of perpetrators of self-sacrificial attacks as a percentage of each national cohort may be calculated.

²¹⁷ This data has been extracted from various sources including the Chicago Project on Security and Threats (CPOST) Suicide Attack Database; Kohlmann (2005a, 2005b); and Hafez (2007b).

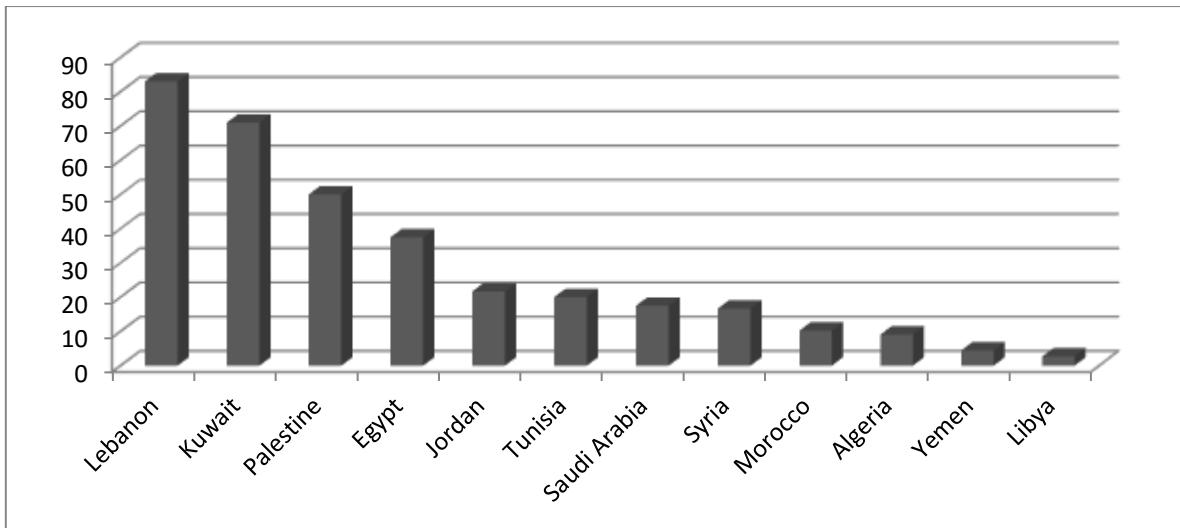


Figure 5.6: Country of origin of perpetrators of self-sacrificial attacks as a percentage of each national cohort (n=110)

Naturally care is required when interpreting the thesis dataset, for example the high Lebanese position may be due to greater publicity of their biographies as a direct result of their involvement in a self-sacrificial attack, or because many Palestinian refugees in Lebanon used the pseudonym of al-Labnani (Aqil, 2004). In the same vein, a lack of publicity may also partially explain the finding from Figure 5.5, that suggests that Libyan fighters were much less likely than other nationalities to be suicide bombers, despite having been listed as ‘much more likely’ by Felter and Fishman (2007: 27). An interesting corollary to the Felter and Fishman (2007) report, is that two of the Libyan so called ‘suicide bombers’²¹⁸ were languishing in an Iraqi prison by 2012 (Zelin, 2013a).

Again, the point to be made here is perhaps the need for a more nuanced understanding amongst academics, the media and policy makers, of *istishhaad* (martyrdom) within the language of political Islam, and consequently a more nuanced analysis of such data. In Chapter 6 this dichotomy occurs again with the publication by Dodwell, Milton, and Rassler (2016a), of a report analysing ‘over 4,600 unique Islamic State personnel records’ (p. iv), that directly translates *istishhaadi* as a suicide bomber (p. 28), without even contemplating the complexities of the meaning and context of martyrdom. It is interesting

²¹⁸ Adil Juma al-Shalali and Hamza Ali Awad.

that there is still even with the backdrop of the Syrian jihad, a lack of consensus amongst scholars concerning the concepts of martyrdom operations and suicide attacks, as there was in Iraq between al-Zarqawi and both al-Zawahiri and al-Maqdisi. To address this disharmony in Iraq and to encourage Arab foreign fighters to target civilians and non-combatants, there appears to have been training and indoctrination that helped to reinforce the ideology of al-Zarqawi's AQI particularly pertaining to terrorist suicide attacks.

Terrorist Training and Indoctrination

Once an individual decided to participate in defensive jihad in Iraq, unless they had received prior military training (possibly as conscripts) they entered training camps established in either Syria or Iraq. One Syrian foreign fighter, Abu Ibrahim, recalled how his group were transported 'across the border and then into villages on the Iraqi side; and from there the Iraqi contacts would take the mujahideen to training camps' (Abdul-Ahad, 2005). According to Hegghammer (2011b: 298) these 'training camps generated an ultra-masculine culture of violence which brutalized the volunteers and broke down barriers to the use of violence.' Some Arab foreign fighters were trained to be *shuhada* (martyrs) leading to their subsequent involvement in either a martyrdom operation or a suicide attack – although at the group (AQI) level, there appeared to be little distinction.

A unique insight into the training of suicide bombers in Iraq was obtained in a rare interview for Time magazine by Aparisim Ghosh (2005). Although the suicide bomber was an Iraqi (not a foreign Arab), Marwan Abu Ubaydah's story is instructive. According to Ghosh (2005), Marwan admitted to having undergone a programme to discipline the mind and cleanse the soul. The training, 'supervised by field commanders and Sunni clerics was mainly psychological and spiritual.' They were 'expected to immerse themselves in spiritual contemplation and prayer.' In addition to reading the Quran, they also read about the history of defensive jihad, in particular the stories of Afghan Arab martyrdom, written by Abdullah Azzam. Noting from Chapter 4 that no Afghan Arabs were understood to have

committed suicide attacks during the Afghan jihad,²¹⁹ it is instructive that Sunni clerics in Iraq had relied on such stories of martyrdom (*fee sabeel Allah*) in order to motivate their suicide bombers.

Indoctrination

As mentioned earlier, the involvement in Islamist terrorism in Iraq was uniquely different from the subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorism by veteran Afghan Arabs, in that in Iraq, defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism coexisted in the same time and space. The trajectory in Iraq from involvement in defensive jihad to subsequent participation in Islamist terrorism did not require travel to, or training in, another country; it all took place within the ‘war zone or a war-like setting combat environment’ (US Department of State, 2015: 388) of Iraq. However much of the literature on terrorism presupposes correctly, that much of the recruitment, possible indoctrination, and radicalisation prior to involvement in Islamist terrorism, occurs in an individual’s home country. This nevertheless appears not to be true concerning Iraq, where individuals had already left their home countries and committed themselves to participate in defensive jihad even though, as noted earlier in the chapter, the majority of Arab foreign fighters arriving in Iraq were not necessarily radicalised (Cordesman, 2005: 5; Gerges, 2005: 268; Atwan, 2006: 206). This implies that most radicalisation that led to subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorism in Iraq actually took place, in Iraq. With this in mind, terrorism studies literature explaining the involvement in terrorism by foreigners in Iraq may have been better situated had it acknowledged the context and impact of the crucible of defensive jihad, experienced by them. For example, the notions of ‘indoctrination’ (Horgan, 2005) or ‘culturing’ (Wiktorowicz, 2005b) often considered to take place within domestic radicalisation, may have a wider applicability than what they were originally conceptualised to explain.

The notion that some Arab foreign fighters were indoctrinated (during training in Iraq) to later become suicide bombers targeting Iraqi civilians and non-combatants is worthy of

²¹⁹ A conclusion also reached by Muhammad Hafez (2012a): ‘these Afghan Arabs did not engage in suicide attacks *per se*.’

examination as it supports the research question. Schmid (2013a: 4) discerned ‘the more recent trend [of] indoctrination and training’ within the ‘ideology and structure of terrorist groups,’ a view corroborated by other academics (Crenshaw, 1994; Moghaddam, 2005; Wiktorowicz, 2005b; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008). The term ‘indoctrination’ is understood to mean the teaching of ‘a person or group systematically to accept partisan or tendentious ideas uncritically.’²²⁰ As noted in Chapter 2, Wiktorowicz (2005b: 27) adopted the alternative label of ‘culturing’ to portray the transmission of ‘information to persuade audiences to change attitudes, preferences, and values.’ Implicit in the notion of indoctrination is the idea of a possible vulnerability to a certain ideology. Although situated within a Western context, the concept of ‘vulnerable people being drawn into terrorism’ (UK Government, 2015: 2) is recognised and acknowledged by the UK Government in various official documents, including UK Government (2012 and 2015).

Horgan (2005: 103) implicitly links the notions of vulnerability and indoctrination, but argued that ‘vulnerability … might be more appropriate if not useful to consider it more in terms of how the individual may be more open to influence at any juncture.’ This may be as a result of ‘a sense of disillusionment with alternative avenues’ (Horgan, 2005: 95) or ‘a provocative event’ (Horgan, 2005: 84). Possible examples of Arab foreign fighters who may have been potentially ‘more open to influence’ include Saudi national Abdul Aziz al-Gharbi who had tried to join the Imam Mohammad ibn Saud Islamic University in Al-Ahsa, but was rejected. This rejection contributed to his decision to go to northern Iraq and blow himself up at a checkpoint in March 2003.²²¹ There was also Tunisian national Abdul Halim Badjoudj, an unemployed second-generation immigrant living in France, who ‘saw no future for himself’ and blew himself up while driving a car near a US military patrol.²²²

Although Hafez (2007a: 112) does not distinguish between martyrdom operations and suicide attacks, he suggests that ‘volunteers for suicide attacks are not brainwashed victims

²²⁰ The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1995: 693).

²²¹ CPOST Attack ID 1230594988. Abdul Aziz Al-Gharbi used to lead prayers at the Imam Bukhari Mosque in Dammam 75 District. On March 22, 2003, he killed four people in a suicide attack in Kirkuk, including an Australian cameraman Paul Moran.

²²² Kohlmann (2005a: 1). No GTD database details. This attack occurred on 20 October 2004.

of opportunistic recruiters, nor are they manipulated individuals who are fooled by calculating terrorists.' Again, this position should not go unchallenged, as research undertaken for this thesis suggests otherwise. Two factors are identified: the existence of a short training or incubation period conducted after arrival, and the young age of many Arab foreign fighters, both of which may contribute to explaining the trajectory from Arab foreign fighter to Islamist terrorist, specifically in becoming a suicide bomber.

First, the short training period after their arrival in the crucible of defensive jihad in Iraq, away from family and friends, suggests that they may have been at their most vulnerable or impressionable, and hence 'more open to influence' (Horgan, 2005: 103). Whether training for martyrdom operations or suicide attacks, this training involved 'the creation of a point of no return' in order to make sure that individuals did not change their minds (Gambetta, 2005). There are many examples of individuals who conducted martyrdom operations or suicide attacks after only a short incubation period in Iraq. They include Saudi foreign fighter, Muhammad al-Halil, who 'less than a month later ... detonated his car beside an American Humvee' vehicle (Chehab, 2005: 53); Saudi foreign fighter, Abdullah al-Shimri, who had only been in Iraq for two months before he blew himself up amongst German contractors;²²³ and Jordanian foreign fighter, Raa'id Mansur al-Banna, who blew himself up within a month of arrival, killing 120 Iraqi civilians.²²⁴ Also noted in Chapter 1, it was less than two months after Ahmad Abdullah al-Shaya had arrived in Iraq that he carried out his suicide attack killing 12 Iraqi civilians in Baghdad. Naturally in the examples above there may be competing explanations including that some individuals may have arrived in Iraq already intent and committed to conduct a martyrdom operation or suicide attack. Additionally, it is interesting that while all the perpetrators only had a short incubation period having arrived in Iraq, they conducted both martyrdom operations and suicide attacks, perhaps indicating that the training for such missions was more focussed on the

²²³ CPOST Attack ID 2127396409. He belonged to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's group *Jama'at al-Tawhid and Jihad*. He targeted a convoy of German contractors in Baghdad (14 June 2004), killing more than 78 and injuring over 50.

²²⁴ CPOST Attack ID 1214934544; Hafez (2006b: 617-619). The attack was in Hillah on February 28, 2005, considered 'the worst single massacre since the U.S. invasion.' He had also made the Islamic pilgrimage (*umra*) prior to going to Iraq.

merits of martyrdom, and that the trainers did not necessarily make any targeting distinctions for such operations.

Second, as noted earlier, the UNSC CTC (2015b) acknowledged the notion of ‘age-related vulnerabilities’ and thus it is worth briefly exploring whether there was an age difference between the participants of martyrdom operations and those of suicide attacks. In the literature, Horgan (2005: 102) recognised ‘the emotional responsiveness of people at a younger age and the increased susceptibility towards greater involvement this might bring.’ In Iraq, according to Gerges (2005: 269), many young Arab foreign fighters were ‘ideologically transformed by their experience … coupled with socialization with hard-core jihadis.’ Extracted from the thesis dataset ($n=19$), the average age of Arab foreign fighters who subsequently conducted suicide attacks (against Iraqi civilians and non-combatants) was only 21-years-old, while the average age of those who conducted martyrdom operations (against coalition and Iraqi forces) was 25-years-old. This may tentatively suggest that those slightly more mature Arab foreign fighters were committed to defensive jihad that included martyrdom operations, while perhaps the younger cohort may have been more ‘more open to influence’ (Horgan, 2005), concerning involvement in Islamist terrorist suicide attacks.

Conclusion

By using systematic, scientific and empirically based research (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010: 889), this chapter has illuminated the circumstances and factors that radicalised some Arab foreign fighters in Iraq to subsequently embrace terrorist related activities, including suicide attacks that targeted Iraqi civilians and non-combatants. Using data that leveraged 711 biographies, albeit often fragmentary and propagandistic, there were four key findings, from which modest inferences may be drawn. First, the principal motivation for initial involvement in the Iraqi jihad was a genuine desire for defensive jihad in response to foreign aggression against co-religionists. The Arab foreign fighters were largely young men, many with a university education. The vast majority had no known previous militant

or terrorist links, and consequently it is argued that they were not necessarily radicalised prior to leaving their home countries.

Second, unlike 1980s Afghanistan where defensive jihad and subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorist related activities were separated in time and space, the unique situation in Iraq witnessed the coexistence of both defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism. In order therefore to be able to distinguish between these two practices, there was a need to disaggregate the targeting preferences of the two cohorts (Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists), as well as to disaggregate martyrdom operations and suicide attacks. This led to the suggestion that in Iraq, Arab foreign fighters conducted martyrdom operations against military forces under the auspices of a defensive jihad; while Islamist terrorists conducted suicide attacks against civilians and non-combatants under the auspices of Islamist terrorism.

Third, the trajectory between Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists appeared to be underpinned by grievances (against Iraqi Shia Muslims), and a corresponding ideology that invoked the notion of *takfir*, and justified the employment of suicide attacks (61 percent) against Iraqi civilians and non-combatants by Islamist terrorists; and martyrdom operations (28 percent) against Iraqi military forces by Arab foreign fighters.²²⁵ This suggests that in the case of the Iraqi jihad, the presence of a strong ideological link between martyrdom operations / suicide attacks and *takfir*.

Fourth, the trajectory between the two cohorts appeared to have been primarily conducted in Iraq (although sometimes in Syria), involving training and indoctrination. There is evidence that the training included strong exhortations towards martyrdom – that later translated into both suicide attacks and martyrdom operations. Although it appeared that there was little distinction between the two tactics at the group (AQI and later ISI) level, ideologically within the language of political Islam it was contested by ideologues such as al-Maqdisi (Wagemakers, 2012: 47) and al-Zawahiri (2005). Further evidence suggests that

²²⁵ As noted earlier in the chapter, the remaining eleven percent of attacks were directed against US led coalition forces.

many Arab foreign fighters having arrived in Iraq were more ‘open to influence’ (Horgan, 2005) by the terrorist narrative, largely due to their social isolation within a combat zone, and/or due to ‘age related vulnerabilities’ (UNSC CTC, 2015b).

Lastly, it is perhaps instructive that back in 2004, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was to make two important prophecies. First, he believed that ‘if a sectarian war was to take place, many in the Islamic world would rise to defend the Sunnis in Iraq’ (2004a) – a belief that has largely materialised. Second, he also raised the prospect of jihad in Syria (involving a town called Dabiq), noting that ‘the spark has been lit in Iraq and its flames will blaze, God willing, until they consume the Armies of the Cross in Dabiq’²²⁶ (al-Zarqawi, 2004b). Whilst this prospect that has yet to materialise,²²⁷ it is illuminating that Ahmad Abdullah al-Shaya, the Saudi suicide bomber who survived his 2004 attack in Baghdad and repatriated back to Saudi Arabia, reappeared again in Syria on 18 November 2013, ‘honoured to be a soldier’s soldier of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham’ (Shaghur, 2013).

²²⁶ According to *Hadeeth Muslim* 2897, as narrated by Abu Hurairah ‘The Last Hour would not come until the Romans would land at Al-A’maq or Dabiq. An army consisting of the best (soldiers) of the people of the earth at that time will come from Medina … win and … be conquerors of Constantinople.’ In effect, this signified a climactic battle involving a final Muslim victory over non-Muslims.

²²⁷ Such a battle appears unlikely and is now perhaps acknowledged by the Islamic State, who changed the name of their magazine *Dabiq*, to *Rumiyah* (Rome), publishing *Rumiyah* Issue 1, on 5 September 2016.

Chapter 6: Arab Foreign Fighters and Islamist Terrorists in Syria

Introduction

This chapter, the last of the three case studies, examines why and how some Arab foreign fighters subsequently became (and continue to become) involved in Islamist terrorist related activities in Syria.²²⁸ Due to the inherent overlaps between defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism, the conflict in Syria is perhaps best understood as an insurgency, defined as ‘a hybrid form of conflict that combines subversion, guerrilla warfare and terrorism ... [in] an internal struggle in which a disaffected group seeks to gain control of a nation’ (Mockaitis, 1990: 3). These overlaps were correctly identified by Borum and Fein (2016: 10), who recognised that the Syrian insurgency appeared to ‘blur the lines between civil war and terrorism, pushing many of the foreign fighters aggressively towards terrorist tactics.’ This suggests that perhaps civil war is a higher-level manifestation of political violence that could also incorporate lower-level manifestations such as terrorism and guerrilla warfare.²²⁹ Unlike the Iraqi insurgency that witnessed defensive jihad against US led coalition troops (the far enemy) and Islamist terrorism against fellow Muslims (the near enemy), the Syrian insurgency involves defensive jihad against Syrian regime forces and Islamist terrorism against Syrian civilians – both the near enemy *per se*.

Despite the Syrian insurgency becoming entangled with the prolonged Iraqi insurgency due to the cross-border influence of groups such as the Islamic State,²³⁰ this chapter specifically examines the insurgency in Syria and the Arab foreign fighters (not including indigenous Syrians) who participated in defensive jihad and who subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. The research period is from 29 August 2011 - the first documented death of an Arab foreign fighter (Saudi national Husam al-Mutayri)²³¹ in Damascus, until 28 July 2016 - when the rebel group Jabhat al-Nusrah ostensibly

²²⁸ This chapter does not seek to explain why some Arab foreign fighters may later become involved in terrorist related activities in their home countries, having returned from Syria.

²²⁹ An historical example would be the Algerian civil war (Horne, 2006).

²³⁰ This chapter uses Islamic State, IS and ISIS interchangeably.

²³¹ *Shamukh al-Islam* Jihadi Forum (17 February 2012) – now password protected.

announced their cessation of links with al-Qaeda (and rebranded itself Jabhat Fatah al-Sham).

This chapter leverages a thesis dataset of 1,930 Arab foreign fighters; the radicalisation framework presented in Chapter 2; the language of political Islam outlined in Chapter 3; and historical reflections on irregular warfare that make the chapter richer and help contextualise the behaviour of many combatants. Arguably, the originality of the research is underpinned by these tools, and in particular the thesis dataset which is based on data obtained through social media, much of which are no longer available due to the suspension of many ‘jihadi’ accounts by Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.²³² The dataset represents between 12 and 19 percent of the overall cohort of Arab foreign fighters based on figures published by Malet (2015: 10).²³³ The data are not time specific (for example 2013-2014 in Dodwell et al., 2016a);²³⁴ group specific (for example Jabhat al-Nusrah in Lister, 2016); or action specific (for example ‘suicide attacks’ in C. Winter, 2017b). The bar for inclusion in the dataset was set at all non-Syrian Sunni Arab fighters who were (or continue to be) involved physically or ideologically²³⁵ in the Syrian insurgency and who were (or continue to be) aligned with a non-state armed group. Researching Sunni Arab fighters (as opposed to Western fighters) is largely predicated on the reality that ‘Arabs dominate the list of foreign jihadists … in Syria, and nine of the top ten countries represented are from the Arab world’ (Zelin, 2013b).

The key findings in this chapter are firstly that the majority of Arab foreign fighters were not necessarily radicalised but went to Syria to participate in defensive jihad in response to the unequivocal Syrian regime violence against fellow Sunni co-religionists. Second, once in Syria, the study found that the majority of Arab foreign fighters were (and still are)

²³² Examples of suspended accounts are www.facebook.com/Strangers.Sy1 and www.Shaghur.com. By 5 February 2016, Twitter had ‘suspended over 125,000 accounts for threatening or promoting terrorist acts, primarily related to ISIS’ (<https://blog.twitter.com/2016/combatting-violent-extremism>).

²³³ Malet (2015: 10) estimated there were 10,000-16,000 foreign fighters (including non-Syrian Arabs) in Syria (2011-2015), while Schmid (2015: 3) determined there were 17,500 ‘from the Arab Middle East and North Africa’s Maghreb region.’

²³⁴ Dodwell et al. (2016a) analysed ‘over 4,600 unique Islamic State personnel’ (p. iv), and identified 4188 foreign fighters (p. 3), of which 1841 were Arab foreign fighters (p. 9).

²³⁵ Prominent Arab foreign fighters who are not in Syria but are ideologically involved include Egyptian al-Qaeda chief, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Jordanian ideologue, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.

participating in defensive jihad, fighting in conventional battles against the Syrian Arab Army and other rebel combatants, rather than executing suicide attacks against civilians and non-combatants. The terrorist related activities perpetrated by armed non-state groups in Syria appear, in many instances, to be more consistent with genocide (defined later in the chapter) often involving brutal mass executions, as a result of exposure to ideological indoctrination and combat itself, with parallels in military history to the 1968 My Lai massacre. Many of the Arab foreign fighter excesses in Syria may be understood from situational and obedience perspectives that appear broadly consistent with earlier research findings based on psychology, including those by Arendt (1994), Milgram (1963), Zimbardo (1971), and Staub (1989).

This chapter is broken down into two component sections. First there is a brief overview of the Syrian insurgency, aware that it has been covered by many scholars including, but not limited to, Hegghammer (2013a), Zelin (2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c), Mironova, Mrie and Whitt (2014), Weiss and Hassan (2015), Neumann (2015), Gerges (2016), Dodwell et al. (2016a), and C. Winter (2017b). Next there is a short analysis of the broad ‘setting events’ - age, geographic origin, and previous experience in defensive jihad and/or Islamist terrorism - in order to contextualise Arab foreign fighter initial involvement in defensive jihad in Syria. The first section therefore takes the readership up to a point of departure for the rest of the chapter, which is when Arab foreign fighters have arrived in Syria and joined a non-state armed group. The idea of researching individuals who have ‘already arrived in Syria ... and joined one of the fighting parties’ was first pioneered by Reed, Van Zuidewin, and Bakker (2015), who identified that the three subsequent ‘pathways’ for these individuals was ‘fighting, supporting terrorist activity, or leaving the jihadi group’ (p. 2). This chapter seeks to explain how and why some Arab foreign fighters subsequently opted for ‘supporting terrorist activity’ in Syria.

Using this point of departure, the second section and the core of the chapter, explains why and how some Arab foreign fighters subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. It examines the targeting of groups such as ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusrah, and the Free Syrian Army (FSA), and the cause of death of their fighters (as a result of

conventional combat or self-sacrificial attacks). For example, if an Arab foreign fighter was killed fighting against the Syrian Arab Army (SAA), this is broadly conceptualised as being in harmony with the notion of defensive jihad. However, if an Arab foreign fighter was killed whilst detonating an explosive vest amongst civilians and non-combatants, this is interpreted as a suicide attack and more consistent with Islamist terrorism. Further examples that may lie outside these conceptualisations are also covered. This section explores the genuine grievances against the al-Assad regime and more widely Shia Muslims, and the ‘different rationales in the ideology’ (Hegghammer, 2009a: 260) of the Arab foreign fighters to address those grievances. Finally, terrorist training, indoctrination, and socialisation within the groups in Syria are examined in order to further explore the trajectory between Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists.

Terminology

The Syrian insurgency has spawned and resurrected a Sunni Arab terminology that warrants a brief explanation, as the labels are present in much of the Sunni anti-Shia rhetoric.²³⁶ They include Alawite, *nusairi*, *rafidah*, *murtadd*, and *taghoot*. According to A.R. Taylor (1988: 78) Alawites are ‘a heterodox Shiite denomination,’ often considered ‘remnants of a wave of Shi’ism which swept over the region a thousand years ago’ (Kaplan, 1993). The term *nusairi* is defined as ‘a gnostic sect in Syria’ (Wehr, 1980: 970), and is more generally understood as a ‘derogatory term for Alawites’ (Rikab, 2015). In some English language Islamist magazines, the label is constructed as ‘*nusairi* Alawite.’²³⁷ Due to the many variations in spelling and for clarity, this chapter will use the labels *nusairi* and Alawite interchangeably.

The next term *rafidah* is ‘a pejorative term’ (Maher, 2016a: xix), commonly used within the Syrian insurgency and refers to ‘dissenters, defectors, a Shiitic sect’ (Wehr, 1980: 349); in effect another term for Alawites. Its wide use is confirmed by its appearance 173 times in the Islamic State magazine Dabiq 13. The term *murtadd* refers to an ‘apostate’ (Wehr, 1980:

²³⁶ Chapters 1 and 3 briefly covered the roots of the Sunni-Shia divide (Gonzalez, 2009). These labels were initially introduced in Chapter 3 concerning their use by Ibn Taymiyya.

²³⁷ For example, Abdullah al-Adaam (2012). *Do Not Consult Anyone in Killing the Alawites*. July 12, 2012.

334) within both Sunni and Shia Islam, and again its wide use is demonstrated by its appearance 59 times in the Islamic State magazine Dabiq 13. Finally, the label *taghoot* (plural *tawagheet*) is a Quranic term, defined as ‘an idol, tyrant, oppressor’ (Wehr, 1980: 561), which is widely used by rebel groups in Syria to denote al-Assad and his regime (*tawagheet*). In political Islam it is understood to signify ‘the near enemy, meaning oppressive regimes in Muslim countries’ (Kepel and Milelli, 2008: 302), and was operationalised by Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj (1981) and Abdullah Azzam (1987).²³⁸ The chief ideologue for ISIS, a Bahraini foreign fighter named Turki Binali, defines *taghoot* as a ‘despot ruler who assails the rulings of God’ (al-Tamimi, 2014). The widespread use of such derogatory and dehumanising terms underpins the deep seated sectarian hatreds held by the combatants on all sides of the Syrian insurgency.

Background to the Syrian Insurgency

The contemporary history of Syria includes ‘the arbitrary partition of the Arabic-speaking provinces of the Ottoman Empire by Britain and France after WW1’ (McHugo, 2015), and the creation of the modern Syrian state as a French mandate. British traveller Dame Freya Stark (1928 as cited in Pipes, 1990: 13) who travelled through Syria observed the absence of any ‘national feeling: it is all sects and hatreds and religions.’ This sectarian existence continued and arguably became more pronounced in 1970 when the al-Assad family came to power in a bloodless coup, led by Hafez al-Assad, father of the current President Bashar al-Assad. After the coup, Hafez al-Assad immediately increased Alawite dominance of the security and intelligence sectors to a near-monopoly (Hinnebusch, 2001: 65; Gerges, 2016: 171) - resulting in a Shia Alawite minority (13 percent) presiding over a Sunni Muslim majority population of 73 percent.²³⁹ This arguably is a reverse of the situation in pre-2003 Iraq, where as noted in Chapter 5, a Sunni Muslim minority (under Saddam Hussein) governed a Shia Muslim majority.

²³⁸ Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj, the ideologue behind the assassination of Egyptian President Muhammad Anwar as-Sadat and author of *The Neglected Duty*, wrote that ‘only the sword can remove the *tawagheet*, the idols of this world’ (Jansen, 1986: 6). Abdullah Azzam (1987) in *Join the Caravan*, also labelled Arab regimes as *tawagheet* (tyrants).

²³⁹ US Central Intelligence Agency. (2014). The World Fact Book: Syria. The remaining 14 percent includes Christians, Druzes, and Jews.

The autocratic rule of Hafez al-Assad was challenged, particularly by Syrian Islamists in Hama in 1982, but was crushed when ‘the Syrian army massacred thousands of civilians’ (Rubin, 2002: 35).²⁴⁰ The next major challenge to the al-Assad dynasty (now controlled by Bashar al-Assad) was the Arab Spring,²⁴¹ led by pro-democracy movements in March 2011, starting in the southern governorate of Daraa but quickly spreading to other parts of the country. According to Human Rights Watch (2012), the Syrian ‘security forces responded brutally, killing at least 3,500 protesters and arbitrarily detaining thousands, including children under age 18, holding most of them incommunicado and subjecting many to torture.’ The level of Syrian regime violence against Syrian civilians and non-combatants was noted at the United Nations, prompting a draft resolution (S/2014/348 dated 22 May 2014), vetoed only by China and Russia, referring Syria to the International Criminal Court. It is this level of unequivocal violence directed against fellow Muslim civilians and non-combatants, that appears to provide the basis for the genuine grievances against the al-Assad regime, resulting in ‘the largest foreign fighter mobilisation of Islamist foreign fighters in history’ (Hegghammer, 2015).

The civilian and non-combatant fatalities in the Syrian conflict are enormous. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (2016) estimated that over the period March 2011 to November 2016, Syrian government forces have been responsible for 188,729 civilian deaths,²⁴² with ISIS responsible for 2,998 civilian deaths, (which represents 92.92 percent and 1.48 percent of civilian deaths, respectively). This is important and perhaps puts the conflict in context, while at the same time providing the basis for the genuine grievances of both Syrian Sunnis and Sunni Arab foreign fighters. The Syrian Revolution Martyr Database (as of 7 July 2016) identified 1,613 Syrian civilian deaths specifically due to a ‘gunshot from ISIS’ and 347 as a result of a ‘bombing or explosion by ISIS’ – a total of 1,960 Syrian civilian deaths as a result of ISIS violence. However, it is important to recognise that whilst Arab foreign fighters ‘have committed serious violations of international humanitarian law,

²⁴⁰ A recently (2016) declassified US Defence Intelligence Agency (1982) report on Syria and the Muslim Brotherhood, estimates ‘the total casualties for the Hama incident probably number about 2,000’ (p. 7).

²⁴¹ Literature covering the Arab Spring includes, but is not limited to, Bradley (2012), Lin & Warren (2012), Wieland, (2012), and McMillan (2016).

²⁴² This represents 1.05 percent of the Syrian population (based on a population of 17,951,639) - estimated by the US Central Intelligence Agency. (2014). The World Fact Book: Syria.

including abductions, torture and summary killings ... Syrian Government forces have been responsible for the majority of violations' (Amnesty International, 2016: 4). This suggests that Arab foreign fighters are more generally engaged in defensive jihad against the al-Assad regime, which has all the hallmarks of an insurgency: subversion, guerrilla warfare and terrorism.

Analysis of the Data

Setting Events - Overview

As in the previous case study chapters, this chapter also leverages the notion of 'setting events' that 'represent the context from which the individual comes' (Taylor and Horgan, 2006: 59). In order to portray the context of Arab foreign fighters, their age, geographic origin, and previous experience in defensive jihad and/or Islamist terrorism are studied. As highlighted in Chapters 4 and 5, the notion of age facilitates examination of the influence of biographic availability (McAdam, 1986)²⁴³ and 'age-related vulnerabilities of community members' (UNSC CTC, 2015b). The inclusion of geographic origin offers examination of the influence of state support and the sometimes complex nature and competing relationships states have with their citizens. Finally, examining the previous experience in defensive jihad and/or Islamist terrorism of Arab foreign fighters facilitates research on their later influence (as charismatic leaders and ideologues) on other Arab foreign fighters, and how that influence may have affected the subsequent trajectories of those newly arrived in Syria.

Age of Arab Foreign Fighters in Syria

Age wise, based on 185 Arab foreign fighters in Syria where data were available, they varied between 16 and 65-years-old with 44 percent of them 23-years-old or under. The average age was 26 and the median was 33. Again, these findings correlate fairly well with

²⁴³ Noted in Chapter 4 and 5, biographical availability refers to the 'absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities' (McAdam, 1986: 70).

Arab foreign fighters in Iraq (post 2003),²⁴⁴ the Afghan Arab cohort,²⁴⁵ and other reports on Arab foreign fighters in Syria (Dodwell et al., 2016a; Rosenblatt, 2016; Perlanger and Milton, 2016),²⁴⁶ although it does raise two points. First, the slightly higher average age of 26 (compared to those Arab foreign fighters who fought in 1980s Afghanistan and Iraq) is probably due to the number of older Arab foreign fighters, many of whom are over 50 years old; indeed the thesis dataset reveals 22 veteran Afghan Arabs (see Appendix E, Table 2) who vary between 49 and 65-years-old.²⁴⁷ Second, even when removing the older cadre of Arab foreign fighters, the average age only lowers to 25-years-old. This suggests that their involvement in defensive jihad may be less due to the notions of vulnerability and indoctrination, and more due to the notion of personal agency²⁴⁸ (Hegghammer, 2013a), and making (what appears to them) rational decisions to engage in defensive jihad.

The Geographic Origin of Arab Foreign Fighters in Syria

A brief overview of the nationalities of Arab foreign fighters in Syria offers the opportunity to examine the broad social, political, and religious context from where the individuals originated. The geographic origin of Arab foreign fighters in Syria from the thesis dataset is presented in Figure 6.1.

²⁴⁴ Chapter 5 found that based on the available data of 283 Arab foreign fighters in Iraq, they varied between 15 years and 54 years with 49 percent of them 23-years-old or under. The average age was 24; the median 28.

²⁴⁵ Chapter 4 found that based on the available data of 102 Afghan Arabs, they varied between 11 years old and 65-years-old, with 51 percent of them 22-years-old or under. The average age was 23; the median 24.

²⁴⁶ Dodwell et al. (2016a: 12) found ‘the average prospective fighter was 26-27-years-old;’ Rosenblatt (2016: 7) found ‘the average age of a fighter … was approximately 26 or 27; and Perlanger and Milton (2016: 21) found the average age of 24-years-old.

²⁴⁷ The veteran Afghan Arabs involved in the Syrian insurgency are an Algerian named Saif Areef (49-years-old), and the al-Qaeda chief, Ayman al-Zawahiri (65-years-old). Both hold command level positions.

²⁴⁸ ‘Agency refers to the belief that one can alter conditions or policies through collective action’ (Hellmich, 2010: 75).

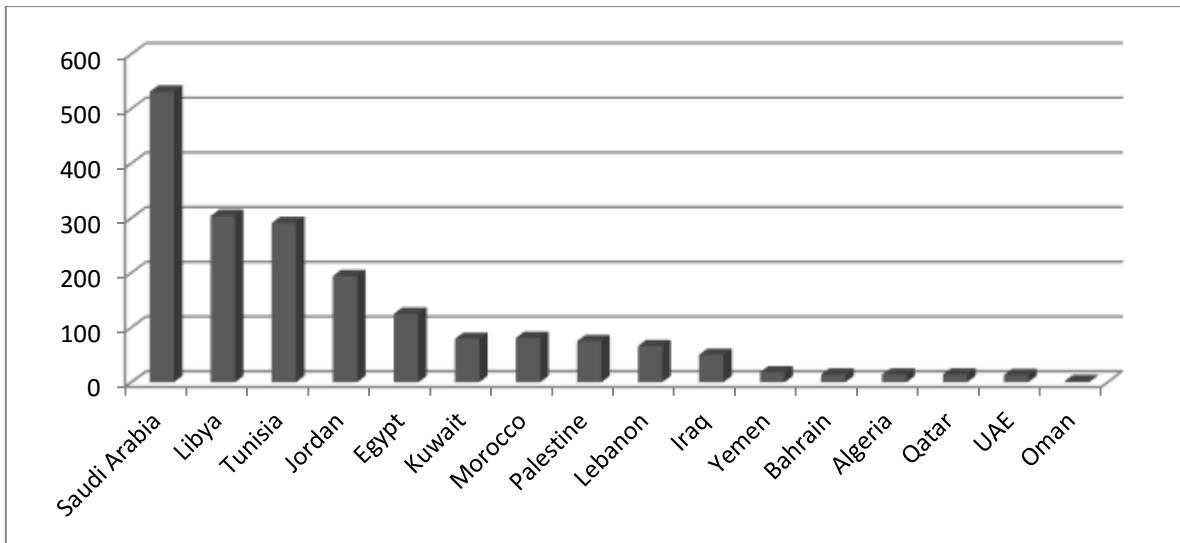


Figure 6.1: The geographic origin of Arab foreign fighters in Syria (n=1,930).

Figure 6.1 shows the top three countries of origin being Saudi Arabia (28 percent), Libya (16 percent), and Tunisia (15 percent), a consistent finding mirrored three years ago by Zelin (2013a). At the other end of the scale, the Sultanate of Oman had only two nationals participating in defensive jihad in Syria. It also appears to suggest that there are very few Iraqi foreign fighters in Syria, arguably due to them being more focussed on the battles in Iraq, a finding supported by Todenhöfer (2016: 164).²⁴⁹ The thesis dataset compares well with the data presented by Dodwell et al. (2016a: 9), less for Palestinian foreign fighters. The thesis dataset identifies 75 Palestinians (not including seven Palestinian refugees living in Jordan) – whilst Dodwell et al. (2016a: 9) identify the presence of only 30. This discrepancy may be due to their report's time frame (2013-2014) as the thesis dataset identifies 19 Palestinians as having entered Syria in 2012; and their report focussed only on ISIS, whereas the thesis dataset includes 13 Palestinians in Jabhat al-Nusrah, and five in the FSA.

Saudi Arabia being the predominant country of origin²⁵⁰ was identified by other scholars (Zelin, 2014a; Dodwell et al., 2016a) and is perhaps best explained by the structural

²⁴⁹ It is also noteworthy that the thesis dataset only identifies 28 Syrian foreign fighters in Iraq, perhaps unsurprisingly suggesting that Syrian fighters are more focussed on their country.

²⁵⁰ *Per capita*, the top three Arab countries were Libya (50 *per capita*); Jordan (30.1 *per capita*), and Tunisia (27.4 *per capita*).

influences within Saudi Arabian *Wahhabi*²⁵¹ society, aware that ISIS rely heavily on the ideology of Muhammad Abdul Wahhab (al-Tamimi, 2014). First, Saudi Arabia appears to conform to the observation that some ‘national governments … [are] enabling foreign fighters to arrive on the battlefield … by providing material resources or turning a blind eye when recruits leave the country to fight’ in Syria (Duyvesteyn and Peters, 2015: 4). This may be understood within the context of Saudi / Iranian geo-strategic regional hostilities (Hokayem, 2014), generally predicated on Sunni / Shia rivalries. Toby Matthiesen (2015) who studies political Islam inside Saudi Arabia argued that the Saudi state considers itself “as the defender of the ‘Sunnis’ in the region” (p. 1), and that ‘Saudi recruits … are often motivated by a desire to contain Shiism and stem Iranian influence in the region – strategic objectives that Saudi media perpetuates *ad infinitum*’ (p. 7). Yet the Saudi position is arguably a contradiction: on the one hand they gave ‘open support for the Syrian revolution from the summer of 2011’ (Lacroix, 2014: 5), while on the other, in ‘early February 2014, the Saudi government issued a royal order declaring that any citizen who fights in conflicts abroad will face three to twenty years of jail’ (Zelin, 2014a). According to Obaid (2016), despite this royal order, Saudi Arabia’s ‘ultimate objective in Syria is to take on … al-Assad and the Iran-created Shia militias, which are the source of as much, if not more, regional terror than ISIS and Al Qaeda.’ It is not known whether this royal order is enforced, although in July 2015 the Saudi Ministry of Interior arrested three Saudis who were linked to the bombing (in June 2015) of a Shia mosque in Kuwait (Al-Jazeera, 2015b); and also arrested ‘431 people suspected of belonging to ISIL cells’ (Al-Jazeera, 2015c).

The second point why Saudi Arabia appears to be the predominant country of origin of Arab foreign fighters is that Saudi ‘Islamic scholars do wield a considerable amount of power in the political system’ (Matthiesen, 2015: 1). An example of this power is demonstrated in a 2013 statement (Al-Moslim.net, 2013) by 72 prominent Saudi shaykhs

²⁵¹ Two interpretations of *wahhabism* are (1) ‘a puritanical form of Islam virtually synonymous with Salafism’ (Moghadam, 2011: 122); and (2) ‘a particularly puritanical, bland, ultra-orthodox and forbidding interpretation of Islam concerned with … notions of moral corruption and the need for purity’ (Denoeux, 2011: 59).

supporting the need for defensive jihad in Syria and the creation of the Islamic Front.²⁵² Of particular influence is Saudi Shaykh Abdullah al-Muhaysani, who in September 2015 gave a speech in Idlib (Syria), uploaded to YouTube, emphatically declaring that the defensive jihad in Syria is an existential battle ‘between the Sunnah and the *Nusayri* Alawites and the *rafidah*’ (al-Muhaysani, 2015). Thus, despite the Saudi regime’s belated opposition to Saudi nationals participating in defensive jihad in Syria, Saudi clerical backing²⁵³ for involvement in the Syrian jihad had ‘huge support amongst the Saudi population, and was seen as a just uprising against a dictatorial ... Shiite Alawite regime’ (Matthiesen, 2015: 6).

Third, some areas of Saudi Arabia embrace political Islam more than others. For example according to Hegghammer (2010b: 121), the central Najd region consisting of Riyadh, al-Qaseem, and Ha'il, is considered ‘the heartland of the Saudi Islamist landscape.’ It is perhaps therefore no surprise that 23 percent (121) of the 531 identified Saudi foreign fighters in Syria originated from the Nejd region, including Shaykh Abdullah al-Muhaysani. Even historically, 22 percent (31) of the original 139 Saudi detainees in Guantanamo Bay prison originated from the Nejd region (Warren, 2012). The significance of a region is not suggesting a cause-effect relationship, but rather that individuals due to their geographic origin, may be more pre-disposed to Islamist activities, that include participating in defensive jihad.

Veteran Arab Foreign Fighters and Islamist Terrorists

The last ‘essentially past contextual influence’ (Taylor and Horgan, 2006: 592), namely previous experience as an Arab foreign fighter and/or Islamist terrorist, is arguably of great significance. According to Ahmed, Comerford, and El-Badawy (2016: 5), ‘relationships formed as far back as Afghanistan in 1979 directly influence the brutality we see in Syria.’ Noting from Chapter 4 that many veteran Afghan Arabs remained involved in defensive

²⁵² The Islamic Front was formed on 22 November 2013, consisting of Ahrar al-Sham, Suqour al-Sham, the Tawhid Brigade, the Haq Brigade, Ansar al-Sham, the Islam Army, and the Kurdish Islamic Front (Lund, 2014).

²⁵³ Other clerics that have great influence in Saudi Arabia include Egyptian Yusuf al-Qaradawi (based in Qatar) who decreed that ‘anyone who has the ability, who is trained to fight ... has to go; I call on Muslims to support their brothers in Syria’ (Zelin, 2014a).

jihad (such as in Bosnia or Chechnya), one might reasonably expect to see a plethora of individuals in Syria with similar background experiences. This however is not the case, with only 3.8 percent (74) identified from the dataset²⁵⁴ – nevertheless their influence and impact appears to be a more qualitative not quantitative issue. The thesis dataset compares moderately favourably with the study conducted by Dodwell et al. (2016a), who found that about 7.1 percent ‘had previously engaged in jihad’ (p. 27).²⁵⁵ The thesis dataset breakdown of prior experience of defensive jihad by Arab foreign fighters in Syria is presented in Figure 6.2.

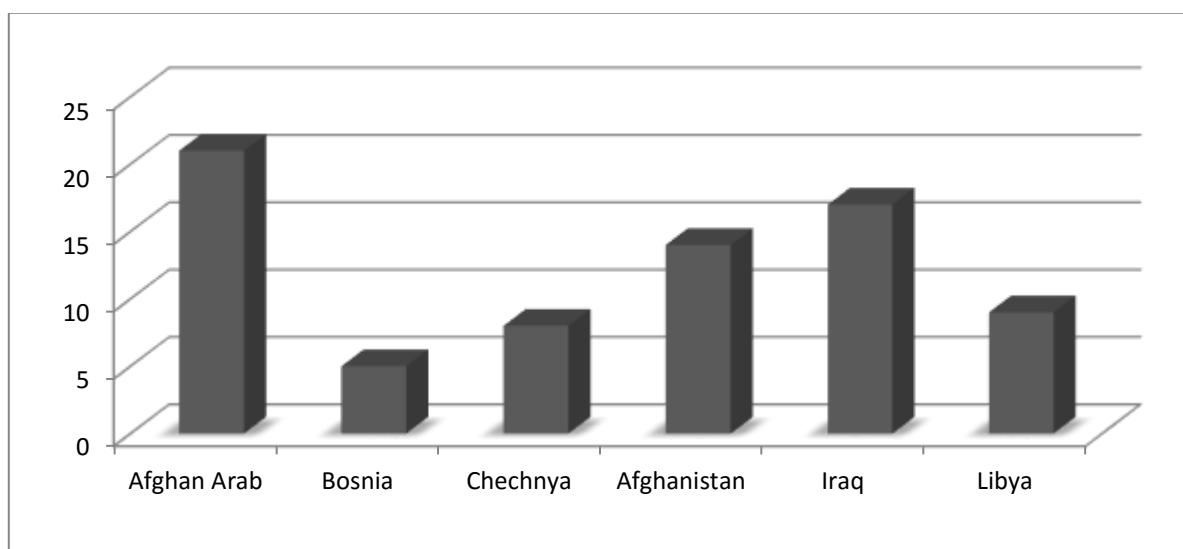


Figure 6.2. Prior experience of defensive jihad of Arab foreign fighters in Syria (n=74)

Whilst there is a general convergence between the thesis findings and those of Dodwell et al. (2016a) - particularly the prominence of defensive jihad in Libya²⁵⁶ and Afghanistan (post 2001) - the strong showing of veteran Arab foreign fighters from the defensive jihad in Iraq (post 2003) found in the thesis dataset (see Appendix E, Table 3), is entirely absent from their findings. Regardless of Arab nationality, from the perspective of geographical

²⁵⁴ Many of these individuals had participated in multiple defensive jihads. The 74 identified had participated in 81 defensive jihads. In addition to the major jihads in Figure 6.2, other locations included Somalia, Yemen, Gaza, and the Sinai Peninsula.

²⁵⁵ This was calculated having removed those Arab foreign fighters who had included on their ‘Islamic State foreign fighter records’ participation in the defensive jihad in Syria.

²⁵⁶ Involvement in the Libyan jihad (which was supported by NATO) was not exclusive to Libyan fighters. The thesis dataset also reveals the presence of two Egyptian (Ahmad al-Barra and Walid Badr) and one Palestinian foreign fighter (Osama Kishta).

proximity (between Iraq and Syria), and ideological synergy (AQI and ISI are forefathers of the Islamic State), arguably such a gap has the potential to skew the findings and analysis of Dodwell et al. (2016a). In addition, there have been copious reports linking involvement in the Iraqi jihad to the emergence of the Islamic State (Weiss and Hassan, 2015; Gerges, 2016: 50; Ahmed et al.; 2016: 19), and indeed former UK Prime Minister Blair went on record admitting that ‘you can't say that those of us who removed Saddam in 2003 bear no responsibility for the situation’ in Syria (Blair, 2015). Particularly prominent and influential veterans of the Iraqi jihad include Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (overall leader of IS); Abdul Rahman al-Qaduli (deceased, deputy leader of IS); Abu Muhammad al-Adnani (deceased, former Emir of IS in Syria and director of external operations); Abu Muhammad al-Gholani (leader of Jabhat al-Nusra); Hashim al-Shaykh (current 2016 leader of Ahrar al-Shaam); and Abu Hammam al-Suri (deceased, former leader of military wing of Jabhat al-Nusra). The positions of authority and overall influence of these Iraqi jihad veterans on the direction of the Syrian jihad (including ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra), are self-evident.

A further important observation to make is that many of the groups in Syria were founded by veteran Arab foreign fighters and formed largely on their geographic (national) origins. Examples would be *Kateebat al-Battar* and *Jaysh Muhammad fee Balad ash-Shaam* established by Libyan foreign fighters;²⁵⁷ and *Harakat Shaam al-Islam* established by three Moroccan foreign fighters from the defensive jihad in Afghanistan (post 2001).²⁵⁸ Thus although small in number (only 3.8 percent of the thesis dataset), veteran Arab foreign fighters arguably had a disproportionate influence over the Syrian insurgency.

Overlaps notwithstanding between veteran Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists, it is also important to identify the presence and influence of veteran Islamist terrorists (35)

²⁵⁷ The thesis dataset reveals Muhammad al-Qab (<https://www.facebook.com/Strangers.sy4> posted 29 October 2013); Husaam al-Shataywi (Convoy of Martyrs); Abdul Qadir al-Misrati (<http://documents.sy/image.php?id=2443&lang=en> posted 28 July 2013); Abu Ibrahim al-Libi, Abu Dharr, and Mu’aweeya al-Libi (Zaman al-Wasl, March 8, 2016) were involved in the Libyan jihad to overthrow the Gaddafi regime in 2011.

²⁵⁸ They were Ibrahim Shakaran, Muhammad Ahmad Mazouz, and Muhammad Sulayman al-Alami, who incidentally, were also former detainees at Guantanamo Bay prison. Other Arab and non-Arab groups with national identities include *Jund ash-Shaam* and *Fatah al-Islam* (Lebanese); *Jaysh al-Muhajireen wa-Ansar* (Chechens); *Kateebat Tawhid wa Jihad* (Uzbeks); and *Crimean Jamaat* (Russian and Crimean Tartars).

within the Syrian conflict, mostly those linked with al-Qaeda (19) and HAMAS (7).²⁵⁹ According to Ahmed et al. (2016: 5), the ‘leaders of Jabhat al-Nusrah and ISIS today can be linked through personal contacts over generations to the forefathers of global jihad [Islamist terrorism].’ The overlaps include 18 Islamist terrorists who were also veteran Arab foreign fighters from previous conflicts, supporting the argument that many Arab foreign fighters do eventually become involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. Notable veteran Islamist terrorists involved in the Syrian insurgency include Ayman al-Zawahiri (leader of al-Qaeda, linked to Jabhat al-Nusrah until July 2016); Abu Firas al-Suri (deceased, former al-Qaeda Shura council member and spokesman for Jabhat al-Nusrah); Abu Khalid al-Suri (deceased, former al-Qaeda member and former leader of Ahrar al-Shaam in Aleppo); and Muhammad Haydar Zammar - the Syrian al-Qaeda ‘source of inspiration’ for the 9/11 pilots (The 9/11 Commission Report, 2005: 164), who joined ISIS in Raqqah.

Again, the point to be made is that veteran Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists appear to have had a disproportionate influence over the Syrian conflict. According to Ahmed et al. (2016), while the majority of Arab foreign fighters were inexperienced with no prior experience of defensive jihad or Islamist terrorism, once in Syria ‘on the battlefield, jihadi novices are being introduced to seasoned veterans’ (p. 9) in the form of ‘an ideologue or a top-level operative’ (p. 29). Whilst perhaps unsurprising, it does lend a degree of credence to the existence of charismatic leaders and ideologues, and their influence through indoctrination on those arriving in Syria, which is covered later in the chapter.

Debunking the Myth of Radicalised Arab Foreign Fighters

This section of the chapter continues to make the case that the majority of Arab foreign fighters who travelled to Syria were not necessarily radicalised²⁶⁰ prior to their decision to participate in defensive jihad. It is often implicit in the scholarly literature on Arab foreign fighters in Syria, that individuals who depart their country of residence in order to

²⁵⁹ The remaining nine belonged to either EIJ, EIG, Fatah al-Islam, LIFG, and/or MIFG.

²⁶⁰ From Chapter 1, radicalisation was defined as the ‘social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to [an] extremist political or religious ideology’ (Horgan, 2009: 152), that may eventually cross a threshold that leads to violence.

participate in defensive jihad in defence of their co-religionists, are somehow already radicalised and/or already Islamist terrorists (Nilsson, 2015; Dodwell et al., 2016a: 10; Borum, 2016).²⁶¹ Berger and Stern (2015) go further to suggest that ISIS ‘sought recruits ... who were further down the path toward ideological radicalization or more inclined by personal disposition toward violence;’ a position not supported by P. Engel (2015).²⁶² Even at the international level, the ‘Arab foreign fighters’ in the thesis dataset are labelled by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC CTC, 2015a) as ‘foreign terrorist fighters.’ Those who do recognise that not all foreign fighters in Syria are radicalised, include Hegghammer (2013a), Cafarella (2014: 9), and the EU’s Director of Justice and Home Affairs, Gilles de Kerchove (2013).²⁶³

This idea that Arab foreign fighters are somehow already radicalised (based on their international volunteerism), whilst compelling, is not persuasive. Nathan Patin (2015), an investigative journalist, researched the motivations of 108 foreign fighters in Syria. Citing the exact words of the foreign fighters themselves, the circumstances supporting their personal (not group) involvement included:

‘the killing of innocent people that couldn’t even defend themselves’ (p. 21);
‘religion is a major one’ (p. 23); ‘I’m going to have an adventure’ (p. 26); ‘to fight on my terms against an enemy I know is evil ... it is redemption, in a sense’ (p. 29); and ‘governments weren’t doing [anything] about it - by God we will’ (p. 30).

The circumstances highlighted above appear to lack the notion of radicalisation and perhaps more accurately demonstrate a certain compassion towards victims, a mild religious fervour to act, and the need of many young men – that of adventure and excitement. What is particularly striking about the study conducted by Patin (2015), is that it was actually

²⁶¹ It is important to recognise that many Arab foreign fighters went to Syria and joined a group, often based on their geographic origin, only to later join groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra or ISIS.

²⁶² P. Engel (2015) analysed an AQ guide, *A Course in the Art of Recruiting*, written by Abu Amry al-Qa’idy in 2010. She noted that ‘ISIS recruiters seem to follow many of the same basic guidelines [as al-Qaeda] for luring people into their group.’

²⁶³ The EU’s Director of Justice and Home Affairs, Gilles de Kerchove (2013), told the BBC on 24 April 2013, that ‘not all of them are radical when they leave, but most likely many of them will be radicalised there.’

investigating ‘American volunteers travelling to Iraq and Syria to fight *against* the Islamic State’ (p. 1), not alongside the Islamic State. Interestingly, in a separate study conducted by El-Badawy, Comerford, and Welby (2015: 5), *Inside the Jihadi Mind*, the ‘system of ideas’ that attracted recruits to ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusrah (and AQAP), broadly mirrored the study by Patin (2015), and included the influence of ‘creedal values,’ ‘the enemy,’ ‘nobility of jihad,’ and ‘allies of God.’ The synergy between the two reports is striking and their findings have an uncanny resemblance, yet the subjects of research were complete opposites. Therefore, were the Americans fighting against ISIS also ‘foreign terrorist fighters’ and are they also assumed to be radicalised? The conclusion by Patin (2015) was that the American foreign fighters were motivated by ‘a sense that something needed to be done in the face of IS’s continuing barbarity,’ arguably the same inspiration as Arab foreign fighters ‘in the face of al-Assad’s continuing barbarity.’ This suggests perhaps more the presence of rationality, rather than radicalisation.

By 2014, it appeared that US policy “chose to stand by those advocating ‘jihad only in Syria’ and against the regional and global jihadist trend represented by ISIS” (Ballout, 2014). This implicitly acknowledged that defensive jihad (against the al-Assad regime or the Islamic State) was now somehow different from global Islamist terrorism. Perhaps it signalled an embryonic awareness and realisation of the distinction between Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists, going back to the 1980s. This drawing of distinctions was further demonstrated by the use of the term ‘moderate’ in statements made by the US White House and Department of State, in relation to those forces opposing al-Assad’s regime and the Islamic State. Such terms include ‘moderate opposition forces’ (Obama, 2016) and ‘moderate groups’ (Kerry, 2016a), however what is meant by ‘moderate groups’? Are they ‘un-radicalised’ fighters and followers of ‘moderate Islam’? Certainly, according to Safadi (2015), it is ‘virtually impossible to bracket these fighters into distinct moderate or non-moderate categories.’ The point to be made is that, by painting every Arab foreign fighter with the label of being ‘radicalised’ or ‘moderate,’ it is not helpful in trying to gain a nuanced understanding of their motivations and circumstances. The actions of the few should not define them all.

Finally, it is instructive that the US Treasury Department issued a waiver authorising the provision of logistical and financial support to the FSA (L. Rosen, 2012). This presupposes that the FSA are considered a moderate conglomeration of opposition groups in Syria, despite their loose alliances and shifting allegiances. Yet the thesis dataset identifies 126 Arab foreign fighters within the FSA, arguably resulting in them being supported by the US Treasury Department whilst at the same time being labelled ‘foreign terrorist fighters’ by the United Nations Security Council. Arguably more worrying is that the thesis dataset also reveals that 10 out of the 126 Arab foreign fighters in the FSA conducted self-sacrificial attacks (martyrdom operations) against SAA units;²⁶⁴ attacks that would be labelled by most governments and academics, as ‘terrorist attacks.’²⁶⁵ This leads to the contradiction of being both supported by the US, whilst also being labelled ‘suicide bombers.’ This inconsistency appears to demonstrate an overall misunderstanding and misrepresentation of many Arab foreign fighters in Syria, and their *modus operandi*. Therefore, whilst it is impossible to prove definitively that the majority of Arab foreign fighters were not necessarily radicalised based on their decision to travel to Syria, there is little convincing empirical evidence to suggest otherwise. However, the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. That said, having arrived in Syria, it is accepted that some ‘will become radicalised as they spend time in the trenches’ (Hegghammer, 2013a) – in the crucible of defensive jihad.

The Radicalisation of Arab Foreign Fighters in Syria: How and Why?

Introduction

The notion of becoming radicalised as a result of ‘time spent in the trenches’ in Syria has some academic and governmental support. Academically, the three broad strands put

²⁶⁴ The martyrdom operations included attacks against Syrian Army checkpoints ‘Panorama,’ ‘Wadi Elbow,’ Barrier 68, and ‘Tumeah;’ Nabq military intelligence building, and Mingh airbase.

²⁶⁵ For example, on 23 December 2011, an Iraqi Arab foreign fighter conducted a martyrdom operation against the Military Intelligence building in Damascus. The UN Security Council (SC/10506 dated 23 December 2011) denounced the attacks as ‘terrorist attacks.’ Additionally, *Agence France Presse* (23 December 2011); *The Daily Beast* (4 January 2012); and *Jerusalem Post* (25 December 2011) also labelled the attack a ‘suicide attack’ (cited under CPOST Attack ID 377522234).

forward by scholars appear to be situational, social, and ideological. These strands are not individually distinct, but overlap with each other, and are also not in ‘a process of linear, discrete progression’ (Horgan, 2009: 140). The situational aspect of personal involvement on the battlefields in Syria includes the duration and intensity of combat, as well as the ‘comradeship ties’ developed between individuals. Scholars who leverage this theory include Mironova et al. (2014: 15) who claim that ‘individuals … become more radical over time;’ Barrett (2014: 7) who argued that ‘all of them will have been exposed to an environment of sustained radicalization and violence;’ while Reed et al. (2015: 5) suggested a ‘radicalising effect of fighting abroad.’ The theory of socialisation within the ranks of the various rebel groups is advanced by Ahmed et al. (2016: 9), who suggested that ‘on the battlefield, jihadi novices are being introduced to seasoned veterans.’ Finally, the ideological aspect of radicalisation in Syria is proposed by Borum and Fein (2016: 10), who champion the ‘incubation of a terrorist ethos’ – which Zelin (2014b: 29) conceptualises as ‘the radicalization … into Salafism.’ These rather broad academic explanations all have their merits, and are explored and tested later in the chapter.

At governmental level, former NCTC Deputy Director Nicholas Rasmussen (2014) noted that foreign fighters ‘may eventually return to their home countries battle-hardened [and] radicalized’ - implying perhaps that their radicalisation occurred in Syria (and not in their home countries). Rob Bertholee (2013: 4), a former head of the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), also reported that ‘numerous foreign fighters … are trained, traumatised or radicalised … having travelled to Syria;’ while the British Security Service (MI5) (2016a) website acknowledged that ‘experience of fighting overseas with terrorist groups can also promote radicalisation.’ Thus at governmental level, there appears to be broad acknowledgement that the radicalisation of many foreign fighters maybe forged in the crucible of defensive jihad in Syria.

Research conducted for this chapter suggests that the theoretical framework which is underpinned by the concept of radicalisation appeared to struggle to explain why some Arab foreign fighters having arrived in Syria, subsequently embraced Islamist terrorist related activities. As noted in Chapter 2, conventional radicalisation theories tend to assume

a home-grown gradual process within a Western (peacetime) environment often involving a ‘bunch of guys’ (Sageman, 2008: 87), rather than within an insurgency such as Syria, involving foreign fighters. That said, while there is no single factor or circumstance to explain why some Arab foreign fighters in Syria subsequently became (and continue to become) involved in Islamist terrorist related activities, it is suggested that grievances, ideology, and training (that includes indoctrination) do have explanatory value. However, these are not discreet circumstances, for example grievances and ideology are nestled together due to their essential interconnectedness (Neumann, 2011), while ideology and training both involve elements of indoctrination.

Grievances and Ideology

Using a reduced dataset of 305 Arab foreign fighters where their grievances and ideology may be inferred, this section explores these circumstances in order to help explain why some of them subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. Whilst this thesis broadly agrees that ‘ISIS is a creature of accumulated grievances [and] ideological and social polarization’ (Gerges, 2014: 343), identifying their content and impact is central to the chapter. With the increased access to, and granularity of, data on Arab foreign fighters in Syria, it is now possible to analyse them by identifying their respective groups (FSA, ISIS, or Jabhat al-Nusra); their adopted method of attack (conventional or self-sacrificial); their intended target (military or civilian / non-combatant); and their cause of death (fighting the SAA, internecine warfare, terrorism, or coalition bombing). Using this empirical data, inferences may be made concerning the cause of their grievances, and the group and individual ideology that supported the method of attack against a particular target (Drake, 1998: 54).

An interesting and evidence based finding of the cause of death of Arab foreign fighters within rebel groups in Syria, is presented in Figure 6.3.

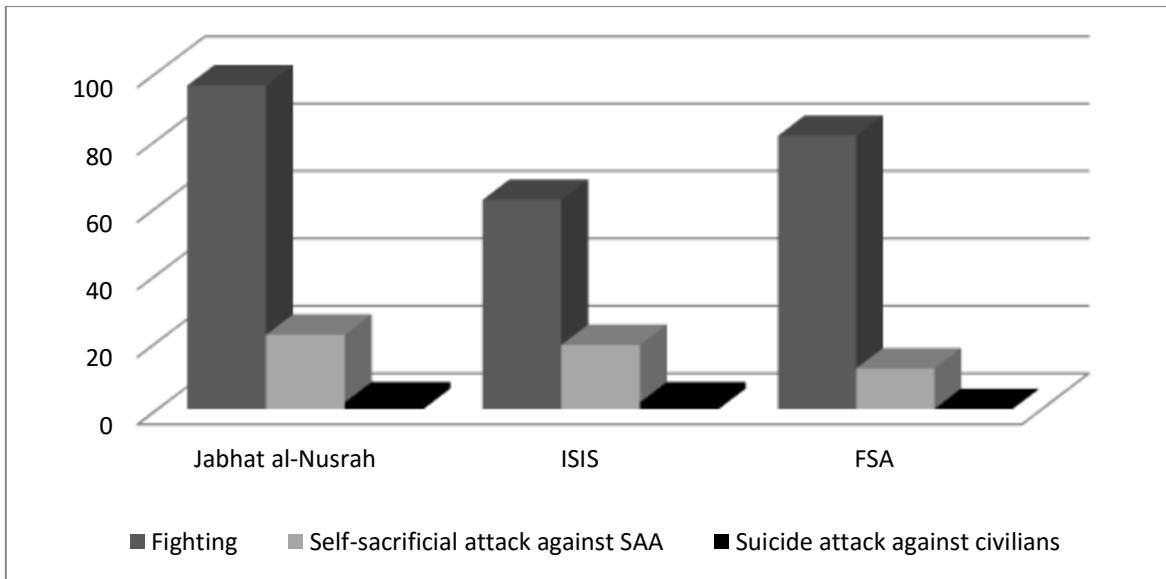


Figure 6.3: Cause of death of Arab foreign fighters within rebel groups in Syria (n=305).

Figure 6.3 offers some inferences that demonstrate that the primacy of grievances held by Arab foreign fighters is against the SAA - grievances that include support for the ideology of *takfir* against all ‘*nusairi* Alawites’; the tactic of self-sacrificial attacks primarily targeting the SAA; and the dearth of recorded suicide attacks that targeted civilians and non-combatants. Thus, despite the UN listing of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusrah as terrorist organisations,²⁶⁶ the evidence suggests that their actual *modus operandi* has little in common with the ‘revised academic consensus definition of terrorism’ compiled by Alex Schmid (2013a: 86), in that they are often not ‘targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants.’ Arguably, it is the ISIS *modus operandi* in the West (inspired and actual) rather than in Syria, that is often more visible and terroristic in nature, particularly the attacks in Paris, Brussels, and Nice.²⁶⁷ In Syria, the terroristic nature of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusrah may be better understood by examining their genocidal atrocities against civilians and non-combatants off, rather than on, the battlefield.

²⁶⁶ The ISIS was designated a terrorist organisation on 13 December 2011, 30 May 2013, 14 May 2014, and 2 June 2014 under the UN 1267 Sanctions List (20 June 2016), p. 53. Jabhat al-Nusrah was designated a terrorist organisation on 14 May 2014 under the UN 1267 Sanctions List (20 June 2016), p. 50.

²⁶⁷ The Paris terrorist attacks on 13 November 2015, killed 130 civilians; the Brussels terrorist attacks on 22 March 2016, killed 35 civilians; and the Nice terrorist attack on 14 July 2016, killed 84 civilians.

Grievances

The primacy of grievances against the al-Assad regime and the resultant ideology of *takfir* against all *nusairi* Alawites, appears to underpin much of the *modus operandi* of all three major non-state groupings (FSA, ISIS, and Jabhat al-Nusra). The vast majority of rebel fighters are engaged in an insurgency against forces aligned with al-Assad (the SAA, Iranian militias, Lebanese Hezbollah), and also in internecine battles between rebel groups. The grievances or ‘diagnostic framing’ (Benford and Snow, 2000)²⁶⁸ against the al-Assad regime arguably are more genuine than perceived - there are well documented cases of Syrian regime extra-judicial killings, detainee abuses, and the widespread use of barrel bombings on civilian areas. One investigation conducted by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria concluded that:

‘Syrian Government forces … have committed crimes against humanity, war crimes and gross human rights violations. These crimes included murder, summary execution, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, sexual violence, violations of children’s rights, pillaging and destruction of civilian objects - including hospitals and schools’ (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2012).

As noted earlier in the chapter, confronting these genuine unequivocal grievances against the al-Assad regime appears to have been the major motivation for many Arab foreign fighters to get involved in defensive jihad in Syria. The ISIS magazine Dabiq is replete with grievances against the al-Assad (*‘nusairi’*) regime, offering graphic images as evidence.²⁶⁹

It appears that having physically witnessed (as outlined above) the ‘crimes against humanity, war crimes and gross human rights violations’ (UNHR, 2012), Arab foreign fighters began to seek revenge for these grievances. It is instructive to note that a later

²⁶⁸ Covered in Chapter 5, embedded within diagnostic framing is the concept of ‘injustice frames’ that are ‘generated and adopted by those who come to define the actions of an authority as unjust’ (Bedford and Snow, 2000: 615).

²⁶⁹ For example, Dabiq Issue 1, pp. 42-43, includes an incident when ‘the Nusayri regime carried out an airstrike in Ar-Raqqah resulting in … all of them being civilian casualties.’

report commissioned by the UNHCR (2016), revealed that although cases of ‘torture and other ill-treatment by armed opposition groups occurred in isolated incidents in the early phase of the conflict … this phenomenon appears to be on the rise.’ It is suggested that this increase in torture and ill-treatment by rebel groups was in part, driven by the need to reciprocate in kind. The notion of revenge is firmly established in the Quran (Ash-Shuraa 42: 40),²⁷⁰ and its link to terrorism is well documented in the literature (Richardson, 2007; Hafez, 2007b: 44; Moghadam, 2011: 230; Silke, 2008: 113).²⁷¹ To further contextualise the idea of revenge, it can also be found in conventional wars fought between national standing armies of participating states; for example a former Alsatian Wehrmacht soldier on the Russian front in WWII, concluded that ‘war always reaches the depths of horror because of idiots who perpetuate terror … under the pretext of vengeance’ (Sajer, 1971: 119). Such contextualisation may help explain the cycles of increasing violence between both Arab foreign fighters and forces aligned to the al-Assad regime, while also suggesting the existence of vengeance within radicalisation processes.

Lastly, the apparent willingness of some Arab foreign fighters in Syria to participate in atrocities may be as a result of situational factors - an explanation supported in the scholarly literature and discussed earlier. Arendt (1994) established that ‘a rather ordinary individual could find himself in a situation in which he could become responsible for the cold-blooded murders of large numbers of people. The situation thus drove evil behaviour’ (as cited in Sternberg, 2003: 301). This explanation was subsequently reinforced by Zimbardo (2007: 8) who concluded that an individual’s action can be ‘traced to factors outside the actor, to situational variables and environmental processes unique to a given setting.’ To contextualise this within an insurgency, Fitzroy Maclean who fought alongside Tito’s Partisans in Yugoslavia in WWII, observed that the impact of the unrestrained violence, shaped the character and behaviour of the fighters (Maclean, 1950: 340). In these circumstances, the context and situation in which grievances are experienced appear to influence the behaviour of individuals, to the degree that they may subsequently commit atrocities. With the situation of the largely uncontained violence in the Syrian insurgency, it

²⁷⁰ See Appendix A.

²⁷¹ In Arabic, the term *qisaas* translates to ‘reprisal, retaliation’ (Wehr, 1980: 766).

is likely that the role of grievances, real and perceived, contribute to some Arab foreign fighters moving further along the continuum to Islamist terrorism. One of the missing pieces appears to include ideology, insomuch as ‘without ideology, grievances are not acted upon’ (Neumann, 2011).

The Ideology of Arab Foreign Fighters in Syria

Before discussing the ideology of Arab foreign fighters in Syria, it is worth briefly touching on the ideologues and scholars who promote the ideology. According to Wiktorowicz (2005b: 25) ‘the reputation of scholars is critical in persuasion: Muslims need to trust the reliability of the interpreter to accept the reliability of the interpretation.’ It is suggested, as with Osama bin Laden who lived amongst the Arab foreign fighters in Afghanistan, that the credibility of ideologues is predicated on the shared experiences of combat and danger in Syria. The main ideologues who are based in Syria include, but are not limited to, a Bahraini named Turki Binali (ISIS), a Jordanian named Iyad al-Uraydi (Jabhat al-Nusrah), and a Saudi named Shaykh Abdullah al-Muhaysani (unaffiliated Islamist ideologue). It is instructive that Wagemakers (2016: 501) contends that in the Syrian insurgency, it is a ‘question of who speaks for jihad: scholars with their theoretical knowledge of Islamic law, or fighters, with their practical knowledge of actual combat.’ This point was also echoed by Maher (2016a: 12), who noted that ‘fighters in the field are driven by a real-time, ad hoc form of jurisprudence that is borne of both the privations and exigencies of war.’ Touched on later in the chapter is the credibility of the ideologues (particularly between those inside and outside of Syria), and the role of ‘charismatic authority’ (Hofmann and Dawson, 2014), and ‘charismatic leadership’ (Eatwell, 2006; Galesic, 2016).

According to Maclean (1950: 330), ‘in guerrilla war, ideas matter more than material resources,’ and within the insurgency in Syria, some scholars claim that the ideas and ideology of the Arab foreign fighters are underpinned by Salafi-jihadism (Zelin, 2014b; Gerges, 2016). Despite there being ‘no clear definition of jihadi Salafism’ (Hegghammer, 2009b: 28), the label ‘has been employed by the Islamist actors themselves’ (Hegghammer, 2009a: 252), thus debating its relevance in Syria does have merit. The concept of Salafi-

jihadism (also referred to as jihadi-Salafism) within political Islam is understood to mean the ideology that supports ‘jihad … against Muslim rulers … whose conduct - particularly with regard to legislation - is not in accordance with Sharia law … [and] to defend the abode of Islam from invasions’ (Wagemakers, 2012: 63). Moghadam (2011: 100) expands this understanding of Salafi-jihadism by also including the intent of declaring ‘an Islamic state … on as large a territory as possible … [focussing] not only on local regimes in the Middle East … but also on the far enemy.’

In the context of the insurgency in Syria, there appears to be little agreement over the underlying ideology of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusrah. Whilst Gerges (2016: 223) argues that ‘Al-Qaeda and ISIS belong to the same family – Salafi-jihadism;’ Bunzel (2015: 7) contends that ‘Jihadi-Salafism is to a large degree what separates the Islamic State from al-Qaeda today.’ The middle ground argued by H. Hassan (2016) is that ISIS’s ideology being ‘traceable straight back to Salafism’ is an ‘illusion’ (p. 4); rather it is a ‘confluence of fundamentalist and revolutionary strands’ (p. 19). Perhaps it is a moot point – Salafism is broadly a ‘Sunni fundamentalist movement’ (Olidort, 2016: vii) and ‘the jihadi faction’ within Salafism ‘calls for violence and revolution’ (Wiktorowicz, 2006: 208). It is suggested that the overarching ideology of both ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusrah draws on Salafi-jihadism, particularly according to Moghadam (2011), due to both groups’ emphasis on the ideology of *takfir* (p. 101); the justifications for targeting and killing of civilians and non-combatants (p. 102); and the permissibility of suicide attacks (p. 103) - which are discussed in the next section.

The Ideology Supporting *Takfir* in Syria

The ideology of *takfir* against ‘nusairi Alawites’ arguably originated from the ‘extremist ideas brought to Iraq by al-Qaeda after 2003’ (H. Hassan, 2016: 9). Whilst Mironova et al. (2014: 16) suggest that in Syria ‘Islamist group leaders appear to be better at using religion to channel collective sectarian grievances,’ arguably it is not the religion of Islam *per se*, but political Islam. Gerges (2016: 292) succinctly argued that the operationalisation of *takfir* is as a result of ‘the instrumentalization of religion for political purposes.’ This

appears a more accurate portrayal, and one that has broad academic support (Hamid, 2014; Wood, 2015; Dodwell et al., 2016a: 32). Evidence from the thesis dataset and from Figure 6.3, supports the centrality of *takfir* against Alawite soldiers, and other Sunnis who warrant being labelled a *kufir* (particularly other Sunni rebel groups). This *takfiri* ideology has led to ‘the largest religious cleansing strategy that has ever been planned in human history’ (Todenhöfer, 2014).

It is instructive that Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi who is considered ‘one of the most important ideologues of Jihadi-Salafism’ (Hegghammer, 2009a: 255), and once ‘the true spiritual father of the Islamic State’ (H. Hassan, 2016: 7), is now labelled a ‘donkey of knowledge’ by the Islamic State in their magazine *Dabiq* 10 (p. 58). This was in large part due to al-Maqdisi ‘denouncing the Islamic State upon rumours of excess in violence and *takfir*’ (Bunzel, 2015: 11). In a *fatwa*, al-Maqdisi (2014) labelled ISIS ‘a deviant organisation from the path of truth … which leans towards extremism (*ghuluw*) … and who have become embroiled in the unlawful spilling of blood;’ a position he reaffirmed in June 2015 (al-Maqdisi, 2015). In essence al-Maqdisi, whilst supportive of *takfir* against the ‘Alawite regime,’ believes the ideology of *takfir* against other Sunni groups (particularly *Jabhat al-Nusrah*) to be wrong. It is however revealing that whilst labelling al-Maqdisi a ‘donkey of knowledge,’ a dispute had already ‘emerged among senior theorists within the Islamic State over the practice of *takfir*,’ leading to the arrest of some Arab foreign fighters (Ali, 2014).²⁷² This lack of overall ideological cohesion appears to have led to varying shades of *takfir* with ISIS - creating what H. Hassan (2016: 1) labels ‘a culture of *takfirism* within *takfirism*.’

The Ideology Supporting the Tactic of Self-Sacrificial Attacks in Syria

The ideology supporting the tactic of self-sacrificial attacks in Syria first needs to be put into context. According to Kenneth Pollack (2004: 573), who conducted an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of conventional Arab militaries, ‘the majority of Arab

²⁷² The arrested Arab foreign fighters included Abu Musab al-Tunisi, Abu Asid al-Maghribi, Abu al-Hawra al-Jazari, and Abu Abdullah al-Maghribi, who were charged with excessive *takfir* accusations.

military personnel demonstrated impressive degrees of self-sacrifice and personal bravery.⁷ This suggests that the notion of sacrifice and martyrdom in battle *fee sabeel Allah* is not an aberration in the Arab world. The parallel to be drawn is that these Arab militaries were in combat against other conventional militaries (either Iranian or Israeli), in the same way that the FSA, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra are against the SAA. This section makes the argument that the employment of self-sacrificial attacks by Arab foreign fighters against the SAA (or other rebel combatants) is ideologically more akin to a martyrdom (*istishhaad*) operation, rather than to a suicide (*intihaar*) attack. It continues to develop the argument in Chapter 5 that in Iraq (post 2003), Arab foreign fighters conducted martyrdom operations against military occupation forces under the auspices of a defensive jihad; while Islamist terrorists conducted suicide attacks against civilians and non-combatants under the auspices of Islamist terrorism. It is also instructive that in the Syrian conflict, the term *inghimasi* (a self-sacrificial tactic explained in detail below) has resurfaced within political Islam, perhaps to support and reinforce the legitimacy of self-sacrificial attacks. Aware that most self-sacrificial attacks (martyrdom, suicide, and *inghimasi*) in Syria appear to be conducted by foreigners (Reuter, 2015; Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 168; Dodwell et al., 2016a: 31; Gerges, 2016: 67), it is essential to disaggregate them in order to understand the nuances between them and their respective motivational ideologies.

The ideological distinctions between ‘martyrdom operations’ and ‘suicide attacks’ conducted in Syria become apparent by using three approaches: targeting, lessons from historical military precedencies, and *inghimasi* operations. These three approaches reinforce the suggestion advanced by Fierke (2014: 198), that ‘the distinction between suicide and martyrdom is closely linked to the intention of the agent.’

Targeting

Using data extracted from the Chicago Project on Security and Threats (CPOST) Suicide Attack Database,²⁷³ it suggests that self-sacrificial attacks in Syria appear to target primarily Syrian military units, and not civilians and non-combatants. This is demonstrated in Figure 6.4.

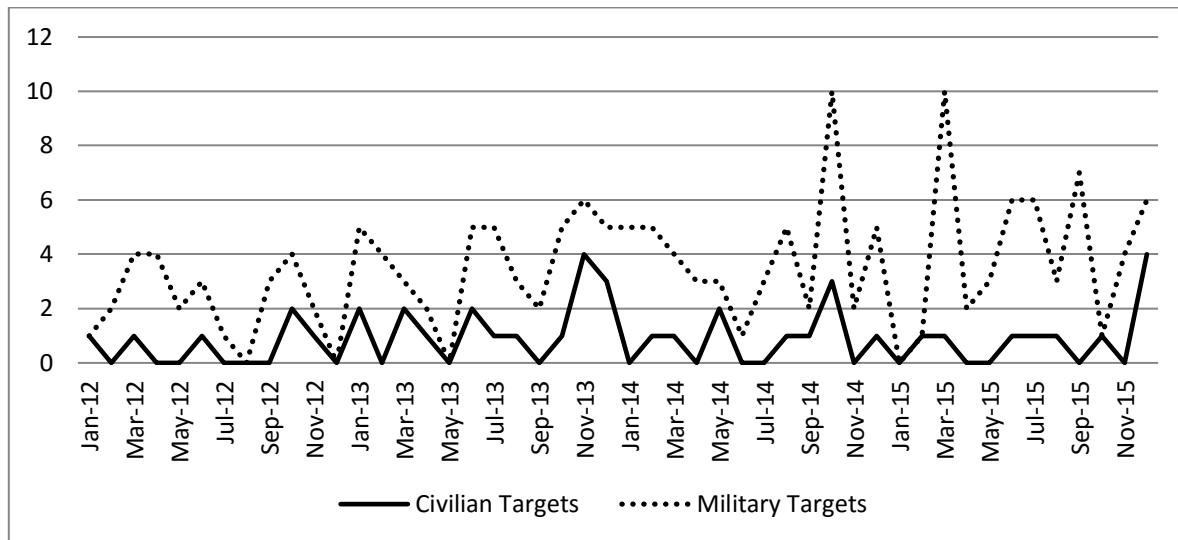


Figure 6.4: Targeting comparison for self-sacrificial attacks in Syria: 2012-2015 (n=168)

The CPOST data from Figure 6.4 ostensibly reveal that 75 percent (125) of ‘suicide attacks’ were targeting the Syrian military, whilst only 25 percent (43) were classified as targeting civilians (and non-combatants). Yet closer examination using content analysis of supporting media articles reveals that although the ‘target’ may be documented by CPOST as ‘civilian,’ this often appears to have been inaccurate. Examples include an attack on the ‘al-Kindi hospital’ that was not occupied by civilian staff or patients, but was occupied and being defended by the SAA,²⁷⁴ hence it was attacked. This analysis resulted in establishing that out of the 43 ‘suicide attacks’ listed by CPOST as attacks against ‘civilian’ targets, actually only 28 could reasonably be considered as suicide attacks targeting civilians and

²⁷³ As noted in Chapter 5, CPOST defines a suicide attack ‘as an attack in which an attacker kills himself or herself in a deliberate attempt to kill others.’

²⁷⁴ CPOST Attack ID 147281505 (20 December 2013).

non-combatants,²⁷⁵ with the remaining 12 attacks being more consistent with defensive jihad, against combatant targets. The detailed analysis of CPOST attacks (2012-2015) is presented in Appendix F. This therefore means that out of the 168 self-sacrificial attacks in Syria, 82 percent (137) should be classified as martyrdom operations against military targets, and aligns the ideological motivation of most Arab foreign fighters to defensive jihad. It is instructive that C. Winter (2017b: 17), having researched 923 Islamic State suicide operations between 1 December 2015 and 30 November 2016, found that ‘84 percent ... were geared towards achieving military goals ... [while] just 16 percent of the time, IS used suicide attacks to target civilians.’ This independent corroboration of the thesis findings suggests a more nuanced appraisal of self-sacrificial attacks in Syria.

In their own words, Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists appear to offer conflicting views over the employment of self-sacrificial operations in Syria. For instance, according to Saudi foreign fighter, Ayachi Abdul Rahman (aka Abu Hajar), ‘killing the innocent along with the enemy is not acceptable. If my target is military and I knowingly kill even one innocent, this is terrorism’ (Shelton, 2013). Yet Iraqi foreign fighter, Ibrahim Ammar Ali al-Khzali, admitted that ‘it was about hitting as many people as possible – especially police officers, soldiers and Shiites ... they are infidels’ (Reuter, 2015). Despite the vagueness in defining Shiites (which could reasonably include civilians and non-combatants), it raises an interesting question whether ‘infidels’ are perceived as belonging to the category ‘civilians and non-combatants.’ Tentative evidence from Figures 6.3 and 6.4 suggest otherwise - the targeting priority appears to be focussed on ‘infidel’ police officers and soldiers. In a separate interview al-Khzali admitted that whilst ‘most people who died were valid targets ... those who were caught up in the attacks will be accepted by God’ (Chulov, 2015) – in other words collateral damage.

The evidence that the majority of Arab foreign fighters targeted only SAA and other combatants raises three issues. First it reinforces the argument made by Moghadam (2011: 5), that an attack should ‘not be labelled a terrorist attack if it is targeted against members

²⁷⁵ Out of an original total of 46 attacks, three of the attacks were duplicate entries and removed. That left 28 attacks targeting civilians and on-combatants, 12 attacks against combatants, and three attacks with no clearly identifiable intended target. See Appendix F for detailed analysis.

of an army, because attacks are ordinarily labelled terrorist attacks when they are aimed at non-combatants’ – as discussed in Chapters 2 and 5. Second, it supports the personal view of Hegghammer (2013b), that maybe ‘the Syrian rebel cause is just and that some of the foreign fighters leave with noble intentions’ – normative arguments notwithstanding. Lastly, it challenges the view that ‘suicide attacks for the most part ... rarely occur against truly military targets’ (Cook, 2002: 9), a position that now appears increasingly obsolete and unrepresentative of the realities on the battlefields in Syria.

Historical Military Examples of Self-Sacrificial Attacks

The use of self-sacrificial attacks against military targets is not unique to the Syrian insurgency. There are numerous historical military examples of ideologically supported self-sacrificial attacks, including Japanese kamikaze pilots in WWII, and Communist Viet Minh forces in the French-Indochina war. There has been some literature drawing analogies and similarities between Japanese kamikaze pilots and Islamist ‘suicide bombers’ (Sprinzak, 2000; Israeli, 2003; Elster, 2005; Pape, 2005; C. Winter, 2017b), notwithstanding kamikaze pilots ‘were acting on behest of a state at war’ (Moghadam, 2011: 5). However, in Syria (and Iraq), it could be argued that ISIS are ‘acting on behest of a state at war.’ According to Shiv Malik (2015), ‘leaked documents show how ISIS is building its state;’ and Todenhöfer (2016: 218) recognised that ISIS were keen ‘to demonstrate [that] the Islamic State is not a state in name only, but really is a state.’²⁷⁶ After the establishment of the Islamic State in June 2014, some scholars do suggest that the Islamic State could be conceptualised as ‘a quasi-state entity’ (Gerges, 2016: 224), or even ‘a phantom, abstracted, delusional and fake state’ (Dabashi, 2016). Either way, it ‘isn’t only a terrorist organization’ (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: xv). Therefore, aware that Islamic State targeting for self-sacrificial attacks appears primarily focussed on enemy combatants (C. Winter, 2017b), perhaps the circumstances and ideological motivations for ISIS volunteers (being quasi-state fighters) have certain similarities to Japanese kamikaze pilots who targeted the American military in the Pacific.

²⁷⁶ The Islamic State ideologue, Shaykh Turki Binali, also confirmed that ‘the Islamic State is a sovereign polity with courts and a legal system’ (Bunzel, 2014).

The parallels are instructive insofar that ‘Japanese suicide attackers seemed to be motivated more by a desire to protect their country’ (Moghadam, 2011: 14). In a similar vein, Saudi foreign fighter Ayachi Abdul Rahman argued that ‘it is not terrorism to defend your country, whether it is Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Syria’ (Shelton, 2013). Implicit in Abdul Rahman’s argument is the notion of the *ummah* – the ‘global community of Muslim believers’ (Moghadam, 2008a: 253) - and the need to defend them from attack – both externally (in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Chechnya), and internally (in Syria). To label such defence as terrorism and the combatants as terrorists is not entirely persuasive. A more nuanced understanding includes the notion of an ‘intra-Sunni solidarity norm [involving] young men … who go to Syria, [who] see its people as their own and feel a more moral and religious obligation to defend them’ (Hegghammer, 2013a). This is somewhat echoed by Gordts (2014), who argued correctly that ‘a lot of people … were motivated by the plight of the Syrians. They were certainly Islamists, but they were not necessarily full-blown jihadi terrorists.’

The second historical military example of ideologically supported self-sacrificial attacks, involves the Communist Viet Minh forces in the 1954 battle of Dien Bien Phu in French-Indochina. According to Fall (1985: 368), the Viet Minh often employed ‘Communist death volunteers loaded with explosives.’ Those in the French Foreign Legion who witnessed these attacks recalled ‘death volunteers carrying satchel charges for the French machine-gun posts’ (Windrow, 2004: 398); and that ‘death volunteers … with twenty pounds of TNT strapped to their chests, came out of the trenches and threw themselves at the French blockhouses’ (Morgan, 2010: 536-537). It is instructive to draw parallels between the militarily inferior Arab foreign fighters in Syria, and the militarily inferior Viet Minh fighters at Dien Bien Phu who were compelled to adopt self-sacrificial attacks in order to defeat the well defended French strongpoints. This chimes with Bar (2006: 14), who argued that ‘jihadis’ conduct self-sacrificial attacks against armies because they ‘do not have the military power of their adversaries’ – therefore self-sacrificial attacks by Arab foreign fighters are, as Hoffman (2006: 155) claims, a ‘weapon of the weak.’ These two historical

military examples demonstrate that, despite sometimes being labelled ‘suicide bombers’²⁷⁷ or ‘death volunteers,’ self-sacrificial attacks are not unique to the Syrian insurgency, and support the argument of Akram (2016), that (terminology notwithstanding), ‘the use of a suicide bomber is more often to do with gaining military advantage.’²⁷⁸

Inghimasi Operations

The last point drawing distinctions between ‘martyrdom operations’ and ‘suicide attacks’ in Syria, is the use of the term *inghimasi*²⁷⁹ which has re-surfaced in media releases from both ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusrah.²⁸⁰ In the scholarly literature the term *inghimasi* is often conflated with suicide attacks and/or more vague labels such as ‘fully committed’ (Zelin, 2014a: 13); ‘suicidal’ (El-Badawy et al. 2015: 20); ‘commando’ (al-Tamimi, 2016), or ‘suicide fighter’ (al-Kadhimi, 2016; Dodwell et al., 2016a: 28). Probably the most contextualised scholarly definition of *inghimasi* from among many (Hafez, 2007b: 117; Cook, 2007: 153; Moghadam, 2011: 104; Bloom, Horgan, and Winter, 2016: 30-31), ‘refers to special operations involving fighters … distinct from suicide bombers … that willingly put themselves in harm’s way, maximising the risk of their deaths in order to cause as much damage as possible’ (C. Winter, 2017b: 5). The broad constituent parts of an *inghimasi* operation appear to involve the target being ‘an enemy position’ (implicitly military); the offensive employment of light weapons and bombs (not just an explosive vest); and that the likelihood of survival is low - although not impossible (Slavicek, 2008: 560; C. Winter, 2017a). The idea that *inghimasi* combatants are necessarily terrorists whilst comforting and even compelling, should not go unchallenged – especially when they are not ‘targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants’ – a key tenet in the ‘revised academic consensus definition of terrorism’ (Schmid, 2013a: 86), as noted earlier.

²⁷⁷ As Fierke (2014: 205) noted, “‘suicide bombing’ and ‘suicide attack’ are examples of Western terminology.”

²⁷⁸ An excellent example of a potential martyrdom operation involving an Arab fighter (of unknown nationality) may be found on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nBc0ksZLHg>). He successfully destroyed a Syrian army tank with just a hand grenade. He survived, although had he died, it could reasonably be conceptualised as a martyrdom operation.

²⁷⁹ The Arabic verb *ghamasa* means ‘to plunge, immerse, submerge’ (Wehr, 1980: 684).

²⁸⁰ The first mention of an *inghimasi* operation (in Syria) was a Jabhat al-Nusrah attack on 100 Syrian Arab Army soldiers occupying the Al-Kindi Hospital in Aleppo on 20 December 2013 (CPOST Attack ID 47281505).

The term *inghimasi* is however a contested term, perhaps less amongst ideologues but certainly between groups. Ideologically, according to Molloy (2009: 17), Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) justified *inghimasi* operations under the pretext of ‘a soldier on a battlefield deciding to carry out an attack that will likely result in his death.’ Contemporary ideologue Abu Basir al-Tartusi (2005) permits *inghimasi* operations ‘even if it leads to one being killed by the enemy … so long as there is benefit to jihad, to Islam, and to Muslims.’ The ideological emphasis is military in nature and appears to be the position adopted by the Islamic State, but not by al-Qaeda affiliated groups.

The Islamic State interpret *inghimasi* operations as a military tactic, against enemy combatants who are generally labelled ‘apostate soldiers’;²⁸¹ ‘murtaddeen officers and soldiers’;²⁸² or ‘PKK and FSA *murtaddeen*.’²⁸³ In an August 2015 ISIS video²⁸⁴ the targets identified as suitable for *inghimasi* operations included ‘well protected targets with barricades, solid buildings, or enemy commanders.’ The ISIS video also specified that an *inghimasi* volunteer must be of ‘good moral disposition’ (*hasan al-khuluq*), and ‘like sacrificing in the path of God’ (*hubb at-tadh-heeya fee sabeel Allah*). A typical ISIS report of an *inghimasi* operation found in magazines such as Dabiq would include:

‘*inghimasi* soldiers of the Khilafah armed with light weapons and explosive belts,²⁸⁵ ‘plunging into the enemy ranks’²⁸⁶ and ‘following the clashes, the two *inghimaasiyyeen* detonated their explosive belts in the midst of the *murtaddeen*, killing a number of the officers and commanders.’²⁸⁷

Al-Qaeda affiliated groups appear to adopt a different interpretation. In al-Qaeda’s magazine Inspire (2014),²⁸⁸ it defines an *inghimasi* as ‘an individual or a small group immersing themselves within a large army of non-believers in search of martyrdom and

²⁸¹ Dabiq. Issue 2, p. 13.

²⁸² Dabiq. Issue 11, p. 29.

²⁸³ Dabiq. Issue 13, p. 17.

²⁸⁴ The Islamic State (2015). *The Inghimasis – The Pride of the Nation*.

²⁸⁵ Dabiq. Issue 14, p. 20.

²⁸⁶ Dabiq. Issue 2, p. 13.

²⁸⁷ Dabiq. Issue 14, p. 23.

²⁸⁸ Inspire. Issue 14, pp. 42-45.

causing damage to them' (p. 43). Al-Qaeda cited examples of *inghimasi* operations including the 2008 attacks in Mumbai; the 2009 attack by Major Nidal Hassan in Fort Hood; and the 2013 attack in Nairobi's Westgate Mall (p. 44). The Islamist terrorist leaning of these examples, involving civilians and non-combatants is unmistakable. It appears that such nuances and subtleties between Islamist groups in general, and in Syria in particular, limit our current understanding of *inghimasi* operations.

To conclude, there is a compelling case to conceptualise Arab foreign fighters, who attack military targets in a war zone, as being more analogous with Kamikaze pilots and Viet Minh fighters, rather than being labelled suicide bombers. As noted in Chapter 1, Fierke (2014: 207) recognised the tension in the relationship between 'suicide terrorism' and 'martyrdom operations,' and uses "the term 'suicide/martyrdom' when pointing to it." There appears to be a need to distinguish between self-sacrificial attacks (martyrdom operations, *inghimasi* operations, and suicide attacks), as there is a tension between the various labels largely based on the differences in targeting. It is suggested that the ideology supporting the tactic of self-sacrificial attacks against military targets is consistent with the more general trend of martyrdom *fee sabeel Allah*, rather than supporting suicide attacks against civilians and non-combatants. This leads to the suggestion that Arab foreign fighters who conducted self-sacrificial attacks against the SAA, should not necessarily be considered suicide bombers, let alone Islamist terrorists. After all, there is no known documentary evidence that Kamikaze pilots or the Communist Viet Minh were ever labelled terrorists. This suggestion clearly challenges much of the existing literature on suicide terrorism, and is addressed in Chapter 7.

The Ideology Supporting the Targeting and Killing of Civilians

The ideology (within Salafi-jihadism) supporting the killing of civilians and non-combatants by Arab foreign fighters in Syria, appears to often manifest itself in the form of genocidal atrocities, rather than entirely as a result of Islamist terrorism. Although the scale of ISIS atrocities amounts to 'only' 2,998 (1.48 percent of) civilian deaths in Syria (highlighted earlier in the chapter), the atrocities against the Shia, Sunni, Christian, and

Yazidi civilians particularly by ISIS, have been well documented (UNHRC, 2016; USCIRF, 2016: 121),²⁸⁹ lending support that the atrocities could arguably be conceptualised ideologically through the prism of genocide (that includes ethnic cleansing),²⁹⁰ as well as through the prism of Islamist terrorism. To support this argument, ‘the legal definition of genocide,’ is defined under Article II of the United Nations (1948) *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (p. 280) as:

‘any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.’

That does not mean that a suicide attack directed against a Shia mosque is not terrorism, but to recognise the intention behind certain attacks, and (as noted earlier) ‘the intention of the agent’ (Fierke, 2014: 198). Interestingly, it was only in March 2016, five years after the conflict in Syria had erupted, that the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, publically went on record and acknowledged that ISIS ‘is genocidal by self-proclamation, by ideology, and by actions – in what it says, what it believes, and what it does’ (Kerry, 2016b).

It is therefore instructive that Staub (1989) in his seminal book, *The Roots of Evil*, found that ‘perpetrators change, as individuals and as a group, as they progress along a continuum of destruction that ends in genocide’ (p. 13). This perhaps is a key finding that has wider applicability to help explain the subsequent behaviour of some Arab foreign fighters in Syria. It supports the argument that despite not necessarily being radicalised prior to their arrival in Syria, over time they can change as individuals and groups, and later embrace a

²⁸⁹ The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) (2016: 121) ‘concluded that ISIL was committing genocide against the Christian, Yazidi, Shi'a, Turkmen;’ while the UNHRC (2016: 1) confirmed that ‘ISIS has committed the crime of genocide as well as multiple crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Yazidis.’

²⁹⁰ According to the Office of the UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide (n.d.), ‘ethnic cleansing’ is one of ‘the elements of the crime of genocide as defined in Article 6 of the Rome Statute’ (p. 3).

more violent ideology. Therefore, although perhaps not currently on the scale of the genocide in Rwanda (Dallaire, 2003: 375),²⁹¹ many of the crimes committed by Arab foreign fighters are perhaps more analogous to genocide (including ethnic cleansing), rather than Islamist terrorism. It is worthy of inclusion to note that some scholars, including Shaykh Abdullah al-Muhaysani,²⁹² post tweets that use the Arabic verb ‘to exterminate, eradicate, or annihilate’ (*ibaada*)²⁹³ on their Twitter accounts. The ideologues are not necessarily invoking the virtues of martyrdom ‘gained’ in a suicide bombing, but dehumanising Alawite civilians and non-combatants, and legitimising genocide against them. This again suggests that simply labelling Arab foreign fighters as Islamist terrorists due to their often unrestrained violence off the battlefield, is not necessarily helpful in trying to understand them.

Finally, some scholars (H. Hassan, 2016: 17; Gerges, 2016) believe that the ideology supporting the killing of civilians is underpinned by Abu Bakr al-Naji’s (2004)²⁹⁴ treatise, *The Management of Savagery* (*idaarat at-tawahhush*) - translated by McCants (2006). It deserves inclusion as, according to Gerges (2016: 36), it provides the ‘intellectual and ideological motivation and inspiration for Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his ideologues;’ and according to the Islamic State magazine Dabiq 12 (p. 39), it ‘describes very precisely the overall strategy of the *mujahhideen*.’ However, it raises two points. First, whilst the translation of *at-tawahhush* as ‘savagery’ (McCants, 2006) is eye-catching and sensational, a degree of caution is required as Dabiq 1 (p. 38) and Dabiq 5 (p. 31) translate *at-tawahhush* as ‘mayhem’ (p. 38);²⁹⁵ whilst Dabiq 8 (p. 60) and McCants (2006: 26) also translate *at-tawahhush* as ‘chaos.’ Second, whilst *The Management of Savagery* discusses ‘the path for establishing an Islamic state’ (McCants, 2006: 36), it arguably does not, as Maher (2016b) proposed, necessarily provide the ‘rationale for how the movement behaves today.’ This is primarily due to the many contradictions between the behaviour, tactics and

²⁹¹ According to Dallaire (2003: 375), 800,000 Rwandans were killed by 30 June 1993 in a genocide.

²⁹² Twitter @meisny 6 May 2015.

²⁹³ Wehr (1980: 85).

²⁹⁴ Abu Bakr al-Naji (possibly also known as Muhammad Hassan Khalil al-Hakim) authored a ‘blue print’ for the establishment of an Islamic State, which ISIS draws upon selectively (Gerges, 2016: 34).

²⁹⁵ Wehr (1980: 1056) translates *at-tawahhush* as ‘wildness, savagery, barbarity, brutality.’

modus operandi of the Islamic State, and what is recommended in *The Management of Savagery*.

For example, despite the guidance of al-Naji (2004) to ‘lighten the severity of the violence against reasonable people amongst the enemy’ (p. 76),²⁹⁶ and ‘to focus on economic targets, particularly petroleum’ (p. 47), it appears that this has not been embraced by the ‘foreign fighters … [who] have been among the worst perpetrators of … serious abuses including indiscriminate attacks, extrajudicial executions, kidnapping, and torture’ (Human Rights Watch, 2014). In addition, reference to ‘the *rafidah* Shia’ appears only once (p. 235), and perhaps most surprising is that there is no explicit inclusion of *takfir*, with al-Naji noting only that ‘the rules governing the killing of [Muslim] tyrants are conflicting’ (p. 73). This final point was also raised in Dabiq 12 (p. 39) that claimed that ‘al-Naji fell into some errors in his discussions on issues related to the *takfir* of parties who forcefully resist the Sharia laws.’ Similar to the broad ideological current of jihadi-salafism, relying on Abu Bakr al-Najdi’s (2004) treatise to explain the ideology of the Islamic State is overly simplistic. It offers little in the way of nuance and despite the importance of ideology when selecting targets (Drake, 1998: 54), al-Naji’s treatise has little explanatory value as to why some Arab foreign fighters in Syria, may adopt certain ideologies analogous with Islamist terrorism.

To conclude, the ideology that appears to support the targeting of civilians and non-combatants in Syria, maybe be better understood as a form of genocide off the battlefield, due to a toxic mixture of *takfir*, the ‘situational circumstances’ (Zimbardo, 2007: 8) Arab foreign fighters experience in combat in Syria; the grievances and need for revenge against the Shia; and the notion of ‘a continuum of destruction’ (Staub, 1989: 13). Using a historical military example for context, Guy Sajer (1971: 234) - an Alsatian Wehrmacht soldier on the Russian front in WWII (referenced earlier in this chapter) - recalled that the brutality both on and off the battlefield often induced ‘the most innocent of youths on whatever side to commit inconceivable atrocities.’

²⁹⁶ This call for moderation by al-Naji (2004) contradicted his earlier guidance that ‘the ingredient of softness is one of the ingredients of failure for any jihadi action’ (p. 72).

Terrorist Training and Indoctrination

Introduction

As in the previous chapters the notion of terrorist training and indoctrination is present in both academic and governmental literature, including a British Security Service (MI5) (2016b) webpage devoted to *Terrorist Training and Indoctrination*. This section explores the philosophy of the structural influences of such training and indoctrination in Syria, and how it may have facilitated the subsequent adoption of Islamist terrorism by some Arab foreign fighters. It includes the need for obedience to those in authority; the near absence of traditional terrorist training in preference for conventional military training needed in the insurgency; and the existence of indoctrination.

In the first issue of the Islamic State's magazine Dabiq 1 (p. 35), the 'roadmap towards an Islamic Caliphate for the mujahhideen' was based upon that proposed by the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and included obedience (to those in authority), training, and fighting. This particular emphasis on obedience and training was reiterated in Dabiq 12, which strongly advised newly arrived Arab foreign fighters 'to listen to and obey those whom Allah has given authority over the affairs of the mujahhideen' (p. 9); and that it 'is obligatory to yield to the opinion he has chosen and submit to his order' (p. 10).²⁹⁷ According to Lia (2008a: 520), this emphasis on obedience to a leader and the leader's power over the group was a cornerstone of the training doctrine of veteran Afghan Arab, Abdul Aziz al-Sharif (aka Dr Fadl).²⁹⁸

This notion of obedience to authority (and charismatic leadership) during both training (and in combat) has explanatory value as to why some Arab foreign fighters became involved in terrorist related and/or genocidal activities. As noted earlier in the chapter, the existence of

²⁹⁷ As an addendum, a later ISIS document dated 17 May 2017, entitled *That Those Who Perish Would Perish Upon Proof and Those Who Live Would Live Upon Proof*, demanded that even if authority figures 'command something that the soul dislikes, obeying them is obligatory' (Price and Al-'Ubaydi, 2017).

²⁹⁸ According to Lia (2008a: 526) Abdul Aziz al-Sharif 'became the most influential voice in the new jihadi trend' as an EIJ member and an Afghan Arab, and advocated religious nationalist jihad in order to defeat the Egyptian government and establish an Islamic state. See Appendix C for a short biography.

charisma is ‘a potentially critical element in the process of radicalization’ (Hofmann and Dawson, 2014: 358), and probably worked in tandem together. The idea of obedience to authority was scientifically explored by Milgram (1963), and later confirmed by Staub (1989). Specifically, Milgram (1963) in his infamous ‘obedience to authority experiment’ uncovered ‘the sheer strength of obedient tendencies … to hurt another person’ (p. 252). This contention is buttressed by Staub’s (1989) own finding that a ‘strong respect for authority and strong inclination to obedience are other predisposing characteristics for mass killing and genocide’ (p. 19), and that the ability of those in authority to ‘repress dissent … enhances the potential for evil’ (p. 28). This demand for obedience, coupled with the existence of ‘charismatic authority’ and ‘charismatic leadership’ (covered earlier), helps to explain the trajectory from defensive jihad to Islamist terrorist related activities. Empirically, the thesis dataset drew on a cache of ‘ISIS jihadist personal data’ released by Zaman Al Wasl (2016), which demonstrated that Islamic State fighters were/are assessed on their ‘level of hearing and obedience’ (*mustawa’ sama’ wa aT-Taa’ā*), a fact later corroborated by Dodwell et al. (2016a: 5). It appears to be the case that Arab foreign fighters in Syria are required to respect authority, which when that authority redirects its violence, those individuals feel compelled to obey.

Training

The ability of Arab foreign fighters to train in Syria is similar to 1980s Afghanistan in that rebel groups hold and control territory within Syria, allowing for the establishment of training camps, with the necessary infrastructure to practise basic and more advanced military drills and exercises. According to Perliger and Milton (2016), ‘training camp attendance … [for] members of Islamic State [occurred] in 96% of cases’ (p. 37) demonstrating the ‘nearly obligatory part of the experience of all foreign fighters entering Syria’ (p. iv). Evidence of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra training is widely available on the Internet,²⁹⁹ but perhaps counter-intuitively, it generally concentrates on conventional military training required for an insurgency. In an ISIS Arabic language training video (released in January 2016) the training included physical preparation (*al-idaad al-badani*),

²⁹⁹ The Islamic State (2016). *Terrify the Enemy of God and Your Enemy*.

weapon training, night raids (*al-iqtihamaat al-layliya*), ‘freeing of POWs’ (*fikaak al-asra*), fighting in urban areas, and anti-ambushes drills (*tafaadi al-kumaa’in*). Although there is an obvious propagandistic nature to these videos, they do demonstrate a solid training infrastructure and a well-developed training regime.³⁰⁰ Despite the military training overlaps between defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism, training for suicide attacks was notably absent from this training video, although such omissions are arguably compensated for by ‘martyrdom’ videos that often show the training, preparation, farewell statements, and results.³⁰¹

According to H. Hassan (2015), who personally conducted interviews with members of ISIS, he discovered that the ISIS training regime was heavily influenced by religious instruction that included Islamist ideology. He recalled a young Arab man, Hamid Ghannam, who had trained in an ISIS camp near Deir Ezzor. In Ghannam’s own words: ‘they test you first … they check your knowledge of religion … they discuss with you everything. They talk to you about the *nusairi* regime and … all the misguided groups.’ H. Hassan (2015) also established that ‘new recruits join training that ranges from two weeks … up to one year. Inside the camps, students receive a mix of military, political and *Sharia* orientation, usually given by around five instructors.’

The Islamist current is demonstrated in the Islamic State Training Camp Textbook, Curriculum in Monotheism (*muqarrar fee tawhid*), particularly within the *Sharia* chapter, which was authored by Bahraini cleric Shaykh Turki Binali, and translated by al-Tamimi (2014). The curriculum is heavily reliant on the writings and ideology of both Ibn Taymiyya and Muhammad Abdul Wahhab. The continual referencing to past ideologues adds to the legitimacy of the ISIS narrative, and helps prevent any challenge to it. A major section of the curriculum exposes the aspiring ISIS recruits to ‘the ten nullifiers of Islam’ written by Muhammad Abdul Wahhab which ‘outlines ten things that automatically expel

³⁰⁰ An example of a Syrian training camp regime, included a ‘timetable … which detailed when [recruits] had to train, eat, pray and stressed that they had to be in bed by 10pm unless they were on guard duty’ (Whitehead, 2014).

³⁰¹ It is acknowledged that videos for suicide attacks and martyrdom operations have considerable overlaps, as both are used to revere the ‘martyr’ and to recruit new members.

someone from the religion' of Islam (Wiktorowicz, 2005a: 81). As al-Tamimi (2014) observed, inclusion of the ten nullifiers is 'a distinctly Wahhabi concept, and provides a very fertile basis for the *takfir* tendencies' of the Islamic State. The most central (fourth) nullifier which undergirds the Syrian insurgency is when Muslims prefer the ruling of a *taghoot* (tyrant) over Allah's ruling. This leads to those Muslims being labelled disbelievers who require *takfir* (excommunication), which in Syria results in death. The common thread of *takfir* throughout much of this chapter does appear to be a central component of the ideology of both ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusrah.

However, there is evidence that ISIS are selective in their references in that whilst relying heavily on Muhammad Abdul Wahhab, he is not referenced concerning martyrdom, due in part, that 'at no point in any of his writings does he promote the concept of martyrdom or encourage Muslims to seek it' (DeLong-Bas, 2004: 59). The existence of training for self-sacrificial attacks in Syria is largely anecdotal, and whilst such individuals are eulogised after blowing themselves up, as noted earlier, these 'martyrdom' videos do often show the training and preparation (particularly the preparation of the suicide vehicle borne improvised explosive devices).³⁰² It is suggested, that whilst such training does take place (Reuter, 2015; Chulov, 2015), because the majority of self-sacrificial attacks appear to be woven into the *modus operandi* of the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusrah and employed against military targets, arguably they are more reliant on bravery, bravado, and brazenness, rather than formal military training. This is arguably applicable within conventional armies too, where the notion of bravery is not necessarily gained through military training, but rather that 'a man of character in peace becomes a man of courage in war' (Moran, 1945: 170).

Lia (2008a: 519), a researcher of 'jihadi terrorist training' identified 'four leading jihadi scholars' who wrote 'about principles for training and preparation in some depth.' They were Abdullah Azzam (covered in Chapter 3 and 4), Abdul Aziz al-Sharif and Abu Bakr al-

³⁰² Recent examples of the preparation of SVBIEDs in Aleppo are found at @AABoroma 19 October 2016 (1:50PM), and 21 October 2016 (2:40PM).

Naji (covered earlier in this chapter), and Abu Musab al-Suri.³⁰³ According to Lia (2008a: 518), whilst these four individuals (who incidentally were all veteran Afghan Arabs) agreed on the importance of training, they also stressed ‘that ideological indoctrination and spiritual preparation should take precedence over physical and military training.’ It is perhaps instructive therefore that according to H. Hassan (2015), “in some cases, new members who struggle with the brutality of the Islamic State’s acts will be sent back to receive more training to ‘strengthen’ their faith.” The notion of strengthening their faith has many of the hallmarks of ideological indoctrination, which Abdul Aziz al-Sharif claims, ‘compensates for numerical inferiority and lack of resources’ (Lia, 2008a: 527). Overlaps notwithstanding, it is suggested that the transition between involvement in defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism in Syria likely includes the notion of exposure to ‘ideological indoctrination and spiritual preparation’ (Lia, 2008a: 518).

Ideological Indoctrination

The indoctrination explanation³⁰⁴ proposed in this chapter has academic ballast (Crenshaw, 1994; Moghaddam, 2005; Wiktorowicz, 2005b; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008), and builds on the findings in Chapter 5. The ultimate aim of indoctrination is to ‘produce battle-hardened, martyrdom-seeking fighters, whose primary strength lies in their spiritual determination, their patience, and a willingness to employ savagery against the enemy’ (Lia, 2008a: 518). Again, the notion of indoctrination is underpinned by the concepts of vulnerability and peer pressure, experienced by an Arab foreign fighter who has left his home country and finds himself involved in an insurgency in Syria, where ‘the rebel group’ becomes his new family, upon which he becomes reliant for everything. Although the notion of ‘age-based vulnerabilities’ was largely discounted earlier in the chapter, more promising perhaps are ‘the experiences of violence, displacement, trauma and loss’ in Syria (Aubrey, Brodrick, and Brooks, 2016: 10).

³⁰³ According to Lia (2008b), Abu Musab al-Suri, author of *Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, ‘advocated mass casualty terrorism in the West’ (p. 3) and that ‘confrontation with America is fundamental’ (p. 412).

³⁰⁴ According to the Oxford Concise Dictionary (1995: 693), indoctrination includes ‘the teaching of a person ... to accept ideas uncritically.’

It is suggested that the situational circumstances ‘of violence, displacement, trauma and loss’ are likely to increase the ‘vulnerability’ of Arab foreign fighters to the ideological indoctrination within rebel groups. Noted in Chapter 5 but worth repeating again, vulnerability should be considered ‘in terms of how the individual may be more open to influence at any juncture’ (Horgan, 2005: 103). The juncture perhaps most relevant to Arab foreign fighters is the time they arrive in Syria, where they are ‘isolated from the other members, their passports are taken away and they attend meetings in which they are brainwashed’ (Waldeck, 2015: 66).³⁰⁵ Despite perhaps the loose terminology (using ‘brainwashed’), this reception on arrival in Syria is likely to reinforce the notions of a vulnerability to indoctrination.

Evidence of the notion of indoctrination in Syria is apparent in the ‘textbooks, guidance literature, and indoctrination methods of the Islamic State’ (Olidort, 2016). Specifically, according to Olidort (2016) the Islamic State has ‘a deliberate strategy it can apply systematically to indoctrinating its followers’ (p. 8) and ‘an indoctrination program for areas under its control’ (p. 6). The result of this strategy was witnessed by a journalist, Jurgen Todenhöfer, who conducted a rare visit in 2014 to meet Arab and other foreign fighters of the Islamic State, in areas under its control including Raqqah (Syria) and Mosul (Iraq). At the end of his visit, he summarised the fighters as ‘completely brainwashed; I’ve never in my life met people like this’ (Todenhöfer, 2015). As noted earlier, this first-hand observation chimes with the importance placed on ideological indoctrination and spiritual preparation, and also confirms the finding in a year-long study of over 350 FSA and Jabhat al-Nusrah fighters, that ‘many fighters are aggressively socialised and exposed to religious preaching once inside the group’ (Mironova et al., 2014: 16).

According to Gerges (2016: 266), Arab foreign (and Syrian) fighters who decide to join the Islamic State have ‘to undergo religious re-education to indoctrinate them with the group’s theology.’ This appears to include religious stories, often taken out of context, in order ‘to help Islamic State members who struggle with committing acts of extreme violence’ (H.

³⁰⁵ This arrival procedure is corroborated by Byman and Shiro (2014: 6) who noted that ‘foreign fighters often have their passports taken away when they join ... and become highly dependent on the group.’

Hassan, 2016: 18). This gradual acceptance of more extreme violence may underpin the transition from Arab foreign fighter to Islamist terrorist - a point raised by Khaja (2014), who noted that fighters in the Islamic State become more ideologically motivated over time, especially having been exposed to the combat environment of Syria, and attended additional courses.

The other main Islamist group in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusrah, also appears to adopt a strategy to indoctrinate Arab foreign (and Syrian) fighters. One, albeit a Syrian fighter, Muhammad Amin al-Abdullah, explained that “Jabhat al-Nusrah leaders kept ‘brainwashing’ him and others about the need for jihad and the rewards that good Muslims get in the Hereafter.”³⁰⁶ It is also instructive that if a ‘suicide bomber’ does have a ‘last minute’ change of mind (as happened with Saudi suicide bomber Muhammad al-Owhali in the 1998 Nairobi US Embassy attacks), the attack coordinator can remotely blow up the explosive laden vehicle. In a double self-sacrificial attack against a Syrian Intelligence building in Damascus on 10 May 2012,³⁰⁷ Jordanian foreign fighter Abu Musab and Palestinian foreign fighter Muhammad al-Ghazi, were both monitored. According to Al-Abdullah ‘there was a remote detonator controlled by the leader, who if the suicide bombers failed to blow up the vehicles for any reason, he would detonate the vehicles from a distance’ (CPOST Attack ID 1457441285). This is an interesting revelation that perhaps challenges the notion (highlighted earlier) suggested by Todenhöfer (2015) that each and every fighter is ‘completely brainwashed.’

Finally, this leads to the notion of deception, given that there is evidence that some Arab foreign fighters are deceived. Muhammad Azzam (2016), a journalist for *The New Arab*, has documented many cases where Arab foreign fighters are duped by the Islamic State into participating in ‘a suicide mission targeting Syrian army soldiers’ that later proved to be other ‘Syrian opposition groups [including] the al-Nusrah Front.’ In addition, M. Azzam (2016) cites Arab foreign fighter, Abu Musab al-Tunisi, who posted a video on YouTube,

³⁰⁶ CPOST Attack ID 1457441285, includes Syrian Documentary on Al-Nusrah Front. Damascus Television Service. 9 June 2012.

³⁰⁷ The attack ‘killed 55 people and injured 372’ (CPOST Attack ID 1457441285), but were not designated military or civilian personnel.

accusing the Islamic State of ‘using religious rhetoric in order to convince them their targeted attacks would not harm women or children,’ which was untrue. Perhaps more alarmingly, M. Azzam (2016) also established that Arab foreign fighters who did not volunteer for self-sacrificial attacks were now bound by their pledge of obedience and allegiance to the group. A good example, uploaded to YouTube,³⁰⁸ shows a weeping and reluctant Uzbeki foreign fighter – Jaffar al-Tayyar – who ‘is ordered to drive an armoured vehicle packed with explosives into the besieged villages of Fua and Kafriyeh’ in Syria (J. Hall, 2015). Whilst the frequency of such orders is unknown, as is the use of attack coordinators who can remotely blow up an explosive laden vehicle (noted above), it does perhaps demonstrate that in some cases, there may be a lack of successful indoctrination and/or a lack of martyrdom/suicide volunteers.

A Historical Military Example of the Normality of Terrorism / War Crimes

It is helpful to conclude this chapter with a short historical military example of how trained soldiers can also conduct war crimes in the form of mass casualty attacks against a civilian population. Although war crimes and terrorism are considered different under international law, according to the ICRC Rule 156, ‘war crimes are violations committed either by members of the armed forces or by civilians against members of the armed forces, civilians or protected objects of the adverse party.’ This suggests an overlap, and whilst the multitude of rules (pertaining to war crimes) under international law are beyond the scope of this thesis, it is suggested that there is a situational overlap between war crimes and terrorism. Such a suggestion perhaps contextualises the violence inherent in a war zone and, moral equivalencies (between state and non-state actors) notwithstanding, demonstrates how atrocities can somehow be normalised and justified.

The example used here is the infamous 1968 My Lai massacre of hundreds of unarmed civilians by US Marines in South Vietnam. According to Hugh Thompson (n.d.), a helicopter pilot during the massacre, ‘there was a lot of evil ... five hundred and four

³⁰⁸ Jafar Al-Tayyar Crying before Suicide bombing in Syria Terrorists. YouTube. 27 September 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHaxkHtWBZE> (last accessed 15 July 2016).

people were murdered. It was a massacre, and civilians were murdered, not killed.' Thompson believed that the massacre was due to 'revenge, prejudice, negative peer pressure, and bad leadership.' Although perhaps not a common occurrence in Vietnam,³⁰⁹ the parallels with the *modus operandi* of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra are striking. Whilst revenge was covered earlier in the chapter, the notion of dehumanisation directed against the Vietnamese population appears tantamount to *takfir*³¹⁰ – indeed Thompson (n.d.) in his own words recalled that 'our training had dehumanized the enemy.' The negative peer pressure on individuals away from home fighting in Syria has parallels with US Marines in South Vietnam, vis-à-vis vulnerabilities, obedience to authority, indoctrination, and mixing with peers who were perhaps more experienced, or in the words of Thompson (n.d.) 'hoodlums, renegades disguised as soldiers.' The point to be made is that the killing of civilians and non-combatants is not the sole preserve of Islamist terrorists in Syria, and highlights the parallels of involvement in atrocities (war crimes) by conventional militaries, and in terrorism in Syria by some Arab foreign fighters. Within the context of a 'normality of excess,' according to Max Taylor (1991: 265), 'at My Lai, a group of otherwise perfectly normal soldiers engaged in a series of horrific acts.'

Conclusion

The research undertaken for this chapter suggests (although not proved) that the majority of Arab foreign fighters (with no known prior terrorist links) were not necessarily radicalised, but went to Syria to participate in a defensive jihad in response to the unequivocal Syrian regime violence against fellow Sunni co-religionists. Once in Syria, it appeared that the majority of Arab foreign fighters were participating in a defensive jihad, fighting in conventional battles against the Syrian Arab Army and other rebel combatants. The incidence of suicide attacks against civilians and non-combatants appears minimal, and the actions of the few should not define the majority. That said, some Arab foreign fighters did subsequently get involved in Islamist terrorist related activities, although arguably they

³⁰⁹ Arguably it may have been a common occurrence. According to Cookman (2007: 154), on the same day as the My Lai massacre, 'another company massacred ninety women and children a mile away in My Khe.'

³¹⁰ Whilst ISIS label their enemy *kufir, rafidah, nusairi, taghoot, and murtadd*, the US Marines in Vietnam used 'gooks,' 'dinks,' and 'slopes' (Cookman, 2007: 156).

gained more publicity when conducted in Europe, rather than in Syria. Those terrorist related activities that did take place in Syria appeared however to be closer to genocide (including crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing). It seemed that over time, being forged in the crucible of defensive jihad, involving exposure to a more extreme *takfiri* ideology, training, indoctrination, and combat itself, some Arab foreign fighters did commit atrocities that also have parallels in military history, such as My Lai. It is suggested that many of the Arab foreign fighter excesses in Syria have less to do with radicalisation, and may be better understood as a result of ‘obedience to authority’ and ‘toxic situational forces,’ consistent with the research findings of Milgram (1963, 1974) and Zimbardo (1971, 2007), respectively.

Chapter 7: Analysis

Introduction

The three case study chapters that were supported by a dataset of 3,010 Arab foreign fighters, established a series of findings that suggested the need for a more contextualised approach to understanding defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism. Specifically, the three major findings are (1) that Arab foreign fighters who participate in defensive jihad should not be conflated with Islamist terrorists; (2) that suicide attacks aimed at civilians and non-combatants are not necessarily synonymous with martyrdom operations aimed at military targets; and (3) those Arab foreign fighters that subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities were influenced by key situational factors including, but not limited to, the personal experience of close combat in a war zone; being subjected to ideological indoctrination (as part of group training and socialisation); and being exposed to charismatic authority and obedience to it – all facets of the *Lucifer Effect*.³¹¹ These findings constitute a significant and original contribution to knowledge insofar that they challenge much of the existing literature on Arab foreign fighters, Islamist terrorists, and the nexus between them. After a short introduction, this chapter analyses these three major findings and enters into a philosophical debate about their relevance and relationship to political contestation.

Analysis of Case Study Findings

The Conflation of Arab Foreign Fighters with Islamist Terrorists

Introduction

The first major finding of this research is that Arab foreign fighters who participated in defensive jihad should not necessarily be conflated with Islamist terrorists, in that

³¹¹ For completeness, the *Lucifer Effect* is understood as ‘processes of transformation at work when good or ordinary people do bad or evil things [and] may be traced to factors outside the actor, to situational variables ... unique to a given setting’ (Zimbardo, 2007: 5-8).

conflation of the two groups, overlaps notwithstanding, is misleading and represents a form of sociological essentialism. Such conflation is apparent at all levels of government, including the United Nations Security Council (2014: 2) who passed Resolution 2178:

'expressing grave concern over ... foreign terrorist fighters, namely individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts ...'

Based on the research conducted for this thesis, this resolution is not evidence based - there is no research to support it – to the degree that (as noted in Chapter 1), Schmid (2015: 5) argued that “a distinction ought to be made between a ‘Foreign Fighter’ and a ‘Foreign Terrorist Fighter.’” This conflation of violent Islamist activities (defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism) appears to demonstrate a lack of a nuanced understanding, and may ultimately lead to flawed policies and resolutions. Perhaps such labelling should not come as a surprise, inasmuch as Silke (2009: 34) maintained, ‘governments and security agencies are extremely quick to try to label their enemies as terrorists in the hope that this will undermine international sympathy for the organisation and deflect criticism away from any policies used to fight the group.’ Although beyond the scope of this study, it is instructive to note that while governments and the media accept and embrace the term ‘jihadi’ which is also used by ‘groups such as AQ’ (Silke, 2008: 100), such linguistic collaboration is not extended to the label ‘martyrdom operation’ (used by most Islamist terrorist groups) where ‘suicide attack’ is deemed a more appropriate and pejorative term. Therefore, whilst this thesis fully acknowledges the terrorist threat posed by some returning Arab (and Western) foreign fighters, by simply labelling them all as ‘foreign terrorist fighters’ appears to be a mischaracterisation.

Even at the academic level, such conflation is more the norm than the exception, as noted in Chapter 1. It is instructive for example, that whilst scholars justify using the label ‘jihadi salafi’ because ‘it has been employed by the Islamist actors themselves’ (Hegghammer, 2009a: 252), such synergy between academics and non-state actors is not extended when it

comes to the labels *mujahhideen* (those who partake in defensive jihad) and *irhaabiyeen* (those who conduct terrorist acts).³¹² It is instructive that Western governments have supported *mujahhideen* directly or indirectly, for example in 1980s Afghanistan, Libya (2011),³¹³ and in Syria (post 2011)³¹⁴ – yet they often retrospectively label those they supported as terrorists. Perhaps most striking is the term ‘global jihad’ (DeLong-Bas, 2004; Gerges, 2005; Lia, 2009; Riedel, 2011; Moghadam and Fishman, 2013), or ‘global salafi jihad’ (Sageman, 2004) – terms that implicitly confuse and conflate the notion of defensive jihad with Islamist terrorism, but have become conventional wisdom.

Finally, there is a need to contextualise Islamist violence; comparisons need to be made by reference to historical military conflicts. Islamist violence is not *sui generis*; the motivations for involvement in defensive jihad are not unique to Islamists or to Muslims in general. This may be seen in the reflections of Sir Philip Gibbs (1929: 52), which for completeness, are quoted in full:

‘Some instinct of a primitive savage kind for open-air life, fighting, killing, the comradeship of hunters, violent emotions, the chance of death, surged up into the brains of quiet boys, clerks, mechanics, miners, factory hands. The shock of anger at frightful tales ... women foully outraged; civilians shot in cold blood – sent many men at a quick pace to the recruiting agents.’

It his book, *Realities of War*, Gibbs was portraying the motivations and justifications behind the British people’s willingness to enlist in the First World War, yet arguably they could have been written about how Arab foreign fighters justified their involvement in the defensive jihads in 1980s Afghanistan, Iraq (post 2003), and Syria (post 2011). This suggests a degree of synergy (however unpalatable) between the rationales of WW1

³¹² It is important to note that those who participate in terrorism do not label themselves *irhaabiyeen*, but as *mujahideen*, within the rubric of political Islam.

³¹³ The thesis dataset (noted in Chapter 6) identified three Arab foreign fighters who fought against the Gaddafi regime in Libya: two Egyptians (Ahmad al-Barra and Walid Badr) and a Palestinian (Osama Kishta). The Libyan jihad was also supported by NATO, and labelled ‘a model intervention’ (Rasmussen, 2016).

³¹⁴ The thesis dataset identified 126 Arab foreign fighters within the US backed Free Syrian Army (FSA), of which 10 conducted self-sacrificial attacks against Syrian Arab Army (SAA) units.

volunteer British soldiers, and that of Arab foreign fighters who mobilised to defend their co-religionists. In order to support such an argument and help differentiate between Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists, this section will discuss the targeting and radicalisation of both transnational mobilisations.

Targeting and Collateral Damage

At the most basic level, the intentional targeting of either military forces, or civilians and non-combatants, helps to distinguish Arab foreign fighters participating in defensive jihad from Islamist terrorists. Although ideology may not be the sole driver of targeting, it does provide Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists with ‘an initial range of legitimate targets … as a means by which … to justify attacks’ (Drake, 1998: 53). Put into historical context, ideologically during ‘the Second World War, the civilian became the legitimate target’ (Ambrose, 1998: 116). In the three case study chapters the research found that the targeting by Arab foreign fighters was predominantly directed against Soviet troops, the US led military coalition, and Syrian regime forces, respectively. In 1980s Afghanistan and Iraq (post 2003), Arab foreign fighters were participating in defensive jihad targeting foreign occupation forces – occupations that lacked full international support.³¹⁵ Perhaps this lack of full international support underpinning the invasions made resistance to them all the more legitimate in the eyes of Arab foreign fighters. Arguably the same logic could apply to the Syrian insurgency vis-à-vis the perceived lack of support for the Syrian regime in the eyes of the international community.³¹⁶ The philosophy of targeting predominantly military forces within the crucible of defensive jihad, contrasts sharply with Islamist terrorist related activities.

³¹⁵ As noted in Chapter 5, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (2004) believed that the invasion of Iraq ‘was not in conformity with the UN Charter … it was illegal.’ Later UK former Lord Chief Justice Lord Bingham (2008) described the war as ‘a serious violation of international law.’

³¹⁶ The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (2015: 2) Resolution 2254 called on the Syrian government and all parties to ‘engage in formal negotiations on a political transition process on an urgent basis.’ Implicit in the resolution was a transition without President Bashar al-Assad. The governments of the US, UK, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia have publicly denounced the legitimacy of the al-Assad regime.

Islamist terrorism that involves the intentional targeting of civilians and non-combatants appears altogether different. After the 1980s Afghan jihad some of the veteran Afghan Arabs switched from targeting Soviet troops, to involvement in Islamist terrorist attacks that targeted civilians and non-combatants. As noted in Chapter 4, these included the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the WTC attacks in 1993 and 2001. In Iraq, the point of inflection that signalled the move from defensive jihad to Islamist terrorism was the targeting switch, away from US led coalition troops and onto Iraqi civilians and non-combatants, as shown in Figure 5.3. Unlike the clear delineation between defensive jihad in 1980s Afghanistan and the subsequent Islamist terrorism in the 1990s, the Iraqi insurgency blurred the distinctions³¹⁷ somewhat in that Iraqi police and army units (because they were mainly Shia) were also targeted. The sectarian overlay within the Iraqi insurgency certainly complicated the overall picture, however relying on Schmid's (2013a: 86) 'revised academic consensus definition of terrorism,'³¹⁸ Ganor (2010),³¹⁹ and the US Department of State (2015: 388),³²⁰ attacks on trained Iraqi police and army units³²¹ remain more akin to defensive jihad. Finally in Syria, those attacks that did intentionally target civilians and non-combatants could reasonably be considered terroristic in nature, and part of a wider strategy of genocide.³²²

In Syria, there were numerous attacks against the military apparatus of the Syrian regime that also caused civilian casualties (collateral damage), but as noted in Chapter 6 (and Appendix F) they often appeared to be misdiagnosed in the CPOST database as attacks

³¹⁷ From Chapter 4, an insurgency was understood to mean 'a hybrid form of conflict that combines subversion, guerrilla warfare and terrorism ... [in] an internal struggle in which a disaffected group seeks to gain control of a nation' (Mockaitis, 1990: 3).

³¹⁸ Schmid's (2013a: 86) 'revised academic consensus definition of terrorism' includes 'targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants' – which Iraqi military units are not.

³¹⁹ As noted in Chapter 1, according to Ganor (2010) 'the targets of terrorism are civilians' thus excluding Iraqi military and police units. Attacks on these units appear more akin to defensive jihad as part of an insurgency.

³²⁰ The US Department of State (2015: 388) label 'military personnel (whether or not armed or on duty) who are not deployed in a war zone or a war-like setting' as civilians. As Iraq is reasonably considered a war zone or a war-like setting – Iraqi military personnel would not qualify as civilians.

³²¹ The adjective 'trained' is used to differentiate between untrained recruits (who are more akin to civilians) and fully trained soldiers or policemen who are operationally active, in a 'war zone.'

³²² As noted in Chapter 6, genocide is defined in Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) and includes acts that are 'committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.' UN confirmation of genocide occurring in Syria is outlined in UNHRC (2016: 1) and USCIRF (2016: 121).

against civilians. The view within political Islam on collateral damage was touched on in Chapter 3 but it is worth reiterating that there is ideological support based on a *fatwa* (*Majmua al Fatawa* 28/537) issued by Ibn Taymiyya. Within the context of human shields ('when the *kaffir* takes Muslims as human shields') according to Ibn Taymiyya, it becomes permissible to fire at civilians and non-combatants (Wiktorowicz and Kaltner, 2003: 90). There is also further theological support for the inevitability of collateral damage, with Islamists drawing on the words of the Prophet Muhammad, who sanctioned the use of a rock throwing catapult during the 630 siege of Taif (in Saudi Arabia), where enemy fighters were mixed with a civilian population. Despite any cries of 'no moral equivalence,' collateral damage is an accepted and indeed planned for, consequence of combat, perpetrated by both state and non-state actors,³²³ the only real difference being the non-state actor is normally employing a less conventional method of attack.

The notion of collateral damage comes down to assessing the intention behind the attack(s). Invariably, civilians that are killed unintentionally are labelled collateral damage. Collateral damage is addressed by conventional militaries using the Law of Armed Conflict that 'stipulates that anticipated civilian or non-combatant injury or loss of life ... incidental to attacks must not be excessive in relation to the expected military advantage to be gained.'³²⁴ The incidence of civilian casualties as a result of Arab foreign fighters attacking a military target has manifested itself particularly in Iraq and Syria. As noted in Chapter 5, collateral damage in Iraq was addressed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (2005), who whilst acknowledging the prohibition of killing 'those who are not intended as targets, such as women and children,' justified collateral damage 'under the principle of *daroorah*'³²⁵ ... in order to ward off a greater evil, namely, the evil of suspending jihad.' A similar theological justification was also proffered by the late ISIS spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani (2014), who argued that 'whether the disbeliever is civilian or military ... both of them are

³²³ According to US Joint Fires and Targeting Handbook (2007) collateral damage is an 'the unintentional or incidental injury or damage to persons or objects that would not be lawful military targets in the circumstances ruling at the time (p. 1-22), and thus a Collateral Damage Estimate (CDE) is conducted as part of the planning process.

³²⁴ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction. *No-Strike and the Collateral Damage Estimation Methodology*. 12 October 2012. (p. D-1).

³²⁵ In Chapter 5, the Arabic word *daroorah* was defined as 'necessity' (Wehr, 1980: 538), and chimes with the 'doctrine of necessity' (Cooper, 1977).

disbelievers ... the only things that make blood illegal and legal to spill are Islam and an Islamic covenant.' Yet these views are not universally supported, as other Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists hold more philosophical views towards collateral damage. In Syria for example, as noted in Chapter 6, Iraqi bomb maker Ibrahim al-Khazali, argued that 'those who were caught up in the attacks will be accepted by God' (Chulov, 2015); while Saudi foreign fighter Ayachi Abdul Rahman argued that 'killing the innocent along with the enemy is not acceptable' (Shelton, 2013). The point to be taken away is that by examining the targeting patterns of the two transnational mobilisations, despite the existence of collateral damage, it is possible to start distinguishing between Arab foreign fighters participating in defensive jihad, and those involved in Islamist terrorist related activities.

Radicalisation

The second method to help differentiate between Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists was by using the notion of radicalisation. Accepting that radicalisation is 'a contentious term vulnerable to subjective and retroactive application' (Beevor, 2016: 3), it has been used in this thesis and understood to mean the 'social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to [an] extremist political or religious ideology' (Horgan, 2009: 152), that may eventually cross a threshold that leads to violence. As noted in the three case study chapters, there was no compelling evidence to suggest that most Arab foreign fighters (with no known prior links to Islamist terrorism), who initially partook in defensive jihad in 1980s Afghanistan, or Iraq (post 2003), or Syria (post 2011), were necessarily radicalised. This finding is largely predicated on the theoretical framework variables that included geographical origin; age; faith; friendship and kinship ties; political and religious ideology; and by comparison with historical military parallels. Using the conceptualisations advanced by Neumann (2013: 873), this suggests that Arab foreign fighters did not necessarily hold extremist beliefs (cognitive radicalisation), or exhibit extremist behaviour (behavioural radicalisation) – a typology empirically supported by Bartlett and Miller (2012: 2). The last point, the apparent lack of behavioural radicalisation, is perhaps the most counter-intuitive finding, in that many Arab foreign fighters clearly

demonstrated violent (albeit not extremist involving terrorism) behaviour whilst participating in defensive jihad. However, national standing armies also demonstrate violent behaviour in war zones but are not considered radicalised, hence this warrants a greater discussion.

The three case study chapters found that Arab foreign fighters were largely volunteers, who engaged in defensive jihad often employing unconventional tactics against a hostile and militarily superior force. The fact that the hostile military force is representing a government or governments (in the case study chapters the former Soviet Union, the US led coalition, and Syria respectively), to link the notion of radicalisation to Arab foreign fighters, suggests political expediency. According to Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010: 901) the ‘conventional wisdom’ on radicalisation has been sapped of its ‘scientific value,’ a view supported by Neumann (2013: 878), who argued that the term radicalisation ‘is believed to serve political agendas [and] is inherently context-dependent, and its meaning will always be contested.’ In many ways governments, the media, and some scholars, have conflated Arab foreign fighters and Islamist terrorists by linking them together through the notion of radicalisation - yet perhaps it is the notion of radicalisation that separates the two mobilisations.

It was instructive that Chapter 6 found a lack of radicalisation amongst both the Western (mainly American) foreign fighters, who were fighting against ISIS in Syria, and amongst Arab foreign fighters who were fighting against Syrian regime forces. Both cohorts were not necessarily radicalised in the sense of cognitive or behavioural radicalisation, but were fighting their respective combatant enemies whilst largely eschewing violence against civilians and non-combatants. They both had deeply held beliefs that innocent people were being killed on a large scale, and that something needed to be done. Arguably it may have been a sense of righteousness (despite the normative value attached to it), rather than radicalisation, which motivated both cohorts.

The notion of extreme radicalisation appears to be more applicable to those Arab foreign fighters who became involved in Islamist terrorism that included atrocities amounting to

genocide. The three case study chapters found that over time, in some cases, there appeared to be a greater acceptance of both extremist beliefs (cognitive radicalisation) and extremist behaviour (behavioural radicalisation). Yet despite this perceived state of extreme radicalisation, are the perpetrators of Islamist terrorism actually radicalised? Are there historical military examples involving national standing armies perpetrating similar atrocities, and if so, were they considered radicalised? This conundrum is covered later in the chapter

The Lack of Nuance between Suicide Attacks and Martyrdom Operations

Introduction

The second major finding of this research is that suicide attacks aimed at civilians and non-combatants are not necessarily synonymous with martyrdom operations aimed at military targets, as such blanket labelling removes nuance and hinders conceptual understanding. As noted earlier in the chapter, just as Neumann (2013: 878) argued that the term radicalisation ‘is inherently context-dependent, and its meaning will always be contested,’ so Fierke (2014: 205) also recognised that the term suicide bombing ‘isolates the action from a political context, and thereby depoliticizes and criminalizes it.’ The three case study chapters identified ‘clear cut’ suicide attacks – those intentionally targeting civilians and non-combatants, yet there were instances where due to military inferiority (a point also raised by M. Taylor, 1991: 191), Arab foreign fighters attacked military targets that often involved a self-sacrificial element. As noted in Chapter 6, the tactic of employing *inghimasi* attacks has (re)surfaced in Syria, despite clear ideological differences between the groups of what constitutes an *inghimasi* attack vis-à-vis the appropriate target.³²⁶ Based on the research undertaken for this study, that included 187 identified Arab foreign fighters who conducted self-sacrificial attacks,³²⁷ there is a tactical, conceptual, and ideological divide

³²⁶ As noted in Chapter 6, while ISIS employ *inghimasi* attacks as a military tactic (Dabiq Issue 2, p. 13); Jabhat al-Nusrah employs them against civilians and non-combatants (Inspire Issue 14, p. 42).

³²⁷ The research conducted for this study identified 187 self-sacrificial attacks (both martyrdom operations and suicide attacks) - 110 in Iraq (post 2003) and 77 in Syria (post 2011). The actual identity of the individuals (Arab foreign fighter / Islamist terrorist) and their intended targets amounted to 33 in Iraq, and 77 in Syria.

between those attacking a military target (within the context of an insurgency), and those attacking civilians and non-combatants (whether as part of an insurgency or within a peacetime environment). To lump all attacks that generally (but not always – see below) involve the death of the attacker as a suicide attack, is simplistic if not misleading, and lacks nuance as regards to the underlying motivations, intentions, and circumstances. In order to support such an argument, the next section will discuss the typology of ‘suicide attacks,’ the importance of targeting, and finally leverage historical military examples of martyrdom.

The Typology of a Suicide Attack

The research conducted for this study found that, based on conventional wisdom, the broadly agreed academic definition of a suicide attack appears to be unreliable, and is at best a platitude. Many notable academics seem to regurgitate uncritically the explicit theme that ‘the perpetrator’s death is a precondition of a successful attack,’³²⁸ while ignoring the physical targets of such attacks. This raises two aspects. First, the success of Japanese kamikaze pilots in WWII was measured by how ‘effective [they were] in hitting ships’ (US Department of the Navy, 1970: 80), and not on ‘the perpetrator’s death.’³²⁹ Second, the definitional focus on ‘the perpetrator’s death’ also does not take into account instances when perpetrators of self-sacrificial attacks do survive.³³⁰ For example, Saudi foreign fighter Ahmad Abdullah al-Shaya, introduced in Chapter 1, blew himself up in Iraq in 2004 killing 12 Iraqi civilians, but although injured, he survived. Based on current academic definitions, al-Shaya’s attack would be deemed ‘unsuccessful’ and not labelled a suicide attack, despite killing 12 civilians. This is a recurring and constant theme within the literature on suicide terrorism, yet it is not necessarily an accurate typology and appears at odds with the thesis findings and the reality on the ground. The only known scholar

³²⁸ The authors include Schweitzer (2000), Ganor (2000: 6), Cook (2004: 135); Pedahzur and Perlinger (2006: 151), Pape (2005: 10), Dolnik (2006: 153), Hafez (2007b: 6), Moghadam (2011: 6), Singh (2011: 3), and De La Corte (2014: 4).

³²⁹ According to the US Department of Navy (1970: 80), ‘14.7 percent of kamikaze sorties … were effective in hitting ships.’

³³⁰ Examples include Saudi Ahmad Abdullah al-Shaya in December 2004 in Iraq; Muhammad Jarallah in February 2014 in Syria (The Meir Amit Intelligence and Information Centre, 2014: 19); and Abu Alaa’ al-Muhajir in August 2014 in Syria ((@JihadNews2. (2014, August 03)).

identified during this study who disputed the academic definition was Merari (2010: 9), who argued that ‘the assertion that the attacker’s death is essential for the success of the operation is not always true.’

One of the definitions of ‘suicide’ is ‘a self-destructive action,’³³¹ therefore a suicide attack may be considered ‘an attack that involves a self-destructive action.’ However, it is notable that the 1981 Irish Republican Army (IRA) hunger strikes, that resulted in ten deaths, were never labelled (for example) ‘suicide starvation’ – despite it being a self-destructive action involving starvation, albeit with a wider political objective (against the UK government). It is therefore important to identify the actual intent of a ‘self-sacrificial attack’ which is normally to attack a target (within an offensive or defensive setting), populated by military personnel, or civilians and non-combatants, or a combination of the two, accepting that the result will likely include the attacker’s own demise. Whilst suggesting the disaggregation of non-state actor self-sacrificial attacks (martyrdom operations and suicide attacks), even these two terms fail to really capture the essence and intent of their missions, when compared with historical military examples. For instance, as Koch (2000) noted, ‘the demand for unselfish self-sacrifice’ (p. 228) placed upon the Hitler Youth, found that ‘when cornered they frequently fought to the last child’ (p. 249). This leads to the suggestion for the possible need for an overarching category of ‘self-sacrificial action’ or ‘self-destructive action’ – that could then be subsequently categorised to include non-state actions involving a variety of intended targets (including oneself as a hunger striker).

As a result of the three case studies, a suicide attack would arguably be more accurately defined as ‘an attack where an individual initiates an explosive device that is being driven or carried, intentionally targeting civilians and non-combatants, even if the individual survived.’³³² This definition overlaps correctly with the ‘revised academic consensus definition of terrorism’ (Schmid, 2013a: 86), while satisfying the requirement to distinguish between attacks that target military forces and those that target civilians and non-combatants (Moghadam, 2011: 5). Whilst it may perhaps appear contrived, distinguishing

³³¹ The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1995: 1393). The other definition is ‘the intentional killing of oneself,’ which within the context of a ‘suicide attack’ does not accurately reflect the action.

³³² This proposed thesis definition draws on that of Merari (2010: 27).

between targets (civilian or military) underpin much of the Law of Armed Conflict and International Humanitarian Law (as outlined in Chapter 2), adopted by most Western national standing armies. This suggested definition of a suicide attack also more accurately represents the predicted demise of the attacker as a means to an end (to harm civilians), rather than an end in itself. Conversely, it is suggested that self-sacrificial attacks should not be labelled suicide attacks, if they are targeting military forces (foreign or otherwise) that are engaged in a military occupation against the majority will of the people of that country (the USSR in 1980s Afghanistan; the US led coalition in Iraq; or the Syrian Arab Army in Syria), for reasons that are set out below.

Targeting

Despite the limitations of some databases in accurately identifying the intended target of self-sacrificial attacks (for example the CPOST highlighted in Chapter 6 and Appendix F), careful analysis of supporting documents has revealed that the intended targets appeared to relate broadly to group ideology, identity, and strategy. Whilst this is in harmony with Drake (1998), their employment in Iraq is instructive. In Iraq, Figure 5.3 demonstrated that out of the 512 identified self-sacrificial attacks, 17 percent (86) targeted US led coalition troops; 39 percent (200) targeted Iraqi police and army units; and 44 percent (226) targeted Iraqi civilians and non-combatants. These figures correlate well with the changing ideology and strategy of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and draw out three points.

First, al-Zarqawi initially sought to resist the US led invasion, by targeting coalition forces employing self-sacrificial attacks (namely martyrdom operations). Although the US led coalition labelled them ‘suicide attacks’ – a pejorative term - such tactics are often employed by the weaker party (Hoffman, 2006: 155; Fierke, 2014: 199), when combating a numerically superior military force. Despite the US led coalition’s armoured vehicles, it was an effective tactic (killing 118 coalition troops), and arguably well within the arsenal of Arab foreign fighters participating in defensive jihad. As noted earlier, the Arab foreign fighters in Iraq were resisting a hugely contentious invasion of Arab territory, which did not enjoy the full support of the UN Security Council. Such resistance, including the use of

self-sacrificial attacks, appeared to be viewed by Arab foreign fighters as a legitimate defence of Arab land. As Chapter 5 found, the evidence from the biographies of those Arab foreign fighters who conducted self-sacrificial attacks against US led coalition troops, suggested that they were not necessarily radicalised. Devout, incensed, humiliated, and revengeful appeared to be a more accurate portrayal of their motivational circumstances.

Second, the switch in targeting of self-sacrificial attacks from US led coalition forces to Iraqi police and army personnel, continued to remain under the rubric of defensive jihad – due to their military and para-military nature. Despite the Iraqi military personnel being predominantly Shia and thus drawing on the (often terroristic) notion of *takfir*, the employment of self-sacrificial attacks in the form of martyrdom operations, suggests military necessity, tactical efficiency, sacrifice and a life hereafter. The pejorative labelling of such attacks as ‘suicide attacks’ is potentially misleading and problematic, in that by conceptualising all self-sacrificial attacks as ‘suicide attacks,’ it ignores the ideology and context of the violence.

Third, the switch in self-sacrificial attacks targeting Iraqi civilians and non-combatants, whilst reflecting the prevailing ideology of al-Zarqawi,³³³ are more clearly conceptualised as suicide attacks that sit under the rubric of Islamist terrorism. It is interesting from Chapter 5, that those Arab foreign fighters who targeted US led coalition troops had an average age of 25, had no specific trait, nationality, or known previous terrorist links. In comparison, assuming that the dataset is representative in both instances, those Arab foreign fighters who targeted Iraqi civilians and non-combatants had a lower average of 21, with 46 percent of them originating from Saudi Arabia. This suggests perhaps that the suicide bombers who targeted Iraqi civilians and non-combatants may have had ‘a greater openness to increased engagement’ (Horgan, 2005: 101) due to their age, and who also originated from a country where ‘children are exposed to the most extreme cases of intolerance and calls to violence during their education’ (USCIRF, 2011: 141; ICRD, 2013: v).

³³³ Al-Zarqawi (2004a) made no distinction between Iraqi military targets and Iraqi civilians/non-combatants. This was based on the view that ‘the Shia’ had taken ‘control of the institutions of the state and their security, military, and economic branches’ making them ‘the real enemy.’

In Syria, relying on the assumption that the majority of self-sacrificial attacks were conducted by Arab foreign fighters (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 168; Dodwell et al., 2016a: 31; Gerges, 2016: 67), out of the 168 self-sacrificial attacks (from Figure 6.4), 82 percent targeted Syrian military targets (effectively martyrdom operations), while only 18 percent targeted civilians and non-combatants (effectively suicide attacks). This is a reliable finding (corroborated also by Winter, 2017b: 17), in that out of the known 77 attacks that identified both the Arab foreign fighter and their intended target, 84 percent (65) targeted Syrian military targets. This suggests that self-sacrificial attacks were primarily a military tactic in order to provide what Hafez (2006a) referred to as, ‘strategic advantages in the context of asymmetrical warfare.’ At the individual level, it appears that the label ‘martyrdom operation’ is entirely appropriate within the realm of a defensive jihad where fighting a military foe is considered *fee sabeel Allah* (in the path of God).

As noted in Chapter 6, whilst ISIS was proscribed correctly as a terrorist organisation, the terroristic nature of the group appeared less apparent through its use of suicide attacks (against civilians and non-combatants), which were infrequent. It appears that ISIS involvement in Islamist terrorist related activities was more visible in Western countries, whilst in Syria it was arguably more visible off the battlefield (in the form of genocide including ethnic cleansing). The call for terrorist acts targeting Western countries was first promoted by the now deceased ISIS spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani (2014), who issued a *fatwa* to ‘kill a disbelieving American or European … including the citizens of the countries that entered into a coalition against the Islamic State.’ It is arguably this targeting rationale that gives ISIS its terrorist designation, whereas in Syria its *modus operandi* appears more genocidal.

Historical Military Examples Involving Self-Sacrificial Attacks

According to Merari (2010: 24), ‘suicide attacks by individuals or small groups of soldiers of many nations have been carried out before and after World War II.’ Reasonably assuming that the soldiers’ targets were opposing military forces, this observation supports the thesis argument that there needs to be a broad disaggregation of self-sacrificial attacks,

broken down into martyrdom, suicide, and *inghimasi* attacks. Chapter 6 noted the incidence of Japanese Kamikaze pilots who specifically forfeited their lives within ‘the framework of a conventional war as part of an organized, large-scale military activity’ (Merari, 2010: 22). Chapter 6 also noted the instances of self-sacrificial attacks adopted by those other than Arab foreign fighters or Islamist terrorists, for example the Viet Minh during the battle of Dien Bien Phu against the French. As far as can be ascertained, the actions by these small groups of soldiers (or airmen) at the time, were never labelled suicide attacks, although in the post 9/11 era, such a politically convenient label is more likely to be applied (Fierke, 2014: 205). From an Arab foreign fighter perspective, such historical military examples could reasonably be labelled martyrdom operations.

At the battle of Dien Bien Phu, the Viet Minh fighters were attempting to defeat a foreign militarily superior occupation force, and gain independence. The parallels with 1980s Afghanistan and Iraq are instructive – indeed Pape (2005) argued that suicide attacks are a direct consequence of foreign military occupation. What Pape does not do is to differentiate between targets, and therefore arguably conflates suicide attacks and martyrdom operations. The point to be made here is that there are many historical military examples of soldiers carrying out self-sacrificial actions, be they defensive (example the Hitler Youth), or offensive (the Viet Minh) in nature, that are tantamount to Arab foreign fighters carrying out martyrdom operations against a military target. As Cook (2007: 151) succinctly noted - ‘the line between bravery in battle and suicide is blurred.’

The Research Question: How and Why do some Arab Foreign Fighters Cross a Threshold to Subsequently Become Involved in Islamist Terrorists Related Activities?

Introduction

Having tentatively established from the three case study chapters that most Arab foreign fighters were not necessarily radicalised prior to their involvement in defensive jihad, the next logical question would be whether those who subsequently participated in Islamist terrorist related activities were themselves actually radicalised. As the thesis employed a

radicalisation framework, such a question is pertinent. Also, does it depend on how and why they joined a terrorist group? This question is teased out, buttressed in part by the question proposed by Beevor (2016: 3), on whether ‘a fighter who … was coerced into joining ISIS, [could] be said to have been radicalized.’ As the case study chapters’ findings also suggested, not all Arab foreign fighters who subsequently became members of proscribed Islamist terrorist groups, appeared to exhibit signs of being radicalised, although the thesis findings varied across the three case study defensive jihads. For instance, many of the Afghan Arabs who later morphed into Islamist terrorists, clearly demonstrated an increasing commitment to an extremist political or religious ideology, by exporting their Islamist terrorism to the far enemy.

Yet it is not so clear-cut concerning the Arab foreign fighters in Iraq (post 2003) and Syria (post 2011). Here, they were engaged in defensive jihad that was tantamount to an insurgency, where according to Merari (1993: 213), the ‘mode of struggle … is dictated by circumstances rather than choice’ resulting in the adoption of terrorism, ‘which is the easiest form of insurgency.’ This suggests that the ‘mode of struggle,’ in this case Islamist terrorism, may be better understood by examination of the dictating circumstances and environment of the insurgency, and how they may have contributed to the notion of radicalisation. As noted earlier, Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) questioned the ‘conventional wisdom on radicalisation’ within a Western context, and perhaps the thesis findings also challenge the ‘conventional wisdom on radicalisation’ within the context of a defensive jihad, as part of an insurgency.³³⁴

The trajectory for those Arab foreign fighters who transited through initial involvement in defensive jihad to subsequent participation in Islamist terrorist related activities appeared to involve situational factors, underpinned by facets of the *Lucifer Effect* – the situational factors encountered whilst participating in defensive jihad, including but not limited to (1) the personal experience of close combat in a war zone; (2) being subjected to ideological indoctrination (as part of group training and socialisation); and (3) being exposed to

³³⁴ This ‘conventional wisdom’ would include the conflation of defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism, and the labelling of all self-sacrificial attacks as ‘suicide attacks.’

charismatic authority and obedience to it. These factors are not necessarily autonomous, heterogeneous, or discreet, but overlap and intersect with one another, each contributing to an overall *Lucifer Effect*.

The *Lucifer Effect*

The overarching factor that appears to help explain the trajectory of some Arab foreign fighters to subsequently participate in Islamist terrorist related activities is the influence of the *Lucifer Effect* – understood as ‘processes of transformation at work when good or ordinary people do bad or evil things’ (Zimbardo, 2007: 5). The notion of the *Lucifer Effect* is based on psychological research conducted by Philip Zimbardo at Stanford University in 1971, whereby students acted out the roles of either prison guards or prisoners within a prison setting. Zimbardo (2007) concluded that individuals’ actions can be ‘traced to factors outside the actor, to situational variables and environmental processes unique to a given setting’ (p. 8), rather than dispositional qualities of ‘genetic makeup, personality traits, character, free will and other dispositions’ (p. 7). It is important to recognise that Zimbardo is not alone in his thesis, others scholars have drawn similar conclusions whilst studying terrorism and/or genocide, including Crenshaw (1981: 381); Staub (1989: 22); M. Taylor (1991: 257); Arendt (1994); and Browning (1998: 209).³³⁵

It is worth briefly discussing the notion of ‘ordinary people’ - a term used by both Milgram (1974) and Zimbardo (2007) – insofar that it is a relational concept with normative connotations. The adjective ‘ordinary’ is understood to mean ‘regular, normal, customary, usual, commonplace’ (Oxford Concise Dictionary, 1995: 960), and in the context of political contestation may be considered as being ‘far removed from extremism’ (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk, 2012: 48). As noted in Chapter 4, in the context of the Arab world, Bayat (2010: ix) defines ‘ordinary people’ as ‘the globalizing youth and other urban grass roots.’ Additionally, again as noted in Chapter 4, the label ‘ordinary’ when referring

³³⁵ Max Taylor (1991: 257) argued that the ‘origins of fanatical violence … seem to lie in situational … factors;’ whilst Browning (1998) posited that ‘situational factors were very strong indeed’ (p. 209) turning ‘ordinary men into willing executioners’ (p. 216).

to ‘people’ and ‘men’ has academic ballast, being used effectively by scholars such as F. E. Katz (1993) and Browning (1998) respectively.

Returning to the *Lucifer Effect*, in essence it may be understood as the overarching factor that incorporates the three situational variables of combat experience in a war zone, ideological indoctrination, and charismatic leadership and obedience to it. The notion of the *Lucifer Effect* (although not the label) was identified earlier by Hannah Arendt who followed the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. According to Arendt (1994), Eichmann was ‘neither perverted nor sadistic … [just] terribly and terrifyingly normal’ (p. 276), who demonstrated ‘the banality of evil’ (p. 287), having simply been swept up in the situational environment of 1930s National Socialism in Germany (p. 31). According to Milgram (1974: 6), Arendt’s findings come ‘closer to the truth than one might dare to imagine.’ Although psychological assessments are rare, it is instructive that the now de-classified CIA (2003) ‘psychological assessment of Abu Zubaydah’³³⁶ found that his ‘background did not indicate … a history of disturbance or other psychiatric pathology’ (p. 546). This chimes with the view of forensic psychiatrist Marc Sageman (2013) who also concluded that Abu Zubaydah was ‘frighteningly normal.’ The notion of being ‘terrifyingly’ or ‘frighteningly’ normal, is of course a normative argument, thus may be better conceptualised as being ‘ordinary’ – as defined earlier in this chapter. The thesis dataset reveals the ordinariness (or normality) of the majority of Arab foreign fighters – the overwhelming majority had not been imprisoned, or been involved in prior Islamist activism including terrorism.

The findings from Chapter 4 established that the majority of Afghan Arabs possessed an idealised notion of defending co-religionists in the defensive jihad in 1980s Afghanistan, and (again the majority) had no known prior links to Islamist terrorism. Yet it was found that the environment that evolved in Afghanistan after (and not necessarily during) the defensive jihad, nurtured an ideology that was terroristic in nature (Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012: 69). Perhaps it is no surprise that much of the later ideological influence

³³⁶ Introduced in Chapter 4, Abu Zubaydah was a Palestinian expatriate living in Saudi Arabia, who became an Afghan Arab and maintained a diary of his experiences. He was later ‘wrongly’ considered (Sageman, 2013) to be ‘the third or fourth man in Al-Qaeda’ (US Central Intelligence Agency, 2003).

originated from Egyptian Islamist terrorists (EIG and EIJ) who effectively hijacked the original notion of defensive jihad. This resulted in some ‘terrifyingly or frighteningly normal’ men becoming involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. The overarching notion of the *Lucifer Effect* – involving ‘situational variables … unique to a given setting’ (Zimbardo, 2007: 8),³³⁷ appears to help explain why some veteran Afghan Arabs from the thesis dataset (who had no known pre-existing terrorist links) eventually became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities.

As noted in Chapter 5, the defensive jihad in Iraq (post 2003) soon developed into ‘a civil war’ (Fearon, 2007) that resulted in an insurgency involving Islamist terrorist activity, that was broadly based on the ideology of *takfir* against Shia Muslims who were dehumanised as ‘crafty and malicious scorpion[s]’ (al-Zarqawi, 2004a). This explicit identification and dehumanisation of the enemy again chimes with the findings of Zimbardo (2007: 17), who suggested that ‘war engenders cruelty and barbaric behaviour against anyone considered the Enemy, as the dehumanized, demonic Other.’ The notion of dehumanisation (and other ‘situational factors’) was recognised by Browning (1998: 216), who found it “was sufficient to turn ‘ordinary men’ into ‘willing executioners’” in Poland in the Second World War. Returning to Iraq, the *Lucifer Effect* acting on Arab foreign fighters included combat in a (civil) war zone; a *takfiri* ideology that dehumanised Shia Muslims; being constantly targeted by Western and Iraqi troops; and the requirement of swearing allegiance to al-Zarqawi (resulting in obedience to authority). These factors, which were ‘outside the actor’ (Zimbardo, 2007: 8) offer a persuasive explanation as to why some Arab foreign fighters in Iraq subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities, involving suicide attacks against civilians and non-combatants.

The ‘situational variables and environmental processes’ (Zimbardo, 2007: 11) in the insurgency in Syria (post 2011) had many similarities with those in Iraq (post 2003), indeed ISIS, their leadership, and their ideology, spawned from Iraq after the US withdrawal of

³³⁷ Chapter 4 found these factors and situational variables included, but were not limited to, terrorist training and ideological indoctrination (often by those with known previous terrorist links); obedience to authority (in this case Osama bin Laden); the inability of many Afghan Arabs to reintegrate back into their societies; and ‘comradeship’ ties.

troops (Gerges, 2016: 50), and expanded into parts of Syria. As Chapter 6 established, most of the Arab foreign fighters had no known previous links to terrorism or defensive jihad, yet some were subsequently involved in Islamist terrorist related activities including genocide, primarily against Shia (Alawite) Muslims and Yazidi Christians. The identification of a dehumanised ‘out-group’ within inter- and intra-group hostilities, helps shape the *Lucifer Effect*, creating “a hostile imagination … embedded deeply in their minds by propaganda that transforms those others into ‘The Enemy’” (Zimbardo, 2007: 11).

Combat Experience in a War Zone

Unlike a nation’s standing army that operates under the auspices of the Geneva Convention and Law of Armed Conflict (LoAC), Arab foreign fighters participating in defensive jihad within a war zone (that involves insurgency, guerrilla tactics, and terrorism in a civil war setting), arguably operate in a less humane, legal framework. They do not necessarily enjoy the privileges afforded to prisoners of war under the Geneva Convention, particularly during inter- and intra-group conflict (such as in 1980s Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria), where torture and death appear possible outcomes.³³⁸ Additionally there is the existence of ‘combat stress, with its real fear of death, [which] is quite different from other kinds of stress’ (Watson, 1978 as cited in Grossman, 2009: 51). It is instructive therefore that a British foreign fighter in Syria, Abu Salman al-Britani, reflected that ‘no one can feel the reality of a battle regardless of how many movies … one watches until he has actually been there,’ recalling that in his ‘first battle … lay a brother with the majority of his head missing and the whole of his brain exposed’ (Van Ostaeyen, 2016). This is arguably the crucible of defensive jihad, in which ‘98% of fighters in Syria had some direct exposure to’ (Perliger and Milton, 2016: 39).

Such combat experience in a war zone appeared to push some Arab foreign fighters further along a trajectory to more extreme violent behaviour, including atrocities and acts of Islamist terrorism. Broader research on armed conflict however suggests that such

³³⁸ The thesis dataset identifies 22 cases of internecine deaths, most generally as a result of kidnapping, torture, and eventual execution.

behaviour is often more the norm than the exception: Bilton and Sim (1993: 370) posited that ‘war is hell … atrocities are inevitable;’ while Browning (1998: 160) was more specific, arguing that ‘war, and especially a race war, leads to brutalization, which leads to atrocity.’ Therefore, according to Ambrose (1998: 108), ‘atrocity is part of war that needs to be faced and discussed.’ There are many instances of nations’ standing armies committing atrocities against civilians and non-combatants (in effect war crimes). A particular infamous example would be the My Lai massacres in the Vietnam War (discussed in Chapter 6), which according to American psychiatrist Robert Lifton, was ‘an atrocity-producing situation’ (Oliver, 2006: 111).

The massacre at My Lai appeared deceptively normal; Oliver (2006: 109-110) argued that ‘the crimes of war … committed by US servicemen in Vietnam were primarily a product of the conflict itself.’ Specifically, Richard Holmes (2004: 391) identified that the ‘road to My Lai was paved, first and foremost, by the dehumanisation of the Vietnamese.’ Together at My Lai, these situational factors led to ‘a culture of violence, of brutality, with people around you doing the same thing … there came a point when nothing mattered anymore’ (Bilton and Sim, 1993: 368). This ‘culture of violence’ in Vietnam appeared to occur as a result of the ‘action-reaction syndrome’ (Crenshaw, 1981: 385), whereby ‘violence becomes cyclical, ratcheted by corresponding strike and counter-strike’ (Mumford, 2012: 11). It appears that the situation in Vietnam, or in the words of Mumford (2012: 12), ‘the permissive structural environment,’ that the US soldiers found themselves in, generated a certain psychology - perhaps a culture - of violence where even the Geneva Conventions and the LoAC were sometimes flouted. Since the 9/11 attacks, Western armies in both Iraq and Afghanistan have been accused of serious atrocities, including British forces, resulting in the establishment of the (now discredited in 2017) Iraq Historic Allegations Team (IHAT), who had been investigating 1351 ‘allegations of abuse of Iraqi civilians by UK armed forces personnel’ (IHAT, 2016).

With this in mind, perhaps Western society should not be surprised that non-state actors including Arab (and Western) foreign fighters also commit atrocities in war zones. All nations’ standing armies draw from the same pool of young citizens within society, some

enlist to become regular combatants, whilst a small minority may become non-state actors. Weiss and Hassan (2015: 129) made the same point about Arab foreign fighters in Syria: ‘these are the same guys that militaries around the world have been counting on forever to be privates or infantrymen. They are knucklehead nineteen-year-olds looking to do something in their life.’ This thesis is not suggesting conflating state and non-state combatants, however both cohorts experience the violence of close combat, except that Arab foreign fighters generally operate in a less regulated environment, with less oversight, and less accountability. It is suggested that the longer Arab foreign fighters remained in such a war zone, the more predisposed they may become to committing increasingly violent atrocities (as recognised in Chapter 6 by Sajer, 1971: 234), including acts of Islamist terrorism. This suggestion does need qualifying however insofar that some Arab foreign fighters had a very short incubation period in defensive jihad, before executing acts of terrorism. Research suggests that these cases invariably involved some form of training and ideological indoctrination.

Ideological Indoctrination

The second situational factor that appeared to influence the trajectory of some Arab foreign fighters to subsequently participate in Islamist terrorist related activities is the notion of ideological indoctrination, often within a training environment. In Chapter 5, it was agreed that indoctrination entailed ‘the teaching of a person or group systematically … to accept ideas uncritically’ (Oxford Concise Dictionary, 1995: 693). This suggestion is not without its detractors including Silke (2009: 96), who argued that ‘you don’t have to teach, you don’t have to brainwash, you don’t have to push, you don’t have to pressure, it goes around by osmosis’. The notion of osmosis, perhaps compliments the overall thesis findings – the two factors are not mutually exclusive; perhaps the notion of ideological indoctrination simply reinforces the process of osmosis.

One interesting empirical study conducted by William Sargant, demonstrated ‘how beliefs, whether good or bad, false or true, can be forcibly implanted in the human brain; and how people can be switched to arbitrary beliefs altogether opposed to those previously held’

(Sargant, 1976: xxii). He concluded that ‘it is quite possible to indoctrinate people with ideas ... or even deliberate lies; and keep them fixed in these beliefs’ (Sargant, 1976: 234). Across the three case study chapters, the incidence of indoctrination appeared to vary, particularly concerning the employment of suicide bombers, and the targeting of civilians and non-combatants. As Chapter 4 established, many Afghan Arabs remained in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal,³³⁹ and became exposed to a ‘range of political beliefs along the Islamist spectrum’ (Hafez, 2009: 78) - the spectrum of political Islam – particularly involving ‘the Jalalabad School of jihad’ (Hamid and Farrall, 2015: 165). This created the conditions for the ideological indoctrination of many Afghan Arabs,³⁴⁰ who subsequently returned to their countries to attack the near enemy (for example Algeria and Libya), or became involved in terrorist attacks that were undergirded by a new ideological emphasis that targeted the far enemy (for example the 9/11 attacks). In many cases, training camps were established based on nationalities (for example Algerians and Jordanians),³⁴¹ where the ideological indoctrination involved either a religious nationalist agenda (Brisard and Martinez, 2005: 68; Hamid and Farrall, 2015: 140), or the more transnational global terrorist agenda (Gerges, 2005: 119).

The subsequent Islamist terrorism witnessed in Iraq (post 2003) occurring as it did in parallel with insurgent violence, was in part due to the presence of ideological indoctrination propagated by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The Islamist terrorism in Iraq was largely sign-posted by suicide attacks against Iraqi civilians and non-combatants, yet the ideological indoctrination was underpinned by *takfir* against all Shia Muslims in Iraq, which included the country’s military and police forces. This ideology blurred the targeting distinctions (between military and civilians) and consequently blurred the distinctions between defensive jihad and Islamist terrorism. That said, the results of the analysis conducted for Chapter 5 suggested that the ideological indoctrination was primarily aimed at two groups of Arab foreign fighters: those newly arrived in Iraq and arguably quite

³³⁹ As Chapter 4 discovered, this was in large part due to their respective regimes’ refusal to reintegrate them back into society.

³⁴⁰ As Chapter 4 found, only 14 per cent of the Afghan Arab cohort had documented pre-existing terrorist links.

³⁴¹ The Algerians attended the *Abdul Majid al-Jazairi* Camp (Hamid and Farrall, 2015: 167), while the Jordanians attended the *Tawhid wal-Jihad* camp in Herat (Brisard and Martinez, 2005:72).

impressionable and ‘more open to influence’ (Horgan, 2005: 101); and those who may have had ‘age-related vulnerabilities’ (UNSC CTC, 2015b). It should be noted that the notion of vulnerability does not necessarily supplant the agency held by youth, however there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that ‘terrorist groups prey upon the vulnerabilities of young persons … and in some cases, youth have been … tricked into participating in terrorist activities, including suicide bombings’ (US Homeland Security Institute, 2009: 2). To buttress this argument, Horgan (2005: 102) also recognised ‘the emotional responsiveness of people at a younger age and the increased susceptibility towards greater involvement this might bring’ – a position reinforced by Browning (1998: 182) and Zimbardo (2007: 21).³⁴²

Finally, the ideological indoctrination supporting Islamist terrorism in Syria (post 2011) occurred within the context of insurgent violence. As Chapter 6 suggested, much of the Islamist terrorism perpetrated by ISIS was more representative of genocide, than specific terrorist attacks employing suicide bombers. The ideological current of ISIS, with its particular emphasis on the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, the promotion of *takfir*, and the staunchly anti-Shia rhetoric, seems to have been embraced as much by osmosis as by indoctrination. What appears apparent in the case of Arab foreign fighters arriving in Syria, was the presence of a process of formal ideological indoctrination (al-Tamimi, 2014; Mironova et al., 2014: 16; H. Hassan, 2015; Waldeck, 2015: 66; Olidort, 2016; Todenhöfer, 2015; Gerges, 2016). The key question is, how influential was this ideological indoctrination in encouraging acts of terrorism in Syria? The answer appears that it was a necessary but not sufficient cause for such acts, and that ‘the phenomenon is far more complex than the superficial appeal of jihadist ideology’ (Joffe, 2016: 800). This is supported by veteran Egyptian Afghan Arab, Mustafa Hamid, who argued that ‘Arabs follow a leader not an idea; they find a person they trust and then they follow him – not the idea’ (Hamid as cited in Hamid and Farrall, 2015: 61). Hamid’s argument thus warrants an examination of charismatic authority and obedience to it.

³⁴² According to Browning (1998: 182), during the occupation of Poland in the Second World War ‘the age of men affected their susceptibility to indoctrination’ leading some to become ‘willing executioners’ of the Jewish population.

Charismatic Authority and Obedience to Authority

The third situational factor that appeared to influence the trajectory of some Arab foreign fighters to subsequently participate in Islamist terrorist related activities is the notion of charismatic authority and obedience to it. According to Max Weber (as cited in Gerth and Wright Mills, 2009: 78), charismatic authority involves a leader who “is personally recognized as the innerly ‘called’ leader of men. Men do not obey him by virtue of tradition or statute, but because they believe in him.” This understanding is further advanced by Hofmann and Dawson (2014), who opined that ‘charismatic authority is a form of legitimate domination exercised by an individual who is perceived to possess divinely given or inspired abilities’ (p. 340), and ‘is something that is *attributed* to a leader, and not something the leader possesses’ (p. 351). There is broad academic consensus as to the centrality and importance of charismatic authority in the birth of Islamist movements, both violent and non-violent (Crenshaw, 1994: 264; Dekmejian, 1995: 63; Wiktorowicz, 2005b: 135; Bjorgo, 2005: 260; Gerges, 2005: 36; Ingram, 2016: 4). In particular, Wiktorowicz (2005b) stressed the centrality of ‘reputation and sacred authority’ (p. 24) of Islamic scholars, but ‘also other characteristics, like charisma’ (p. 26). It appears that much of their role is ‘to transform widespread grievances and frustrations into a political agenda for violent struggle’ (Bjorgo, 2005: 260). It should be emphasised however that these scholars were examining a rather different cohort – a home-grown Western ‘bunch of guys’ (Sageman, 2004), and not Arab foreign fighters who have already mobilised and demonstrated martial fervour in the crucible of defensive jihad.

As noted in Chapter 6, according to Hofmann and Dawson (2014: 358), the notion of charismatic authority is ‘a potentially critical element of the process of radicalization.’ In particular, according to Bartlett and Miller (2012: 15), this is engendered by “previous conflict experience abroad, or the perception of ‘battle hardiness,’ including the charisma and gravitas derived from such experiences.” Particular examples of charismatic authority from the case study chapters, include Abdullah Azzam (Emerson, 1998; McGregor, 2003; Stanley, 2005; Hegghammer, 2008b); Osama bin Laden (Reeve, 1999; Bodansky, 2001; Landau, 2002; Bergen, 2002 and 2006; Saghi, 2008); Shaykh Omar Abdul Rahman (Wright,

2006; Euben and Zaman, 2009); Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Brisard and Martinez, 2005; Napoleoni, 2005; al-Shishani, 2005a, Milelli, 2008); and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (McCants, 2015; Beevor, 2016; Hofmann, 2016). Concerning ISIS, Beevor (2016: 1) also argued persuasively that the group practises ‘coercive radicalisation’ through ‘charismatic authority’ once they capture territory, noting that some may be ‘initially unwilling subjects.’ This thesis extends Beevor’s (2016) finding by suggesting that some Arab foreign fighters, who having mobilised to participate in defensive jihad, appeared to become ‘swept up’ by ISIS on their arrival in Syria, regardless of which group they had originally intended to join. This appeared to result in some Arab foreign fighters passing through a point of inflection, and getting involved (some, somewhat involuntarily) in Islamist terrorist related activities, and subsequently defecting from ISIS, as established by Neumann (2015).

In tandem with the notion of charismatic leadership, is the notion of obedience to authority, understood to mean ‘a situation in which a person gives himself over to authority and … no longer regards himself as responsible for his actions’ (Milgram, 1974: xii). It is clear from the evidence presented in the case study chapters, that Islamist terrorist groups demand unquestioning obedience, and in many cases require the pledging of allegiance (*baya*) to a charismatic leader. As noted in Chapter 6, the ISIS magazine Dabiq 12 (p. 10) reminds its readership that it ‘is obligatory to yield to the opinion [Allah] has chosen and submit to his order.’ The impact of obedience to authority was tested by psychologist, Stanley Milgram, at Yale University in 1961, whereby ‘a person … is told to carry out a series of acts that become increasingly into conflict with conscience’ (Milgram, 1974: 3). He established that:

‘ordinary people … can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become blatantly clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority’ (Milgram, 1974: 6).

It is instructive that the findings of Milgram's study³⁴³ were validated 35 years later by Burger (2009), providing perhaps more reason to draw on his findings on the influence of authority. Milgram (1974: 189) also makes an important point concerning 'legitimate authority' and concluded that a 'substantial number of people do what they are told to do, irrespective of the content of the act and without limitations of conscience, so long as they perceive that command comes from a legitimate authority.' The content of the act is important, and could reasonably include terrorism and/or genocide, which according to Staub (1989: 19), requires a 'strong respect for authority and strong inclination to obedience.' Historically, according to Bilton and Sim (1993: 362), the US Marines involved in the My Lai massacre 'were following orders in a context in which they had been trained to follow orders.' Scientifically, this chimes with the research of Milgram (1974: 7), who established that 'orders from a man with epaulets, and men are led to kill with little difficulty,' thus arguably the results of his research go some way to explain why some Arab foreign fighters subsequently became involved in Islamist related terrorism.

Conclusion

The analysis conducted for this thesis established three major findings. First, Arab foreign fighters who participate in defensive jihad should not be conflated with Islamist terrorists – overlaps notwithstanding, they tend to have different intentions, objectives and targeting rationales. Second, suicide attacks aimed at civilians and non-combatants are not necessarily synonymous with martyrdom operations aimed at military targets – again the intentions, objectives and targeting rationales tend to be different. Third, those Arab foreign fighters that subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities were influenced by key situational factors that contributed to the *Lucifer Effect*, including but not limited to, the personal experience of close combat in a war zone; being subjected to ideological indoctrination (as part of group training and socialisation); and being exposed to charismatic authority and obedience to it.

³⁴³ All 40 subjects obeyed the experimental commands to administer Shock Level 20 (a fake 300 volts) to their victims. Subsequently 26 (65 percent) continued to obey the experimenter's orders to the end, administering a fake 450 volts (Milgram, 1963).

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter draws on the analysis and findings offered in Chapter 7, in order to address the ‘so what?’ questions and suggest some implications relevant to these findings for policy makers and academia. Finally, this chapter reminds the reader of the limitations of the study, before offering an overall conclusion.

Implications – Answering the ‘So What?’ Questions

First, Arab foreign fighters who participate(d) in defensive jihad should not be conflated with Islamist terrorists – overlaps notwithstanding, they tend(ed) to have different intentions, objectives and targeting rationales. So what? From a policy perspective, the implications are far reaching, but are perhaps most relevant to Arab governments assuming the eventual return of Arab foreign fighters. The assumption is that Arab foreign fighters ‘who gain combat experience in Iraq and Syria … come back as hardened veterans, steady in the face of danger and skilled in the use of weapons and explosives - ideal terrorist recruiting material’ (Byman, 2015: 582). Arguably therefore, Arab (and indeed Western) governments need to develop individualised reintegration programmes (de-radicalisation programmes) that recognise that not all foreign fighters are automatically terrorists. This would entail a recalibration in the targeting and reintegration of those who partake in defensive jihad, and in particular the content of CT/CVE/PVE messaging – which arguably should be crafted with respected and qualified Islamic scholars. This could assist in shaping the ‘post-conflict behaviour’ of veteran Arab foreign fighters (and terrorists) and in preventing Islamist terrorist attacks in both the Arab world and Europe.

According to Hafez (2012b), the historical ‘post-return behaviour’ of Arab foreign fighters includes peacefully reintegrating into society; being co-opted by existing regimes; remaining involved in defensive jihad; or becoming (more) involved in religious nationalist or transnational terrorism. Aware that half of the above ‘post-return behaviours’ are violent

in nature, some Arab foreign fighters returning from Syria are likely to pose a threat to their autocratic regimes. The threat is real – already some Arab foreign fighters have returned from Syria and inspired or personally conducted terrorist attacks in their home countries including Saudi Arabia,³⁴⁴ Tunisia,³⁴⁵ Egypt,³⁴⁶ Libya,³⁴⁷ Kuwait,³⁴⁸ and Yemen.³⁴⁹ However, what this study has established is the idea that not all Arab foreign fighters are necessarily terrorists, and that not all members of ISIS (for example) are necessarily terrorists. Treating all Arab foreign fighters returning from Syria as terrorists does not correlate with the thesis findings, and lacks a nuanced understanding about the nature of the phenomenon, and the threat they may, or may not, represent.

It is clear therefore that if Arab governments and regimes do not (or are unwilling to) prevent their citizens from getting involved in a foreign defensive jihad, they would benefit from establishing *post hoc* rehabilitation strategies. Whilst some Arab countries do have de-radicalisation programmes for example Saudi Arabia (Al-Ansary, 2008; Al-Saud, 2009) and the UAE (Al-Sayegh, 2004), many including Morocco (Sakthivel, 2013), Egypt (Hussain, 2015), Jordan (Pizzi, 2015), Saudi Arabia (Murphy, 2015), Tunisia (Byman, 2015: 587), and the UAE (Al-Arabiya, 2016), are also appearing to adopt particularly harsh models (some - the UAE - in parallel), including the death penalty.³⁵⁰ This approach is again problematic, in that ‘returnees are likely to take up arms ... if the[y] are not being integrated into society’ (Byman, 2015: 591). As Chapter 4 found, some veteran Afghan

³⁴⁴ Mosques in Saudi Arabia were bombed on 22 May 2015 (Qatif); 29 May 2015 (Dammam); 6 August 2015 (Abha); 4 July 2016 (Medina and Qatif).

³⁴⁵ ISIS inspired attacks in Tunisia include the 18 March 2015 Bardo Museum attack; the 6 June 2015 Port El Kantaoui beach resort attack; and the 24 November 2015 bombing in Tunis (against the Presidential Guard).

³⁴⁶ ISIS inspired attacks in Egypt include the 11 July 2015 attack on the Italian Consulate in Cairo; the 8 January 2016 attack on the Red Sea city of Hurghada; and the 22 October 2016 assassin of an Egyptian general (Adil Rageea).

³⁴⁷ In addition to ISIS expansion in Benghazi, Sirte, and Tripoli (A. Engel, 2015), ISIS inspired attacks within the country include the 27 January 2015 Corinthia Hotel (Tripoli) attack, and the 7 January 2016 Zliten truck bombing (killing 60 policemen and wounding 200).

³⁴⁸ ISIS inspired attacks in Kuwait include the 26 June 2015 bombing of a Shia mosque in Kuwait City (killing 27 and wounding 227).

³⁴⁹ ISIS inspired attacks in Yemen include the 20 March 2015 Sanaa mosque quadruple suicide bombing (killing 142 and wounding 351); the 25 March 2016 triple suicide bombing in Aden; the 26 May 2016 bombing of army recruits in Aden.

³⁵⁰ For example, the United Arab Emirates ‘sentenced four Emiratis (whose ages ranged from 18 to 29) to death in absentia for joining the militant ISIS group and fighting alongside the militant group’s members in Syria’ (Al-Arabiya, 2016). Interestingly in the early 1990s, the United Arab Emirates ‘instigated a particularly generous package of rewards’ for Emirati Afghan Arabs (Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012: 109).

Arabs subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorism due in part to their inability to return home without being arrested and imprisoned. Perhaps this was a regime strategic decision, as it resulted in Islamist terrorism being perpetrated beyond regime borders and thus beyond regime jurisdiction and responsibility - in effect implicitly exporting terrorism overseas.

Second, suicide attacks aimed at civilians and non-combatants are not necessarily synonymous with martyrdom operations aimed at military targets. So what? This finding is probably the most politically unpalatable, due in part to the monopoly states have on the application and use of violence. It appears that the state is always right, despite any autocratic or totalitarian tendencies of regimes and governments, particularly in the Arab world. Such a position makes any resistance to regime and government power illegitimate, creating the need to use pejorative terms for those who resist. It is also important to recognise the nature and intent supporting martyrdom operations – they are primarily aimed at enemy combatants (whether state or non-state actors). It somewhat begs the question whether there is any moral, ethical, or legitimate difference between a UK special forces attack on an ISIS position (that results in UK casualties), or an Arab foreign fighter's martyrdom operation on an ISIS position (where the fighter also dies). ISIS is a recognised terrorist organisation, thus attacking a common enemy by whatever available military means, has a degree of legitimacy. The converse is a suicide attack aimed at civilians and non-combatants, which has no legitimacy.

Third, those Arab foreign fighters that subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities were influenced by key situational factors contributing to the *Lucifer Effect*, including but not limited to, the personal experience of close combat in a war zone; being subjected to ideological indoctrination (as part of group training and socialisation); and being exposed to charismatic authority and obedience to it. Again, so what? Looking first at the influence and impact of personal experience of close combat in a war zone within an insurgency, suggests that the challenge is to recognise how this may have affected them, on their return to their home country. Arguably, some returning individuals are likely to be suffering from mental illness, including PTSD (Briggs and Silverman, 2014:

37), and would most likely benefit from some form of decompression and rehabilitation, rather than simply being incarcerated in prison. Some Western countries have recognised the presence of PTSD in foreign fighters, such as Denmark (Hooper, 2014), and offered suitably tailored rehabilitation programmes. If the intent is that of preventing future terrorist attacks, recognising and managing the impact of combat experience in an individual, post conflict, could have tangible and long term positive effects.

Next the influence and impact of being subjected to ideological indoctrination (as part of group training and socialisation) is similar to the personal experience of close combat in a war zone. Again, foreign fighters' minds are likely to need time readjusting to a peacetime existence, and absorbing more moderate ideological messaging, for instance at their local mosque. The Saudi rehabilitation model perhaps recognises this, and spends many months on three programmes that include rehabilitation, counselling, and aftercare (Gardiner, 2017). In his edited book, *Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict*, Erin Martz (2010: 4) stressed the importance of the 'psychological component of ... post-conflict rehabilitation.'

Finally, the influence and impact of being exposed to charismatic authority and obedience to it. So what? First, as noted in Chapter 7, a 'substantial number of people do what they are told to do, irrespective of the content of the act' (Milgram, 1974), thus it appears to be a psychological weakness inherent in all humans. This leads to the conclusion that any post-conflict rehabilitation programme must acknowledge the notion of 'obedience to authority' and, as highlighted in Chapter 7, how 'ordinary people ... can become agents in a terribly destructive process' (Milgram, 1974: 6). Second, the result of exposure to charismatic authority may be addressed by the use of individuals with suitable credentials such as fellow reformed foreign fighters (for example Abdullah Anas and/or Musa al-Qarni), or highly respected (although arguably controversial) religious authorities (for example Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi) who are not perceived to be government officials.

The implications of this thesis for academia involve thoughts about future theory building and future research. Future theory building includes developing a framework to better explain the processes involved that influence foreign fighters (particularly Arabs as they are

the predominant ethnic grouping) becoming involved in Islamist terrorism. As discussed earlier the thesis radicalisation model struggled to explain this trajectory, resulting in a need to draw upon the psychological theories of Arendt, Milgram, Zimbardo, Staub, and F. E. Katz - hence a greater reliance on psychology may be more appropriate. This resonates with Horgan (2015), who argued that 'psychology has tremendous potential both to shape our understanding of terrorism as well as offering us the basis for a strategic framework ... whenever there is a crisis, the questions that are at the top of the list relate to psychology.' Thus, despite leveraging a large dataset, the theoretical framework whilst helpful, did not advance academic understanding of radicalisation *per se*, perhaps again leading to credence to the argument that 'the conventional wisdom on radicalisation [is] a failed discourse' (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010).

The implications for future research includes conducting a comparative study that examines how Western foreign fighters, who initially participate in defensive jihad subsequently become involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. Do the situational variables (inherent within a civil war context) affect Western and Arab foreign fighters in the same way? Are Western foreign fighters who often lack knowledge of the Arabic language, persuaded more easily to commit atrocities including terrorism and genocide? There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that this is true (Atteridge, 2016: 23; Neumann, 2016: 104). Are there cultural dissimilarities – do Arabs have a greater propensity for obedience to authority? Can both the Western and the Arab world learn from each other about rehabilitation programmes? Second, this study raises the prospect of investigating the influence of family and social ties between Arab foreign fighters, employing Social Network Analysis. The existence and importance of such relationships and networks in the socialisation process leading to the recruitment, possible radicalisation, and involvement with Islamist violence are widely documented (Sageman, 2004; Bakker, 2006; Helfstein, 2012). The thesis data is of sufficient granularity to be re-analysed using Social Network Analysis software, in order to empirically validate the role of social networks in facilitating the transition from involvement in defensive jihad, to subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorist related activities.

Limitations of the Study

It was recognised in Chapter 2 that there would be limitations of practical concern as well as theoretical matters concerning ‘threats to validity’ (Robson, 2002: 171) of the research, particularly the data, the theoretical framework, and the absence of a control group. First, the threats to validity of the thesis data may include issues of how representative the Arab foreign fighters are of the overall phenomenon, and the reliability of the data sources. The database, although leveraging information on 3,010 Arab foreign fighters, may still not be representative of the overall Arab foreign fighter phenomenon. That said, there are no agreed totals of Arab foreign fighter participation, and only in Chapter 6 is there an approximation that the dataset collected represents about 11 percent of the overall Arab foreign fighter contingent in Syria, based on figures provided by Malet (2015). As the research net was cast far and wide (including English and Arabic sources), the dataset represents the best ‘open source’ resource on Arab foreign fighters covering the period 1979 to 2016 (available and known to the author). Second, the reliability of the data was a concern, insofar as the research relied largely on information from ‘jihadi’ sources, which are inherently propagandistic, possibly unreliable, and constructed more for group recruitment than for research. That said, where possible, the data were triangulated using other independent sources, and when this was not possible, the researcher’s judgement was applied.

The next threat to the thesis validity was the theoretical framework based on the notion of radicalisation. As Robson (2002: 171) cautioned, the ‘main threat to providing a valid interpretation is that of imposing a framework or meaning on what is happening rather than this occurring or emerging from what you learn.’ Although the theoretical framework was useful in explaining the future trajectory to Islamist terrorism of many veteran Afghan Arabs, it appeared to struggle to accurately explain why some Arab foreign fighters in Iraq (post 2003) and Syria (post 2011), subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities. Perhaps this should not come as a surprise, as the notion of radicalisation is highly contested, leading some scholars to challenge the basis on which it is used, in particular Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) in a Western context; Neumann (2013) in a

conceptual sense; and Beevor (2016) in the context of ISIS in Syria. It will therefore be noticed that the radicalisation framework was not leveraged exclusively to explain the trajectories of Arab foreign fighters in Iraq (post 2003) and Syria (post 2011), but was inductively augmented by additional theories including those of Milgram (1963, 1974) and Zimbardo (1971, 2007), and by contextualisation offered by historical military examples. This resulted in a richer account, rendering greater explanatory value.

Finally, less perhaps for veteran Afghan Arabs, there was no control group of those who initially participated in defensive jihad, but did not subsequently become involved in terrorist related activities. In the case of the Afghan Arabs, seven returned back to their country of origin, but they all continued to demonstrate strong Islamist sympathies, thus questioning whether they were actually a credible and representative control group. Perhaps the absence of a control group for the defensive jihads in Iraq (post 2003) and Syria (post 2011), demonstrates the interconnectedness between civil war, insurgency, and terrorism. It could be argued perhaps that defectors (particularly from ISIS) could constitute a control group in that some never embraced terrorism,³⁵¹ but having already been members of proscribed terrorist organisations, precludes them somewhat as a credible control group. This absence of a control group therefore represents a threat to the validity of the study, thus the thesis findings and arguments are more suggestive, rather than definitive or conclusive.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to explain why and how some Arab foreign fighters, who having participated in a defensive jihad against a combatant enemy, subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities that targeted civilians and non-combatants. In the attempt, this study has also challenged some basic academic assumptions. Specifically, Arab foreign fighters who participate in defensive jihad should not be conflated with Islamist terrorists; overlaps notwithstanding, they appeared as different cohorts. This study

³⁵¹ As noted earlier, many Arab foreign fighters adopted insurgency tactics in both Iraq and Syria, targeting only ‘enemy’ military forces. In Syria with the acknowledged overlaps between civil war, insurgency, and terrorism, it ‘raises a conceptual question: Is ISIS best described as a terrorist group?’ (Moghadam, 2014).

also established the need to disaggregate self-sacrificial attacks that target civilians and non-combatants (suicide attacks), and those that target military forces (martyrdom attacks). In addition, it also found that the widely accepted definition of a suicide attack appeared misleading, focussing more on the demise of the perpetrator, rather than on the intended target.

Concerning theory, this study found that the notion of radicalisation appeared to struggle to explain the trajectory from involvement in defensive jihad to subsequent participation in Islamist terrorism, perhaps due to different points of departure. Radicalisation, being a Western conceptualisation, may be more suitable in explaining why Westerners living in the West become involved in Islamist terrorism. This however is different to explaining why Arabs, who had already mobilised to participate in defensive jihad, subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorism. The study suggested that Arab foreign fighters (who had no known prior terrorist links) were not necessarily radicalised, and that even those who subsequently became involved in Islamist terrorist related activities, were often more ‘ordinary’ than ‘radicalised.’ This was predicated by the use of comparative historical military examples (of atrocities), and the research findings of Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo.

The answer to the research question, whilst complex and often involving profoundly individual trajectories, appears to be broadly underpinned by facets of the *Lucifer Effect* – the situational factors encountered whilst participating in defensive jihad, including but not limited to, the experience of close combat in a war zone; being subjected to ideological indoctrination; and being exposed to charismatic authority and obedience to it. This suggests, although not definitively, that subsequent involvement in Islamist terrorism by Arab foreign fighters, is primarily forged in the crucible of defensive jihad.

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Appendix A

Quranic Verses Covering Martyrdom and Suicide

Quranic Reference	Narrative
Al-Baqarah (2:154)	And do not say about those who are killed in the way of Allah, 'They are dead.' Rather, they are alive, but you perceive [it] not.
Al-Baqarah (2:194)	And the one who attacks you, attack him in like manner.
Al-Baqarah (2:195)	And do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction.
Al-'Imran (3:157)	And if you are killed in the cause of Allah or die - then forgiveness from Allah and mercy are better than whatever they accumulate [in this world].
Al-'Imran (3:169)	And never think of those who have been killed in the cause of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision.
Al-'Imran (3:170)	Rejoicing in what Allah has bestowed upon them of His bounty, and they receive good tidings about those [to be martyred] after them who have not yet joined them - that there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.'
An-Nisaa' (4:29)	And do not kill yourselves. Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful.
An-Nisaa' (4:93)	Whosoever intentionally kills a believer, hell is his eternal recompense, and the wrath and curse of Allah are upon him, and a great punishment is in store for him.
Al-Ma'idah (5:32)	If anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder ... it would be as if he killed all mankind.
Al-An'am (6:51)	Do not slay the soul sanctified by God, except for just cause.
Al-Isra' (17:33)	Do not take a life that Allah has made inviolable without justification.
Ash-Shuraa (42:40)	And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it.'
Muhammad (47:4)	And those who are killed in the cause of Allah - never will He waste their deeds.
Muhammad (47:5)	He will guide them and amend their condition.
Muhammad (47:6)	And admit them to Paradise, which He has made known to them.

Appendix B

Content Analysis – Coding Matrix

Categories	Codes	Remarks
Geographic origin	Nationality	Sageman, 2004; Silke, 2008
	Migrant Status	
	Town of birth	
Age	Age of initial involvement in jihad	
	Age of involvement in terrorism	
Education		
Previous jihad experience	Country (ies)	
Previous terrorism experience	Country (ies)	
Triggering event	‘Significantly provocative event’	Horgan (2005: 84)
	‘Catalyst events’	Silke (2008: 114)
	‘Cognitive openings’	Wiktorowicz (2005b)
	‘Precipitants’	Crenshaw (2003)
	‘Sense of moral outrage’	Sageman (2008: 75)
	Grievances	
Kinship & social	Family ties	
	Friendship ties	
Faith	<i>Fatwa</i>	
	Mosque	
	Reformist	
	Religious education	
	Hajj / Ramadan	
Political Islam	Ideologue	Charismatic authority
	Defensive jihad	
	Offensive jihad	

Categories	Codes	Remarks
	Sunni / Shia ‘identity conflicts’	King and Taylor (2011)
	<i>Takfir</i>	
	<i>Tawheed</i> (oneness of God)	
	<i>Istishhaad</i> (martyrdom)	
	<i>Intihaar</i> (suicide)	
	<i>Inghimasi</i> (raider)	
	Justification for targeting Civilians and non-combatants	
	Establishing an Islamic state.	
Indoctrination	‘Culturing’	Wiktorowicz (2005b)
	‘Influenced by ideas’	Sageman (2008)
	Diagnostic, prognostic frames	
	Motivational frames	
Charismatic authority	Ibn Taymiyya	
	Hassan al-Banna	
	Sayyid Qutb	
	Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab	
	Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj	
	Abdullah Azzam	
	Osama bin Laden	
	Abu Musab al-Zarqawi	
	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi	
Comradeship ties		
Obedience to authority		
The <i>Lucifer Effect</i>		

Appendix C

Afghan Arab Subsequent Involvement in Global Islamist Terrorism

Ser	Name	Short Biography
1	Abu Ali al-Maliki al-Jazairi	Former Algerian Afghan-Arab veteran, who stayed in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal, and until the fall of the Taliban post 9/11. He escaped to eastern Afghanistan where he trained foreign fighters on explosives and prepared suicide bombers. Killed in US air raid in 2001.
2	Adil Hadi al-Jaziri Hamlili	Algerian. Involved from the age of 11. Father and brother all involved. He claims he was involved with transferring illegal nuclear material to al-Qaeda (and governments of Iraq & Sudan) in 1995. Committed extremist; acknowledged <i>takfiri</i> .
3	Lakhdar Boumediene	Algerian Afghan Arab. Both a global and religious nationalist terrorist. Encouraged by a friend (Abu Mustafa Ahmad) to go to Afghanistan. Later involved with GIA and also fought in Bosnia with <i>Mujahhid</i> Brigade. Arrested and jailed in Algeria in 1999 (as member of FIS/GIA). Arrested in Bosnia in October 2001 as part of the Algerian Six Cell, plotting an attack against the US Embassy in Sarajevo. GTMO detainee, released in 2009.
4	Mukhtar Muhammad Belmukhtar	Former Algerian Afghan Arab, going to Afghanistan in 1991. Both a global and religious nationalist terrorist. Head of <i>Katibat al Mulathamoon</i> AQIM 4th region in the Sahel. Led attack on Algerian oil facility in 2012, and was the suspected planner behind hotel attack in Mali (in November 2015).
5	Mustafa Ahmad Hamlili	Former Algerian Afghan-Arab who fled Algeria in 1986 due to his political views (although no evidence of terrorism). Both a global and religious nationalist terrorist He went to Saudi Arabia and was recruited by the IIRO to go to Afghanistan, going in 1987. Later he was a member of GIA/GSPC. Linked with senior Al-Qaeda individuals. Knowledge of AQ Anthrax programme? GTMO detainee.
6	Juma Mohammed Abdul Latif Al Dosari	Bahraini member of al-Qaeda. Global jihadist. Visited the USA. Influenced by a radical shaykh at a mosque. First went to Afghanistan in 1989 and Bosnia in 1995. Returned to Afghanistan again after 9/11, to fight US. Member of Lakawanna Six Cell in US.
7	Mahmood Abu Halima	Egyptian. Adolescence spent within terrorist group EIG (although not personally involved with terrorism). Later moved to Germany as an immigrant in 1981 (aged 22). Became an Afghan-Arab (in 1988). Met and befriended Ramzi Yusuf and planned the 1993 WTC attack in New York. Jailed in 1994.

Ser	Name	Short Biography
8	Muhsin bin Musa (Ibrahim al-Muhajir)	Egyptian engineering graduate; 1980s Afghan Arab veteran. Moved to Sudan and later involved in 1998 Kenya/Tanzania bombings. Explosives expert, who was 'engineering martyrdom operations' and 'preparing martyrs'. Killed by US in Afghanistan in April 2006.
9	Omar Abdul Rahman	Egyptian. Known as the 'Blind Shaykh'. Imprisoned in Egypt as a member of the Islamic Group (not EIJ - but maintained close ties with Zawahiri). On his release from jail, he moved to Afghanistan. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, he moved to New York City, and was involved in the 1993 WTC attack in New York. Sentenced to life in a US federal prison for his role in the attack; died in February 2017. He has at least three sons involved in terrorism (Assad, Muhammad and Ahmad).
10	Mustafa Mahmood (Abdul Wakil al-Masri)	Veteran Egyptian jihadi. He was a veteran Afghan Arab and later a trainer in al-Furooq Camp. He moved to Sudan and organised Somalis against the US, and was directly involved with the 1998 Kenya/Tanzania US embassy bombings. Returned to Afghanistan once under Taliban control, and was killed fighting alongside AQ/Taliban forces against the US in 2001.
11	Mustafa Kamel Ibrahim (Abu Hamza al-Misri)	Former Egyptian Afghan Arab and later radical cleric who was living in London, as the Imam of the Finsbury Park Mosque. Inspired many Islamist terrorists. He was imprisoned in the UK for 7 years, and then extradited to the US on terrorism charges in 2012. Sentenced to life in prison on 9 January 2015.
12	Awf Muhammad Abdul Rahman	Egyptian Afghan Arab. Once Afghan civil war broke out, he moved to Tajikistan but later returned to Afghanistan and joined Bin Laden in Kandahar. Fought the US (post 9/11), and was killed by US forces near Jalalabad.
13	Ahmad Saeed Khudr	Egyptian immigrant to Canada. First went to Afghanistan in 1984 to fight the Soviets. Returned to Canada, but after 9/11, he went back to Afghanistan to support the Taliban and fight the US. He escaped but was killed (in 2003). His two sons were captured in Afghanistan and sent to GTMO prison.
14	Sami Muhammad Tufunkashi	Key Egyptian Afghan Arab veteran who had fought the Soviets. One of the twelve founders of al-Qaeda. Lived in Afghanistan after Taliban took power. Escaped to the FATA after the US invasion but later died using a BM rocket.
15	Abdullah Sami Muhammad Tufankashi	Egyptian immigrant living in Saudi Arabia. He moved to Afghanistan with his father, who became an Afghan Arab. Following in his father's footsteps, Abdullah trained in Kandahar, during Taliban rule. Killed in eastern Afghanistan by US forces.

Ser	Name	Short Biography
16	Zakariya (Abu Yahya al-Hawn)	Former Egyptian Afghan Arab veteran, who remained in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal. Became a trainer, and escaped after the US invasion to FATA, where he continued to train mujahideen. He later died of cancer.
17	Mustafa Hamid (Abu Walid al- Misri)	Egyptian. Author of <i>The Story of the Afghan-Arabs: From Entry to Afghanistan to the Final Exodus with Taliban</i> . Considered by al-Sharq al-Awsat as "a leading ideologue of al-Qaeda, and one of the first batch of Afghan-Arabs". Related by marriage to many prominent leaders of al-Qaeda. Fugitive al-Qaeda operative, Saif Adil, married his daughter.
18	Ramzi Mowafi	Former Egyptian doctor for Bin Laden. Went to Afghanistan in 1990. Explosives expert. Did chemical weapons (WMD) work for AQ. Mawafi escaped from an Egyptian prison in 2011, and in December 2011, he became the Emir of the new al-Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula. He was designated a terrorist by US State Department on 21 October 2014, for 'helping to arrange money and weapons to support violent extremist activity.'
19	Sayyid Imam Abdul Aziz al- Sharif (Dr Fadl)	Egyptian plastic surgeon specializing in burn injuries. Played a senior management role in EIJ. Went to Afghanistan in 1984/85 and worked for Kuwaiti al-Hilal Hospital in Peshawar - and in 1986, secured a job for Ayman al-Zawahiri. Became an ideologue and authored ' <i>The Compendium of the Pursuit of Divine Knowledge</i> ' - later a core jihadi reference. Later moved to Yemen (1994) and after 9/11 was arrested and imprisoned for 3 years. In 2004, he was returned to Egypt where he denounced al-Qaeda and terrorism.
20	Ahmad Omar Abdul Rahman (Saif)	Egyptian. Son of Omar Abdul Rahman. Former Afghan Arab and member of EIG, and later member of al-Qaeda. Killed by a US drone strike in Afghanistan in October 2011.
21	Ahmad Hasan Jamil Sulaiman	Jordanian Afghan Arab from 1989, and has been associated with IIRO (NGO) and senior al-Qaeda operatives ever since. Arrested in Pakistan in 2002 and sent to GTMO.
22	Khalid Mahmood Abdul Wahhab	Jordanian. In 1985, he moved to PAK to work with JT. In 1986, he worked for Maktab al-Khidmat under Abdullah Azzam. Ostensibly worked for HIF (NGO) while continuing his relationship with al-Qaeda from 1988 – 2002. Sent to GTMO.
23	Abdul Latif al Banna	Jordanian. Recruited by Dr Samih Zidan in 1990, to travel to Afghanistan to fight jihad against the Soviets, working for the IIRO (NGO). Later went to the UK (1991) and worked with radical cleric Abu Qatada. Arrested in Gambia in November 2002. Associated with al-Qaeda.

Ser	Name	Short Biography
24	Muhammad Sadiq Odeh	Jordanian of Palestinian origin. Involved in 1998 US embassy bombing in Nairobi. Born in Saudi, raised in Jordan. Holds a Bachelor's degree in engineering from Manila University. 'Radicalised' in Philippines. Went to Afghanistan in 1990. Joined AQ in 1992, served as 'technical advisor' to Nairobi cell. Swore <i>bayah</i> to Bin Laden. Implicated in Somalia killing of US soldiers. Sentenced to life imprisonment in October 2001.
25	Iyad Adil al-Qunnah (Abu Bakr al-Falastini)	Jordanian of Palestinian origin. Went to Afghanistan in 1980s to fight the Soviets. Once Afghan civil war broke out, he left but returned after the Taliban took control (1994/5). He fought the US (post 9/11) and was later killed by US forces.
26	Khalid Shaykh Muhammad (KSM)	Kuwaiti (Pakistani decent). A veteran Afghan Arab (from 1987) and involved in 1993 WTC bombing. Veteran of Bosnian jihad. Member of AQ. The principal architect of the 9/11 attacks. Head of AQ Mil committee. Family involved in extremism, including 3 x brothers, 6 x cousins, and 1 x nephew (Ramzi Yusuf). High Value Detainee in GTMO
27	Ramzi Ahmad Yusuf (Abdul Basit Mahmoud Abdul Karim)	Kuwaiti (of Baluchi decent). Born in Kuwait. Nephew of KSM. Studied in Swansea, UK. Became an Afghan Arab in 1988, by attending training. Met and befriended Mahmood Abu Halima. Later together, they planned the 1993 WTC attack in New York (and Bojinka plot). Was never a member of AQ. Jailed for life in America in 1998.
28	Wadih al-Hajj (Abdul Sabur)	Lebanese. El Hage was born in 1960 into a Catholic family in Lebanon, but grew up in Kuwait, where he converted to Islam. In 1978, he moved to the US and studied at a university in Louisiana. In (1984?) he left the US and went to Afghanistan - acting as an educator. He returned to the US in 1985, but in early 1992, he moved his family to the Sudan and began working as a secretary for Osama bin Laden. He was involved (as an engineer) in the 1998 AQ bombings of the US embassies in Kenya & Tanzania, and later jailed in the US.
29	Abu Faraj al-Libi	Libyan. In 1989, he travelled to Afghanistan. Later he was the operational chief of al-Qaeda. He managed al-Qaeda operations in Iraq (after KSM's capture). Involved with the 1998 East Africa attacks and 9/11 planning. Arrested in Pakistan in 2005. Sent to GTMO.
30	Ziyad Faraj al-Bah (Assad Allah al-Libi)	Libyan. Went to Afghanistan in 1990, and later moving to Tajikistan (with Khattab). Lived in Sudan (with Bin Laden) and later returned to Afghanistan. Fought the US, later escaping into the FATA, and joined Abu Layth al-Libi. Killed in Afghanistan.

Ser	Name	Short Biography
31	Ali Ammar al-Rufayi (Abu Layth al-Libi)	Libyan Afghan Arab who returned to Libya to fight the Gaddafi regime (religious nationalist - LIFG). Escaped Libya and was later imprisoned in Saudi Arabia. Moved to Afghanistan in 1997, and joined al-Qaeda. He was killed on 29 January 2008, as AQ's No.3 operator.
32	Ahmad Muhammad Ajaj	Palestinian asylum seeker to the US. In 1992, he went to Khaldan training camp for military training. Involved in the 1993 WTC bombing, although he was in prison at the time. Convicted and sentenced to life in prison in the US.
33	Omar Yusuf Juma (Abu Anas al-Shami)	Palestinian expatriate raised in Kuwait. Trained in Afghanistan for three months in 1990 (Afghan Arab), learning to use weapons and explosives. In 1991, he was forced to depart Kuwait and return to Jordan, where he was Imam at the Murad Mosque. He went to Bosnia in 1995, and became a radical cleric. He was imprisoned in Jordan in 2003, and 'believed that the Americans came to Iraq to kill Muslims, and they had a right to defend themselves.' He went to the <i>umra</i> in Saudi Arabia before disappearing to Iraq. Served on Shura of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. He was killed in Baghdad on 17 September 2004 by US forces.
34	Zayn al-Abidin Muhammad Husayn (Abu Zubaydah)	Palestinian. Received militant training in Afghanistan in late 1980s. He arrived in Afghanistan in January 1991. He was inspired by the Palestinian cause. Following the first Afghan jihad he decided to dedicate his life to jihad. He was recruited by al-Qaeda in 1997 and later was on the Shura Council. Helped facilitate al-Qaeda attacks outside Afghanistan. Former Director of Khaldan Training Camp in Afghanistan. Now a High Value (GTMO) Detainee.
35	Omar Mahmood Uthman (Abu Qatada)	Palestinian. Abu Qatada lived in Jordan until 1989 when he fled to Afghanistan. There he served as a professor of <i>Sharia</i> law sciences. He arrived in the UK and became a radical preacher in London, and had connections with the GIA in Algeria. Both a global and religious nationalist terrorist. Extradited to Jordan in 2013, and later was found not guilty of terrorism charges.
36	Osama Azmarai	According to Hamid and Farrall (2015), Osama Azmarai was a Saudi Afghan Arab, with an Uzbek background (p. 181), who later established his own camp near Jalalabad. He worked closely with KSM and Ramzi Yusuf, including the 1993 WTC attack. He was anti-US before al-Qaeda, and planned with KSM the failed 'Bojinka' hijackings in SE Asia. He no tangible link al-Qaeda. He was firmly rooted in the 'Jalalabad School' that 'pioneered attacking America and planted the idea of 9/11 with Bin Laden' (p. 322). Arrested in Malaysia in 1995 by the US.

Ser	Name	Short Biography
37	Abdullah al-Hudhayf	Saudi Afghan Arab and former university student in the US in early 1980s (and held very anti American views). Went to Afghanistan in late 1980s. Later involved in an attack on a Saudi prison interrogator, in revenge of the alleged torture of his father, brother, and friends. He was subsequently arrested and allegedly tortured to death (on 12 August 1995). His action prompted a revenge attack in the form of the 1995 Riyadh bombing.
38	Khalid al-Sa'id	Saudi Afghan Arab and later part of a group that carried out a terrorist attack in Riyadh, 13 November 1995. Killed seven & injured 37 Americans. Arrested in Saudi Arabia, and beheaded.
39	Riyad Sulaiman Ishak al-Hajiri	Saudi Afghan Arab and later part of a group that carried out a terrorist attack in Riyadh, 13 November 1995. Killed seven and injured 37 Americans. Arrested in Saudi Arabia, and beheaded.
40	Muslih Ali Ayad al-Shamrani	Saudi Afghan Arab and possibly a veteran of Bosnian War. Leader of a group that carried out a terrorist attack in Riyadh, 13 November 1995. Killed seven and injured 37 Americans. Arrested in Saudi Arabia and beheaded.
41	Musa bin Muhammad bin Yahya al-Qarni	Saudi. Former Muslim Brother and Afghan Arab. Travelled to Afghanistan ‘in the early days of the Afghan jihad’ (1985) in order ‘to attend an academic course in Peshawar.’ He later became an Islamic scholar for Bin Laden. Supported the jihad in Iraq. Now living as an academic in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
42	Fahd Mahdi Ahmad Hamdan al-Hassan al-Shehri	Saudi foreign fighter with a long career fighting alongside al-Qaeda in Tajikistan, Afghanistan (Afghan Arab), Bosnia, and Iraq. In 1999, he was with Bin Laden and Abu Zubaydah in Khaldan Guest House in Afghanistan. As of late August 2006, US forces had arrested, detained, and debriefed him.
43	Yusuf al-Uyayri	Veteran Saudi Afghan Arab from 1991. Both a global and religious nationalist terrorist. Briefly a bodyguard to Bin Laden. After the 1996 Khobar bombings he was imprisoned (and tortured?) for two years. Later became a committed AQAP cleric who wrote the <i>Crusade in Iraq Series</i> . Killed by Saudi forces in Saudi Arabia in Turba/Hail in late May 2003.
44	Abu Khalil al-Madani	Former Saudi Arab Afghan, Fought with Bin Laden in Jaji. Part of al-Qaeda shura council. A fugitive, he reappeared in al-Qaeda video in 2013 and 2014, discussing <i>Jabhat al-Nusrah</i> and ISIL.
45	Wa'il Hamza Abdul Fatih Julaidan	Saudi. Worked in US at Tuscon (Arizona) Islamic Centre. Helped establish Maktab al-Khidmat. Worked for Saudi NGOs, including the Saudi Joint Relief Committee (SJRC). Served as part of the Arab and Islamic Shura Council in Afghanistan, and later helped to establish al-Qaeda.

Ser	Name	Short Biography
46	Abu Sulaiman al-Makki (Khalid al-Harbi)	Former Saudi teacher at Holy Mosque in Mecca. Former Afghan-Arab and friend of Abdullah Azzam. Wounded by Serb forces in June 1992 (Battle of Tishin). Was permanently paralysed from waist down. Later involved with al-Qaeda and featured in post 9/11 video (in December 2001), praising the 9/11 attacks with Bin Laden. Surrendered to Saudi authorities in 2004. ³⁵²
47	Osama Muhammad bin Laden	Saudi (of Yemeni decent). Financier for Afghan-Arabs and Maktab al-Khidamat. Later leader of al-Qaeda. Issued famous 1996 and 1998 <i>fatwas</i> . Involved in the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania; the 2000 USS <i>Cole</i> bombing in Yemen; and the 9/11 attacks. Killed in 2011 in Abbottabad (Pakistan) by US Seals.
48	Muhammad Haydar Zammar	A Syrian who moved to Germany with his family aged 10. Later involved in the Afghan jihad in 1991. Went to Bosnia in 1995, and later recruited some of the 9/11 pilots of the hijacked planes. Captured in Morocco in late 2001, he was sent to Syria (not GTMO) for interrogation. Was freed in exchange for Syrian army officers, in late 2013 during the Syrian civil war (co-ordinated by Ahrar al-Sham),
49	Raswan Namoos (Abu Firas al-Suri)	Syria, born in Damascus in 1949. Joined anti-regime militants in 1980. In mid-1980s, he moved in Afghanistan and acted as a trainer with mujahideen. Later became a member of the al-Qaeda Military Shura Council. Moved to Yemen in 2003, and returned to Syria (as al-Qaeda representative in Syria) in order to mediate between <i>Jabhat al-Nusra</i> and ISIS (now IS). He failed, and officially joined <i>Jabhat al-Nusra</i> as their spokesman. Killed in an airstrike in Syria in April 2016.
50	Muhammad Ayman Aboul-Tout (Abul-Abbas al-Shami)	Syrian, involved in the 1980s Islamist uprising in Syria, within the ranks of the Fighting Vanguard, a now-defunct 1970s Muslim Brotherhood splinter faction that was influenced by the militant ideologue Sayyid Qutb. Escaped to Afghanistan in the 1980s as an Afghan Arab, and later became involved with al-Qaeda. In Syrian civil war, he became a member of Ahrar ash-Shaam and the Islamic Front's top Sharia ideologue. Narrowly survived a suicide attack (9 September 2014) that killed majority of the leadership of Ahraar ash-Shaam.
51	Baha Mustafa al-Jughl	Former Syrian Afghan Arab, who was later arrested as a terrorist suspect in Pakistan in the early 2000s. In the Syrian civil war, he held a leadership position within Ahrar ash-Shaam.

³⁵² Not to be confused with Kuwaiti Sulaiman al-Ghayth who appeared in a post 9/11 al-Qaeda video (on 10 October 2001).

Ser	Name	Short Biography
52	Mustafa Abdul Qadir Nassir (Abu Musab al-Suri)	Syrian. According to Lia (2008b) Abu Musab al-Suri, author of a 1600 page treatise, <i>Call to Global Islamic Resistance</i> , 'advocated mass casualty terrorism in the West' (p. 3) and that 'confrontation with America is fundamental' (p. 412). It is understood he is currently (2016) in a Syrian prison.
53	Muhammad Loay Bayazid (Abu Rida al-Suri)	Former Syrian Afghan Arab. Born in Syria in 1964, and moved to US as teenager. Started university (engineer undergraduate) in 1982, and in 1985 went to Afghanistan. Allegedly later involved with al-Qaeda plot to obtain uranium, and membership of BIF. Never indicted in the US, last seen in Sudan in 2006.
54	Mustafa Setmariam Nassir (Abu Musab al-Suri)	Syrian Afghan Arab from 1987-92. In 1991, he wrote a book, <i>Global Islamic Resistance</i> , advocating global terrorism against the West. Despite his emphasis on 'global jihad' - according to Wagemakers (2012: 80), al-Suri 'contends that the rulers of the Muslim world are apostate infidels.'
55	Abdullah Omar	Tunisian Afghan Arab who left Tunisia in 1990 following the Tunisian government's crackdown on opposition groups. Both a global and religious nationalist terrorist (Tunisian Combat Group). Familial ties to terrorism, including his son (who is GTMO detainee). In 1997, he was a Koran instructor in Afghanistan. Linked with al-Qaeda. GTMO detainee.
56	Abdul Rahim Husayn Mohammed Al Nashiri	Yemeni. Long time member of al-Qaeda. Pledged oath of allegiance (<i>bayat</i>) to Bin Laden. Afghan-Arab. Veteran of Tajikistan, Chechnya, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan. Involved in the attack on the USS <i>Cole</i> in 2000 in Aden, Yemen. His cousin (Jihad Muhammad Ali al-Harazi) was a suicide bomber in the attack on the US embassy in Kenya in 1998. Involved with planning of 9/11 attacks. GTMO High Value Detainee.
57	Ayman Saeed Abdullah Batarfi	Yemeni Afghan Arab and medical doctor. He first went to Afghanistan in 1988 and fought the Soviets (as an Afghan Arab). He later became the chief medical advisor for the al-Wafa, an al-Qaeda linked NGO. He also assisted Yazid Sufaat, one of AQ's anthrax researchers in Afghanistan. GTMO detainee.
58	Abdul Majid Aziz al-Zindani	Yemeni. Al-Zindani was a 'radical' cleric that recruited Yemenis for the 1980s Afghan jihad. He was present in Peshawar and Afghanistan (Musa Qarni, 2006). He continued to support militant activities, including terrorism.
59	Ibrahim Muhammad Balawi	Yemeni Arab Afghan in late 1980s; Bosnia in 1992; Afghanistan under the Taliban (with al-Qaeda) in 2000. Became a prolific jihadi recruiter in Yemen). Killed on 5 December 2001.

Ser	Name	Short Biography
60	Ali Hamza Ahmad Sulaiman al Bahlul	Veteran Yemeni Afghan Arab. First went to Afghanistan from 1990-1993, and returned to AF in 1999. He swore <i>bayat</i> to UBL, served as Bin Laden's personal secretary, operated the al-Qaeda media center, and was leader of the Dirty 30 group of Arabs. Convicted in a US court in 2008, which was overturned in 2013. GTMO detainee.
61	Marwan Qasim Jawan (Abu Ali al- Yafi)	Yemeni Afghan Arab and veteran Chechen jihad. Recruited and facilitated at least 10 Yemeni jihadis for al-Qaeda. He was once a Bin Laden bodyguard. Al-Yafi was reportedly killed during a coalition raid in Kandahar, in 2001.

Appendix D

Afghan Arab Subsequent Involvement in Religious Nationalist Terrorism

Ser	Name	Short Biography
1	Ahmad Fadhl Nazir al-Khalalah (aka Abu Musab al-Zarqawi)	Jordanian. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi went to Afghanistan in 1989 (Afghan Arab). In 1992 he was jailed in Jordan with Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (on terrorism charges). Released 1999. Recidivist. Returned to AF & established his own training camp (near Harat). Later led Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and was killed in June 2006.
2	Khalid Mustafa al-Aruri (aka Abu Qassam, Abu Ashraf)	Jordanian. Brother-in-law of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, whom he worked with in Afghanistan from 1989-1993, in the Herat camp. Returned to Jordan, and was subsequently imprisoned (with al-Zarqawi) from 1993-1999. On his release, he returned to Herat camp in Afghanistan, and later was a key liaison with Ansar al-Islam in northern Iraq. Worked in Iraq after 2003 invasion, and later fled to Iran. Was imprisoned, but later absconded (as at 28 July 2005).
3	Abu Khabab al-Filistini	Palestinian/Jordanian. Close friend of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. First went to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets, but stayed on to fight the communists, including at the battle of Jalalabad. He also worked with al-Zarqawi in the Herat camp. Returned to Jordan, but fled to avoid arrest. Went to Chechnya to fight, but arrested in Azerbaijan. He returned to Herat camp in Afghanistan, and later was among the first to join the jihad in Iraq. He was later killed by US forces.
4	Yusuf al-Uyayri	See Appendix C, Serial 43.
5	Asim Muhammad Tahir al-Barqawi (aka Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi)	Jordanian. Famous influential Jordanian Palestinian ideologue. Early years spent in Kuwait (expatriate). Later moved to Saudi Arabia to study salafi writings. Wrote important book: <i>Millat Ibrahim</i> . Participated in military training in Afghanistan during Afghan jihad. He was not a fighter, but spent his time teaching and writing (ideologue). Evicted (with all other Palestinians) by Kuwait after the Gulf war (for Palestinian support to Iraq) and moved back to Jordan, where he met Abu Musab al-Zarqawi again, and due to their political agitation, in 1994 both were imprisoned until 1999. Maqdisi continues to be a salafist ideologue, living in Jordan, intermittently in and out of jail.
6	Kamal Algerian	Algerian. Arab Afghan who returned to Algeria, and continued jihad in his home country. Was killed by Algerian security forces in 1993.

Ser	Name	Short Biography
7	Abdul Hadi (aka Abu Sumayya)	Algerian. His home town was centre of Islamic Front & other militant groups. A sermon of Shaikh Ali bin Haj tilted him towards religion and jihad. He went to Afghanistan & later returned to Algeria in 1992. Was killed by Algerian security forces in May 1993.
8	Nasim Islam	Algerian. Arab Afghan who returned to Algeria in 1992, and continued jihad in his home country. Was killed by Algerian security forces in 1993.
9	Al-Qaqaa	Algerian. Arab Afghan who returned to Algeria, and continued jihad in his home country. Was killed by Algerian security forces in 1993.
10	Abu Sariya	Algerian. Known as the 'Lion of Khost.' Arab Afghan who returned to Algeria in 1992, and continued jihad in his home country. Was killed by Algerian security forces on 11 December 1992.
11	Salih ad-Deen	Algerian. Arab Afghan who returned to Algeria, and continued jihad in his home country. Was killed by Algerian security forces in 1993.
12	Abdul Muqtadir Abu Sayyaf	Arab Afghan who started his jihadi activities in Algeria. Went to AF in 1991 & then returned to Algeria, and continued jihad in his home country. Was killed by Algerian security forces in 1993.
13	Muhammad Yusuf	Algerian. Arab Afghan who started his jihadi activities in Algeria. Went to AF for 'a few months' & then returned to Algeria, and continued jihad in his home country. Was killed by Algerian security forces in 1993.
14	Lakhdar Boumediene	See Appendix C, Serial 3.
15	Tayyib al-Afghani	Algerian. Former Afghan-Arab who returned to Algeria in early 1990s. Early GIA leader, who was captured in SE Algeria in 1992.
16	Sid Ahmad Murad	Algerian. Former Afghan-Arab who returned to Algeria in early 1990s. Joined GIA & was killed in March 1994.
17	Sharif Ghusmi (aka Abu Abdullah Ahmad)	Algerian. Former Afghan-Arab who returned to Algeria in early 1990s. Became leader of Katiba al Mawt death squads, and later leader within GIA. He was killed in September 1994 (aged 26).
18	Karmar Khaban	Algerian. Former Afghan-Arab commander who returned to Algeria in early 1990s. Former Algerian Army officer and key FIS leader. Involved in Bosnian jihad (role unknown).

Ser	Name	Short Biography
19	Boudjemaa Bounoua (aka Abdullah Anas)	An Algerian, who was an Afghan-Arab from 1983 until 1992. He was a founder of the Maktab al-Khidmat in Peshawar. He became a principle military commander to Ahmad Massoud (Northern Alliance). He married the daughter of Sheikh Abdullah Azzam. He is on the council in exile of the FIS, the Algerian Islamist Party, and lives in London, having gained political asylum.
20	Abdul Hamid al Ghazzawi	Libyan. AQ associate. At the Tariq Bin Ziyad mosque in Tripoli, he met extremists (Najib al-Akhdar, Yusif al-Bukhari, Iz al-Din Balkhayr, & Ammar al- Qut) who distributed tapes that preached jihad. In 1988, he went to AF as an Afghan-Arab. He went to Sudan (1994) and then to Afghanistan again to the LIFG guesthouse in Jalalabad. More LIFG than AQ.
21	Abdul Rauf Umar al Qusin	Libyan. In 1990, the detainee deserted the Libyan military and fled to Tunisia where he met Abu Idriss (aka Abu Anas). Idriss convinced al-Qusin to go to Afghanistan for jihad against the Soviets (1990?). At the end of 1990, detainee remained with the Taliban to fight other groups in Afghanistan. He admitted he was a member of the LIFG while in AF. More LIFG than AQ.
22	Mustafa Setmariam Nassir	Also known as Abu Musab al-Suri. See Appendix C, Serial 54.
23	Abdullah Umar	See Appendix C, Serial 55.
24	Mukhtar Muhammad Belmukhtar	See Appendix C, Serial 4.
25	Mustafa Ahmad Hamlili	See Appendix C, Serial 5.
26	Tayyib Masoudi (aka Tayyib al-Afghani)	Algerian. Former Afghan Arab. In November 1991, he attacked an Algerian army post, killed 15 conscripts & stole weapons. Killed in Biska (Algeria) in December 1991.
27	Abdul Rahman Dahane (aka Dahane al-Afghani)	Algerian. Former Afghan Arab. Became the most prominent Algerian Afghan Arab. Involved in a November 1991 attack on an Algerian army post, that killed 15 conscripts & stole weapons. He was captured in 1992 in Magrane, El-Oued, and executed in 1993.

Ser	Name	Short Biography
28	Abu Abdullah al-Sadiq	Former Libyan Islamist before going to Afghanistan in 1988. One of the founders of the LIFG after 1990 (not al-Qaeda).
29	Abu Mundhir al-Sa'idi	Former Libyan Islamist before going to Afghanistan in 1988. One of the founders of the LIFG after 1990 (not al-Qaeda).
30	Abdul Ghaffar al-Duwadi	Former Libyan Islamist before going to Afghanistan in 1988. One of the founders of the LIFG after 1990 (not al-Qaeda).
31	Salah Fathi bin Sulaiman	Former Libyan Islamist before going to Afghanistan in 1988. One of the founders of the LIFG after 1990 (not al-Qaeda).
32	Abdul Wahhab (Abu Idris)	Former Libyan Islamist before going to Afghanistan in 1988. One of the founders of the LIFG after 1990 (not al-Qaeda).
33	Iwad al-Zawawi	Libyan. Student of Islamic Law, and graduate from Tripoli University. Former Afghan Arab, went to Afghanistan in 1986. One of the founders of the LIFG after 1990.
34	Ali Ammar al-Rufayi	Also known as Abu Layth al-Libi. See Appendix C, Serial 31.
35	Omar Mahmood Uthman	Also known as Abu Qatada. See Appendix C, Serial 35.
36	Muhammad bin Isa bin Musa al-Rifa'i (aka Abu Hammam al-Filistini)	Jordanian doctor of Palestinian origin, who was an Afghan Arab from the mid-1980s, practicing medicine & da`wa (missionary) activities to support the Afghan jihad. In the early 1990s, he returned to Jordan and helped created a religious nationalist group - <i>al-Da`wa wa-al-Jihad</i> . He was jailed for four months, and on his release he returned to Peshawar (1992). On 3 April 1993, his Peshawar-based associates swore loyalty to him as the caliph. In 1996 he fled to London, and in 2006, he was detained, before being released on health grounds, dying in March 2014.
37	Abdul Aziz al-Muqrin	Saudi. Al-Muqrin went to Afghanistan in 1990 and subsequently fought in Bosnia, and Algeria in 1994; In 1995 he was arrested in Ethiopia and accused of taking part in a failed assassination of Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak. He was extradited to Saudi Arabia where he served a two-year prison term. He was released in summer 2001, and returned to Afghanistan after 9/11 and fought against the US-led coalition. Became head of AQAP in March 2004, and was killed in Saudi Arabia in June 2004.

Appendix E
Veteran Arab Foreign Fighter Further Involvement in Defensive Jihads

Table 1

*Veteran Afghan Arab Involvement in Iraq (post 2003)**

Ser	Name	Kunya	Nationality
1	Muhammad Hardan		Iraqi
2	Ahmad Fadhil Nazir al-Khalalah	Abu Musab al-Zarqawi	Jordanian
3	Khalid Mustafa al-Aruri	Abu Qassam	Jordanian
4	Mustafa Ramadan Darwish	Abu Muhammad	Lebanon
5	Abu Faraj al-Libi		Libyan
6	Abu Khabab al-Filistini		Palestinian
7	Omar Yusuf Juma	Abu Anas al-Shami	Palestinian
8	Musa Muhammad Yahya al-Qarni		Saudi
9	Fahd Mahdi al-Hassan al-Shehri		Saudi
10	Yusuf al-Uyayri		Saudi
11	Abu Raghd al-Jazrawi	Abu Raghd al-Utaybi	Saudi
12	Osama Muhammad bin Ladin		Saudi (Y)

* Involvement includes physical and/or ideological support.

Table 2

*Veteran Afghan Arab Involvement in Syria (post 2011)**

Ser	Name	Kunya	Nationality
1	Saif Areef	Abdullah al-Jazari	Algerian
2	Muhammad Shawqi al Islambouli		Egyptian
3	Abu Hafs al-Misri		Egyptian
4	Ayman al-Zawahiri		Egyptian
5	Ahmad Salama Mabrook	Abu Faraj al-Misri	Egyptian
6	Abu Abdullah al-Muhajjir		Egyptian
7	Abu Hani al-Masri	Abdul Rahman al-Misri	Egyptian
8	Muhammad Ibrahim al-Saghir	Abu Abdullah	Egyptian
9	Abdul Aziz al-Qatari		Iraqi**
10	Asim Muhammad Tahir al-Barqawi	Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi	Jordanian
11	Abdul Hakim Belhaj		Libyan
12	Abu Khalil al-Madani		Saudi Arabian
13	Ibrahim al-Bawadi	Saqr al-Izz al-Jihad	Saudi Arabian
14	Abdul Malik al-Ihsai	Abu Leen	Saudi Arabian
15	Zaid al-Badawi	Abu Ammar al-Makki	Saudi Arabian
16	Abu Muhammad al-Halabi		Saudi Arabian
17	Abu Khalid al-Suri		Syrian
18	Raswan Namoos	Abu Firas al-Suri	Syrian
19	Muhammad Ayman Aboul-Tout	Abul-Abbas al-Shami	Syrian
20	Baha Mustafa al-Jughl	Abu Hamza al-Jughl	Syrian
21	Muhammad Haydar Zammar		Syrian
22	Abu Basir al-Tartusi		Syrian

* Involvement includes physical and/or ideological support.

** Iraqi national despite *kunya* of al-Qatari.

Table 3

*Veteran Arab Foreign Fighters from Iraqi Jihad Involvement in Syria (post 2011)**

Ser	Name	Kunya	Nationality
1	Abu Omar al-Shami		Foreign Arab
2	Omar Abu Qatam		Jordanian
3	Riyadh Hudayb	Abu Hamza al-Urduni	Jordanian
4	Iyad al-Tubaysi	Abu Julaybib	Jordanian
5	Mohammed al-Dosari	Abu Talha al-Kuwait	Kuwaiti
6	Abdul Ghani Jawhar	Abu Ali	Lebanese
7	Ibrahim Bakhaytan al-Hamzi		Moroccan
8	Khalid al-Suwayd	Abu Hamaam	Saudi Arabian
9	Ahmad Abdullah al-Shaya		Saudi Arabian
10	Abu Khalid al-Suri		Syrian
11	Hashim al-Shaykh	Abu Jabir	Syrian
12	Abu Muhammad al-Gholani		Syrian
13	Abu Muhammad al-Ayaat		Syrian
14	Hassan Abood		Syrian
15	Abu Hammam al-Suri		Syrian
16	Hamdi Thawadi	Hamdi al-Tunisi	Tunisian
17	Boubakr al-Hakim	Abu Muqaatil al-Tunisi	Tunisian

* Involvement includes physical and/or ideological support.

Appendix F

Analysis of CPOST Suicide Attacks in Syria (2012-2015)

Chapter 6 highlighted the 46 ‘suicide attacks’ listed, on the Chicago Project on Security and Threats (CPOST) Suicide Attack Database, as attacks against ‘civilian’ targets, occurring in Syria between 2012 and 2015. Having removed three duplicate entries and three with no clearly identifiable target, out of the remaining 40 attacks, only 28 could reasonably be considered as suicide attacks targeting civilians and non-combatants, with the remaining 12 attacks being more consistent with defensive jihad, against combatant targets. This appendix is included to demonstrate the difficulty in interpreting self-sacrificial attacks (despite the best intentions of those who compile the data), and the care needed before drawing findings and conclusions based on such data. Below are the results of the analysis of the 46 CPOST ‘suicide attacks,’ where the ‘target type’ was classified by CPOST as ‘civilian.’

Table 1
Self-sacrificial attacks consistent with defensive jihad

Ser	Attack ID	Attack Date	Supporting Media Depiction of Target
1	-170414947	2012-03-05	Car bomb in Deraa that wounded 20 ‘including security force personnel.’
2	-2120898580	2012-06-14	‘A security complex overlooking the garage was damaged. The bomb went off near security offices, damaging the apparent target as well as the shrine. It was not immediately clear whether the shrine was the intended target.’
3	-2143985988	2012-10-03	‘The officers’ club and the hotel were almost completely destroyed. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights … said …most of them members of the regime forces.’
4	1393729660	2012-11-28	‘Attacks took place in Jaramana, where pro-regime militiamen have set up armed groups to defend the town against rebels.’

Ser	Attack ID	Attack Date	Supporting Media Depiction of Target
5	1428079662	2013-10-21	'Suicide bombers detonated at the gas line and a regime base outside Sadad and then entered the town.'
6	-976959534	2013-11-20	The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said opposition forces had entered Bassel Hospital to capture a (Hizibullah) wounded officer but were unsuccessful.
7	-147281505	2013-12-20	Al-Kindi Hospital. 'The Al-Kindi Hospital is located in a valuable strategic point in Aleppo countryside and ... under the Syrian Army control and clashes continue.' 2 x Iraqi foreign fighters (Khattab al-Iraqi & Abu Turab al-Iraqi).
8	1405965104	2014-03-11	Hadaya Hotel (Qamishly). 'Hotel in the city which was being used as a local Kurdish administration office.' Saudi bomber (Abu Hamam al-Najdi).
9	1427906664	2014-10-10	Attacked the Grand mosque in Kobani. Suicide bomb - no casualties. Part of "heavy clashes between Kurdish forces and Islamic State fighters." Tunisian bomber (Abu Mahmood al-Tunisi).
10	1443114679	2014-10-13	Abu Noor al-Jazai'ri (Saudi Arabia) attacked a bus station in Kobani as part of "heavy clashes between Kurdish forces and Islamic State fighters."
11	220425044	2014-12-29	'Five employees and four regime troops guarding the Firqlos gas plant were killed in a car bomb blast near the facility in the east of Homs province' said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Two Moroccan bombers (Abu Abdullah al-Maghribi & Abu Ayoob al-Maghribi) involved in attack.
12	1439321480	2015-07-05	Al-Hasakah thermal power plant - strategic target.

Table 2

Self-sacrificial attacks consistent with Islamist terrorism

Ser	Attack ID	Attack Date	Supporting Media Depiction of Target
1	1286459136	2012-10-21	French run hospital
2	1428346952	2013-01-18	Mosque
3	366163269	2013-03-21	Mosque
4	419829513	2013-04-08	Central bank in Damascus
5	-178029777	2013-06-08	Bank in Damascus
6	-958440792	2013-06-27	Greek Orthodox church
7	433590465	2013-07-08	Regime controlled area of Homs
8	1772105982	2013-08-22	Pro government journalist
9	-1867325880	2013-11-04	A Shiite school
10	36219496	2013-11-11	Residential area in Kobani, although unknown target. Saudi suicide bomber was Dr Mashara al-Qasami.
11	478816730	2013-11-26	Bus station in Sumariyah
12	-26866722	2013-12-03	'The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights ... said that the target appeared to be a government building.'
13	1428337179	2013-12-22	Shiite school children.
14	-169017205	2014-01-02	Residential area Al Kafat Hamaa.
15	-2097645099	2014-02-20	Syrian refugee camp.
16	1405624820	2014-05-02	Alawite residential area in Jibrin
17	1707119703	2014-05-02	Alawite residential area in Humairi
18	-1060000123	2014-06-02	Non-Arab FF (French)
19	-326953823	2014-08-09	Suicide car bomb in Ghranij (Deir Azzoor). Saudi foreign fighter (Abu Mujahhid al-Jazrawi).
20	677680545	2014-09-30	Ekrimah primary school - Alawite children
21	1128660167	2015-03-20	Kurdish New Year - suicide attack

Ser	Attack ID	Attack Date	Supporting Media Depiction of Target
22	-752085471	2015-06-25	Al Jazeera's Nisreen El Shamayleh, reporting from Amman, said several ISIL fighters "carried out suicide attacks; decimated themselves and caused a lot of casualties" after entering the city.
23	-1236149507	2015-08-29	Suicide attack in Alawite neighbourhood of Homs
24	1447968890	2015-10-08	Suicide bombing of Aleppo market
25	342352671	2015-12-11	Suicide attack on a hospital, market and residential area in Kurdish controlled territory (Hasakah)
26	-622581575	2015-12-12	Syrian suicide bomber - attacks Alawite area in Homs
27	596139371	2015-12-28	Alawite neighbourhood of Homs
28	-1911637284	2015-12-30	Suicide attacks in three restaurants in Qamishli

Table 3

Unknown intended target

Ser	Attack ID	Attack Date	Supporting Media Depiction of Target
1	1431361176	2014-01-03	National Hospital in Jasmin City. 'Army managed to explode the vehicle with RPG rockets before it reaches its goal.' Saudi bomber (Ibrahim al-Arif)
2	-1932641626	2014-04-09	Attack on Alawite neighbourhood. 'Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 3, 2015 - still not confirmed whether if they were fighters allied to regime forces or civilians.' Libyan bomber (Abu Abdullah as-Salmiya).
3	1820843504	2015-02-21	According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights 'the explosion that hit the town of Qardaha ... two women and two soldiers were killed in the attack.'

Table 4

Duplicate entries

Ser	Attack ID	Attack Date	Supporting Media Depiction of Target
1	1405541428	2013-03-22	Duplicate of attack ID 366163269
2	1416424873	2014-10-01	Duplicate of attack ID 677680545
3	1667842542	2015-12-11	Duplicate of attack ID 342352671