

Understanding Jihadi Proto-States

by Brynjar Lia

Abstract

The rise of the self-proclaimed “Islamic State” in Iraq and Syria has ushered to the forefront the issue of territories governed by jihadi groups. This article offers an overview of previous and current “jihadi proto-states”, discusses their characteristics and common features, and explores ways of understanding their ultra-aggressive behaviour. Although attempts to form proto-states have been a constant feature of contemporary jihadism over the past 25 years, in the post-2011 Middle East, such attempts have multiplied and succeeded to a greater extent than in the past. These proto-states share at least four distinct characteristics: they are intensely ideological, internationalist, territorially expansive, and irredentist. They also devote significant resources to effective, if harsh, governance. The article argues that forming Islamic emirates and proto-states represents a bid for increased power and influence vis-à-vis rival Islamists. The uncompromising strategy pursued by jihadi proto-states is a result of the intense rivalry with other Islamist rebels as well as the proto-state’s dependence on external (“global jihadi”) constituencies whose allegiance and support can only be maintained by demonstrating a high ideological commitment.

Keywords: Jihadism, rebel governance, ISIS, al-Qaida, ideology

Introduction

The so-called “Islamic State” (IS), an al-Qaida offshoot group which has conquered substantial parts of northern Syria and Western Iraq, has drawn attention to the question of jihadism and state building. Although this new entity is clearly an unprecedented development in many respects, it is far from the first jihadi republic. In fact, over the past 25 years jihadi insurgents have repeatedly announced the formation of “Islamic states” or “emirates” in many parts of the Muslim world, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Caucasus, Yemen, Somalia, Iraq, Syria, Gaza, Sinai, Cairo, Libya and northern Mali. Very few of these proto-states have survived for more than a year, and not all of them have actually controlled territory in any meaningful sense.

In most of these cases, the jihadis vowed to form “emirates” or “states” whose prospects for survival were poor to begin with. On top of that, these newborn jihadi proto-states often acted aggressively and provocatively vis-à-vis the outside world, seemingly in contradiction with the goal of consolidating territorial control and obtaining some kind of international recognition. The paradox of jihadi state building is also evident in the way the jihadi ideology negates virtually all aspects of the Westphalian world order, including even the very names of existing states and their boundaries.[1] Why are jihadi rebels preoccupied with declaring their own states long before their goal of a liberated Islamic world is attained? Why do jihadis sometimes announce emirates whose actual territory is either undefined or lacking? And in those cases where territorial control is present, why do jihadis often jeopardize their hard-won territories by a highly aggressive policy vis-à-vis the outside world? Before exploring this puzzle in more detail, this article will first briefly define “jihadi proto-states” and then present a historical survey of such entities as a basis for identifying typical features, commonalities, and evolution over time.

Defining Jihadi Proto-States

First of all, it might be useful to explain how one might define the term “jihadism” and, what jihadis mean when they speak of “emirates”. For simplicity, jihadism can be defined as the ideology of al-Qaida and other militant Islamist groups who refer to themselves as jihadis.[2] This definition has become slightly more problematic with the rise of pro-jihadi public activist groups like the Ansar al-Shari‘a organisations and the deep fissure between IS-aligned and AQ-allied groups.

“Emirate” (or *amirate*) (Arabic: إمارة *imārah*) literally means a “principality”, and usually refers to a territory ruled by an emir. The latter is usually translated as commander, general, prince, governor, or ruler. Emirate is sometimes used to denote political leadership or military office as opposed to spiritual (*imāmah*) leadership. In early Islamic history, emirates often came to denote local Muslim principalities or small kingdoms nominally subordinate to the Islamic Caliphate, established as part of Islam’s steady expansion eastwards and westwards, one prominent example being the Emirate of Córdoba.[3]

The Islamic scholar Akbar Ahmed has noted that “the original model of Islamic rule was the small tribal emirate”, inspired by the Rashidun caliphs who “preached and practiced austerity.”[4] As such the term “emirate” seems to have had a certain connotation of a frontline state, a jihad state, an Islamic warrior republic, fighting in the name of the Caliph and expanding his territory against non-Islamic powers.[5] This, together with the jihadists’ aversion against the usage of Western state concepts, may explain the popularity of the term among the contemporary jihadi movement.[6] Another reason for its prevalence may be that it does not actually require territorial control and is a less ambitious political project than a full-fledged Islamic state, let alone a Caliphate. An emir commanded the obedience of his immediate subordinates and those inhabiting the land he controlled, and unlike the Caliph, he could not lay claim to the allegiance of the worldwide community of Muslims.[7]

As practiced by contemporary jihadis, the territorial threshold for forming an emirate is actually very low, in the sense that the jihadis sometimes use the term about a small group of true believers who have sworn to obey an emir. Hence, it may simply consist of a neighbourhood, a refugee camp, or a group of prison inmates. An emirate, in other words, is a highly scalable concept in terms of territorial scope and material resources. The very *scalability* of the jihadi state-building project from mere a group of committed fighters to a full-fledged state with a multi-million size civilian population enables the jihadis to view every action they take as relevant for the ultimate goal of a powerful Caliphate ruling the Muslim world.

Al-Qaida and the contemporary jihadi movement dates back to the late 1980s. During this time frame a significant number of jihadi proto-states have existed, some more well-known than others. Below is a tentative overview of such proto-states, including actual state-like entities with a multi-year life span as well as short-lived, fictional ones that were declared mostly to challenge local authorities or rival Islamist organizations. Clearly, the level of territorial control, the size of their claimed territory, their longevity, their ability to attract and host foreign fighters all vary immensely. “The Islamic State” represents one end of the spectrum with some eight million people under its rule, a territory larger than the UK, an extensive bureaucracy, infrastructure, police, courts, and many other state attributes. At the other end of the spectrum are entirely aspirational efforts with little substance beyond online statements. One example of the latter is the *Jund Ansar Allah* militants in southern Gaza who proclaimed “an Islamic Emirate” in August 2009 as a way of challenging Hamas’ Islamic legitimacy and succeeded in provoking a fierce response.[8]

The list has been compiled based on a multiyear effort of tracing jihadi proto-states in available secondary literature and primary sources on jihadism. It is still probably incomplete, but may serve as a starting

point for identifying commonalities, differences, and not the least, the evolution of the jihadi proto-state phenomenon until the present day.

Overview of Jihadi Proto-States (real and attempted), 1989-2015

Name	Country / district / town, village	Time frame	Territorial control	Civilian institutions	Foreign fighters
Jama'at al Da'wa (Jamil al-Rahman) - The Islamic Emirate of Kunar	Afghanistan / Kunar Province	1989-91	Limited	No?	Yes
Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya – “The Islamic Republic of Imbaba”	Egypt / Cairo / Imbaba	1989-1992 (late 1992)	Limited to local neighbourhoods in Imbaba	Yes	No
Groupe Islamique Armée	Algeria / Mitidja, parts of Greater Algiers, the cities of Lakhdaria, Medea, etc	c.1993-95	Yes, not complete	Yes	Very few
Taliban – The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan	(Most of) Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001.	c.1994 -	Yes, 90 % of Afghanistan by 2000. Significant pockets of territorial control since 2002.	Yes	Yes, very high number (esp. from Pakistan)
Jund al-Islam / Ansar al-Islam	Northern Iraq / Villages in the Howraman region (Biyara, Tawila, etc)	September 2001 – March 2003	Yes	Yes	Yes, small number
Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad / AQI / Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)	Iraq / parts of the Sunni Triangle (Faluja, Ramadi, etc)	2004-2008	Not permanent	Yes	Yes, high number
Al-Qaida, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Tehrik-e-Taliban	Pockets in FATA, NWFP, Waziristan	c.2006 ? –	Not permanent	No	Yes, high number
Al-Shabaab/ “The Islamic Emirate of Somalia”	Most of southern and central Somalia	2009-	Yes	Yes	Yes, high number, (esp. Somali diaspora)
Caucasus Emirate	Northern Caucasus	October 2007	Not permanent	Yes	Yes, small number
Fatah al-Islam	Lebanon / Nahr El-Bared refugee camp	May-June 2007	No, limited control of the refugee camp	Uncertain	Yes.

Jund Ansar Allah	Rafah, Gaza Strip	August 2009	No, only the Ibn Taymiya Mosque in Rafah	No	No (?)
2011 - Arab revolutions and the onset of civil wars in Libya and Syria					
AQAP – Ansar al-Shari’ah	Southern Yemen / Abyan Province (Zinjibar, Ja ‘ar, Shuqrah, etc)	2011-2012	Yes	Yes	Yes, small (?) number
AQIM – Ansar al-Dine, MUJAO (The Islamic Emirate of Azawad)	Northern Mali / Timbuktu, Kidal, Gao, etc	March 2012-2013	Yes	Yes	Yes, small (?) number
Jabhat al-Nusra	Syria, areas mostly in North-Western (Idlib) and South-Western Syria	2012 –	Yes	Yes	Yes, but far fewer than ISIS/IS
Islamic State of Iraq and Sham / The Islamic State	Large parts of northern Syria and western Iraq	2013 –	Yes	Yes	Yes, unprecedented (20,000?)
Majlis Shura Shabab al-Islam (MSSI) – Ansar al-Shari’ah Libya – Islamic State’s Provinces of Barqah, Tripoli, and Fezzan	Libya / Derna, Benghazi, Sirte, etc	2014 –	Yes, (not permanent)	Yes	Yes
Bayt Ansar al-Maqdis– Islamic State’s Sinai Province	Egypt / Sinai	2011 –	No	Uncertain	Yes, small number
Boko Haram	(Large territories in) Northern Nigeria / towns and villages in Adamawa, Borno, etc	2014 –	Yes	Yes	Yes, but mostly from Niger, Cameroon, Chad, etc
AQAP – Ansar al-Shari’ah	South-Eastern Yemen / Mukallah	2015 –	Yes	Yes	Yes

Before the advent of the current “Islamic State”, the two most successful emirates – in the eyes of the jihadis – were the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Shabaab in Somalia.[9] In October 1997, the Taliban proclaimed itself as “The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” and by 2000 it controlled almost 90 % of the country.[10] Even after its fall from power in Kabul in 2001, the Taliban’s Emirate has retained a significant degree of local control throughout Afghanistan, through its shadow governors, courts and provision of harsh, but effective justice.[11] From 2007 onwards, the Somali Shabaab rebel movement with an estimated 3,000 to 7,000 fighters captured most of southern Somalia, controlling at its height a territory the size of Denmark.[12] Its administrative structure (consisting of regional “wilāyāt” (Arabic) or “wilaayada” (Somali) usually translated as both “provinces” and “states” in Shabaab propaganda) resembled those of IS in terms of exercising

permanent territorial control and paying attention to providing some civilian services and meting out harsh justice.[13]

The most prominent example of small “Islamic emirates” with de facto territorial control in the pre-2011 era was that of the Ansar al-Islam organization in Northern Iraq in 2001-3, which ruled a cluster of villages outside Halabja near the Iranian border.[14] It established training camps and sharia courts, burnt un-Islamic books and destroyed Sufi shrines, and attracted a few hundred foreign fighters including al-Qaida militants fleeing Afghanistan. At the time, the small jihadi proto-state was deemed sufficiently threatening to become the first target to be bombed during the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

While Taliban, Shabaab, and Ansar al-Islam all controlled territory, other jihadi proto-states have exercised only a very tenuous hold of their claimed territory. One such example is the “Caucasus Emirate”, formed in 2007 and claiming sovereignty over all of Northern Caucasus. Another example is the “Islamic State in Iraq (ISI)” whose existence was proclaimed in 2006. While failing to establish permanent territorial control, they both mounted extensive media campaigns and, to varying degrees, carried out non-military activities, especially in the way of implementing *Shari‘ah*, clearly with a view of demonstrating that they had gone beyond being simply just another rebel organization. Although the Islamic State in Iraq failed abysmally in its attempt to become a state in the latter half of the 2000s, as a rebel organization, it survived. As the US withdrew from Iraq, Syria descended into civil war and the Iraqi government grew increasingly sectarian under Nouri al-Maliki, ISI bounced back and evolved into “the Islamic State”, the most internationalist and ideologically hardline jihadi proto-states we have seen so far.

If one should point out a watershed in the history of jihadi proto-states, it must be 2011 when the Arab Spring revolutions unsettled state authorities in the region. The upsurge in new jihadi proto-states over the past four years has been remarkable. The survey above counts some ten jihadi proto-states during the 22-year period between 1989 and 2011 and almost as many during the brief four year period since 2011. In Yemen, Al-Qaida on the Arab Peninsula (AQAP) and its Ansar al-Shari‘a organization gained control over significant parts of the Abyan province for nearly a year and ran several “Islamic Emirates” there, inviting journalists there to witness life under “Sharia rule”. Having been driven from its territories in mid-2012, AQAP again captured large territories in South-Eastern Yemen in 2015, including the important city of Mukalla. In Northern Mali, another Al-Qaida affiliate, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), in conjunction with local partner organizations such as Ansar al-Dine and MUJAO, overran and governed the region, including the historical site of Timbuktu, from March 2012 to January 2013, until a French-led military intervention dislodged the militants. In Northern Nigeria, the Boko Haram organization carved out a territory the size of Belgium in 2014. Finally, in Libya, various IS-aligned militia groups have captured significant pockets of territory, especially in the cities of Derna, Benghazi, and Sirte, where they fly the flag of IS on buildings and run police patrols in the streets. The proliferation of such militant non-state entities in the Middle East is unprecedented. There are few signs that this process is set to reverse any time soon, with the qualification that IS’s absorption of smaller entities as regional “provinces” may reduce the number, but not the geographical scope, of current jihadi proto-states.

Characteristics

Despite their numerous differences, jihadi proto-states share a number of important characteristics. Most important is that they are all intensely *ideological projects*, i.e. their establishment is justified solely by the ideological imperative to establish *Shari‘ah* (“to rule according to what God has revealed”) and wage jihad against God’s enemies.[15] Hence, their commitment to a particular territory is relatively low and vastly

different from that of separatist and nationalist rebel groups.[16] To demonstrate their ideological purity and allegiance to the jihadi movement's goal of liberating 'Muslim lands' and establishing 'God's rule', jihadi proto-states are eager to publicize and "market" their virtuous acts in the way of implementing Shari'ah. The ideological factor manifests itself in numerous ways, such as in the harsh treatment of minorities, the public application of physical punishments (*hudud*), and the marketing of their ideological acts in cyberspace. An integral part of the jihadi proto-state's ideological project is *iconoclasm*: the public destruction of "un-Islamic" shrines, tombs, and other manifestations of un-Islamic life. This is perhaps the most typical signaling act by jihadi proto-state builders: These acts, whether they occur in Nimrod, Palmyra, Timbuktu, or Bamyan, enrage the outside infidel world, and underline the defiance of the emerging jihadi proto-state.

Another key characteristic feature of jihadi proto-states is that they are all *internationalist projects*. Their pan-Islamist dimension is perhaps best illustrated by their desire and ability to attract foreign fighters, some of whom have served in more than one emirate. Their leaders often seek religious endorsement from foreign-based religious clerics and enlist funding and material support from external constituencies, not only from local sources.[17] They express solidarity, in both words and violent deeds, with other jihadi proto-state projects, and they sometimes compete with other jihadi emirates over media exposure on jihadi online channels.[18] The influx of foreign combatants and the jihadis' commitment to internationalist causes have led to situations where emerging jihadi emirate projects are seen as being "in, but not of," the local area in which they try to establish themselves.

A third feature of jihadi proto-states is their *aggressive behavior vis-à-vis* neighbouring states and the international community. Often, jihadi proto-states have caused such severe international security concerns that they attracted military intervention. Again, jihadism is a revolutionary ideology bent on altering the world order, and true to their ideology, jihadi proto-states do not respect international borders, drawn by the colonial powers. The Islamic State, for example, insists that it has only "frontlines", not borders, and takes great pride in demolishing the "Sykes-Picot" system. For jihadi proto-states, international terrorism is a legitimate weapon for future territorial expansion, and perhaps more important, it should serve as a "deterrent force" against attempts at reconquering the jihadi proto-state's territory.[19]

A fourth, and perhaps the most surprising, characteristic of jihadi proto-states is their *commitment to effective governance*. When controlling territory, jihadi proto-states from IS-rule in Mosul to Shabaab's administration in Southern Somalia, have proved *comparatively* effective in administrating and governing their territories and civilian populations, devoting significant resources to the provision of civilian services, an effective (but often very harsh) justice system, a commitment to training ideological cadres to administrative and military duties, organizing councils for tribal mediation, and the like.[20]

Why Jihadi Proto-States?

The declaration of a jihadi proto-state, whether "an Islamic emirate", an "Islamic state" or a "Caliphate", represents primarily a bid for increased power and influence vis-à-vis rival Islamist groups. It is basically a vehicle to increase one's influence and weight vis-à-vis competitors.[21] The question remains, however, how do we explain the observation that jihadi insurgent groups after declaring their ambitions to create territorial entities ('emirates'), do not adapt their behavior with a view to attaining statehood? Despite numerous attempts at creating jihadi proto-states, none has existed for very long, and even relatively long-lasting proto-states—the Taliban and Shabaab—appeared to grow more, not less, radical and uncompromising over time. True, the very move into state-building may be interpreted, in relative terms, as a move toward pragmatism. Furthermore, ultra-radical ideological groups may find satisfaction in remaining loyal to its ideological

message, even if it imperils its long-term material interests. Furthermore, learning to handle the practicalities of local governance and international relations is a long-term process. Internal al-Qaida correspondence suggests that jihadi proto-states have attempted to distill lessons learned and pass these on.[22] At the same time, the recipients of such recommendations have not heeded advice for pragmatism and gradualism, for example in the application of sharia laws. The Islamic Emirate of Azawad in Northern Mali, for example, went ahead with their *hudud* punishment shortly after seizing power, despite being warned against this by AQAP.[23] Shabaab proudly announced their entry into al-Qaida despite being warned against doing so by bin Laden, who feared that such a move would put undue international pressure on the nascent jihadi proto-state.[24]

There are two intertwined factors which may help us explain why jihadi proto-states sacrifice state building on the altar of ideological purity: (i) rebel rivalry and (ii) dependence on external constituencies. Competition with other Islamist rebels in the conflict area makes it harder for emerging jihadi proto-states to compromise and seek pragmatic non-ideological solutions without losing key constituencies. The internationalist character of jihadi insurgencies in which foreign fighters and external assistance play a key role, reinforces this reluctance to adapt non-ideological positions. The jihadi movement propagates the perception of multiple fronts in al-Qaida's war with the West.[25] Unlike ethnic diaspora communities who are bound to their homeland and its local struggles, the jihadi sympathizers have *multiple choices* about "which jihad" they would like to support and where to travel as foreign fighters. A jihadi insurgent group whose enforcement of Sharia is halfhearted and whose commitment to jihad is compromised by peace talks with the enemy will not attract ideologically committed foreign fighters. Hence, the radical agenda of external constituencies may therefore easily overrule local preferences in situations when the prospects of increased territorial control should have encouraged local rebels to adopt a more moderate posture.

As I have suggested elsewhere, the marketing metaphor is a useful avenue to understanding jihadi movements' behaviour in a competitive, media-driven world.[26] In his book *The Marketing of Rebellion*, Clifford Bob argues that "a few Third World political movements" have become "global causes célèbres" while most remain forgotten, precisely because they have proven themselves the savviest in "a Darwinian struggle for scarce resources." [27] External funding and support depend heavily on visibility in the media, which underlines the centrality of the jihadi online propaganda efforts. The actual size of the international jihadi funding market is impossible to estimate with precision, but available evidence suggest that external funding is substantial, even for groups with extensive internal sources of funding, like IS.[28] While it is inherently difficult to estimate the degree to which "market leaders" receive more resources than others, the flow of foreign fighters is a clear indication of which jihadi front receives most funding and media attention. Their presence deepens fundraising-, media- and recruitment networks linking the proto-state to the outside world. Foreign fighters bring large amounts of cash and equipment when they arrive and are often supported by fund-raising rings of supporters in their home countries.[29] The massive influx of foreign fighters to IS, exceeding by far any previous foreign fighter emigration in history, provides IS with not only highly motivated manpower, but cash, equipment and a worldwide recruitment and media network. It demonstrates IS's success in outbidding al-Qaida and becoming the undisputed "market leader" of jihad.

IS's (temporary?) victory over al-Qaida comes at a price, however. More than any other previous jihadi group, IS has invested heavily in demonstrating ideological purity. It has unleashed a vicious media campaign against the alleged "pragmatism" and "hypocrisy" of the al-Qaida leadership, thereby fracturing the global jihadi movement.[30] It has adopted maximalist goals, alienating other Islamist rebels in Syria and Iraq, and has created for itself an endless list of new enemies by its "mediatized barbarism".[31] Several observers have suggested that the apocalyptic nature of IS is the only logical answer to its irrational behavior.[32]

Such a view of jihadi proto-states goes beyond IS. For example, studies of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan have sometimes dubbed it “a Samson state”, whose rigid ideological agenda tied its hands to suicidal policy decisions which eventually imperiled the state’s very existence.[33]

Repeated jihadi attempts at forming ultra-radical states is not necessarily suicidal behavior by religious fanatics, when viewed from the perspective of jihadi strategists. In their view, an emirate represents only a tactical front in a larger transnational insurgency with multiple focal points and a largely de-territorialized popular support base.[34] What may appear as erratic behavior by jihadi groups according to classical insurgency theories may in fact be strategic adaptation to a globalized world where the old parameters of success are no longer valid. As has been suggested by the insurgency scholar John Mackinlay and others, jihadi insurgencies may be harbingers of a new post-Maoist model of insurgency in which the primary point of gravity or the “insurgent energy” is no longer located in rebel-controlled areas.[35] Nor is the ideological mobilization of the *local* population key to success. Instead, the critical core is the archipelago of diaspora communities, ideological support networks, and online sympathizers scattered around the world.[36] The continuous establishment of local emirates, even when they fail, serves a purpose because they galvanize this archipelago which embodies what is essentially a global insurgent movement.

Mackinlay’s “insurgent archipelago” thesis is intriguing, but should not lead us to dismiss the local power bases of jihadi proto-states. For example, most of IS’ revenues are generated locally. Still, the mere presence of more than 20,000 foreign fighters in the Syrian-Iraqi war theatre (not counting the thousands of Shiite and Kurdish foreign fighters) points to a fundamental shift in the organization and mobilization in contemporary insurgencies. Non-state transnational networks are no longer negligible actors compared to state sponsors in influencing local insurgencies.

Summing up, my preliminary hypothesis is that jihadi proto-states remain radical and uncompromising to the detriment of their state building ambitions because they seek support from a radical transnational support base whose hardline ideological agenda prevents a shift towards pragmatism. If this hypothesis holds water, then we might expect measures aimed at reducing rebel rivalry and preventing transnational mobilization of assistance to jihadi proto-states to induce jihadi insurgents to adopt more pragmatic and conventional strategies of territorialisation. Practitioners involved in combating jihadism should take notice of internal and external dynamics which may alter the overall calculus of jihadi proto-states.

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Notes

[1] Jihadis usually avoid the names of existing states as Western colonial inventions and prefer terms hailing back to the early days of Islamic civilization, such as the “Land of the Two Rivers” instead of (most of) Iraq, the “Land of Khorasan” instead of Afghanistan (and beyond), and the “Islamic Maghreb” instead of (most of) North Africa, etc.

[2] The core tenets of jihadism is that the Islamic world is directly or indirectly ‘occupied’ by an alliance of ‘infidel crusader’ forces in collusion with nominally Muslim apostate regimes and that only a worldwide violent struggle against these forces will liberate the Muslim world. Transnational terrorism and mass murder – with some qualifications—are seen as legitimate means in this struggle. All Muslims, irrespective of geographical boundaries and ethnic divisions, are obliged to participate. “Al-Qaida” consists of the remaining al-Qaida leadership structures, located in the Afghan-Pakistani border areas, as well as regional branches and associated organizations, as well as a global web of sympathizers and supporters, often referred to as ‘the global jihadi movement’. Al-Qaida’s branches and associates have not necessarily adopted all of al-Qaida’s ideological worldview and modus operandi. While this delineation of jihadi vs. non-jihadi may seem fussy and terribly imprecise, there is a relatively strong awareness among jihadi sympathizers about ‘who is in’ and ‘who is out’. One reason for this is that al-Qaida’s media outlets, especially jihadi web forums, continuously update their audiences with news from the various jihadi ‘fronts’, containing reports and communiqués detailing the exploits of all active jihadi groups. Those not listed (such as Hamas, Hizbollah, etc) are per definition not jihadis. Among forum participants, there is also a continuous assessment of, and discussion about, the various groups’ armed activities and ideological production.

[3] For classical and modern Islamic thinkers on government and state, see for example Gerhard Bowering (ed.) *Islamic Political Thought: An Introduction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Reza Pankhurst, *The Inevitable Caliphate?: A History of the Struggle for Global Islamic Union, 1924 to the Present* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013); and “Islamic State”, *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, undated. URL: <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0394>.

[4] Akbar S. Ahmed, *The Thistle and the Drone: How America’s War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013, Kindle edition), not paginated, see subchapter on “Islamic Emirates and Tribal Societies”.

[5] As the early Caliphate gradually gave way to a more decentralized Islamic empire, with local Muslim governors usurping power, local emirates proliferated, especially along the Empire’s peripheries. For Islamic jurists’ treatment of the difficult issue of power sharing between the Caliph and his increasingly autonomous governors, see for example Mawārdī’s theory on Imāra and Wizāra in Ann K. S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam* (London: Routledge, 1981/2014), pp.83-102.

[6] The earliest example of the adoption of Emir/Emirate terminology by Salafi-Jihadi groups is uncertain. While the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood favoured other titles for their leader, such as *murshid* (guide), stressing the spiritual and non-assuming role of their leader, its militant offshoots in the 1970s began referring to their commanders as emirs. The term also appears to have gained more traction amongst Islamist writers. In the early 1990s, the French scholar Olivier Roy had taken notice of the proliferation of self-styled Islamic mini-states or communities, governed by ‘neofundamentalist’ Salafist adherents. These pockets of Islamized communities, partly isolated from their surroundings were the result of a broader wave of Islamisation from below which characterized parts of the Muslim world from the 1970s onwards. Roy observed more concrete manifestations of self-styled Islamic statelets. In what he saw as a relatively new phenomenon in the Muslim world, territorial pockets underwent “a transformation [...] at a subnational level, into an Islamic entity, directly connected to the outside world by religious and economic networks, and in which Islamic scholars (ulama) and traders acted as ‘the tools and agents of local autonomy’”. One place where Islamic emirates proliferated was the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan from the 1980s onwards, where local tribesmen under the leadership of a mullah and his supporters in the Pakistani Salafi movement Ahl-I Hadith set up an Islamic Emirate in Nuristan in 1984. A more well-known example is “the Islamic Emirate of Kunar” – a mini-state established by the Afghan shaykh Jamil al-Rahman in 1989, and which lasted until his assassination in 1991. Two years later, another and more short-lived attempt at forming an Islamic emirate took place, this time by a group of Arab-Afghan veterans in the Khaybar agency. During early and mid-1990s, when Egypt was shaken by a wave of violent unrest, militant Islamist groups repeatedly declared the establishment of Emirates in their strongholds. In 1992, the Egyptian army sent in tanks and thousands of troops into the impoverished Cairo district of Imbaba “where Islamic groups had virtually controlled whole neighborhoods and set up their own ‘Emirate of Imbaba.’” See Olivier Roy, *The failure of political Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 42ff, 84; Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: the search for a new Ummah* (London: Hurst, 2002), pp. 284; Anne Stenersen, *Brothers in Jihad: The Alliance between al-Qaida and the Taliban* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2016); Nibras Kazimi, “The Caliphate attempted”, *Current trends in Islamist Ideology* 7 (July 2008), pp. 16-17; Michael Collins Dunn, “Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia Accuse Sudan, as Halaib Dispute Flares Up”, *MERIP*, (February 1993), p. 33; and author’s own interviews in Cairo in 1993-95.

[7] See Joas Wagemakers’ discussion on *bay’a* in his article in this issue of PoT.

[8] “Radical Muslim cleric among 21 killed in Gaza clashes”, *CNN.com*, 16 August 2009. URL: <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/08/15/gaza.clashes/index.html?iref=24hours>.

[9] Consider the following quote from Anwar al-Awlaki: “The two most successful examples, even though far from perfect, of Islamic rule in this past decade were the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Islamic courts in Somalia. In both countries only these Muslim fighters brought peace, security and rule of law in both countries. Both movements reached to power not through elections or debates but through war.” Cited in “Anwar al Awlaki: a question about the method of establishing Caliphate,” *Kavkaz Center*, 13 January 2009. URL: <http://kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2009/01/13/10562.shtml>.

[10] “Afghanistan: Taleban Declare Afghanistan ‘an Islamic Emirate,’” *AFP*, 27 October 1997; and Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present* (London: Hurst, 2005), p. 281.

[11] Jami Forbes, “The Significance of Taliban Shari’a Courts in Afghanistan,” *CTC Sentinel*, 6 (5) (May 2013), pp. 13-16. For Taliban’s own portrayal of its governance structures as of 2010, see Ikram Miyundi, “The Islamic Emirate Of Afghanistan And Its Successful Administrative Policy,” *Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam*, 25 December 2010, <http://www.shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=91308>.

[12] For estimates of the number of Shabaab fighters in 2013, see “Al-Shabaab (Al-Shabab),” *GlobalSecurity.org*, undated. URL: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/al-shabaab.htm>.

[13] See discussion on Shabaab’s governance in Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005-2012* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), chapter 6.

[14] Interestingly, unlike the Taliban movement, Shabaab and Ansar al-Islam did not consistently refer to themselves as “emirates” or “states”. The Shabaab movement retained its original name (which roughly translates “The Mujahideen Youth Movement”), and its leadership repeatedly declined proposals that its name be formally changed to the “Islamic Emirate of Somalia”. The latter term was sometimes used in jihadist propaganda material, however, and Shabaab used the term “state” about its provinces. The confusion regarding Shabaab’s name seems to reflect internal struggle within the Shabaab leadership regarding the organization’s future orientation, in which a “nationalist wing” reportedly sought to re-name the group as the “Islamic Emirate of Somalia” and refocus on local governance instead of moving the organization closer to al Qaeda. See Brownyn Bruton and J. Peter Pham, “The Splintering of Al Shabaab: A Rough Road From War to Peace,” *ForeignAffairs.com*, (2 February 2012). URL: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2012-02-02/splintering-al-shabaab>; “Fatwa of Somali Scholars on Current Affairs in the Country,” *Associated Press*, 29 February 2012. (From AP’s collection of documents retrieved from a building occupied by al-Qaida fighters in Timbuktu, Mali). URL: http://hosted.ap.org/specials/interactives/_international/_pdfs/al-qaida-papers-somalia-fatwa.pdf; and “AlShabaab to Change Name to Imaarah Islamiyah. AlShabaab Declares ‘Islamic Emirate’ of Somalia,” *SomaliaReport*, 5 December 2011. URL: http://www.somaliareport.com/index.php/post/2212/AlShabaabto_Change_Name_to_Imaarah_Islamiyah.

[15] The following statement by “the creators of Imarat Kavkaz” is illustrative: “the basis for the proclamation of the Islamic State was the bounden duty of Muslims before Allah to set in the territories under their control the law of Allah – the Sharia.” Cited in “Statement on creation of Imarat Kavkaz,” *Caucasian Knot*, 29 December 2014. URL: <http://eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/30497/>.

[16] The perhaps most important ideological dictum on the necessity of a state was formulated by Ayman al-Zawahiri’s *Knights under the Prophet’s Banner* in 2001, later expanded and updated in 2010, in which he declared that “The mujahid Islamic movement will not triumph against the world coalition unless it possesses a fundamentalist base in the heart of the Islamic world.” Interestingly, al-Zawahiri was not concerned about the precise location, attributes, or extent of this territorial base, nor its relationship to other states in the region. Rather, the territorial entity envisioned by al-Zawahiri was more akin to a piece of liberated territory from which to expand further and assist other like-minded liberated territorial entities rather than a state of its own.

[17] For example, in late 2010, the Caucasus Emirate obtained a widely publicized fatwa from the prominent Syrian Islamist scholar Abu Basir al-Tartousi in London in which he declared that “The Mujahidin under the leadership of Dokku Umarov are the legal rulers, under Sharia law, of their countries and their people. It is obligatory to unite with them and submit to their rule.” Cited in “Fatwa of Sheikh Abu Basir al-Tartusi on the Jihad in the Caucasus (in Russian),” *Ansar AlJihad Network*, 24 August 2010. URL: <http://www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=26120>. The fatwa was initially made in Arabic in a telephone interview, posted on the Caucasus Emirate’s websites, and later translated into many languages.

[18] See for example Andrei Smirnov, “Umarov Trying to Increase Financial Support from the Middle East,” *North Caucasus Analysis* (Jamestown Foundation), 8 (41) (25 October 2007). URL: http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4505#.VZQEm_nltBd.

[19] Al-Qaida strategist Abu Bakr Naji argued that jihadi emirates could be defended effectively. He pointed in particular to the importance of developing a sufficiently strong “deterrent force”, in the form of international operations, but he acknowledged “the problem of aerial attacks of the enemy – Crusader or apostate – on military training camps or residential areas in areas which we administer”. Cited in Abu Bakr Naji, “Management of Savagery”, pp. 15-16, 32.

[20] The initial popularity of some jihadi proto-states, including the Taliban and Shabaab, stemmed from their removal of unpopular warlords and the establishment of a monopoly of power, which ensured some level of security and predictability in otherwise wartorn countries.

[21] The Jund Ansar Allah's Emirate proclamation in Gaza is illustrative: "The group posted a statement on the site announcing the establishment of the Islamic emirate in Gaza and proclaiming al-Maqqdassi 'the commander of the faithful'. The statement declared that armed forces in Gaza should unite under him. The statement urged Muslims everywhere to support the 'young emirate' and provide the group with money, weapons and men because 'this is the hope of the Muslim nation in raising the banner of monotheism in Palestine and to liberate all the lands and purify Al-Aqsa mosque from the filth of the damned Jews'. The group accused Hamas of not being Islamic enough, saying Hamas cares more about pleasing 'tyrants' than 'obeying God.'" Cited in "13 die as Islamic radicals, Hamas clash in Gaza", *CNN.com*, 14 August 2009. URL: <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/08/14/gaza.clashes/index.html?iref=nextin>.

[22] See for example AQAP-AQIM correspondence on the former's experiences in rebel governance in "Wuhayshi imparted lessons of AQAP operations in Yemen to AQIM", *Long War Journal*, 12 August 2013. See also Bin Laden's letter in *United States v. Abid Naseer*, February 15, 2015. GOVERNMENT EXHIBIT 425 10-CR-019(S-4)(RJD) Letter to Shaykh Mahmud. Signed Your brother Zamuray Saturday, August/7/2010 [bin Laden]. URL: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.documentcloud.org/documents/1686788/abid-naseer-trial-abbottabad-documents-exhibits.pdf>

[23] Andrew Lebovich noted in a study of jihadism in Northern Mali that "[t]he jihadists' rush to impose Shari'a and hudud punishments—including stonings, amputations, and public whippings—even embarrassed AQIM's leadership in northern Algeria, prompting a strong, private rebuke from the group's leader, Abdelmalek Droukdel [...]". Cited in Andrew Lebovich, "The Local Face of Jihadism in Northern Mali", *CTC Sentinel*, 25 June 2013. URL: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-local-face-of-jihadism-in-northern-mali>.

[24] "Bin Laden told Shabaab to hide al Qaeda ties", *Long War Journal*, 3 May 2012. URL: http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/05/bin_laden_instructs.php.

[25] A multipronged state building strategy, even if it occurs without much coordination, fosters a sense of moral solidarity, creates synergy effects between the different fronts, and offers better prospects for increased transnational ideological mobilization. It also offers important experiences and lessons learned which are discussed and transferred to the next jihadi proto-state project.

[26] Brynjar Lia, "The Islamic State and its Mediatized Barbarism", *New Middle East Blog*, 14 March 2015. URL: <https://newmeast.wordpress.com/2015/03/14/the-islamic-state-is-and-its-mediatized-barbarism/>.

[27] Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[28] For example, one fund-raiser in Kuwait reportedly sent \$2 million a month to IS's predecessor in Iraq. "Treasury Designates Al-Qa'ida Supporters in Qatar and Yemen", U.S. Department of Treasury, Press Release, 18 December 2013. URL: <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2249.aspx>.

[29] Although IS's "primary sources of revenue" derived from "illicit proceeds from its occupation of territory", the foreign fighters "continue to be a relatively small, but important source of funding" for the organization. See *Financing of the Terrorist Organisation Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)*, FATF Report, February 2015. URL: <http://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/Financing-of-the-terrorist-organisation-ISIL.pdf>.

[30] See for example the cover story of IS online magazine entitled "Al-Qa'idah of Waziristan: A Testimony from Within", *Dabiq*, No.6, Rabi al-Awwal 1436.

[31] Lia, "The Islamic State and its Mediatized Barbarism".

[32] See for example Peter Bergen's assessment that "[i]ts actions do indeed seem to make no sense or are self-destructive". Cited in Peter Bergen, "Why does ISIS keep making enemies?", *CNN.com*, 18 February 2015. URL: <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/16/opinion/bergen-isis-enemies/>

[33] See the interesting discussion about Taliban as "a Samson state" in Svante E. Cornell, "Taliban Afghanistan: A True Islamic State?", in Brenda Shaffer (ed.) *The Limits of Culture: Islam and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs), pp. 263-289.

[34] See Abu Bakr Naji, "Management of Savagery".

[35] John Mackinlay, *Insurgent Archipelago; From Mao to bin Laden* (London: Hurst, 2009).

[36] For an interesting comparison between the jihadi movement and the Maoist insurgency model, Michael F. Morris, *Al Qaeda as Insurgency* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2005). URL: <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/ksil234.pdf>.