

**Extremist and Terrorist Organizations:
(A Foundational Approach to Understanding the
Jihadist Case)**

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Al-Masaha is a local platform working in North and East Syria, specialized in opposing violence and extremist ideology represented by radical religious groups. Al-Masaha researches the causes and effects resulting from violence and extremism, and investigates the sources from which these ideas have emerged, and the effects they have left behind. Al-Masaha's work is conducted through articles, research, critical and analytical studies based on scientific and rational foundations, in addition to visual programs and materials. Al-Masaha Platform also works to consolidate the culture of civil society and to promote the values of coexistence, dialogue and peace; renouncing violence, extremism and all forms of exclusion and marginalization.

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About the author:

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He worked for years in studies of violent extremism, and in the meantime, he published the book *"The Return of the Special Organization: The Full Story of Hasem and Sister [Organizations]"*. Together with other authors, he has also published three books: *"The ISIS After Al-Baghdad"*, *"The New Dynasty of The Muslim Brotherhood's International Organization: Transformations, Conflicts, Terrorism"* and *"The State of Religious Violence: How Extremist Organizations Operate in the Middle East"*.

Ahmed Sultan is currently working as a non-resident researcher with several leading research centers. He has previously participated in the foundation of press websites and research centers focused on "dynamic Islam". He also produced a series of journalistic investigations to trace the weapons in the possession of extremist groups in Egypt, and conducted interviews with members and defected fighters from the Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and the Egyptian Jihad movement – these interviews were published in Egyptian and Arab newspapers and TV channels.

Research Summary:

Over the past years, the world has faced increasing terrorist threats, coinciding with the rise of religious, national and ethnic rebel organizations, which adopt armed action as a means of change in confronting the ruling authorities.

The concepts of extremism and the issues related to it enjoy a great deal of discussion in the global and regional public spheres, especially since the United States of America withdrew its forces from Afghanistan in August 2021, which terrorist organizations with jihadist ideology consider a great victory for themselves.

In this context, the current research seeks to present a comprehensive conception of extremism and terrorism, with a special focus on the two experiences of global/transnational Jihad in its most prominent form: The Islamic State, known as ISIS, and the al-Qaeda jihad organization; clarifying the transformations that have taken place within the jihadist case, and the dilemma of terrorism after the collapse of the territorial Caliphate (March 2019) until now.

The research includes a review of the main general features of jihadist organizations, and highlights the most important strategies that they follow during their terrorist activities.

Research Questions

This research discusses the impact of changes in the jihadist case on the activity of armed Islamic organizations with a globalized and local ideology, and answers a set of questions related to extremism and terrorism:

- What are the definitions of extremism, terrorism, insurgency and radicalism?
- What are the developments that the armed jihadist case has undergone since 1940s?
- How have geopolitical changes affected the activity of jihadist organizations?
- What are the changes in the jihadist case since the collapse of ISIS caliphate in March 2019?
- What are the founding ideas of jihadist violence?
- What are the most prominent strategies adopted by the global jihadist organizations?
- What does the future of the jihadi organizations look like after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan (August 2021)?

This paper follows an integrative study approach based on the combination of the inductive historical method considering the nature of the research related to the historical context, and the descriptive analytical approach that is concerned with describing the phenomenon, analyzing it and clarifying the developments it has undergone, in addition to the forward-looking approach that seeks to anticipate the future of the phenomenon based on a scientific source.

Introduction

The concepts of extremism and terrorism have occupied the mind of many official and unofficial circles over the past decades in light of the exceptional rise of transnational jihadist movements, which succeeded in establishing scattered jihadist emirates in many countries, despite the efforts made by local governments, regional and international forces active in combating terrorism – led by the United States and European countries – to contain extremism and terrorism.

Although these concepts are usually used to refer to political and religious extremist groups, the widespread use of these terms has led to a confusion of concepts and misperception about the criteria that should be followed to judge behavior/action as extreme or moderate.

The peril of the absence of specific definitions of extremism and terrorism lies in the confusion of concepts to a degree in which common acts of violence overlap, with terrorist attacks and plots – consequently, the absence of a specific definition of terrorism leads to negative repercussions on the work of combating terrorism and extremism on many levels, in such a way that the relevant terms and statistics lose their value and significance.

The crisis of [lacking] precise definitions

It is difficult to present an accurate definition of extremism and terrorism. Perhaps the crisis of [lacking] precise definitions is related to the broad limits of the connotations of the two terms, as what can be considered extreme or terror has a very wide and manifold scope [1]. The two phenomena are highly complex, and the definitions provided by specialists in the study of extremism and terrorism differ according to their scientific references and their visions. [2]

Considering the objective limit adopted by this paper, we can provide procedural definitions of a number of related concepts, foremost of which are:

- 1- **Extremism:** A set of beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions and strategies of a nature far from the normal and moderate limit. [3]
- 2- **Violent Extremism:** The beliefs and actions of people who support the use of ideologically motivated violence to advance social, economic, religious, or political goals; in fact, in many cases, this term applies only to armed groups that are fighting states. [4]
- 3- **Terrorism:** The use of violence (including violence against civilians), with intent to kill or inflict serious bodily injury, or to take hostages, with the intent of creating a state of terror among the public, or particular persons, or to intimidate a group of people; or forcing a government or an international organization to do or not to do something. [5]
- 4- **International/Global Terrorism:** We will choose the definition chosen by the 1937 Geneva Convention for the Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism,

which defines it as: “Criminal acts directed against a state, aiming or planning to cause panic and terror among certain personalities, groups of people, or the public.” [6]

- 5- **Armed Insurgency:** An insurgency is defined as the organized use of force, sabotage, and violence to overthrow or control political power within an area.

Insurgent groups seek to destroy or topple government authority, take partial or complete control of resources and population in an area through the use of organized force (guerrilla warfare, terrorism, coercion and intimidation, propaganda, sabotage, political mobilization) – insurgents do not focus only on killing government forces, but also seeks to establish an alternative regime to control the area and to found an authority parallel to the existing authority, i.e. the insurgent aims to weaken the government’s control and legitimacy while increasing the insurgents’ control and influence. [7]

- 6- **Radicalism:** This term does not refer to a specific system of ideas, values, and arguments, but is used to describe any ideas or movements that oppose agreed ideas and systems, or that have become accepted and are considered a subject of consensus and agreement in society. [8]
- 7- **Terrorist Radicalism:** The path that leads a person to the conviction that terrorist violence represents a possible and perhaps legitimate means to achieve the end goal, and may be viewed as similar to other actions through which individuals are invited to join terrorist organizations. [9]

By reviewing these definitions, it becomes clear that the terms extremism, insurgency, radicalism and terrorism – although their meanings are relatively different – they all share common basic features and characteristics, including the use of moral and material violence by their adherents, at different levels, to achieve their own goals. In addition to the closed, rigid and intolerant nature that is characterized by an anti-world view based on the idea of zero conflict, and classifying the world according to the idea of absolute good and evil, meaning that whoever is not with them is against them. In the words of Osama bin Laden, the founding leader of Al-Qaeda: *“The entire world is divided into the camps of faith, without disbelief – and the camp of disbelief in which there is no faith.”* [10]

With an analytical look at the reality of the current jihadist groups (in their local and global versions), we conclude that these groups bear in their organizational and ideological structures the common features of extremism, radicalism and terrorism. They are extremist and radical in ideology, terrorist in their practices and actions, and insurgent in view of their goals and means that they employ. On this basis, terrorists are best described as the people who plan, participate in and carry out terrorist operations that may be conducted to serve a particular group or a particular cause. [11]

In addition, the characteristics of terrorist groups are also controversial issues. While some researchers argue that terrorists/extremists have certain features that justify their violent tendencies, others refuse to make these generalizations about groups, considering that there are no special features that differentiate these groups from others, although some people or religious/ethnic/political groups, etc. have a greater

inclination and willingness to violence than their counterparts.

[12]

Common traits and characteristics

Perhaps the most prominent feature that distinguishes the cases of the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda organizations – as they are the two practical models on which this research focuses on – is their quest to get rid of local governments, dismantle the structure of the existing global system and challenge the influence of major countries and actors in it; and ultimately establish an alternative system based on the theory of the Islamic Caliphate rooting in their history, which is based on an ideological-political motive.

The jihadist groups are similar, in terms of structural-dynamic features, to the traditional rebel groups. It adopts a hybrid model of guerrilla groups, combining the Maoist “*Protracted War*” model of the famous Chinese leader Mao Zedong (1893-1976), during the fighting period for the founding of the People’s Republic of China, which is based on the establishment of a homogeneous fighting organization with a hierarchical central command, a hierarchical chain of command, and specific purposes they seek to accomplish. In addition to that is the model of “modern insurgent groups” consisting of diverse and complex cells and networks, enjoying a greater degree of decentralization, with a charismatic central leadership, usually a source of inspiration, attraction and agreement for these decentralized groups. [13]

It is not surprising that there are similarities between underground jihadist organizations and their communist counterparts, as the first was influenced by the latter, it drew on its experiences and employed it in its armed rebellion. A review of the publications of the strategic theorists of the jihadist movement (such as Abu Musab al-Suri, Saif al-Adl al-Masry, Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Saudi, etc.), whose

writings show that they were influenced by communist organizations that adopted guerrilla warfare whose theorists were Chinese Mao Zedong, Argentine-Cuban Che Guevara, Cuban Fidel Castro, and Brazilian Carlos Margiela, who is known as the “father of civil terrorism”.

Generations of Jihadists

On the same level, it is noted that the structural/organizational shape of jihadist groups has gone through a series of changes and transformations, over decades, regardless of the methodological and intellectual framework adopted by these groups. The development of these organizations has been linked to the knowledge derived from the experience of revolutionary groups around the world.

It is possible to classify the generations of jihadist organizations, according to this criterion, into 4 generations:

First: The generation of hierarchical and country organizations

Many political, economic and social factors in Muslim societies and countries contributed to the formation of this generation. With the overthrow of Sultan Abdul Hamid II and the official collapse of the Ottoman Empire in March 1924, the nucleus of the political Islamic movement began to form, at the hands of the Egyptian Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949), who founded the Muslim Brotherhood in March 1928; laying down a gradual plan for the movement’s growth and spread in 3 stages, namely: (Public Call (definition), Private Call

(formation), work to change public custom (implementation).
[14]

Hassan al-Banna took the first step to militarize the Islamist movement, establishing the Muslim Brotherhood's own regime/organization (the Armed Secret Service), in 1940, based on the idea of communist and fascist secret organizations popular in the twentieth century. [15]

The Muslim Brotherhood's special system was a hierarchical country organization consisting of a supreme leader (the Muslim Brotherhood's Guide), a central command (The Leadership Council: 5 leaders), an advisory body (the Advisory Council), a technical committee (the Staff), and personnel (the Soldiers' Body). The chain of internal commands followed specific paths from top to bottom according to the hierarchy of command in force within the Armed Secret Service.

On the same basis, the armed Muslim Brotherhood organization was formed in Egypt in 1965, known as the Sayyid Qutb Organization (1906-1966), the Syrian Fighting Vanguard Organization [16], which was active in Syria during the 70's and 80's of the last century.

The generation of hierarchical and country organizations suffered heavy losses at various levels. Its experience did not succeed in any country in which it was active, and it was defeated militarily and security-wise in the face of local governments. It also failed to attract the masses, or to strengthen its bases, because it adopted the principle of "working and preparing cadres during the battle", which failed miserably, and led to the killing and arrest of most of

the cadres of these organizations and the dispersal of the remaining members.

Second: The generation of immigrant jihadists and the “open frontlines”

The strategic shock that the Islamic movement suffered – especially in the Egyptian case – along with other political and social conditions, caused a great fluid situation among various youth groups whom started the accumulation of ideas of jihad and armed revolution, and mixed them with the theories of Sayyid Qutb and the fatwas of Ahmed bin Abdul Halim Al-Harrani, known as Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328), forming an intellectual and methodological system more fundamental than its Muslim Brotherhood theory. Takfiri tendencies existed in that period, the most prominent of which was the one launched by the Muslim group called in the media “Takfir wa al-Hijra”, which was founded by the former member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Shukri Mustafa (1942-1978) while he was in Egyptian prisons during Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser’s rule (1918-1970).

In about the same period, other Arab countries (Algeria, Morocco, Syria) witnessed the presence of radical Islamic groups that adopted ideas of coup, armed revolution and guerrilla warfare, although none of them achieved any significant achievement at the strategic level.

By the late 70s of the 20st century, a new frontline opened up in Central Asia, after the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989) – the United States and its Western allies took advantage of the jihadist movements in the geopolitical framework revolving with the Soviet Union within the Cold War between the two camps. [17]

The jihadist movement benefited from the experience of the open frontlines, which provided them with safe havens to train in combat and gain practical experience. This stage was also considered the beginning of the globalization of the radical Islamic movement, as Abdullah Azzam al-Filistini (1941-1989) – described as the spiritual father of the Afghan jihad – made great efforts to invite Arab youth to join the battlefields. The jihadists fleeing from their countries in the Middle East also headed to the Afghan arena to escape security persecution. The outcome of these factors was the transfer of hundreds of jihadis to Afghanistan, to later form several diverse jihadist organizations, some of which adopted a national and international approach, and all of them cooperated in one way or another because of the commonalities that united them. The most important shared aim was that they saw themselves as “brothers in arms”. [18]

The generation of “open frontlines” experienced real victories, whether in the Afghan or Bosnian experiment (1992-1995), and in the first Chechen experiment (1994-1996). These experiences gave the jihadi movement a great moral and material boost, and enabled it to prepare hundreds of highly trained cadres, on which to build the new generation of jihadists. However, the jihadi movement suffered two strong setbacks in two different stages, the first of which was the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 to overthrow the Taliban regime and eliminate the camps of Arab jihadists, and the second was in the experience of the ISIS caliphate (2014-2019), which ended in March 2019 under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the Syrian village of Al-Baghouz (Deir Ezzor governorate).

Third: The generation of solidarity and globalized jihad

The generation of solidarity jihad with a global character arose on the basis of the of the generation of open jihad frontlines. About 9 years after the end of the Afghan experience, a group of Afghan Arabs (as they are called), led by Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, formed the global Islamic front to *'fight the Jews and the Crusaders.'* [19] Then those efforts culminated in the announcement of the Al-Qaeda Organization in the same period, which included the Arab jihadists who decided to turn their compass towards a new enemy, the United States of America.

Al-Qaeda was considered an umbrella and a source of inspiration for many local organizations that declared their loyalty to it, to benefit from its own jihadist brand. This gave the jihadis a great momentum, which led to the globalized jihadi movement.

The generation of globalized solidarity jihad was distinguished by its focus on targeting the 'distant enemy' (from its own perspective), so it carried out its most prominent attacks (September 11, 2001) against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Aiming to drag the United States into a new war on the ground so that the jihadis could defeat it, and then set out to establish their own state. [20]

This generation was characterized by the prevalence and spread of the idea of fighting against the "distant enemy" and the local regimes supporting it, without being limited to a strong organizational bond. Many of the attacks carried out in the name of al-Qaeda, were, therefore, conducted at the personal initiative of individuals, and were subsequently

attributed to the organization which celebrated and praised them.

However, the aftermath of 9/11 led to the destruction of the actual capabilities of the organization and the dispersal of its elements. The jihadists were again dispersed between Iran, Pakistan and other countries, and many of them fell into captivity. The jihadist movement entered the groove of fire, which “*swallowed it up*” as expressed by Abu Musab al-Suri. [21]

Fourth: The generation of ‘system’, not ‘organization’

On the other hand, the US invasion of Iraq gave the jihadists a kiss of new life, and provided an atmosphere conducive to the growth and expansion of groups and organizations that united dramatically. Within only 3 years of the fall of Baghdad (April 2003), a semi-central entity called itself “The Islamic State of Iraq” [22]. That entity, which was established in late 2006, seemed to realize itself as a traditional jihadist emirate, so it deployed its fighters in the provinces of the Sunni triangle, and worked to prepare for the next stage. For them the next stage would have been the establishment of a global caliphate from Iraq, before it suffered painful defeats; the jihadists ultimately sided with the desert during the following years – until the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in 2011. [23]

The foundations jihadist organizations

As a result of the experience gained on the battlefields from Afghanistan to Iraq, the setbacks that the organizations faced, and the self-criticism that existed within the jihad

organizations, the “theorists of strategic jihad” developed what can be considered a general theory for building jihadist organizations, based on 4 main foundations: (Leadership, movement approach, economic and military structure, planned strategy, and the allegiance performed by individuals – who are associated with the leadership and are deemed to obey.) [24]

The ‘approach’ – from the jihadist point of view – is an intellectual and dynamic framework that unites the members of the group/organization, mobilizes them around its goals, and ensures the existence of consistency among the individuals involved in it.

‘Leadership’ comes next in the curriculum, and represents a primary focus for building groups/organizations. However, it is not concerned with individuals who manage and run groups only, but includes the higher leadership (the Emir/Caliph, for example). The next leadership chain is (The Leadership Council, or the Shura Council), and the decision-making mechanism within the leadership, or what the jihadi organizations call “the Shura.”

The jihadi groups pay a great deal of attention to the issues of financing and work strategy, especially after the failed experiences of their country organizations in Syria, Algeria, Egypt, Libya and others; in which the factors of financial weakness and the absence of a comprehensive strategy played a main role to undermine and eliminate entire organizations and groups after years of work and preparation.

The pledge of allegiance [oath of allegiance], which is absolute obedience in all cases, constitutes the link system

between the individual and the leadership in the organizational chain. [25]

In this context, the new generation of jihadist groups employed the principle of “the system, not the organization”, in building terrorist cells and networks. The previous principle is to establish a working system, not a central organization, through the formation of separate cells and clusters related to: (the common title, the political and legal approach, and the common end goal). This method ensures that the groups are separated from each other, so that the exposure of a particular cell does not lead to the exposure of the rest of the organization’s cells.

It is remarkable that the combat experiences of these groups, and the setbacks to which they were subjected to, gave their members extensive operational experience; it contributed to the complexity of clandestine groups/organizations, the development of terrorist attack methods, their implementation mechanisms, and the means for personnel and weapons to move between the flaring fronts in separate countries. This had a major impact on the structure of the globalized jihadist movement.

It should be noted that the development of the jihadist movement - which is often attributed to qualitative contributions by leaders and active individuals within it – took place within the framework of a social process, and the succession of two generations within the movement itself. In other words, the emergence of any of the jihadist generations did not abolish its predecessor, but rather added to it and benefited from it and developed its methods to achieve the final goal, which has been characterized to a large extent,

stems from the fixed nature of the approach on which it is based.

This sequence can be noticed in the experience of the Islamic State in particular – and in Al-Qaeda to a lesser extent – the first announcement is the establishment of the territorial Caliphate [26] in June 2014; then attracting thousands of young fighters who had no “jihadi practice”, yet they maintained the state of coexistence that lived among them [27], and between the older generations that had previously fought in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq, in particular – without the emergence of a generational gap in the sociological concept. [28]

Transformations in the jihadi case

However, the rise of ISIS to the leadership position of the globalized jihad – following rift with Al-Qaeda in 2014 – and then the first declaration of the territorial Caliphate in the same year, within the territories it controlled in Syria and Iraq – contributed to an accelerating process of critical transformations within the jihadi case.

The great jihadist discord impacted the fragile cohesion between the two heads of globalized jihad (Al-Qaeda and ISIS), which were divided into two camps; one of which being affiliated with the Islamic State, it included the groups that pledged allegiance to the ISIS and announced their conversion to its States and foreign branches – the second section were loyal to al-Qaeda and include groups allied to it in Asia and Africa; and finally are those independent groups that fight within a specific local/country cause and are

committed to fighting the conflict without linking to external groups.

The earlier repositioning played a role in modifying the status of the jihadist organizations in general, as the jihadist map was reshaped, including the areas of influence and spread, alliances and associations, and the objectives of the jihadist groups in different areas of their activity.

We can classify the main shifts in the jihadist case according to 3 directions, which are:

A) The Most Radical Global Jihad

The Islamic State represents this movement, as it was keen to distinguish itself as a radical model that adheres to the old line of its earlier version (the Islamic State of Iraq organization) [29]; describing al-Qaeda as a deviation from the “old” jihadist method, which is openly hostile to all, and refuses to ally with forces with nationalist and patriotic inclinations. The stampede between the two organizations led to ISIS launching the rule of ‘infidelity’ against Al-Qaeda; while the latter responded by describing the former as one of the “new takfiris”, and that they [ISIS] represented “the extremist Kharijites [Khawarij], the grandsons of Ibn Muljam,” as Ayman al-Zawahiri described in his audio words. [30]

It is clear that the separation of the two organizations from each other hastened the transformation of ISIS to a more radical approach, especially with the rise of what is known as the ‘delegated committee’ [31] within ISIS and its adoption of views and theories that expand the provisions of takfir [infidelity], as it permits the organization to kill its opponents

in general, without looking at the legal premises for the sanctification of blood that jihadist organizations usually invoke. [32]

However, “ISIS brutality” is attributed to several reasons, including the psychological pressure caused by the military and security gravity that its fighters have been subjected to, since the start of the international campaign to combat the organization, which is led by the International Coalition (Operation Inherent Resolve); which altered their attitudes towards violent action and contributed to enhancing their desire for revenge, in addition to the decline and absence of legitimate leaders [33] who play a controlling role in the behavior of individuals and leaders. In most cases, ISIS’ restriction to the limits of organizational jurisprudence choices, especially in light of the tendency of the senior leadership of ISIS to pay attention to military and security aspects at the expense of legal issues. This was clearly embodied in the saying of Abdullah Qardash (Amir Abd al-Mawla al-Salbi [34]): “*I do not care about all these doctrinal issues. The most important thing for me is the [Islamic] State (the organization).*” [35]

In addition to the previous factors, is the rise of an “entire new generation” within ISIS during the period of the territorial Caliphate, as spoken in the words of the former spokesman for ISIS and the emir of the Delegated Committee (the organization’s supreme leadership and executive body).

The danger of the aforementioned ISIS generation lies in its being less committed to the ideology and the jihadist approach, and more inclined and willing to commit murder, bloodshed, theft and looting, under the pretext of damaging the infidels’ funds. This is due to multiple reasons, including

the transformations taking place in the ISIS jihadist case, and the presence of a large number of psychologically unsound people in this generation – with our affirmation that the idea of normality and psychological disorder is a relative matter that differs from person to person – hence, it is not correct to pass judgment on members of groups and organizations in general because there is no ‘terrorist personality’, although some people are more willing to do so compared to normal people. [36]

B) The Less Radical Global Jihad

In contrast to the Islamic State, al-Qaeda has shown greater flexibility in dealing with events since the outbreak of the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011. With the success of change experiments in Tunisia and Egypt, the organization was able to dramatically change its face, and promote itself as a less extremist model vis-à-vis its traditional rival, the ISIS.

A secret message among the documents collected during the “Abbottabad raid” [37] shows that the late al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden asked the organization’s foreign operations official, Jamal al-Misrati (known by the nom de guerre Atiyatullah al-Libi), to warn the organization’s foreign branches to beware of carrying out terrorist operations; because the bloodshed of civilians, especially Muslims among them, led to the organization losing the sympathy of large groups of its sympathizers, which may lead to “*paralysis of the jihadist movement*,” as he described it. [38]

In that letter, Osama bin Laden urged the supreme operational leadership of al-Qaeda to play a greater role in controlling the behavior of the organization’s fighters and its foreign branches, and to stay as far as possible from engaging in local

conflicts that drain its energies and causes losing support in Muslim countries. This was part of a “military policy” formulated by Al-Qaeda emirs prior to the outbreak of the Arab Spring revolutions, trying to gain momentum and support to continue terrorist acts, in addition to launching a propaganda campaign through the organization’s platforms to improve its image and present it in a new costume; emphasizing the necessity of cohesion with the “community”, as the organization calls it.

The new direction of the al-Qaeda leader was evident in his last audio speech published by the al-Sahab Media Institution (the propaganda arm of al-Qaeda), following his death in May 2011; Osama bin Laden shifted from calling for armed insurgency and change by force, to praising peaceful revolutions and considered them a victory for the Islamic nation and an indication of realizing the ultimate goal set by the organization, which is to “eliminate Israel” and “expel the United States from the Arab region.” [39]

The organizational letters and subsequent propaganda publications demonstrated that bin Laden’s instructions were not so much a self-initiative, rather an emerging trend within al-Qaeda, nearly two decades after the 9/11 attacks.

In 2012, French forces in Mali, participating in Operation Serval to combat terrorism in the Sahel and Sahara (January 2013 – July 2014), found an internal document of Al-Qaeda written by Abu Musab Abdel-Wadoud, the emir of the regional branch of Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (1970-2020) covering the organization’s vision to establish a promising jihadist emirate in the Azawad region (northern Mali), which was later published by the organization’s propaganda platforms under the title: “*General guidance regarding the*

Islamic jihadist project in Azawad – Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb”, revealing that it was drafted in consultation with the central leadership of Al-Qaeda, and the organization’s foreign operations officials, led by Attiya Allah Al-Libi (1969-2012), and Abu Yahya Al-Libi (1963-2012).

The document included a presentation of the vision of the new rule for the jihadist emirate, and stressed the need not to rush in implementing Islamic law: such as applying [sharia] penalties, demolishing shrines, imposing specific dress codes on women, banning televisions, satellite, etc.). The document prohibited [Al-Qaeda members] from monopolizing power at the expense of other armed groups, and warned them not to be at the fore in the political and military scene; asking its followers to seek to win the loyalty of the local community with its different ethnic and tribal components in the application of the theory of cohesion with the community. In addition to that, the instructions required [Al-Qaeda members] to work to neutralize the largest possible number of opponents, and not to enter into conflicts with tribes or armed groups, even if they disagree with the organization, but rather to work to attract and mobilize them behind al-Qaeda; considering the relatively limited capabilities of Al-Qaeda, and thus attempting to reduce regional and international pressures on the organization’s strongholds.

The document of general instructions for jihadist action has been circulated and discussed in its content to more than one branch of the organization, which is demonstrated by the experiences of the foreign branches of al-Qaeda. In Yemen, Ansar al-Sharia (the local branch of al-Qaeda) followed almost the same principles, when they took control of the coastal city of Al-Mukalla, the third most important city in the

country (east of Sanaa), they established a council with local prominent figures to manage the affairs of the city, and tried to attract the people and Yemeni tribes. [40]

It appears that Nasser al-Wahaishi (Abu Basir al-Yamani – 1976-2015), the former emir of al-Qaeda in Yemen who was a candidate to succeed Ayman al-Zawahiri in the leadership of al-Qaeda, also drafted a document for jihadist action similar to the aforementioned Azawad document. Nasser al-Wahaishi sent his advice to his counterpart in the Islamic Maghreb branch, “Abu Musab Abdel-Wadoud”, instructing him to ensure the provision of basic services such as water, electricity, general cleaning services, etc. to the population, and to ensure their wellbeing, as indicated by regulatory documents found in the city of Timbuktu (Northern Mali) after the withdrawal of al-Qaeda fighters and their allies from it in 2012. [41]

The speeches and messages of the current emir of al-Qaeda, “Ayman al-Zawahiri”, similarly indicated the new direction of the organization. During his eulogy video for Osama bin Laden, in June 2011, Al-Zawahiri said that: *“Our greatest victory over America is in exposing its decadence and defeat in the field of morals and principles,”* recommending the followers of the organization to *“join with the masses of the Muslim Ummah, and be keen on serving them, defending them, preserving their safety and sanctities, and avoiding any action that exposes them to danger in the markets or mosques or crowded places, for we did not leave our homes and abandon our homelands except in defense of them and their dignity.”* [42]

Ayman al-Zawahiri, in his video releases in 2021, incited the formation of a combat alliance that would bring together the

Al-Qaeda Organization and other armed Islamic groups active in various parts of the world, stressing the same principle of identification with local groups and tribal militias, which Abu Musab Abdel-Wadud, and Nasser Al-Wuhayshi also talked about. [43]

An analysis of the speeches of the Al-Qaeda emirs and the organization's media messages confirms that the transformations within their framework have taken place in a semi-planned and studied manner, and are not a momentary influence of the political developments taking place in the Arab region. However, this transformation caused a structural rift within the globalized jihadist movement, due to its role in the split of the Islamic State and its disengagement from al-Qaeda, justifying this by the deviation of the latter organization from its original jihadist path and ideology. In the words of Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani: "Al-Qaeda does not differentiate between the Mujahideen, the Sahwat, the bandits and the criminals. The disagreement between the ISIS and al-Qaeda is an issue of a crooked religion and a deviated approach, a method that replaced the [true] religion of Abraham, and by disbelief in the tyranny, and by disavowing its followers and their jihad: a method that believes in pacifism, and runs behind the majority." [44]

C) Country Jihad

The country jihad comes next to the globalized jihad movements. This movement is also called the "local jihad", which is a common and accurate designation considering the territorial limit and the strategy adopted by the actors in this movement. However, we prefer to use the term "country" to

distinguish this current from local jihadists or lone wolves, who are often personally motivated and influenced by jihadist ideology without formal association.

The Afghan Taliban movement and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham are the most prominent examples of the country jihad movement, which has a local tendency. For the time being, the Taliban has changed its approach from supporting and harboring Arab and foreign al-Qaeda jihadists, to focusing on its local cause of expelling foreign forces from Afghanistan by following the strategy of negotiation and fighting, and establishing an Islamic jihadist emirate within Afghanistan's borders only. [45] While Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham has changed its appearance and severed its association with Al-Qaeda, it also launched a security campaign against active Al-Qaeda cadres in the northwestern Syrian province of Idlib to suggest that it rejects the globalization of jihad and refuses turning northern Syria into a base for Al-Qaeda to launch transnational attacks. [46]

The leaders of the Taliban have announced that the relations between them and al-Qaeda have become a thing in the past, and that they will not allow Al-Qaeda to exploit Afghan lands to launch terrorist attacks or threaten regional or international countries – and this is part of implementing the peace agreement signed with the United States of America in the Qatari capital, Doha in February 2020. [47]

It is worth noting that the country jihad movement within Taliban is not a new trend, but rather an old and original one in the Afghan movement in general, which emerged primarily as an ethnic-religious-national movement that brings together a mixture of: Mawlawis, students of religious sciences, commandos, and former fighters who fought the occupying Soviet forces between (1979-1989) [48], but it was changed

strongly since the mistakes of Western jihadists and their conduct of the 9/11 attacks which caused the overthrow of the rule of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban), and the occupation of the country for about two decades.

The country jihad movement, in general, and within the Taliban in particular, is characterized by pragmatism and a focus on the movement's self-interests at the expense of ideology. As Osama bin Laden, the founding emir of al-Qaeda, described in one of his secret messages, which was released after his death: “[The Taliban] is a flattering movement that has misinterpretations of bloodshed under the pretext of the interest of the Islamic Emirate, and it is delegated for the Pakistani Military Intelligence Service (ISI) and other regional powers, and it will not refrain from shedding al-Qaeda's blood if it conflicts with their interests.”

[49]

Similar to the Taliban experience, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, which consisted of the remnants of al-Qaeda fighters in Syria (Jabhat al-Nusra), and local groups close to jihadis, in addition to fighters from Syrian tribes and clans, moved to the northwest of the country. [50]

HTS tended to re-present itself in a new guise as a national Syrian movement concerned with fighting against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his allies (Russia and Iran) for an ethnic and national cause related to – as they say – the “Sunni project” which is committed to regional understandings to reduce escalation between Russia, Iran and Turkey, as well as international agreements, with the core of which is the fight against cross-border terrorism. [51]

The transformations of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham [52] became clear in interviews with its leader Abu Muhammad al-Julani, who confirmed that it is a “*moderate local faction*” that seeks to be delisted from the American and international list of terrorist organizations; that it rejects the threat to regional and international security from northern Syria, and has no objection to establishing relations with the United States and other countries that believe in its cause. [53]

Although the HTS still provides, in its organizational and media discourse, justifications for its positions based on Salafi-Jihadi ideological adoptions, to preserve the jihadist component and its traditional support base; but its repeated positions prove its adherence to the principle of ‘country jihad’ that rejects cross-border fighting. The HTS, on more than one occasion, has declared its hostility with the Guardians of Religion Organization (the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda), and its quest to dismantle the Guardians’ specific cells known as “*cells behind the enemy lines*”, which are currently the spearhead of Al-Qaeda in Syria. Adding to that is the arrest of the Guardians’ cadres, as mentioned by senior sharia official for the Guardians of Religion Organization. [54]

On this basis, the “country jihad” may be described as a pragmatic trend that is more open than the “globalized jihad”, and more hardline than the armed factions with a local strategy. The “country jihad” has no objection to entering into the political process, whether in the form of negotiations and coordination with regional and international powers, or accepting communication and entry into existing international and regional organizations such as the United Nations or others. This is in contrast to traditional jihadists, who consider

such actions and other political tactics to be “a blasphemy that leads to dismissal from the religious nation.” [55]

This movement has received a great moral boost, following the withdrawal of the United States of America from Afghanistan, which was promoted among the jihadists as a precious victory for the Taliban movement with a national strategy, in contrast to the failure of projects and experiences of globalized jihad. [56]

D) Local Jihadists

In a related context, the local jihadists and those returning from the hotbeds of the jihadist conflict constitute a sub-current among the previous major jihad movements, especially since they are not associated with a specific movement or group at the level of organizational links; yet they identify with the same lines as a result of ideological conviction, the influence of jihadist propaganda, past experiences, and the influence of family members, friends, etc.

Local jihadists, who are described in the media as “lone wolves”, constitute a significant threat to security around the world, because terrorist attacks have become easier to carry out, using unconventional means such as setting fires, running over people with cars and trucks, etc. [57]

Such attacks do not require special preparation or equipment, as much as they require a person with personal willingness and initiative. [58] Previous experience in counter-terrorism indicates that such attacks are usually difficult to predict compared to large-scale and coordinated attacks, which complicates the efforts of law enforcement agencies. [59]

Most of the local jihadists resort to latency and waiting for long periods without taking any action that would raise suspicion around them. They also carry themselves around in a manner as if they were under surveillance, and this keeps them away from the eyes of the security services. Security services are often surprised after the “local jihadists” conduct their attacks.

It is noteworthy that the global jihad organizations, such as the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, allocate great importance to local jihadists, and regularly broadcast provocative messages urging them to launch attacks within the countries in which they reside. This is aimed at spreading terror and panic among the local population, or as they say “*to make the neighbor fear their neighbor*”. This serves the interests of these organizations to a degree that outweighs the numerous of attacks they carry out in their main strongholds of activity. In the words of the former spokesman for the Islamic State: “*The smallest work that you do in their [enemy’s] own homes are better and more beloved to us than the largest work we have; it is more effective for us. If one of you wishes to be in the Islamic State, one of us wishes to be in your place, to injure the Crusaders day and night, and frighten and terrorize them until the neighbor fears his neighbor.*”

It is likely that the trend towards “local jihad” will increase in the short and medium term, especially after Al-Qaeda’s setbacks in Syria, Yemen and the Afghan-Pakistan border areas, as well as the collapse of ISIS’ territorial Caliphate.

The founding ideas of the jihadist ideological system

At the level of founding ideas for the jihadist ideological system, we note that this system was built on a dual ideological and dynamic basis. It is a fundamentalist Salafi notion in terms of doctrine and ideology, and a dynamic jihadism in terms of practice and movement.

The jihadist ideological system was formed, over years, during which ideas accumulated on top of each other without being subject to great consideration or study. The failed experiences of armed organizations and groups added a kind of extremism to these ideas, which was reflected in the practice of these groups. [60]

Surely, the founding ideas of the jihadist movement are larger than what writings can contain, but we will try to point out the main features in this complex intellectual system, including:

- Supremacy / Authority

The idea of supremacy (also called monotheism of supremacy, which means that Allah is the only ruler and legislator, and that judgment against His law – in its traditional form in the Salafi thought – [is] a blasphemy that leads to dismissal from the religious nation, and necessitates the fight. This is a basic pillar in the jihadist intellectual system, and it requires detailing the provisions of takfir [atonement] (*general atonement*), and *specific atonement*. It also entails the rulings in terms of the homeland of Islam and ‘the infidels’, on which the principles of takfir, the rulings on fighting and the permissibility of blood, etc., are also based.

Perhaps the issue of ‘supremacy / authority’ can be considered as the first seed that was planted in the soil of the

contemporary jihadist movement to grow. Later on, a tree or trees with multiple branches, each of which followed a distinct path according to the contexts of its emergence and development. Since Sayyid Qutb, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood's Guidance Office and responsible for spreading the da'wah, launched his theses about the absence of supremacy/authority under Asdaf al-Jahiliya rooted in the contemporary world. [61] Sayyid Qutb was influenced by Abu Al-Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979), the founder of the Pakistani Islamic group; the idea began to grow like a snowball rolling from a high peak, it intensified over time, and become more widespread and extreme.

The study of the “absent obligation”, [62] which was written in 1981 by the Egyptian jihadi theorist Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj (1954-1982), was a merger of the polar theses with the fatwas of the faqih Ahmed ibn Abd al-Halim ibn Taymiyyah in the fight against the Tatars. This had a great impact compared to other jihadist literature in rooting the idea of combat jihad, blaspheming the ruler, and fighting local governments according to the rule of prioritizing fighting apostates over fighting the original infidel. This ruling has since turned into a base strategy for global [jihad] organizations such as the Islamic State, which say “fighting the near enemy [local regimes, Shiite sects, etc.] is more important than fighting the original infidel [the United States and Western countries, etc.]” – especially in the case of ISIS, which adopts a global jihadist ideology that is evidently based on sectarian pillars. [63]

The jihadi organizations believe that anyone who does not rule by Sharia is an infidel who is outside the religion and is worthy of killing and fighting – and this includes those with

secular, nationalistic, patriotic, communist and Baathist tendencies, etc. – likewise, it is considered that the ruling applies to everyone who entered the political process, whether by participating in the elections, the government, or the parliament. [64]

These issues are rooted under the classification of: “*Associating partners [with Allah] through obedience [to someone other than Him]*,” which includes extensive chapters on the provisions of atonement related to democracy and national constitutions. [65]

- **The land of infidelity and Islam**

Following the bases of ‘supremacy / authority’, another issue that is no less important than others, is: “the rulings over homelands”, which are divided, according to the Salafi criterion, into ‘*the lands of Islam*’ and ‘*the lands of infidels*’ – some faqihs have added a third category, which is the ‘*compound homeland*’. The decisive criterion in dividing the lands from the Salafi perspective as well as the Salafi jihad, is to consider the predominance of the rulings over these lands; thus, it is judged that a particular country is the abode of Islam if Islam rules there, and it is also judged that a particular homeland is the abode of unbelief if ‘infidelity rules.’

It is not required to overturn the rule of a homeland over its residents. Judging that the homeland is the abode of unbelief does not require its people to be infidels. However, the groups with takfiri tendencies (which disbelieve in general, such as the Takfir wal-Hijrah group and others) consider that ruling over homelands is a criterion for ruling its people – contrary to the jihadist organizations in their global/country versions, which do not [consider] the public to be in disbelief – as Abu

Omar al-Baghdadi (the Emir of the Islamic State of Iraq – the earlier version of ISIS) mentioned in his audio speech: “*Say: I am aware of my Lord,*” adding: “*and we believe that if the homelands are established on the laws of disbelief, and the rulings of disbelief prevail in them rather than the rulings of Islam, then they are lands of disbelief; yet this does not necessitate that we declare the inhabitants of these homelands to be infidels.*” [66]

According to the jihadist ideology, the land of Islam is the homeland of peace and security in which there is no fighting. As for the lands of disbelief, they are divided into ‘*lands of kufr that are warlike*’ (to fight the jihadist groups), and ‘*lands of kufr that are not warlike*’ – in the former, according to jihadists, it is permissible to fight and kill, which may be almost uncontrolled.

As for the “compound abode”, it is that which was the abode of Islam or the abode of infidelity, then it was transformed. [67] This division is well-known during the authority of Ibn Taymiyyah in his fatwas related to the Tatars in his time, such as his fatwa on the people of Mardin which states that it bears both meanings; it is not in the status of the abode of peace in which the rulings of Islam are applied – because its people are Muslims – nor is it in the status of the abode of war whose people are infidels. Rather, a third category treats the Muslim with what they deserve, and fights the one who is outside the Shariah of Islam with what they deserve, according to Ibn Taymiyyah. [68]

The Islamic State, in its current version, was influenced by the fatwa of ‘the people of Mardin’ regarding the division of the rulings of the homelands. They have coded the term “*the lands of emergency infidelity,*” which means the cities/areas

that were under the control of the organization and then they lost them. There was a great disagreement on this issue between the shariah officials of the organization in 2016 and 2017, the conclusion of which was that such lands are considered ‘*the homelands of infidels without opposing its people*’, as indicated by organizational documents published by the leaders of the organization, which the researcher has obtained a copy of them. [69]

The jihadists build on the rulings of the homeland, and other issues related to governance. From their subjective perspective, national constitutions and the laws affiliated with them are considered “tyrannical laws” that alter Allah’s rule on earth. Therefore, such states fall into the circle of “the homelands of infidelity”, and since the systems, local governments, national armies, police and law enforcement agencies are based on the protection of these constitutions, they are all within the circle of infidelity, and they ‘*should be fought without distinction.*’ [70]

- **Fighting the abstaining sect**

Among the founding ideas of the jihadist movement, which originates from the “the tree of supremacy/authority”, is the idea of fighting the sect that abstains from the rule of Sharia, by force of arms – as the jihadi groups see that fighting is “*imposed upon them – to overthrow the infidel rulers who rule the homelands, to deter the sects that guard these rulers, protect their Sharia and support them, to install a caliph for the Muslims, to recover what was stolen from the lands of Islam, and to free the prisoners.*” [71]

The jihadi organizations of all kinds adopt the idea of fighting the sect, but they differ among themselves in judging the

notables of the sect (the prominent people). The Egyptian Islamic groups, for example, used to say that ruling in a sect is ‘blasphemy as a whole’, while ruling over the notables (prominent figures), should be subject to other controls, including the fulfillment of the conditions of ‘atonement’ and the absence of its legally-established prohibitions, from the Salafi perspective.

These ideas can be summarized in the words of the prominent jihadist and legal theorist of Al-Qaeda and then the Islamic State, “Abu Abdullah Al-Muhajir,” that the ruling was divided into the land of Islam and the land of infidelity, and the last land was a home of permissibility for fighting without differentiating between civilians – because there are no longer civilians, and they are rather soldiers. The same applies to the permissibility of blood, money of the “infidel” in any geographical area, as well as fighting the apostate (the parting with Islam after belief in it) without repentance or hesitation.

[72]

These ideas play the role of fuel for the global jihadist organizations, and ensure their continuity despite their setbacks and military defeats, because ideological organizations do not end with a military and security confrontation only.

The old and new strategies

The setbacks faced by the global jihadist movement, along with the collapse of the territorial caliphate of the Islamic State, caused it to return to following old strategies and tactics with the purpose of setting the grounds for a future return to

spread again; while its rival, Al-Qaeda, continued to pursue almost the same strategies to reach the same goal.

Perhaps the similarity in the strategies of combative action stems from the single origin from which the global jihad organizations branched off. Al-Qaeda has been at the forefront of the transnational movement for years, accumulating theories and theses of military leaders, strategic theorists, and enthusiastic supporters, on how to reach the establishment of a global caliphate.

When ISIS was formed and began to differentiate as an entity separate from Al-Qaeda, it acquired the latter's dynamic legacy, especially general work strategies, and employed them to achieve its own objectives.

The Islamic State and Al-Qaeda organizations focus on several strategies to reach the ultimate goal, the most prominent of which are:

- **Arm movement strategy**

This strategy is based on mobilizing and concentrating the main military effort in the battle center consisting of two fronts: Syria and Yemen in the case of Al-Qaeda; and Syria and Iraq in the case of ISIS, with the opening of an extended series of partial fronts so that the external branches work to occupy and drain 'the enemy' in their frontal field, so that the operational movement on more than one side turns into the form of two arms. This ensures the dispersal of counter-terrorism efforts that may be led by any international or regional military alliances, and it provides logistical and intelligence support to the main front. [73]

In parallel with the expansion of the military confrontation, the general command of the jihadist organization is focusing on providing the appropriate atmosphere for the perpetuation and continuation of the conflict by providing propaganda support aimed at preserving its mental image / jihadist brand in the minds of its followers and supporters – in addition to attracting the human competencies present in its various branches, and employing them in their field and psychological operations in achieving organizational goals by spreading fear and panic among civilians within countries hostile to the jihadist movement – focusing on the activity of the security detachments operating inside the hostile countries entrusted with carrying out specific attacks to pressure these countries and compel them not to participate in military operations against the jihadists, while working to prepare for the stage of decisiveness and empowerment.

By following the strategy of ‘moving in two arms’, the jihadi organizations seek to reach the “enemy's breaking point” through a long series of operations on the open fronts of attrition, and thus the moving towards declaring a global caliphate.

- **Attritional War Strategy**

It is also called the strategy of endless war and the strategy of “Al Matoulah wa Ma’arama” [Compulsion], which was adopted by the jihadi organizations in the event of military defeat, and against strong enemies with whom the conflict cannot be resolved quickly. This strategy was derived from military history and the experiences of armed national struggles. [74]

By following and analyzing the combative approach of the Islamic State, since the collapse of the territorial caliphate, and Al-Qaeda and its foreign branches, we realize their dependence on the strategy of attrition that seeks to undermine and drain the enemy's military, economic and logistical strength and capabilities, and destroy its morale by dragging it into a vicious circle of intermittent confrontations.

The former spokesman for the Islamic State, “Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir,” confirmed that ISIS followed this approach in his last audio speech, which coincided with the siege of the last strongholds of the territorial caliphate in the Syrian village of Baghouz, saying: *“Whenever the Crusaders thought that they would extend their influence and raid the Muslims, the conquerors appeared in another episode in a war that the builders of the Caliphate and its leaders wanted; to challenge the enemy's arrogance and tyranny in every place and inch of land, and drain its energies and capabilities; until Allah grants victory.”* [75]

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi stressed, in his last video appearance, that the stage of “controlling the land” and the territorial caliphate has ended temporarily, calling on the fighters of the Islamic State to launch a war of attrition against the enemy on all fronts to drain its military, financial and logistical capabilities. [76]

It is important to realize that the jihadist organizations do not aim with a war of attrition to reach an immediate resolution of the conflict, but rather aim to stress and exhaust the enemy to the maximum extent possible, and defeat it psychologically and tactically, in preparation for a comprehensive military resolution that may be delayed. [77]

- **Comprehensive Strategy**

On the same matter, the philosophy of the comprehensive strategy is based on focusing on the ultimate goal that the jihadist organizations aspire to, which is a gradual strategy that begins with weakening the enemy and attrition of its allies, then the convergence and union of the active armed groups based on the geographical factor according to their proximity or distance from the other, and ends with the declaration of a global caliphate. [78]

This long-term strategy is based on the principle of functional specialization and the unity of the ultimate goal. It works on detailing the way to be followed in each country in which jihadist organizations are active based on the conditions of this country, and the vision of its leadership, which consults with the general leadership, which in turn coordinates work to serve the objectives the jihadist movement.

In this regard, it should be noted that the strategies of the globalized jihadist movement evolve and mutate to adapt to changes in the movement or the challenges it faces, to ensure its survival and adaptation within the altering operational environment. This is what is called the “*last war strategy*,” which means developing the method of work and not repeating the previously used methods and strategies, even if they were fruitful, in order not to remain trapped in repetition, and to be able to keep pace with variations and adapt to the unexpected.

The future of jihadism

Based on the foregoing, it can be said that the jihadi organizations adopt a semi-planned future strategy for survival and expansion, although the success of implementing these strategies remains a relative matter linked to many factors, the partial successes achieved by organizations such as the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban movement, and others, promote their own narrative and enhance their mental status in the minds and hearts of their followers, ensuring their survival and continuity in their struggle and the long war that they have declared.

While the major international powers and regional actors have partially withdrawn from the arena of combating international terrorism – driven by political developments and difficult economic conditions in light of the COVID-19 pandemic – the jihadi organizations continue to work on preparing for the next round of their struggle with the East and West alike.

The jihadist organizations have proven that they are able to survive and exist in hostile environments and exceptional harsh conditions. This has given them a moral victory because they consider that the sincerity of its call depends truly on their survival and continuity, even if they lose their leaders and members who pass the fight from one generation to another, pledging to continue fighting until the end of time; within a war of attrition and terrorism fueled by the flames of the clash of civilizations, the rise of extreme right-wing trends, the continuation of sectarian conflicts, and religious and political persecution, as well as exploiting the difficult economic and social conditions.

Time has indicated that the fire of terrorism does not die down despite the jihadist divisions and disagreements, but rather increases chaos and turmoil around the world. The competition of the jihadi parties over who would become fiercer and carry out attacks against traditional opponents, is a tool for them to confirm the correctness of their approach and attract new followers. [79]

In addition to the [jihadi] organizations' adaptation in difficult circumstances, the security and intelligence departments concerned with combating terrorism emphasize that the jihadists have developed methods of propaganda, polarization and financing, and have taken advantage of modern technology, the internet, and cryptocurrencies to realize their goals, which continues to raise the threats they pose now and in the future.

While the global jihad project has been broken and its organizations have been militarily defeated on more than one front, there is still a long way to the end of the terrorist threat. Eliminating extremism and terrorism is not possible in the foreseeable future at least; and the coming period may witness a new resurgence of jihadist organizations and groups, after the American withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Conclusion:

The whole world is facing a real threat to international stability and security, and this is due to the rise and spread of radical extremist ideas, which do not believe in the acceptance of the other or peaceful coexistence. The jihadi organizations continue to wage a global war to undermine and destroy the current world order, in order to rebuild a new system or a territorial caliphate, rooted in a marginal vision of the world.

The challenge posed by jihadist organizations, whether transnational or country [local], requires the major actors and regional states to continue cooperating to combat terrorism and focus on expected threats, not to withdraw and leave the tasks on the shoulders of local powers and governments that are unable to control the security situation in their countries in the face of insurgency and jihadism.

This challenge also requires governments, counter-terrorism agencies, and organizations to study extremism, as well as religious bodies, to formulate a comprehensive strategy to combat terrorism, especially the global [jihad], and work to implement these studies, considering the privacy of local communities and respecting their traditions and culture. Past experiences have proven that confronting extremism and terrorism with military and security force only is not achievable, and that terrorism will remain as long as the reasons that led to its existence remain.

Recommendations:

From the previous premise, we suggest the following recommendations to deal with terrorist threats in the current and future period:

1- Securing a comprehensive strategy

Extremism and terrorism represent a complex phenomenon in which the boundaries between what is material and what is moral is blurry. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the threats comprehensively without underestimation, and to work on formulating a comprehensive strategy to confront it. Such strategy must include a security and military confrontation, as well as an intellectual and ideological confrontation, supported by a psychological and sociological vision to ensure the sustainability of the strategy and maximize the results.

2- Avoiding analytical bias

Experts in law enforcement agencies, as well as researchers and scholars of terrorism tend to harmonize the new information they receive with their previous perceptions and ideas about jihadist organizations, and this is perhaps one of the reasons for the catastrophic failure in dealing with the jihadist phenomenon.

In order to avoid mistakes made in the fight against terrorism, organizations and groups must be understood in their proper context, without preconception. Because understanding the phenomenon is the first step to dealing with it, and terrorist groups derive part of their strength from our lack of understanding of the contexts in which they originated and

our lack of awareness of the developments they have gone through.

Therefore, we recommend working to understand the developments taking place in the jihadist situation, and identifying the sources of the threat in an accurate way to deal with them.

3- Increasing regional and international cooperation to counter terrorism

The growing terrorist threat requires national governments to strengthen cooperation with regional countries and international organizations to counter terrorism. This cooperation must cover a long list of aspects, including border security and immigration, and the exchange of intelligence information, as well as the exchange of military and security experience derived from counter-terrorism operations; in addition to supporting countries that face the risk of collapse in the face of armed organizations and groups.

4- Dealing with returning and local jihadists

The international community and national governments should assume their responsibility in dealing with the issue of returning jihadists and prisoners of jihadist organizations and their families who remain in conflict areas within the Middle East in particular. Because neglecting to deal with this matter and relying on temporary solutions will exacerbate the threat of the emergence of a new generation more dangerous than the previous one. It could, as well, lead to greater tendencies of violence within the elements of these groups, both against local communities and against their countries of origin.

5- De-securitization

Traditional counter-terrorism programs focus on confronting and dismantling jihadist organizations through security and military action, without paying attention to the social, political and religious reality, or the conditions that contributed to the rise of terrorism. Of course, the security approach achieves relatively quick victories against the jihadi organizations in the short term, but it fails every time to prevent the jihadist threat or neutralize their influence, since the jihadists insist on fighting the war to the end, and believe that *‘whoever continues to fight will eventually succeed.’*

Attention should be paid to building a non-security approach that focuses on addressing the intellectual and ideological roots, and dealing with the political, social and psychological conditions that stimulate extremism and terrorism, because they will not end as long as the real causes that helped create them do not end.

6- Supporting local communities

Finally, local communities must be supported, and sectarian, religious or ethnic conflicts must be prevented. Because jihadist organizations and armed insurgent groups derive their legitimacy and momentum from local grievances, which causes continued violence and the failure of efforts to contain it.

Local traditions should be respected, and efforts should be made to help local communities whether on the economic, social or educational level. Because this breaks the links between those societies and the jihadist and extremist organizations, and deprives the latter from strong roots, and

thus it makes it easier to uproot and eliminate them, as demonstrated by previous experience in combating terrorism.

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26 – ISIS declares Islamic caliphate and pledges allegiance to al-Baghdadi, Al-Arabiya website, Jun 29, 2014, see: <https://bit.ly/3mYzGXy>

27 – The Islamic State organization (ISIS) suffered from internal disputes in 2016 and 2017, and this dispute was almost completely resolved during 2018. However, this dispute arose mainly because of ideological and methodological differences, not because of generational gaps between the older and newer groups within the organization.

28 – The ‘generational gap’ here means: the difference in mentality and thought of one generation from another, and the difference is in opinion, politics, values and even belief and behavior.

29 – Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, ‘This Was Not Our Approach and Will Not Be’, Al-Furqan Foundation for Media Production, an audio speech, April 2014.

30 – Ayman Al-Zawahiri, ‘Go Out to Syria’, Al-Sahab Foundation for Media Production, audio speech, May 2015.

31 – The ISIS consists of 3 main movements: these movements differ in ideological and methodological field, the most important of which is the position on the fundamentals of takfir (ideological issues of faith and infidelity), detailing the provisions of the homeland and its division between the homeland of Islam, the homeland of infidelity, and the emergency/accidental homeland of infidelity. These provisions occupy a large space in the intellectual system of the global jihadist movement, and ISIS consists of:

- **The Abu Jaafar al-Hattab** (an idiomatic designation), which is incorrectly known in the media as the al-Hazmi movement, adopts very extreme positions on the issue of takfir. The movement speaks of the theory of sequential atonement, which is based on the atonement of all non-believers in the ideas of this movement. The movement was curbed after a campaign against its cadres during in 2014 and 2016.

- **The Delegated Committee**, known internally as the **Al-Furqan Movement**; named after the former ISIS deputy emir, Abu Muhammad al-Furqan, Wael Hussein Al-Fayyad Al-Iraqi. This movement adopts a hardline view on the issues of takfir and judging individuals with Islam and unbelief, but to a lesser degree than the “al-Hattab” movement. They reject the idea of sequential atonement, or to say that considering the origin in the general population being ‘disbelief’. This movement is currently controlling ISIS, and from it descends the Emir of the organization, Abu Ibrahim Al-Hashimi Al-Qurashi.

- **The “Curriculum Research Office”**, sometimes attributed to Turki al-Binali, former head of the ISIS Research and Studies Office. This movement adopts less strict views on issues of atonement, and admits reasons for ignorance in matters of ‘minor disbelief.’ The movement fully rejects the expansion of the idea of atonement, and in one of its fatwas it permitted referral to civil courts in case of necessity (ISIS describes these courts as tyrannical). This movement was entrusted in 2014-2016 the Emirate of Sharia bodies within ISIS: Office of Research and Studies, Diwan of Call and Mosques, Diwan of Education, Sharia Office of Diwan al-Jund, Sharia Office of Camp Administration, Court of Justice and Grievances; before withdrawing these authorities from the movement based on the vision of Abu Muhammad al-Furqan and his followers, who considered that the Research Office’s movement did not represent the correct ideological line of the organization.

For more information on ISIS movements and their internal disputes, please see:

Ahmed Sultan, *The “ISIS” dynamic thought after Al-Baghdadi and its impact on the organization, ISIS after Al-Baghdadi*, Al-Misbar Book (Book 159), United Arab Emirates, Al-Mesbar Center for Studies and Research, March 2020 | Abu Khabab al-Masri and Abu Suleiman al-Shami, *“The Document on Forestation for Issues of Exaggeration, Deferment, and Atonement,”* Systematic Control Committee of the Islamic State, internal document, 2016 | Abu Khabab al-Masry and Abu Suleiman al-Shami, *“The Criterion Issues between Right and Falsehood,”* Systematic Control Committee, Internal Regulatory Letter, 2016

- 32 – Ahmed Sultan, ISIS transformations from takfir to “super blasphemy”, Ida’at website, 21-5-2021, see: <https://bit.ly/3AMgTnd>
- 33 – Abu Abd al-Malik al-Shami, Sighs from the host country, internal organizational letter, electronic version, September 2017.
- 34 – Amir Muhammad Sa’id Abdal-Rahman al-Mawla, rewards for justice, available at: <https://bit.ly/3BOiV7P>
- 35 – Ibn Jubayr, The Fall of the Myth, Al-Wafa Media Foundation (ISIS defector), October 2019.
- 36 – Shaker Abdel Hamid, Psychological Explanation of Extremism and Terrorism, previous source, p. 15-16.
- 37 – The US Special Forces that killed Osama bin Laden obtained hundreds of letters and hard drives containing organizational files, and the US Central Intelligence Agency published parts of them in 5 separate versions on its website.
- 38 – From Zamri (Osama bin Laden) to Sheikh Mahmoud (Atiyatullah al-Libi), the Abbottabad Documents, 1st Edition, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) website, (the researcher holds an electronic edition).
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- 46 – “Al-Julani’s Gambles”: The opponents of the leader of Tahrir al-Sham reveal his worst fluctuations, News Al’an, June 22, 2021, see: <https://bit.ly/3pcP7hr>
- 47 – Taliban spokesman: “Al-Qaeda does not exist in Afghanistan and we have nothing to do with it”, CNN Arabic, 22-8-2021, see: <https://cnn.it/3lQw7DF>
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- 49 – From Osama bin Laden to Ayman al-Zawahiri, a letter on the assassination of Mullah Dad Allah, Abbottabad Documents, 7-5-2008 (*the researcher holds a copy*).
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