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## The Longevity of Religious Terrorist Organizations

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# **The Longevity of Religious Terrorist Organizations**

**Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College**

**by  
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## **Introduction**

Since the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, when hijackers piloted American passenger planes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, terrorism has become the largest security concern of the United States. Also, religious terrorist groups are distinct in that they launch much more violent and costly attacks than other kinds of terrorists, leading to nation states making combating terrorism a much higher national security priority. The hijackers from 9/11 were mostly from Saudi Arabia, along with a few from other Arab states, who were all members of the terrorist organization al Qaeda, led by Osama Bin Laden. Al Qaeda attacked the United States because it viewed U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East as destructive to Muslims and wanted to get rid of foreign influence in Muslim countries. Osama Bin Laden described al Qaeda's religious reasoning for attacking the U.S stating:

"We have declared jihad against the US, because in our religion it is our duty to make jihad so that God's word is the one exalted to the heights and so that we drive the Americans away from all Muslim countries"<sup>1</sup>.

The attacks on 9/11 led to President George W. Bush's declaration of the commencement of The War on Terror in which he stated, "Our 'War on Terror' begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated."<sup>2</sup> George W. Bush believed that the only way to combat terrorism was to destroy all terrorist organizations, starting with al-Qaeda and continuing on to other groups throughout the world. President Bush's speech about the

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<sup>1</sup> Laden to Frontline newsgroup, "Osama bin Laden V. The U.S: Edicts and Statements."

<sup>2</sup> *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People: Hearings Before the American People*, 2001 President (D.C. 2001) (statement of George W. Bush). Accessed May 1, 2017. <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.

events of 9/11 and the War on Terror rallied U.S public opinion in support of the war. The War on Terror led the United States to invade both Afghanistan and Iraq. After fifteen years, U.S troops are still battling terrorists in Afghanistan, and despite the U.S. withdrawal of conventional soldiers from Iraq, the state is still in major turmoil due to terrorist organizations. The U.S., along with its allies, has failed to destroy al-Qaeda and global terrorism through military means, and now the terrorist group The Islamic State is operating in Iraq and Syria.

While the United States continues to prosecute the war on terrorism, history suggests most terrorist groups will eventually collapse on their own without states' counter terrorism measures. The majority of terrorist groups struggle to survive and eventually collapse within several years. It has been estimated that around 70% of modern terrorist groups do not continue to exist past one year from their first attack, and 80% do not exist five years after their first attack.<sup>3</sup> However, there is a reason to expect that religiously motivated terrorist organizations are capable of having a much longer life span compared to other forms of terrorism.

For example, consider the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The IRA formed in 1917 and has, until recently, continued to operate and launch attacks. The IRA, originally formed to end the British rule of Ireland, later fought to unify Northern Ireland with the independent Republic of Ireland after Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were split. Danny Morrison, a former IRA member, explains why the IRA resorted to violence for Irish independence stating, "The main struggle, the main thrust- *and this goes without saying*- is

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<sup>3</sup> Young and Dugan, "Survival of the Fittest,".

the armed struggle, because that's the only way to get the Brits out of Ireland"<sup>4</sup>. The IRA has survived longer than other anticolonial terrorist group and even any other modern terrorist group<sup>5</sup>. In addition, the IRA was also a religious organization. Despite the IRA having nonreligious goals, it was by no means a secular organization. The IRA was not a secular organization because it was deeply connected to Catholicism due to the sectarian divide between Irish and English Protestants vs. Irish Catholics. These observations raise important questions: why do religious terrorist organizations<sup>6</sup> last longer than other kinds of terrorist groups? And what consequences does this have for U.S foreign policy?

I contend that religion changes the recruitment strategies of terrorist organizations, enabling them to continue to recruit new members because the religious ideology of the organization can draw them in. Religion allows terrorists to recruit new members not just for political reasons but for religious reasons as well. The very nature of religious terrorist groups helps draw in additional recruits, because joining the groups seems more imperative and morally justified because they are fighting for their religious beliefs and their God or God's. Religion also attracts new members because terrorist organizations can frame political issues and counterterrorism measures as an attack on their religion, which makes people believe they must join in order to defend their religious beliefs. Many of these groups that are recognized as religion-based organizations are hardly that at all, but the religious aspects are highlighted in order to gain sympathy and inspire new

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<sup>4</sup> Shanahan, *Provisional Irish*, [Page 45].

<sup>5</sup> Rapoport, *Attacking Terrorism*, [Page 48].

<sup>6</sup> To be clear, when I use the term religious terrorist organization, I do not mean to suggest that terrorism grows out of any specific religion. This is a particularly important point given the current politicization of Islamic terrorism in the United States national security discourse. Thus when I use the terms Islamic terrorist organization or Islamic terrorist. I am referring to their self-described religious motivation, and not making a judgment to the legitimacy of those claims.

membership. In predicting the longevity of a terrorist group, it is essential to look at their recruitment strategies and their recruitment successes. Many religious terrorist groups have excelled in continuously recruiting newer members, and because of this it appears they will continue to exist as long as their recruitment strategies are not interrupted.

In this paper, I will first review why recruitment is vital for terrorist groups, because successful recruitment leads to the longevity of these organizations especially because it is difficult for terrorist groups to survive. From there I am going to write about my case study of the IRA and how religion was important for IRA recruitment. Successful recruiting based on religious beliefs allowed the IRA to become the longest lasting modern terrorist organization. In the following section, I am going to write about two currently operating Islamic terrorists groups, al Qaeda and ISIS, who despite using varying methods of recruitment, still both utilize religion to gain members. Finally, I consider the implications of this argument for current U.S. counterterrorism policy.

### **Why Recruitment is Important for Longevity**

The reason why certain terrorist groups survive longer than others is due to their ability to continuously appeal to individuals to join their organization. Constant recruitment is necessary for terrorist organizations because it provides these groups with the manpower and resources needed to continue their campaign. Brian Phillips describes why terrorist organizations are dependent on recruitment for survival writing,

“Groups want sympathetic individuals to join them in the struggle, but costs to the individuals—prison or death, for example—can be high. To survive, terrorist groups need to have attributes that give them advantages in mobilization. Mobilization refers to the process of a group maintaining its resources (members, money, etc.) and getting new resources.”<sup>7</sup>

As previously mentioned, 80% of modern terrorist organizations do not continue to operate for more than five years after their first attack, as seen in the graph below<sup>8</sup>. The majority of groups that do not survive past the five-year mark do so because of their inability to recruit new members and maintain enough members for the organization to function. Terrorist groups with greater membership are more durable and can continue to operate longer because they have more resources through their members, therefore making it much more difficult for governments to break them apart<sup>9</sup>. Lack of constant recruitment is what leads to the demise of most terrorist organizations.

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<sup>7</sup> Phillips, "Terrorist Group," [Page 337].

<sup>8</sup> Young and Dugan, "Survival of the Fittest,"

<sup>9</sup> Jones and Libicki, "How Terrorist," [Page 17].

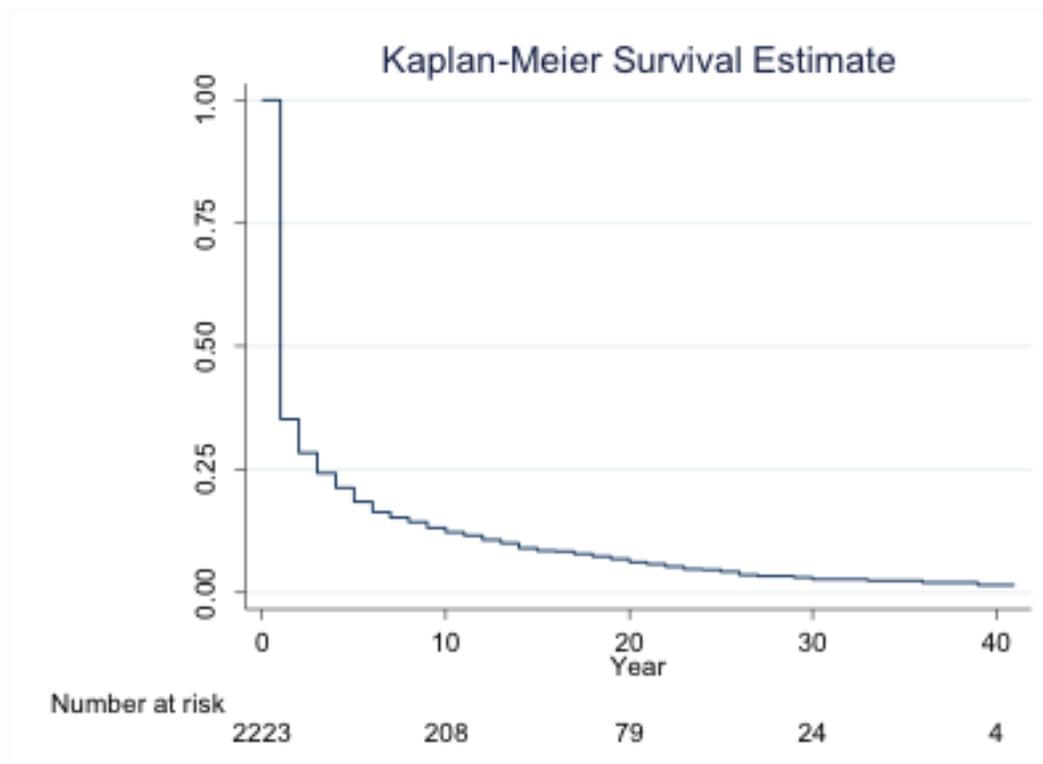


Figure 1. *Kaplan-Meier function for 2,223 terrorist organizations, 1970-2010*<sup>10</sup>

Terrorist groups also acknowledge the strength of their membership as well as the importance of recruitment as being vital to their survivability. This can explain why terrorist organizations are constantly competing with one another for members. Terrorist groups have to capture the interest of recruits in order for the recruits to join their organization and not another. In doing so they advertise their brand of terrorism as if they were a company advertising a product. When a terrorist group successfully creates an ideology and follows certain practices that are popular among possible recruits, then it can succeed in gaining more members giving the group the longevity it desires. Groups that are unable to compete with other groups for membership are much more likely to fade away. The necessity for recruits and competition among terrorist groups becomes even more

<sup>10</sup> Young and Dugan, "Survival of the Fittest,"

evident when you look at how the number of terrorist attacks and the number of groups currently operating within one region correlate, which is due to these terrorist groups launching attacks in order to gain notoriety and members<sup>11</sup>. In the graph below, one can see how the number of competing terrorist groups led to the increase in terrorist attacks, which were in large part executed by each group in order to draw in new members to their organizations.

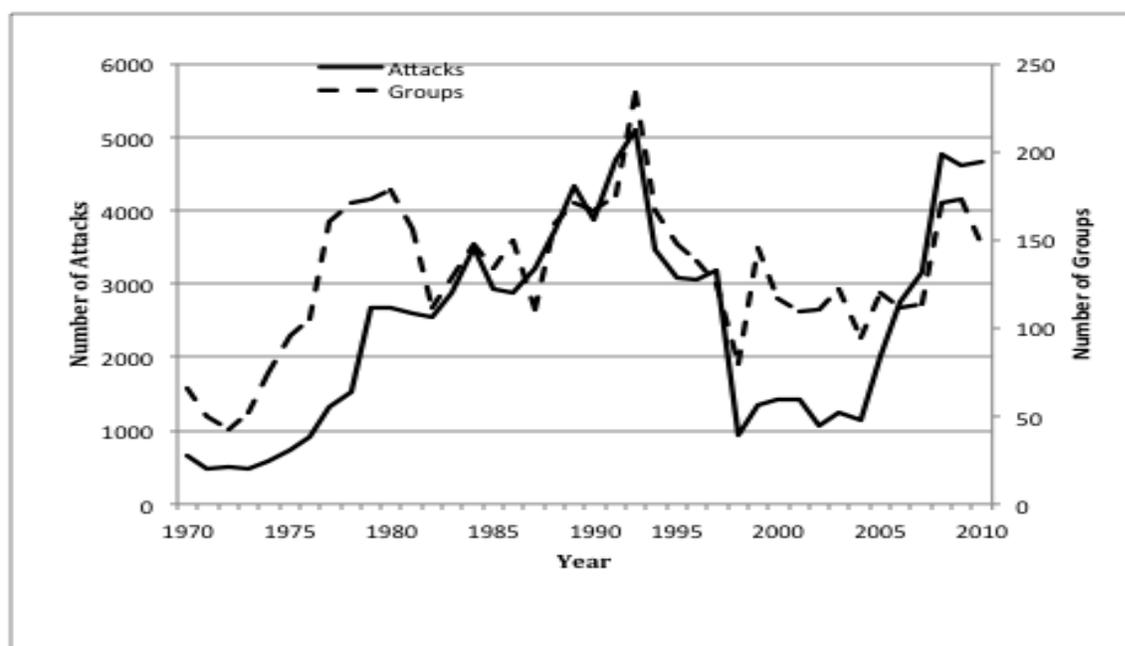


Figure 2. Number of Terror Attacks and Groups from 1970 to 2010, Global Terrorism Database<sup>12</sup>

Recruitment is essential to terrorist organizations if they are to survive and have a chance at succeeding or achieving some of their political goals. However, even for the 20% of terrorists groups that manage to successfully recruit enough members to survive for five years, they do not usually exist longer than one generation. The reason why terrorist

<sup>11</sup> Young and Dugan, "Survival of the Fittest,"

<sup>12</sup> Young and Dugan, "Survival of the Fittest,"

organizations only last about one generation at most is because of their inability to successfully continue their recruitment strategies beyond one generation. As hard as it is for terrorist groups to recruit enough members to begin their organization, it becomes even more troublesome when it comes to recruiting a newer, younger generation. Once a group becomes older, it becomes much harder for members to appeal to younger generations who are more likely to be out of touch with the group's cause. The younger generation of potential recruits may relate more to a new cause and be drawn to different ideas proposed by a newer terrorist group's ideology.

This pattern is consistent with the wave theory of terrorism, which purports to explain why each "breed" of terrorist group has lasted about one generation. David Rapoport describes how forms of terrorism have gradually disappeared writing, "When a waves energy cannot inspire new organizations, the wave disappears. Resistance, political concessions, and change in perceptions of generations are critical factors in explaining the disappearance"<sup>13</sup>. As terrorist groups become older, it becomes much more difficult to gain new membership from younger generations because they do not share the same views or values as the original members of the organization. Once a terrorist organization is unable to appeal to younger recruits, the terrorist group eventually dies out along with its aging members. Currently, the most common form of terrorism is religious terrorism, which started to become popular in the 1970s. Religious terrorism has now existed for 46 years, thus, according to the David Rapoport's wave theory; the United States should expect al-Qaeda, its affiliates, and other religious terrorist groups to persist for about ten more years

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<sup>13</sup> Rapoport, *The Four*, [Page 48].

until a generational shift in ideas makes it impossible for existing religious terrorists groups to successfully recruit new members. According to the wave theory, younger generations will be disinterested with the ideas of religious terrorism and will join newer “breeds” of terrorism creating a new wave of modern terrorism.

Due to religious terrorist groups uniqueness in their use of religiosity to mobilize more members to fight, they can survive for much longer than other kinds of groups. Generational shifts in political views of younger members have led to the demise of many terrorist groups, but many believe that these organizations may survive because of the “staying power of sacred or spiritually based motivation”<sup>14</sup> which helps attract new members from younger generations. Scholars use the Irish Republican Army (IRA) as a prime example of how to gain new members by using religion as a motivating factor.

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<sup>14</sup> Jones and Libicki, "How Terrorist," [Page 6].

### **Case Study of the IRA**

The Irish Republican Army provides a valuable case study for evaluating the longevity of terrorist organizations because of the IRA's uniqueness in existing for such an extended period of time. The Irish Republican Army was formed in the early 1900's as a nationalist group that fought for Irish independence from England. So you may wonder, how does the nationalist IRA relate to today's religious terrorist groups? Despite the conflict in Ireland revolving around Irish independence, religion played a major role in the conflict. The IRA's fight for Irish independence developed into a fight between Catholics and Protestants. In the following chapter, I describe many important moments that occurred in the IRA's history and how religion played a pivotal role. Religion affected recruiting and is the reason why the IRA existed for such a long stretch of time in comparison to most other terrorist groups.

#### **Background:**

Before the IRA became organized, it was inevitable that a religious conflict would occur as a result of the political environment in Ireland. Prior to the formation of the IRA, there was already a major division in Ireland between Catholics and Protestants. Ireland was predominantly Irish Catholic, but Protestants made up a majority of Ireland's six northern counties, while Catholics held a majority population in the remaining twenty-six counties. However, because Ireland was part of the United Kingdom, Irish Catholics were treated as British citizens. Unlike Ireland, Britain's population had a Protestant majority, which led to Irish Protestants being treated much better than Irish Catholics. Religious, economic, and land ownership issues in Ireland led to the Irish Home Rule Movement in the 1870's which was a push for the development of an Irish parliament that would rule over

domestic issues in Ireland. The Irish Home Rule Movement started to gain more momentum once Irish Protestants began to agree that union with Great Britain was becoming more problematic, and Britain's government did not have the capability of fixing many of Ireland's problems. Isaac Butt, who developed the first Home Rule Act, made it clear that if the Protestants supported the home rule movement, then they would gain support from the Catholic majority who he and many others believed would spiral into rebellion if an Irish Parliament was not developed<sup>15</sup>. Unionists did not want to separate from Britain, but they accepted that the Irish Catholics would likely rise up if something was not done to give Ireland more independence.

It wasn't until 1914 that the Third Irish Home Bill passed in England and was expected to go into effect after one year or until the end of WWI. Irish Catholics, who largely favored the bill, were anticipating having self-governance, which would give them more power and make their own culture more prominent<sup>16</sup>. The development of the Home Rule Bill was met with severe resistance from unionists. Unionists formed the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) that promised to use military force in order to protect unionist politics. Witnessing unionists bearing arms in opposition to the Home Rule Act, nationalists responded with a similar gesture in the Home Rule's defense. "Thus in November 1913 in Dublin the Irish Volunteers established, a militia whose Irish title was to be that of the IRA into which the volunteers later evolved"<sup>17</sup>. Due to the formation of armed unionists, nationalists responded by developing their own militia, which would later develop into the well-known IRA. The religious divide became more apparent among Protestants and

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<sup>15</sup> McCaffery, "Isaac Butt," [Page 78].

<sup>16</sup> English, *Armed Struggle*, [Page 10].

<sup>17</sup> English, *Armed Struggle*, [Page 10].

Catholics because of politics with Protestants resisting the Home Rule Act and Catholics strongly supporting the act. Eventually, war broke out between the Irish nationalists and British called the Anglo-Irish War. The war would result in the Anglo-Irish treaty which created an independent Ireland which consisted of all majority Catholic counties and Northern Ireland which was mostly Protestant and would remain under British control. The war and its aftermath would only intensify the religious divide between Protestants and Catholics and help the IRA continuously recruit new members. The political views of Irish Catholics and Protestants were for the most part polar opposites because Catholics supported Irish nationalism and while Protestants supported maintaining Ireland's union with England. This political divide between nationalists and unionists throughout the 1900's would not just lead to a political conflict between unionists and nationalists, but a religious conflict as well because of how Protestants and Catholics had such divided political beliefs regarding England. The political struggle between both sides would become a religious struggle as well, and would help the IRA gain members as religious differences between unionists and nationalists became a major factor influencing Irish Catholics to join the IRA.

### **Easter Rising**

The Irish nationalist movement began to gain even more momentum on April 24th, 1917 it was Easter and a rebellion started in Dublin that lasted several days. The Irish Republican Brotherhood and another group called the Irish Volunteers organized and launched the rebellion and claimed the land they controlled to be ruled under the Irish Republic, free from British rule. The Easter Rising only lasted five days until the British

army had destroyed the rebellion and restored English control. Despite the uprising's defeat, it did succeed in changing Ireland's political atmosphere. After the uprising was crushed, British troops executed all of the leaders who organized the plot and imprisoned many other nationalist participants. The British army also destroyed many homes and businesses in Dublin after the rising. The British army's punishment of those active in the rebellion and destruction of private property in Dublin were done in the hope that it would create fear among Irish nationalists and deter any further rebellion. However, the British army's actions had an adverse effect and actually promoted nationalist sentiment among Irish Catholics. "Together with the post-Rising arrest and internment of many people, the executions produced sympathy for that rebel cause which they were supposed to undermine. The dead rebels became martyrs... A cult had come into existence, with a quasi-sacred quality attaching itself to the rebel leaders after the Rising had entered popular imagination. Catholic Ireland had found new heroes, and their celebration-unsurprisingly-possessed a markedly religious flavor"<sup>18</sup> After the Easter Rising those who took part succeeded in spreading their vision of a sovereign Ireland to the Irish Catholic population. The Easter Rising proved to be the spark that ignited Irish Catholics to pursue the development of a free Irish state.

While the Easter rising occurred before the founding of the IRA, it proved to be an essential event that led to the creation of the IRA and helped maintain its recruiting for a long period of time. Before the Easter Rising, Irish nationalists relied on diplomatic methods to gain varying forms of independence from England. Despite diplomatic means

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<sup>18</sup> English, *Armed Struggle*, [Page 6].

being successful in leading to the approval of the Thirds Home Rule Act giving Ireland only domestic power, many British politicians and Irish unionists strongly opposed the implementation and many militaristic unionists groups formed. They included both the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Volunteers. Both of these groups were hardline nationalist groups who believed that in order to create a better Ireland an independent Irish state was vital, and the use of violence was justified in order to achieve this goal. However, before the Easter Rising many Irish nationalists did not share this view and many of these groups were small and without much influence. Nevertheless, due to the Easter Rising and its aftermath, many Irish nationalists and Catholics began to believe that an Independent Irish state was needed and that diplomatic methods would potentially not be useful without violent actions. The sentiment that developed among many Irish nationalists and Catholics that violence was necessary, helped spur the formation and successful recruitment of the IRA because it created a large population of Irish nationalists and Catholics who would be potential recruits for the IRA.

With the Easter Rising changing the public's perspective of Ireland's relationship with Britain, existing nationalist groups also changed. Before the Easter Rising, many nationalistic groups existed although none had a large amount of members or carried out a significant amount of civil unrest. After the rising, more Irish citizens began to join nationalist groups to fight for Irish independence, but no groups changed as much as the Volunteers. The Easter Rising changed everything for the Volunteers as older members left and waves of new ambitious and energetic recruits joined the group filling old units and creating numerous new units and becoming unofficially known as the IRA<sup>19</sup>. Many

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<sup>19</sup> Hart, "The Social," [Page 219].

nationalist groups in Ireland faded away as the IRA gained thousands of members and became even more powerful. The IRA eventually became the military power of the newly formed Irish Parliament and was the main fighting force against the British in the Anglo-Irish war. With the IRA becoming the most powerful nationalist group, it became even easier for the organization to recruit because recruits saw the IRA as being more promising in creating an Irish state.

The Easter Rising proved to be a pivotal and critical moment for the IRA because it led to the group's creation and large-scale recruitment. Due to Irish Catholic and nationalist's very sympathetic views of the Easter Rising, many became more inclined to join the IRA and fight the British instead of relying solely on diplomatic means<sup>20</sup>. Eventually, the Anglo-Irish war ended in 1921 with the Anglo-Irish peace treaty signed creating an independent Ireland with 26 counties and Northern Ireland with 6 counties under British control which all had a Protestant a majority population. At the height of the war there were believed to be about 100,000 members, but once the treaty was signed the IRA was split on whether to accept the treaty or not and continue fighting. This divide resulted in 90% percent of the IRA's members leaving, choosing to accept the treaty while the remaining members still believed that Northern Ireland should be incorporated into the Republic of Ireland<sup>21</sup>. However, despite the IRA losing so many members the group survived and eventually grew again due to the division of Ireland and Northern Ireland being created based on sectarian lines, which created new issues and conflicts. For

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<sup>20</sup> English, *Armed Struggle*, [Page 10].

<sup>21</sup> Hart, "The Social," [Page 209].

generations to come, Irish nationalists and Catholics were inspired to fight against the British until they believed they had succeeded in uniting all of Ireland under one Irish Republic.

### **The Troubles**

The division of Northern Ireland and Ireland had been an issue since the Anglo-Irish treaty was signed, however, it would become even more problematic during the late 1960s and would help the IRA have a resurgence recruitment and strength. The minority population of Catholics in Northern Ireland were viewed and treated as second class citizens, and as Northern Irish Catholics began to clash with Protestants, North Ireland Police, and British military forces, things quickly become much more violent in Northern Ireland with smaller incidents happening in the Republic of Ireland and Britain. The uptick in violence in the region is referred to as the Troubles Period because of the surge in political violence that lasted from 1969 until the mid-1990s. Due to the political and religious conflicts during the Troubles Period, the IRA experienced a surge in recruiting between 1969 and the early 1970s and that helped lead to continued recruiting success for decades and the group's longevity. In the following section, I will explain events that occurred during the Troubles Period and how they led to the IRA gaining and new recruits and maintaining their influence in the region.

### **Battle Of Bogside**

During the 1960's, Bogside, a Catholic area in Derry, Northern Ireland was the home of many civil rights demonstrations that protested for equal rights for Catholics primarily in the areas of employment and political disfranchisement. However, no demonstration

would have more of an effect than during annual parade called the Apprentice Boy Parade in 1969. The parade celebrates the failed revolt of Catholic James II to Protestant William of Orange who held the British throne. The parade had taken place for years and was meant to humiliate Catholics and many indeed felt threatened by it. However, in 1969 as the parade went past the Catholic community in Bogside, conflict erupted. A riot occurred once Catholics began to protest the Parade as it traveled past Bogside, which was predominantly Catholic. Fighting took place between Catholics on one side and Royal Ulster Constabulary (Northern Ireland's police force) and unionist Protestants on the other. The British army was then deployed in order to stop the violence, eventually ending the Battle of Bogside and resulting in great suffering within the Catholic community. "British forces were dispatched on August 14<sup>th</sup> to help deescalate the situation. Despite their presence, violence against the Catholic community continued: Loyalist Protestant mobs burnt down homes and schools and murdered community members, while, in some instances, Northern Irish authorities sat idly by observing the devastation and carnage"<sup>22</sup>. Despite the British army's presence, loyalist Protestants continued to attack the Catholic community and in some instances in front of Northern Irish police who did nothing to stop the violence.

Due to Catholics being a minority in Northern Ireland, they were much more vulnerable to violence because they were such a smaller population making them an easy target for Protestants. Catholics were treated as second-class citizens in Northern Ireland, which is why the Battle of Bogside occurred in the first place. The battle proved to many Catholics that in order to protect themselves and end the discrimination they endured, they

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Arena and Bruce Arrigo, *The Provisional Irish Republican Army* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2007),

must take matters into their own hands because clearly the Northern Irish government and its institutions did not regard Catholics as equals for if they had they would have intervened and protected them.

The Battle of Bogside became a rallying call to Irish Catholics in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to fight back against Britain and loyalists because the Catholics believed, and for good reason, that Catholics living in Northern Ireland were in danger and England and political elites in Northern Ireland did not have any regard for the minority population of Catholics. The IRA greatly benefited from the Battle of Bogside because it caused numerous Catholics to join because many viewed the IRA as a necessity to defend their communities.

Lorenzo Bosi conducted interviews of previous IRA members about why they originally joined the IRA and quoted one former member who stated how the treatment of Catholics in his community and himself by the British army and Protestants effected his decision to join the IRA:

“In 1969 the Troubles broke out. I witnessed the burnings and some of the shootings. I also witnessed the death of a school friend. Shortly after that I was arrested for rioting behavior, and I was sentenced to two months in prison. While I was in prison I met some people who were both members of the Provisional IRA and of the Official IRA. While their influence was really strong... they probably just stoked awareness then for the first time. It was the first recollection of anything political. Before, during the very early stages of the Troubles, I wouldn't have known what was going on, the political issues and colonization and all that, never gave [it] a thought a thought before. And it [wa]s then, when I come out of the prison, late in 1971, that I made my own choice to join the IRA; I decided to join the IRA to be able to fight back at the British. I still did not understand the politics of Ireland... I probably made my own conclusions very, very quickly, and I just made a decision to join the IRA. With a sense of being able to strike back with any sense of meaning at the British, at unionism. Not that I fully understood then, but I just felt what was done towards us was wrong and that someone had to

do something, and that is what it was that motivated me; a very, very simple choice. (Interview no.4)<sup>23</sup>

Many members joined the IRA for similar reasons as the person in Bosi's fourth interview. Those who joined during in the late 1960's and 1970's had fewer political reasons to become involved than previous members had. The IRA gained a large amount of members who did not fully subscribe to the IRA's nationalistic goals at the time they joined because the majority was more interested in fighting the British and Protestants because of the discrimination Irish Catholics were facing in Northern Ireland. The IRA provided an avenue for Catholics who felt it was their responsibility to fight the British and Northern Irish loyalists in order to create a state that protected Catholics. The individual in Bosi's fourth interview admitted to only knowing very little about the politics revolving around Irish nationalism but due to their attraction to the IRA they soon adopted the group's ideology of uniting Ireland with Northern Ireland under the Republic of Ireland.

By looking at a graph below, it shows how Catholics in Northern Ireland were subject to much more violence than Protestants during the Troubles.

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<sup>23</sup> Bosi, "Explaining Pathways," [Page 371].

**Table 5: Religious Differences in Exposure to Political Violence, 1973–98**

	Percentages of each religion reporting							
	1973		1978		1995		1998	
	Prot	Cath	Prot	Cath	Prot	Cath	Prot	Cath
<i>Direct experience</i>								
Intimidated	9	24	–	–	12	27	12	23
Victim of violent incident	2	4	–	–	8	11	13	16
<i>Indirect experience</i>								
Family/relative killed/injured	7	9	–	–	17	22	21	22
Know someone killed/injured	21	34	–	–	69	69	54	59
<i>Collective exposure</i>								
Caught up in explosion	13	10	18	24	22	19	24	26
Caught up in riot	31	39	12	18	16	26	19	28

Sources: Irish Social Mobility Survey, 1973; Social Attitudes Survey, 1978; Social Identity Survey, 1995; Northern Ireland Referendum and Election Survey, 1998. <sup>24</sup>

This graph clearly shows the difference in the ways that Catholics and Protestants experience violence in Northern Ireland. Catholics in Northern Ireland are more likely to be intimidated by violence, witnessing violence, knowing someone who has been killed or injured, and being a victim of violence themselves<sup>25</sup>. Hayes and McAllister wrote about the differing views Protestants and Catholics had towards the legitimacy of violence going on during the Troubles based on a survey conducted in 1973, shortly after the Troubles started:

“A more explicit question about the legitimacy of violence, divorced from historical circumstances, produced different results in 1973. When asked if they believed that violence was a legitimate way to achieve one’s goals, 16 percent of Protestants agreed, but more significantly, 25 percent of Catholics took the same view. Clearly the violence of the early years of the conflict, which had disproportionately affected Catholic areas, had caused a shift in

<sup>24</sup> Hayes and McAllister, "Sowing Dragon's," [Page 910].

<sup>25</sup> Hayes and McAllister, "Sowing Dragon's," [Page 910].

opinion towards support for the use of violence in order to defend their areas from Protestant attack."<sup>26</sup>

The increased violence led to different views on the subject for Catholics and Protestants. The higher amount of violence Catholics faced made many more Catholics view their own use of violence as more legitimate, compared to the Protestants who were exposed to much less. The sectarian divide and the increased amount of violence experienced on the Catholic side can explain why the IRA was capable of continuously gaining more members during the Troubles and after events like Bogside, because more Catholics became supportive of the use of violence for political gains and the IRA provided an organization for many Catholics who held this view<sup>27</sup>.

The Battle of Bogside would mark the beginning period of the Troubles in Ireland. With Protestants attacking Catholic minorities and the lack of protection of Catholics being provided by Northern Irish police, young Irish Catholics looked to the IRA as a source of protection and as a means to resist oppression from Northern Irish Protestants. With the Battle of Bogside, new IRA members were joining for religious reasons because they either saw, knew or they themselves fell victim to violence due to their Catholic identity. The Battle of Bogside led to the British Army being put in place to protect Catholics in Northern Ireland, but this would only lead to more conflict between Catholics in Northern Ireland against the Irish Protestants and British, resulting in the IRA gaining even more members.

### **Bloody Sunday**

Only a few years after Battle of Bogside, another major event in Northern Ireland

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<sup>26</sup> Hayes and McAllister, "Sowing Dragon's," [Page 913].

<sup>27</sup> Hayes and McAllister, "Sowing Dragon's," [Page 915].

occurred that would help the IRA gain even more members. January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1972 came to be known as Bloody Sunday as violence in Bogside erupted once again except this time between Catholics and the British army. Since the Battle of Bogside, British troops were stationed in Derry in order protect the Catholics from the Protestants and maintain peace. The British army took steps which they believed would help maintain the peace such as barricading nationalist areas, segregating and removing different nationalists and also a policy of internment which allowed security forces to imprison suspected “troublesome” nationalists and hold them without trial<sup>28</sup>. In response to the British army’s internment policy, many Catholics took part in a march to protest, but the peaceful march soon turned violent and resulted in the British army opening fire into a crowd of protestors. Patrick Hicks describes the events of Bloody Sunday after interviewing many of those who witnessed the event and writing:

“Like most atrocities, no one is exactly sure how this one began. The British soldiers of the First Battalion Parachute Regiment claimed that they were fired upon and that they thought nail bombs would be used against them. The protesters have vigorously and repeatedly denied such claims. What we do know is that shortly before 4 o'clock, the rifles opened up. In the car park of Rossville Flats and near the army barricade on Rossville Street and in area known as Glenfada Park, 13 lives were taken in less than 20 minutes. Five of the dead were shot in the back. No weapon of any kind was ever found on the marchers. When it was finally over, 21 soldiers had fired 108 rounds. Altnagelvin Hospital was overrun with families who were desperate for news of their loved ones. The next day, the Catholic community around Northern Ireland rightfully felt that they were being targeted by the British army. Whisperings of genocide began to fill the streets. Recruitment in the Irish Republican Army skyrocketed and within a few short months bombs were going off all over the place”<sup>29</sup>.

To this day there is confusion as to what led to the British troops to fire on the protestors. Some say they were attacked first while others deny any violence being

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<sup>28</sup> Arena and Arrigo, *The Provisional*, [Page 103].

<sup>29</sup> Hicks, "One bloody," [Page 3].

directed at the British soldiers. Upon the aftermath of the shooting it was brought to light that none of the protestors shot were armed or even looking in the direction of the troops, outrage broke out throughout Ireland and the Catholic communities in Northern Ireland.

Bloody Sunday served as an important symbol for the IRA because Bloody Sunday symbolized the oppressive government that Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland endured. The British Army, which was sent into Northern Ireland with the purpose of protecting Catholics, had instead indiscriminately killed Catholics. In many of Lorenzo Bosi's interviews it was very common for IRA members to join because of the British Army's presence and action in Northern Ireland. In Bosi's 15<sup>th</sup> interview the former IRA member stated:

"The British army was here to oppress us. When I was going to school I was stopped by the army. Actually it was then that I thought, this is wrong. I was then joining riots in the streets. I made a choice at that time, there was actually a slogan on the wall, "Join the Na Fianna Eireann," so I went there, and I asked, "Can I join?" and they asked, "Why do you want to join?," and I said that "I Want to fight for Ireland." What motivated me was a sense of revolution to what the British were doing to our community. There was a mobilization within the community against the British and what they are doing, and I just became a part of that. There was a sense of patriotism, to defend your people, a reactionary feeling, because you wanted to retaliate to what the British were doing against your community"<sup>30</sup> (Interview no. 15)

It was very common for IRA members to initially join because they felt oppressed by Britain due to its military presence in Northern Ireland. The British army was sent to protect Catholics, however, it also actively sought out to destroy the IRA in Northern Ireland. Many of the tactics that the British army used only further alienated Catholics and drove more to join the IRA. For example, in Lower Falls, a considered nationalist area, a curfew was implemented and 3,000 troops conducted house searches. Five people died

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<sup>30</sup> Bosi, "Explaining Pathways," [Page 370].

during these searches and the IRA responded and claimed to provide the only effective defense for Northern Catholics and nationalists. From that time on, Catholics started to believe the IRA was the only force capable of defending them; not the British military<sup>31</sup>. Bloody Sunday, much like the Battle of Bogside, proved to be an important symbol for the IRA because to Catholics in Northern Ireland, the British army represented their status of second-class citizens and the oppression they faced in Northern Ireland. The IRA was enticing for recruits because of events like Bloody Sunday and other actions the British military carried out in Northern Ireland. These incidents were enough proof for many Catholics that the British army was not here to defend them, but to further oppress them, and that it was necessary to join the IRA to fight back.

### **Hunger Strikes**

When people first think of hunger strikes, Mahatma Gandhi in India is the first to come to mind. However, Irish nationalists were the first to use hunger strikes as a form of political protest in the early 1900s. Irish nationalists (many of which were IRA members) would hold hunger strikes in order to attempt to force the British to immediately to give up certain actions, policies, or laws throughout the 1900s. The ideologies behind the hunger strikes by Irish nationalists were to force the British to quickly adhere to the nationalist's demands or risk the deaths of numerous strikers. The hunger strikes also served a more long-term purpose, which was to gain sympathy and support from the Irish public to support the nationalists against the British, which in turn led to increased IRA membership. How did hunger strikes in Ireland help gain support for nationalists and the IRA?

Hunger Strikes were successful in gaining support for nationalists and the IRA because of

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<sup>31</sup> Arena and Arrigo, *The Provisional*, [Page 104].

Ireland's history with hunger strikes, religious attributes associated with hunger strikes, and the negative characterization strikers created for the British and unionists in the eyes of many Irish nationalists and Catholics. The hunger strikes alone did not gain support from Irish civilians but due to their association with Irish culture and Catholicism in Ireland, they succeeded in gaining nationalist support causing IRA membership to increase.

Hunger Strikes have always been a common practice in Ireland dating all the way back to the medieval period. Hunger strikes were very different in medieval Ireland than hunger strikes in Ireland during the 1900s. Despite that, medieval hunger strikes in Ireland created an Irish culture that felt empathy for those who partake in such a protest and this sympathetic culture towards hunger strikers would continue to exist during the strike of the 1900s. David Beresford describes Ireland's medieval hunger strikes writing,

“The earlier records place its origins in medieval Ireland where, as *Troscad* (fasting on or against a person) or *Cealachan* (achieving justice by starvation), it had a place in the civil code, the *Senchus Mor*. The code specified the circumstances in which it could be used to recover a debt, or a right to perceived justice, the complainant fasting on the doorstep of the defendant. If the hunger striker was allowed to die the person at whose door he starved himself was held responsible for his death and had to pay compensation to his family. It is probable that such fasting had particular moral force at the time because honor attached to hospitality and the dishonor of having a person starving outside one's house”<sup>32</sup>.

Two major differences between the hunger strikes of medieval Ireland and those of 20<sup>th</sup> century Ireland were what they were protesting for and whom they were protesting against. In medieval Ireland, hunger strikes were carried out by individuals against other individuals who they believe owed them some form of reparation for causing the protestor

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<sup>32</sup> Beresford, *Ten Men Dead*, [Page 10].

some perceived injustice. But 20<sup>th</sup> century hunger strikes were not protesting against individuals, but were political protests against the British or unionists to encourage political change.

Despite that, Irish society's cultural views towards protestors and those being protested against through hunger strikes had not changed much over the years. Irish society saw hospitality as a virtue and allowing someone to starve outside your house due to your disagreement was considered inhumane and dishonorable no matter how innocent the defendant may be, thus if the person carrying out the hunger strike died, the defendant had to pay his or her family reparations and were looked poorly upon by those within their community. In the 1900's, this view was commonly shared and the multitude of hunger strikes carried out by Irish nationalists grew. The majority of hunger strikes occurred inside prisons where the British held IRA members or other political prisoners. Hunger strikes would be organized and launched by prisoners who could be protesting a variety of things such as prison conditions, the reasoning for their incarceration, or to support issues other prisoners may be facing. The Irish public viewed England as cruel, similar to an individual allowing a protestor to die in medieval Ireland, for not giving into hunger strikes and allowing Irish nationalists to suffer and die.

The British inability to end multiple hunger strikes led to increased recruitment for the IRA because people were outraged and felt sympathetic to the protestors and saw their deaths as unnecessary. The Irish view towards those who conduct hunger strikes and those who are targeted in those protests did not change between medieval Ireland and 20<sup>th</sup> century Ireland and the same sentiments towards hunger strikes helped lead to increased recruitment for the IRA.

Hunger Strikes in Ireland also had a religious element to them, which helped the IRA gain recruits. Due to the conflict being a sectarian struggle once the IRA and other nationalists started to use hunger strikes to protest, it helped the IRA gain new recruits because of the Christian idea of self-sacrifice. "Fasting quickly established itself within Christianity in the Ireland as a purely symbolic gesture. Fasting and self-sacrifice in general began to have a special value in the development of Irish-Christian traditions, more particularly so it was linked to or offered up to God in unison with the suffering and self-sacrifice of Christ<sup>33</sup>" In Irish Catholic tradition, self-sacrifice had a high value because of Christ's self-sacrifice, and once protestors began to use hunger strikes, Irish Catholics widely supported those striking and viewed them very admirably. New members began to join the IRA because the strikes proved to many Catholics that the IRA would fight for their religious equality because the strikers displayed the Catholic virtue of self-sacrifice. The strikers also showed how determined and strong they were by enduring pain for so long and demonstrating their willingness to die, which helped the IRA gain new members who joined because of the protestor's commitment.

The 1981 hunger strikes are a prime example of how hunger strikes helped the IRA and Irish nationalism as a whole gain more support. The 1981 Hunger Strikes occurred because in 1976 the British government announced it would not maintain a special category for prisoners imprisoned for paramilitary actions but regard them as regular prisoners. In addition, Britain passed the responsibility of security of Northern Ireland from the British army onto RUC<sup>34</sup>. In response to being regarded as regular prisoners and

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<sup>33</sup> Sweeney, "Irish Hunger," [Page 422].

<sup>34</sup> Arena and Arrigo, *The Provisional*, [Page 104].

not paramilitary prisoners, imprisoned IRA members started a hunger strike, led by Bobby Sands an IRA commander, for their status as paramilitary prisoners to be reinstated. The hunger strike gained a lot of support from those throughout Ireland who saw those taking part as admirable for their devotion due to their willingness of committing to self-sacrifice for their cause. The strike ended up having more of an impact on Ireland than expected. Sands ended up winning a seat in Fermanagh-South Tyrone over unionist Harry West, however, he died shortly afterward but his funeral also showed the impact his hunger strike had on the Catholic population with an estimated 100,000 people coming to pay their respects and honor him for his self sacrifice<sup>35</sup>. Nine other protestors died from starvation and shortly after the strike ended. The strike had significant political ramifications as Sin Fein, the Irish nationalist party, gained a significant amount of seats especially those in Northern Ireland, which was very surprising. The IRA also gained numerous members because of the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's policy of attempting to work with the protestors and allowing them to die. In a response to one of the protestor's sisters asking the Prime Minister to stop the protest, Prime Minister Thatcher responded saying she wouldn't, writing:

"I want you to know that despite what is said and written by some people about my attitude to the hunger strike, I very much regret that young men have been prepared to throw away their lives for an objective which – as I have said on many occasions – no responsible Government anywhere could grant, since it could only aid and abet those who advocate and use violence to political ends<sup>36</sup>."

The Prime Minister's unwillingness to try and stop the hunger strike created a lot of

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<sup>35</sup> T.G Fraser, *Ireland in Conflict 1922-1988* (London, England: Routledge, 2000), [Page 60-61].

<sup>36</sup> Duffin, "National Archives," [Page 1]

anger among many in Ireland so the IRA capitalized on this and gained more recruits. The IRA almost successfully assassinated her, which proved to many that the IRA was a serious group determined to fight the British and end Catholic suffering in Northern Ireland bringing in more recruits into the fold.

The combination of Ireland's cultural history and Irish Catholicism's association to hunger strikes helped draw in many recruits for the IRA. The public in Ireland viewed protestors in hunger strikes favorably because they represented Catholicism and willingness to self-sacrifice, which inspired many to join the IRA. The hunger strikes also cast the British as cruel oppressors willing to allow protestors to starve themselves to death which helped gain sympathy from many in Ireland. Because of Ireland's culture of hospitality, the British willingness to allow Irish nationalist Catholics to starve themselves was viewed as unacceptable and drove more people to join the IRA.

### **Concluding Points on IRA**

The purpose of this case study was to look at how recruitment is what led the IRA to exist longer than any other modern terrorist organization, and how many of the same recruitment characteristics of the IRA are shared by modern religious terrorist organizations. The IRA was meant to be a secular organization, which fought for the creation of an independent Ireland and later unification of the Republic of Ireland with Northern Ireland, but ended up having non-secular characteristics. The IRA was not completely secular because the different political views by Protestants and Catholics led to a sectarian divide between the two. The IRA benefited from the political divide between Catholics and Protestants because it helped the organization continue to gain members inspired to fight against the British and Northern Irish Protestants. Policies created and

physical force used by the British and Protestants, aimed to suppress Irish nationalist's claims for an independent and unified Ireland, backfired because with most nationalists being Catholic, it created a perception among Catholics that they were being suppressed due to their religious beliefs and led to many individuals joining the IRA. The IRA also used hunger strikes, which were popular in Irish Catholic tradition because they resembled Christ's self-sacrifice, which helped gain sympathy and more members for the IRA because they saw the IRA as a righteous and serious organization. Due to the IRA's link with Catholicism through sectarian issues and religious symbols, it was capable of recruiting for generations and allowed the group to exist for nine decades. With religious terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda and ISIS sharing many of the same characteristics as the IRA, it suggests that they have the ability to survive for much longer than previous terrorists organizations and exist for just as long as the IRA.

## **Al Qaeda and ISIS**

Today's terrorist groups have the ability to survive for much longer than those that existed in the past because they have distinct recruiting advantages that were not previously available. Religious ideologies, religious symbols, sectarian issues, and globalization due to advancements in technology have all been beneficial to the survival of current religious terrorist groups because they generate more potential recruits for these organizations. By focusing on two terrorist organizations, al Qaeda and The Islamic State (ISIS), which formed out of al Qaeda, one can see how their successful recruitment has led to their continued survival amid the numerous difficulties each has faced. Both groups are Islamic terrorist organizations, however, both had different political and religious ideologies along with different recruitment strategies. They have similarities in recruitment strategies in that they focus on appealing to recruits through their religious ideals and rely on modern technology in order to promote their causes.

## **Al Qaeda**

### **Background:**

The origins of al Qaeda can first be drawn back to the militant group the mujahedeen. The mujahedeen had developed in order to fight back against the newly formed Afghani government, the Peoples democracy of Afghanistan, in 1978. Due to the government's lack of power it allied itself with the Soviet Union who would send 30,000 troops to defend and assist the new Afghani government against the rebels. With widespread distaste of the new government's policies and the presence of Soviet soldiers among Muslims in the country, the mujahedeen fought both of them until the Soviet army left and the Peoples Democracy of Afghanistan had fallen. Shortly after, Osama bin Laden, a

former mujahedeen member, would become the leader of al Qaeda. Al Qaeda was founded under the ideology that Muslim countries should abandon secularism and adopt governments and public affairs that are guided by Islamic law. In doing so, al Qaeda needed to end U.S. and Western power in the Middle East because of the influence they had over the region. In order to establish Islamic states in the Middle East, al Qaeda launched a terrorist campaign against the United States and their fatal attack on 9/11 would change the way the world looked at terrorism. Shortly after the attack, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan to crush al Qaeda. That has yet to occur and al Qaeda still operates sixteen years after the attack.

In what follows, I am going to examine the religious aspects of al Qaeda that helped the group attain thousands of followers, ultimately allowing the group to survive for over a decade despite the enormous effort put in by the United States and its allies to destroy the al Qaeda organization.

### **Religiosity**

As previously discussed, the religiosity of religious terrorist groups is questionable, and when looking at al Qaeda, one can see that the religious ideologies of al Qaeda do not seem to be the focal point of the group's existence, but are instead entwined within the group's political aims in order to justify their claims<sup>37</sup>. Specifically, al Qaeda desires to create and promote Islamic fundamentalism in Middle Eastern states and other highly populated Muslim countries. Islamic fundamentalism became a popular movement shortly after the Iranian revolution when the Government of Islamic Republic was created. Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden believed it was necessary for Muslim countries to adopt

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<sup>37</sup> Badey, "The Role," [Page 84].

Islamic governments and abandon existing secular governments as Iran did. However, they saw that in order to do so it was imperative to end foreign influence in the Middle East, especially influence from the United States and other western powers.

Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda wanted to create political change in the Middle East and end the influence of foreign powers in the region which was a popular philosophy among many in the Middle East. However, al Qaeda, and its leader Osama bin Laden, needed to become even more popular and gain more members if it were to launch a successful or lasting campaign. In order to do this, al Qaeda aimed at persuading Muslims to join because of the religious disdain the U.S and the west had towards Muslims. An anonymous CIA operative in his book "Imperial Hubris" describes how Osama bin Laden created a sense that western powers, especially the U.S., is a force that must be met with violence because of the destruction that the U.S. was causing and will continue to inflict on Muslims:

"Part of bin Laden's genius is that he recognized early on the difference between issues Muslims find offensive about America and the West, and those they find intolerable and life threatening. The difference, that is, that moves large numbers of people from demonstrating with placards to demolishing with plastic explosives. And in the movement-causing category fall, almost exclusively, U.S. political, military, and economic policies toward the Islamic world"<sup>38</sup>.

Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda conveyed that their political goals were religiously motivated because they wanted to mobilize more Muslims to use physical force to resist the U.S. and did so by framing that United States foreign policy as being detrimental to Muslims. They knew that just simply highlighting the differences concerning political and cultural issues between the Middle East and the West would not gain as much support for

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<sup>38</sup> Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris*, [Page 7].

their terrorist group<sup>39</sup>. Al Qaeda would point to U.S. foreign policy issues such as the United States support of Israel and how this alliance had been detrimental to Muslims and, in fact, could be seen as an attack on Islam. Osama bin Laden wrote a letter to America outlining the reasons why the U.S was an enemy to al Qaeda and thus promoted using violence to end American foreign policy actions in the Middle East, writing:

You attacked us in Palestine...Palestine, which has sunk under military occupation for more than 80 years. The British handed over Palestine, with your help and your support, to the Jews, who have occupied it for more than 50 years; years overflowing with oppression, tyranny, crimes, killing, expulsion, destruction and devastation. The creation and continuation of Israel is one of the greatest crimes, and you are the leaders of its criminals. And of course there is no need to explain and prove the degree of American support for Israel...Each and every person whose hands have become polluted in the contribution towards this crime must pay its price" [Letter from bin Laden to America in 2002]<sup>40</sup>.

Shortly after WWII, the British controlled modern day Israel and despite most of the land being inhabited by Muslims, the British allowed for the Jewish state of Israel to be created resulting in thousands of Muslims being displaced by the Jewish State. Since then, the Jewish state has continued to grow and has pushed further into Palestinian territory causing more displacement of Muslims and continued conflicts between Palestinians and Israel. Due to the U.S. support of Israel, especially through military and economic means, the U.S. has become a major issue for Muslims wishing to stop Israel's control of the Holy Land and continued suppression of Muslims in Israel and Palestine. Due to the U.S supporting Israel, many Muslims worldwide see the U.S. support of a harsh Israel as anti Islamic. This idea was extremely popular within al Qaeda. As seen above in bin Laden's

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<sup>39</sup> Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris*, [Page 11].

<sup>40</sup> Bin Laden, "Full text," [Page 2].

statement, he claims that the U.S support of Israel is a crime against Muslims because the U.S. holds responsibility for the oppression that many Muslims face because of Israel. Yildar Muhammad, an al Qaeda member, writes about how the United States support of Israel was part of his motivation to join al Qaeda and said, "All of us have grown up learning about injustice brought on Palestine. My generation was never able to do anything about that. This was the chance for me and my generation to take up the cause and take on the root of the cause, which is American and its support for Israel"<sup>41</sup>.

Al Qaeda also points out other oppressive U.S foreign policy issues in the Middle East such as U.S military bases in the region, desire for oil, and economic sanctions placed on Muslim majority countries<sup>42</sup>. Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda blame many of the issues Muslims in the Middle East face on U.S foreign policy which they said has led to economic issues, oppression of Muslims, lack of sovereignty, and starvation in some cases, such as in Iraq after the U.S. placed sanctions on the country<sup>43</sup>. Al Qaeda uses the outcome of U.S. foreign policies on Muslims and highlights them as attacks on all Muslims and Islam and claim that the U.S. is doing this intentionally. By al Qaeda claiming that their political issues with the Middle East policies of the U.S and the West are truly based on religious issues, they were able to develop more membership because Muslims then began to view Islam as being oppressed by foreign powers. Religious terrorists groups use religion to portray their conflict as good versus evil and to demonize any opposing views of the group, which is the effect al Qaeda had by portraying the U.S. as an evil force against Islam<sup>44</sup>.

### **Religious Symbols**

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<sup>41</sup> Sciutto, *Against Us: The New Face*, [Page 11].

<sup>42</sup> Bin Laden, "Full text," [Page 4].

<sup>43</sup> Bin Laden, "Full text," [Page 4].

<sup>44</sup> Sosis and Alcorta, "Militants and Martyrs," [Page 4].

Al Qaeda, like many other religious terrorists groups, uses religious symbols and historical moments to support their ideology as a way to appeal to potential recruits. In secular and non-secular religious terrorist groups, symbols are important for group cohesion and recruitment. For religious terrorists, these effects are enhanced because religious symbols are generally even more powerful than symbols non-secular terrorist groups use<sup>45</sup>. This is a successful recruiting method used by al Qaeda because most of their recruits and members do not have a full understanding of their own religion and are vulnerable to misinterpretations of it, so al Qaeda can use Islamic symbols and history to “insert a skewed view of Islamic teachings into their heads”<sup>46</sup>. The ability of al Qaeda to insert their views of Islam and how Islam pertains to current political issues helps the organization recruit new members because they can effectively develop the religious and political views of individuals who are susceptible to al Qaeda’s teachings, and convince them that joining al Qaeda is in their best interests.

One of the common religious symbols al Qaeda uses, along with other Islamic terrorists including ISIS, is the Islamic ideology of jihad. The word jihad is an Islamic term with many meanings. One is someone’s internal struggle with his faith in Islam. Another is striving to preach the teachings of Islam and directly translates to “struggling or striving”<sup>47</sup>. Despite that, jihad is now popularly thought to be the use of violence by an individual or group who claim to use it to fight for Islam which, is in large part, because of today’s Islamic terrorists declaring their violent struggle as being motivated by religion. Like majority of religions, Islam promotes peace and strongly condemns the killing of any other person,

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<sup>45</sup> Sosis and Alcorta, "Militants and Martyrs," [Page 4].

<sup>46</sup> Venhaus, "Why Youth," [Page 8].

<sup>47</sup> SHAYKH MUHAMMAD HISHAM KABBANI, "Jihad: A Misunderstood," The Islamic Supreme Council of America.

however, it also mentions how violence can be used in order to defend oneself, those in their community, and the Islamic faith<sup>48</sup>. Al Qaeda and other Islamic terrorists have declared jihad in order to gain support from other Muslims and display to potential recruits that their use of violence, also used by other religious groups, is a divine duty because it is religiously imperative<sup>49</sup>. Nevertheless, al Qaeda does not properly adhere to the mainstream ideology of military jihad, according to many Islamic scholars, yet, with al Qaeda taking advantage of individual's lack of religious education, they have projected their perception of jihad onto others and convinced them to join and fight with al Qaeda. The Islamic Supreme Council of America outlines the term jihad and in the description it states, "If there is no peaceful alternative, Islam also allows the use of force, but there are strict rules of engagement. Innocents - such as women, children, or invalids - must never be harmed, and any peaceful overtures from the enemy must be accepted"<sup>50</sup>. Clearly al Qaeda's claim to fighting jihad does not fit into this definition of a physical force of jihad because it does not follow the strict rules of engagement for starters, yet due to al Qaeda's ability to spread their religious ideology to the religiously uninformed, it does not matter. Al Qaeda can inspire many members to join through the idea of a "defensive jihad" because misinformed recruits may believe that al Qaeda is properly adhering to the rules of jihad despite its very strange interpretation of it.

Al Qaeda's use of jihad is unique from other Islamic terrorist groups due to the fact that al Qaeda stresses that its use of jihad is only being implemented for defensive

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<sup>48</sup> Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris*, [Page 14].

<sup>49</sup> Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris*, [Page 10].

<sup>50</sup> SHAYKH MUHAMMAD HISHAM KABBANI, "Jihad: A Misunderstood," The Islamic Supreme Council of America.

purposes for Muslims and Islam. This type of jihad is known as a “defensive jihad” because al Qaeda claims to be fighting the U.S. in order to defend Islam and Muslims, and doesn’t seek to become an offensive organization with more expansionist goals. In one message read by Osama bin Laden he states, “crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on God, his messenger, and Muslims”. Bin Laden asserts that al Qaeda’s attacks against the United States are not meant to be offensive attacks, but defensive because the United States’ foreign policy in the Middle East has forced al Qaeda to act defensively. Many people in the Muslim world already dislike U.S. presence in their countries and view the U.S. as an imperial and colonial power and that the War on Terrorism is instead a war on Islam<sup>51</sup>. Due to many Muslims believing U.S. actions in the Middle East are focused on attacking Islam, al Qaeda’s portrayal of fighting a “defensive jihad” may draw in many recruits who desire to protect Islam from America.

Many critics of al Qaeda’s claim of fighting a “defensive jihad” point out that al Qaeda is more offensive than defensive because al Qaeda routinely targets civilians and launches aggressive attacks against the U.S. However, al Qaeda still states that these attacks are in reaction to the U.S. attack on Islam because citizens elect those in the U.S. government and pay taxes. Osama bin Laden explains why civilians are also targets saying, “A man is considered a fighter whether he carries a gun or pays taxes to help kill us. So when they say bin Laden kills civilians, who are they killing in Palestine? Children. Our aim is that every American man is an enemy whether he kills us or pays taxes to kill us”<sup>52</sup>. According to bin Laden, American civilians may as well be soldiers because they pay taxes and shape

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<sup>51</sup> McCauley and Quiggin, "Momin Khawaja," [Page 16].

<sup>52</sup> Laden to NBC newsgroup.

the U.S government through elections and that has led to the death of many Muslims. Al Qaeda describes their seemingly aggressive attacks as part of their “defensive jihad” despite the fact that they are aimed at civilians. Al Qaeda holds U.S. civilians responsible for the government’s actions because they elect those in power. Mohammed Siddique Khan is a former al Qaeda member and leader of the 2005 London suicide bombings, and he described why he and al Qaeda were targeting civilians writing,

“Your (the West’s) democratically elected governments continue to perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. Your support for them makes you directly responsible ... until we feel security, you will be our targets. Until you stop the bombing, gassing, imprisonment and torture of my people, we will not stop”<sup>53</sup>.

In his statement, one can clearly see how he still portrays western countries as the aggressors against Muslims due to their foreign policy activities in the Middle East. He also holds citizens of these countries responsible for U.S. actions and considers them to be potential targets if their governments continue attacking Islam. They deserve what they get because they selected their states’ leaders who have caused devastation for many Muslims in the Middle East. Al Qaeda has continuously tried to promote their defensive jihadist view in order to gain recruits because many Muslims view the U.S as an enemy to Islam and by al Qaeda proclaiming to defend Muslims many recruits may be inspired to join.

In the Qur’an it also teaches that it is each Muslim’s personal responsibility to contribute to a jihad in any way they can if Islam, its followers, or their land is under attack and those that don’t partake, will face God’s judgment<sup>54</sup>. This places an incentive for Muslims to join because they may feel devoted to protect Islam. As previously referenced,

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<sup>53</sup> McClauley and Quiqqin, "Momin Khawaja," [Page 40].

<sup>54</sup> Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris*, [Page 6].

many al Qaeda members are not fully educated in their religion and if Al Qaeda can persuade recruits that Islam is under threat, they may join al Qaeda's "defensive jihad". Jihad is an important symbol for al Qaeda's recruitment because their claim to be fighting a "defensive jihad" paints the U.S. as the aggressor because of American foreign policy. In addition, many Muslims already believe that the U.S. is waging a war on Islam regardless of al Qaeda's influence. A "defensive jihad" may appear to be more attractive to those Muslims leading to additional recruits joining al Qaeda. On top of that it is also the personal obligation of each Muslim to assist in a jihad in any way they can, and for those that view the U.S. as an enemy to Islam, they may be much more inclined to join al Qaeda and wage a "defensive jihad".

Al Qaeda also uses historical religious events to help gain recruits. For example, Osama bin Laden would often say that the U.S. is like the Christians in The Crusades, leading multiple campaigns against Muslims in order to take their holy lands. Bin Laden would say things such as "The new crusade led by the Americans against the Islamic nations" and how a battle would sure be soon to begin "between the Islamic world and the Americans and their Allies"<sup>55</sup>. Al Qaeda describes the predominantly Christian U.S. as modern crusaders wishing to take control of the Holy Land and Middle East and in doing so cause harm to Muslims along the way. The connection of The Crusades and the U.S. foreign policy by al Qaeda served as an important recruitment tactic because it symbolized the effects the U.S had on Muslims and also painted U.S involvement in the Middle East as aggressive. Al Qaeda's description of America as being modern day crusaders could also be tied into the al Qaeda ideology of waging a "defensive jihad" because by al Qaeda

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<sup>55</sup> Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris*, [Page 16].

portraying the U.S as a crusader, they could state they were fighting in reaction to the aggressive and predatory United States. A former al Qaeda member named Momin Khawaja talked about his view of the United States being a modern crusader as a reason for his radicalization stating,

“Would the American and British political leaders learn any lessons from their failure in the on-going wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? For over 13 years, they were not engaged to promote democracy or to protect human dignity and rights or any logical discourse against the ruthless authoritarianism. They are leading a new Crusade against the Muslim world. Every beginning has its end. It is just that most transgressors do not know about it when they crossover the limits of the Laws of God”<sup>56</sup>.

Khawaja, and other al Qaeda recruits, understand U.S foreign policy to be a modern day crusade because of al Qaeda’s use of the historical significance as well as the many actions the U.S takes in the Middle East which violate the sovereignty of many Middle Eastern countries. Many Muslims around the world, whether or not they are a member of a terrorist group, view U.S. actions as a War on Islam,<sup>57</sup> and al Qaeda uses this popular idea and ties it back to The Crusades to help gain sympathy and legitimize the organization’s use of violence, helping them grow their membership.

The way al Qaeda proclaims their use of “defensive jihad” and their portrayal of the United States as crusaders is done in order to gain recruits and sympathizers, which has helped the group survive for decades. Due to al Qaeda being focused on fighting foreign powers, it is essential for them to use historical and religious symbols to make the U.S. appear even more aggressive in order to demonize the U.S. Al Qaeda’s use of jihad and historical moments is very similar to the hunger strikes used by IRA members. Both

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<sup>56</sup> McCauley and Quiggin, "Momin Khawaja," [Page 15].

<sup>57</sup> McCauley and Quiggin, "Momin Khawaja," [Page 16].

terrorist groups used historically religious motivated techniques and in doing so gained sympathy for their organization, causing more members to join, helping both groups survive for so long.

## **ISIS**

### **Background:**

The Islamic state first formed in 1999, but did not start gaining international attention until recently. The Islamic state began in Iraq shortly after the U.S invasion of Iraq in 2003, and was led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Bin Laden funded Zarqawi's organization in Iraq, however, with Zarqawi not sharing the same goals as bin Laden and al Qaeda, the Islamic State did not affiliate itself with al Qaeda until negotiations between the two groups led to the unification of the jihadist groups and the Islamic state renaming itself "al Qaeda of Iraq" (AQI)<sup>58</sup>. Despite the two groups unification, there were still stark differences between the al Qaeda and its affiliate AQI. Over time, different political events, diverging ideologies, and al Qaeda's organization would cause AQI and al Qaeda to cut ties and AQI to rename itself ISIS in 2012. In 2012, the Islamic State would experience a revival as new members flocked to ISIS under new leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi due to the group's idea of establishing an Islamic state, increased violence in Iraq, and the beginning of the Syrian Civil War.

### **Religiosity**

Despite both groups wishing to form Islamic governments, ISIS has a much more hardline approach and its goals are focused more on challenging the current state system by unifying Muslim countries in the Middle East under a caliphate, while al Qaeda worked

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<sup>58</sup> Byman, "Comparing Al Qaeda," Brookings.edu.

to establish Islamic State governments in existing states. Despite these different political ambitions, they both are supporting the development of Islamic government, though the Islamic States' political goals matched with their religious perception of their political goals have led to much more recruitment for ISIS since its revival in 2012.

While both groups wish to overthrow governments in the Middle East and form Islamic governments, they view their enemies, as well as the obstacles preventing them from achieving their goals, differently. Al Qaeda viewed foreign actors, specifically the U.S., as their enemies who were preventing the development of Islamic governments. Therefore, their focus was primarily on fighting the U.S. ISIS's ideology is different in that the group believes that regional actors are the main force preventing the creation of Islamic governments so they focus more of their attention to combating those within their region, specifically the Asad regime in Syria, Abadi regime in Iraq, and those that do not adhere to their political and religious ideologies.<sup>59</sup>

ISIS focuses their attention and resources more on regional adversaries because they wish to develop a caliphate, which is a Muslim community in a region, ruled over by a political and religious leader the called caliph who is meant to be the successor of Muhammad. ISIS linked their political aspiration of establishing a caliphate to Muhammad's travel from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E when Muhammad established a caliphate in Medina, which was the first base in which Islam began to grow after he fled Mecca to escape religious persecution. Sabhan Khalef Ali al-Juburi, an ISIS leader, spoke about how he and ISIS are following the work of the Prophet stating, "Following the example of the Prophet when he left Mecca for Medina and established the Islamic State there, not-

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<sup>59</sup> Byman, "Comparing Al Qaeda," Brookings.edu.

withstanding the alliance of the idolaters and the People of the Book against him...the territories under our control equal in expanse the first State in Medina”<sup>60</sup>. ISIS’s goal in establishing a caliphate has been popular among many jihadists and has been a major incentive for new members who wish to join in order to unite all Muslims under one caliphate and end existing state governments.

Before ISIS split from al Qaeda, central al Qaeda leadership supported the Islamic States’ desire to develop a caliphate in Iraq, but al Qaeda’s support of ISIS started to fade due to al Qaeda losing control of its own state building abilities, the hardline ideologies of the Islamic State and ISIS’s eagerness to become engaged in Syria<sup>61</sup>. If jihadist groups were placed on a political spectrum, al Qaeda would be placed on the left and ISIS on the far right because ISIS has a much stricter ideology of the Qur’an and its goal in creating a caliphate for all Muslims; a much less popular idea for al Qaeda<sup>62</sup>.

However, al Qaeda did not understand the high number of jihadists that support this much more conservative political and religious ideology, which led to many jihadists joining ISIS instead of al Qaeda. ISIS’s early success in 2014, in which it took large amount of territory in Iraq and Syria, helped prove to many jihadists that the organization was determined to focus on establishing a caliphate and not fighting foreign powers as al Qaeda did in order for states to individually form Islamic governments. “The reality of a proto-state and ISIS’s willingness to try to govern- this Khilafa project, as many within the group call it- is quite appealing to jihadists. ISIS is not only talking the talk about establishing an

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<sup>60</sup> Bunzel, "From Paper," [Page 18].

<sup>61</sup> Bunzel, "From Paper," [Page 17].

<sup>62</sup> Byman, "Comparing Al Qaeda," Brookings.edu.

Islamic state, it is walking the walk”<sup>63</sup> which, has attracted many foreign fighters to its side. Al-Azy was a captured member of ISIS and in an interview with CNN from his prison cell in Iraq, he explained why he joined ISIS stating, “I was a believer. I believed in the caliphate and I believed in the Islamic State. They said the pledge to the caliph is from the days of the Prophet and those who don't pledge are not Muslims. I was convinced by this”<sup>64</sup>. ISIS’s political goal of uniting Syria and Iraq and forming a caliphate as the Prophet had done has been popular among jihadists and along with ISIS success in gaining territory, the group had legitimized itself to many recruits. The very conservative ideology of ISIS and its ability to form a caliphate has led to increased membership from individuals such as al-Azy because they believe in the formation of the caliphate and see joining ISIS as the best means to do so because the organization has been quite successful in doing so.

### **Religious/ Political issues which help Recruitment**

One essential recruitment tool for ISIS has been Sunni disfranchisement and growing sectarian lines in Iraq and Syria. For centuries, since the religious split of the Sunni and Shiite Muslims, there has been conflict between both sects and ISIS has cleverly used this sectarian struggle, especially with tensions between both sects worsening in both states, to recruit many members<sup>65</sup>. ISIS claims to be the champion of Sunni Muslims in their struggles against the Iraqi and Syrian regimes. Because of the political climates in both countries, many Sunni Muslims have been convinced that it is necessary for them to join ISIS because they believe that Sunni’s are under attack and that they must fight back,

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<sup>63</sup> Zelin, "The War between," [Page 7].

<sup>64</sup> Black to CNN newsgroup, "I was a believer': Face-to-face with ISIS inside an Iraqi prison."

<sup>65</sup> Nuemann, "Victims, Perpetrators," [Page 9].

and that a Sunni Muslim Caliphate will create a government that best represents Sunni interests.

One major factor, which has helped draw in thousands of recruits for ISIS and led to the group's revival back in 2012, is the Syrian conflict. Many ISIS members joined because they see the violent struggle in the Syrian Civil War in sectarian terms. For decades, Syria has been under the rule of the Assad family while the Sunni Muslims who make up about 75% of Syria's population have experienced repression. The Alawites make up only 15% of population but have control of the government and private sector<sup>66</sup>. The civil war started in 2011 when protests erupted in Syria over the discontent with the Assad-controlled government and for the removal of Bashar-al-Assad as the President of Syria. Once these protests were met with a violent response by the Assad government, a war started between the rebels and the government with Sunni Muslims making up the majority of the Syrian rebels. The religious and political divide that developed between the Syrian government and the Syrian Sunni population helped ISIS recruit thousands of members. Many ISIS members joined because they believed that Sunni Muslims in Syria face genocide and that they have a moral obligation to defend other Sunni Muslims and their religious identity from the Assad government<sup>67</sup>. With the Assad regime using brutal tactics, such as the use of chemical weapons, bombings, and the targeting of civilians, ISIS has been able to gain many recruits because most of the communities the Assad government targets are Sunni because they support of the rebellion. A woman, whose name is kept anonymous for her protection, who is a former member of ISIS explains how conditions in Syria led to her joining ISIS saying, "Everything around us was chaos. Free Syrian Army, the regime, barrel bombs,

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<sup>66</sup> BBC to BBC newsgroup, "Guide: Syria's Diverse Minorities."

<sup>67</sup> Nuemann, "Victims, Perpetrators," [Page 9].

strikes, the wounded, clinics, blood -- you want to tear yourself away, to find something to run to. My problem was I ran away to something uglier"<sup>68</sup>. By the Assad government attacking Sunnis, ISIS was able to gain many members because many Sunnis believed joining ISIS as fulfilling a jihad because their faith and the people of their faith are in danger due to the Syrian government's targeting of civilians, especially Sunni Muslims.

ISIS has also been able to recruit thousands of members to join in Iraq because of the religious divide within the country. In Iraq, Sunni Muslims are a minority making up 42% of Muslims, while the majority of other Muslims in Iraq are Shia<sup>69</sup>. Before the fall of Saddam Hussein, the Sunni's held more political power, but once the U.S. invaded Iraq and formed a new government there, a predominantly Shiite government took over and has left much of the Sunni population feeling disenfranchised especially with many of the Iraqi government's policies and actions which have marginalized the Sunnis. The change of power in Iraq has created an abundance of potential recruits for ISIS because of the sectarian divide between Sunni and Shiites because ISIS can convince many Sunnis that already feel disenfranchised that in order to gain equality, it is necessary to join ISIS and wage jihad against the Iraqi government. Thahir Sahab Jamel, a former ISIS member, states how he joined ISIS to fight the mostly Shia Iraqi government saying, "A man named Salam talked to me and got me connected to ISIS. He told me I needed to be a jihadist and fight the Shia government. He convinced me to fight the government. I started getting involved as they were planning operations to begin in Iraq and Syria"<sup>70</sup>. Many Sunni Muslims view the Shia government as illegitimate as it has led to the disfranchisement of the Sunni

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<sup>68</sup> Damon and Tuysuz to CNN newsgroup, "How she went from a schoolteacher to an ISIS member."

<sup>69</sup> Lipka, "The Sunni-Shia," PewResearchCenter.

<sup>70</sup> McKay to Fox News newsgroup, "Confessions of a Captured ISIS Fighter."

population. ISIS has been able to recruit many members by capitalizing on this view towards the Iraqi government.

In an email written by a Sunni Muslim women living in Iraq, she writes about her observation as to why many young Sunni Muslim men have joined ISIS due to the violent experiences Sunni communities have endured because of their treatment as second-class citizens by the Shia government and U.S. and ally airstrikes in Sunni communities:

“The bombardment was carried out by the government. The air strikes focused on wholly on civilian neighborhoods. Maybe they wanted to target two ISIS bases. But neither round of bombardment found its target. One target is a house connected to a church where ISIS men live. It is next to the neighborhood generator and about 200-300 meters from our home. The bombing hurt civilians only and demolished the generator. Now we don’t have any electricity since yesterday night. I am writing from a mobile device in my sister’s house, which is empty. The government bombardment did not hit any of the ISIS men. I have just heard from a relative who visited us to check on us after that terrible night. He says that because of this bombardment, youngsters are joining ISIS in tens if not hundreds because this increase hatred towards the government, which doesn’t care about us as Sunnis being killed and targeted. Government forces went to Amerli, a Shia village surrounded by tens of Sunni villages, though Amerli was never taken by ISIS. The government militias attacked the surrounding Sunni villages, killing hundreds, with help from the American air strikes”<sup>71</sup>.

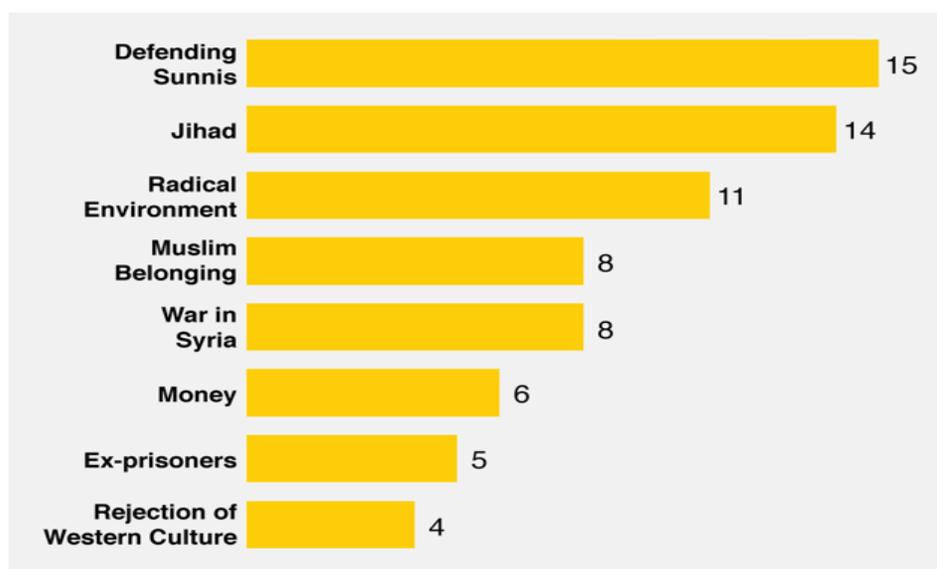
Due to ISIS members identifying as Sunni Muslims in Iraq, they have taken control and operate out of mostly Sunni communities. However, this makes it much more difficult politically for the U.S. and Iraq because the unintentional killing of civilian Sunni Muslims not affiliated with ISIS can cause individuals within these targeted communities to be pushed towards joining ISIS because they feel as though their communities, families, religious identity, and they themselves are under attack. Also, the lack of protection provided by the Iraqi government had led to further tensions. Iraqi militias and the

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<sup>71</sup> Cockburn, *The Rise*, [Page 62].

governments military have on numerous occasions given security priority to Shia communities over Sunni communities in combating ISIS, and in the eyes of many Sunnis shows the government's unequal treatment of the two different Muslim sects.

A study conducted by Quantum Communications interviewed 49 ISIS members who either were detained or defected from the group in Iraq and Syria, to see what their motivations were for joining the terrorist organization. This study compiled the 49 subject's motivational reasons, the most common having to do with defending Sunnis. Many of the other reasons they described also had to do with defending Sunnis such as the waging a jihad and the war in Syria. It is their opinion that they are launching a holy war in order to create a better government and life for Sunnis<sup>72</sup>.



The number of people among 49 current and former members of extremist groups in Iraq and Syria influenced by each factor in joining the fight (George LeVines / *Defense One*. Data: Quantum Communications)<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Tucker to The Atlantic newsgroup, "Why Join ISIS? How Fighters Respond When You Ask Them."

<sup>73</sup> Tucker to The Atlantic newsgroup, "Why Join ISIS? How Fighters Respond When You Ask Them."

The research and the graph above from Quantum Communications shows how sectarian issues in both Iraq and Syria have led to increased recruitment for ISIS. With Sunni disfranchisement occurring in both countries, many Sunnis have joined ISIS because they believe it will create a state where they are no longer inferior to other religious groups and can take control their own governments. ISIS's successful recruitment in both countries is also quite similar to the IRA's successful recruitment in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. The Sunni disfranchisement in both states is much like Catholic disfranchisement in Northern Ireland during the 1970s and 1980s that caused many Irish Catholics to join the IRA to change the social and political status quo. The sectarian divide helped the IRA recruit for decades and with sectarian issues existing for years in both Syria and Iraq with no sign of a solution in either state, ISIS can capitalize on this turmoil and continue to recruit disenfranchised Sunni's helping to ensuring ISIS's survival.

### **Social Media**

Today's terrorist groups also have a new strategic element for recruiting new members, unavailable to previous terrorist groups, and that is social media. Social media is not unique to only some of today's religious terrorists groups because they all share a special relationship with it. Social media has been beneficial for existing terrorist groups because it is a cheap, effective, and low risk method of recruiting. Social media has helped various religious terrorist groups because social media has allowed terrorist groups to reach larger audiences, target young audiences, and use new methods of propaganda making their recruiting more effective.

Social media allows terrorist groups to recruit members globally instead of solely relying on possible recruits from within their local population. Recruiters for today's

terrorist groups can simply log into any social media site, find and meet people online who they believe are prone to being radicalized and entice them to join their group. Facebook is the most popular form of social media with around 1.8 billion users logging on at least once a month<sup>74</sup>. The popularity of Facebook gives terrorist groups access to such a large pool of people that it becomes much easier to find potential new members. Geoff Dean explains how religious terrorist groups utilize social media, specifically Facebook, to recruit members:

“The most important and useful Facebook feature for terrorist organization is the ‘groups’ function. The apparent strategy used by terrorist organizations is to create a Facebook groups based on a seemingly innocent ideal, such as supporting Palestinians or Islam in general. As member numbers of the group increase, jihadist material can be slowly introduced by the members of the organization to the Facebook group in a way which does not directly condone or encourage jihadist actions, and thus does not constitute a violation of Facebook policy. From this position, the group can even be directed straight to the websites and forums of the terrorist organization behind the Facebook group.”<sup>75</sup>

Members of ISIS and al Qaeda can utilize Facebook by drawing in people by creating a group that looks appealing to many users throughout the site. Groups terrorists create on Facebook will more than likely have no direct reference to the group or terrorist actions, but will be about topics that may relate to the group’s ideology or certain political positions. The description of the groups that terrorists create aim to target individuals who may be more likely to be radicalized, so recruiters develop Facebook groups which would be more likely to target these individuals. For example, ISIS recruiters may create a Facebook group that supports more Sunni political representation in IRAQ, or a group that

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<sup>74</sup> "Social Networking," PewResearch.

<sup>75</sup> Dean, "The dark," [Page 7].

supports Palestine against Israeli military actions relying on the religiosity of each conflict. If ISIS were to create a group that was about something that did not remotely relate to their group's cause, such as a Red Sox fan club, they would fail to attract those who may be interested in fighting for ISIS, and instead attract Red Sox fans who would only relate to fighting with Yankee fans. Once the recruiters gain a decent amount of member, recruiters start posting content about jihad and see what response members give. Those who appear to be more enthusiastic about the content will likely be contacted further because they are much more likely to be radicalized and join the terrorist organization. Religious terrorist groups have benefited greatly from social media platforms such as Facebook because it allows them to recruit new members through the Internet who might live all across the. An ISIS or al Qaeda member may sign onto Facebook in the Middle East and recruit an individual living in Europe or North America. The 22,000 foreign fighters in Syria in Iraq who joined ISIS from 100 different countries show how effective social media has been for recruitment for today's religious terrorist groups because it was able to increase ISIS membership by reaching out to recruits thousands of miles away<sup>76</sup>.

Social media as a tool of recruitment may also lead to ISIS, al Qaeda and other groups being viable for a greater length of time because of the age group social media caters to the most. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that those under 30 years old were much more likely to use social media and be more active on social media than those older than 50<sup>77</sup>. With the majority of social media users being under 30, religious terrorist groups are benefit greatly from social because it gives ISIS and al Qaeda the ability to attain new members necessary for the group's survival past one generation.

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<sup>76</sup> Flournoy and Fontaine, "An Intensified," [Page 178].

<sup>77</sup> "Social Networking," PewResearch.

Many terrorist organizations fail to inspire younger generations to join and continue the group's cause. They fade away and cease to exist as members age and die. However, social media gives existing religious terrorist groups more of an advantage in surviving because they can inspire younger people through its various channels.

Social media has also made sharing videos to wide audiences much easier, and in many cases, today's religious terrorist organizations have used videos on social media to encourage viewers to join their cause. Similar to the IRA, much of ISIS and al- Qaeda's propaganda is created in reaction to political or military events and is aimed at inspiring people to join. Visuals have been known to cause more impressions on people than just text. For example, in the U.S. during the Vietnam War, much of the violence was captured on film and anti-war sentiment was spurred because of the public's realization of the carnage in warfare. Al Qaeda and ISIS have both used video for propaganda and recruitment purposes, however, ISIS is much better known for their videos. In many of ISIS's videos, they capture combat footage and show images and videos of their group's successes such as their video showing bulldozer's destroying the Syrian Iraqi border. They also use videos to recruit new members. For example, in a video entitled, "There is No Life Without Jihad", two western ISIS members are addressing Muslims and claiming they should join ISIS by saying things like "the cure for depression is Jihad" and "you can be here in the golden time or you can be on the sideline for which you will have to answer on judgment day"<sup>78</sup>. With social media platforms such as YouTube, these messages can be spread worldwide and be viewed by thousands of people quickly. Because of the effects

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<sup>78</sup> Fernandez, "Here to stay," [Page 8].

imagery has on people and current religious groups ability to broadcast their videos through social media, they can effectively and rather simply upload videos inspiring people to join their terrorist organization.

## **Counterterrorism**

### **Background**

Terrorist organizations can cease to exist for a variety of reasons. Terrorist groups can be dismantled by a state or states, a group could lack the financial resources needed to operate, and in rare instances, a group can also succeed and lose its need to continue to operate. There are many more possibilities as to why terrorist groups cease to exist, however, religious terrorism seems unique in that it has many qualities that may lead to groups transcending normal difficulties previous groups have had to face in order to survive. Accepting that religious terrorist groups such as ISIS and al Qaeda have a much higher probability of surviving for longer than different forms of terrorist groups due to their religiosity and other present day factors, what are some ways in which states can effectively employ counterterrorism measures against today's leading international terrorist groups? And what counterterrorism measures should states avoid?

### **End The U.S. War on Terrorism**

U.S. military counterintelligence strategies used thus far to combat today's religious terrorist organizations, have caused a wide range of issues for the United States. U.S. military action must be used more effectively in order to bring an end to al Qaeda and ISIS. By saying effectively, I do not suggest increasing the military's role in countering terrorism by increased bombing of suspected terrorists, more military spending, or deploying more troops abroad to combat terrorists. On the contrary, in order to effectively bring an end to today's religious terrorist organizations, I believe it is necessary for the United States and other western countries to restrict their use of the military to combat terrorism, and allow

for nonmilitary measures to play a larger role. The use of military force by the United States and other Western countries has failed for many reasons, but this is not uncommon because only 7% of the time states rely on the military to end a terrorist campaign are they successful. Military use for counterterrorism can also have an adverse effect and lead to terrorist organizations gaining more members. The military's role in counterterrorism must be reduced and a greater focus placed on more preventative measures that block terrorist organizations from launching attacks and gaining territory in order to protect potential victims therefore discrediting the legitimacy of the organization.

After 9/11, al Qaeda succeeded in gaining more support for their cause because of the United States use of military force and its invasion of both Afghanistan and Iraq. The United States invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq was done as a part of the U.S. War on Terrorism, which vaguely declared that the United States would fight until all terrorist groups wishing to attack the United States and its allies were eliminated. In 2001, after the 9/11 attacks, Congress passed a bill, the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists (AUMF) which gave the President the power "to engage those 'nations, organizations, and persons' responsible for the 2001 attacks both as a means of retaliation and to allow preventive action"<sup>79</sup>. The deployment of U.S. troops to combat al Qaeda in the War on Terror and the passing of the AUMF in 2001 would be the beginning of the United States' militarization of counterterrorism, which still exists today.

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<sup>79</sup> McIntosh, "Counterterrorism as War," [Page 25].

Before the 9/11 attack occurred, bin Laden had made videotapes and explained to reporters that he wanted to draw a U.S. military presence into the Middle East in order to combat U.S. troops stationed there<sup>80</sup>. One major reason why al Qaeda wanted this was because they believed it would spur widespread recruitment because much of Islamic world had already viewed the United States as an aggressive country and as an enemy to Islam. Osama bin Laden's bodyguard alluded to this idea before the 9/11 attacks and is quoted as saying, " We are working for a big operation: namely, dragging the United States into a confrontation with the entire Islamic world"<sup>81</sup>. By deploying hundreds of thousands of troops to Afghanistan, and shortly after Iraq, the United States provided proof for the al Qaeda organization to spread to its audience, most importantly potential recruits, that the United States was waging war against Islam and that a defensive jihad was necessary to defend Islam. Bruce Hoffman writes about the effect that the United States foreign policy actions had on countries with large Muslim populations in the aftermath 9/11 and their views towards bin Laden:

"Bin Laden's astonishingly popularity among the populations of such key American allies in the war on terrorism as Pakistan (where in 2004 he was viewed favorably by 65 percent of those polled), in Jordan (55 percent), and in Morocco (45%) attests to the intense antipathy felt toward the United States in North Africa, the Middle East, and South and South East Asia, as well as in other regions with large Muslim populations. This perception of Islam under attack by an incontestably predatory, aggressive U.S dominated West is of course eagerly exploited and expertly manipulated by bin Laden and his minions"<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> Geltzer, *US Counter-terrorism*, [Page 100].

<sup>81</sup> Geltzer, *US Counter-terrorism*, [Page 104].

<sup>82</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, [Page 129].

The United States War on Terrorism may have been unsuccessful for a variety of reasons, but it is hard ignore one reason in particular and that is it gave al Qaeda the propaganda and thus the ability to recruit thousands of new members to fight against the U.S. The United States military may have successfully diminished al Qaeda's strength, influence, and operational capabilities, but despite that the group still exists and launches attacks today because it was able to recruit new members over the past 16 years.

After President Bush's two terms, his successor, President Obama, declared an end to the War on Terrorism, however, he still utilized many of the same military tactics President Bush had use to combat terrorism. During President Obama's presidency, he shifted counterterrorism policy slightly from President Bush's by pulling back military use and placing more importance on preventing terrorist groups from attracting new members. However, despite President Obama including more non-military actions to battle terrorism, the U.S. military still played a major role in counterterrorism during his presidency. While Obama was President, he kept U.S. troops in Afghanistan and increased military spending such as "U.S Special Operations Command from \$9bn in 2010 to \$9.8bn in 2011-and assistance to foreign militaries, raised from \$350m in 2010 to \$400m in 2011"<sup>83</sup>. Despite President Obama claiming to end to the War on Terrorism, he still used the military under the AUMF to combat terrorism, which may as well have been a continuation of the War on Terror<sup>84</sup>. Despite the Obama administration not ending the War on Terrorism due to the President's use of the AUMF, he did reduce military involvement. United States counterterrorism policy makers should continue to deescalate the military's role to combat

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<sup>83</sup> Hughes, "The Military's," [Page 4].

<sup>84</sup> McIntosh, "Counterterrorism as War," [Page 26].

terrorism and focus on preventing the radicalization of people who continue to join al Qaeda and ISIS.

That does not mean that the United States should completely abandon military use in counterterrorism. Geraint Hughes writes about how western states should shape their counterterrorism policies and use military force:

“Physical elimination or incarceration of terrorists is a secondary task to wider nonmilitary measures to reduce the appeal of terrorism, notably the need to work with foreign governments, civil society groups and NGOs to address socioeconomic and political problems which may radicalize potential recruits for al-Qaeda. It is also advisable following the Iraq debacle to keep direct military intervention by Western states to an absolute minimum...specific military measures can be applied if they are related to a wider process of political engagement with regional powers, and also aspects of soft power such as public diplomacy”<sup>85</sup>.

One successful use of the military against terrorist organizations is its ability to launch preemptive intervention strikes against a terrorist organization before it launches an attack. During the 1990s in Ireland, the British military adopted a strategy of prevention and focused its resources and men on preventing the IRA from launching attacks. This proved to be successful in not only preventing the attack but because it had a demoralizing effect on the IRA. These preventative strikes by the British against IRA members who were about to commit a terrorist attack were successful because they not only made the IRA unable to launch attacks but ultimately led to the killing or capture of many members. The inability of the IRA to attack led to frustration within the group and resulted in failing recruitment and lack of propaganda so the population of Irish Republicans turned to

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<sup>85</sup> Hughes, "The Military's," [Page 132].

“nonviolent methods to pursue their goals” as violence became more apparently unsuccessful to them<sup>86</sup>.

Since 9/11, military force has been the focus of U.S. counterterrorism policies. The U.S. has held the belief that the most successful way to combat modern terrorists is to go overseas and root out terrorists and kill them in order to deplete the group’s membership and deter others from joining evidenced by President Bush stating, “Those who make war with the United States have chosen their own destruction”<sup>87</sup>. In President Bush’s statement he declares that any person who joins a terrorist group, such as al Qaeda, will be destroyed in order to deter members and with the military using aggressive means to kill as many terrorists as possible, this should be a sign to any person thinking of joining al Qaeda. Deterrence through military means has been unsuccessful but despite that, this method has been continuing for over a decade and has been very costly for the U.S, and as mentioned above, has also spurred further membership for terrorist groups. What the U.S should do is vastly reduce its military action in its counterterrorism efforts and focus more on nonviolent practices that aim to prevent recruitment. Due to the differences in al Qaeda and ISIS, I propose two separate approaches that the military should take to combat them. The U.S. military should focus on preventing al Qaeda from launching attacks against the West and stop ISIS from gaining new territory.

Al Qaeda cannot be fought militarily because “al Qaeda is ineradicable because it can survive, cockroach-like, by going underground”<sup>88</sup>, which makes it difficult for conventional

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<sup>86</sup> Hughes, "The Military's," [Page 36].

<sup>87</sup> Geltzer, *US Counter-terrorism*, [Page 35].

<sup>88</sup> Wood, "What ISIS," [Page 25].

militaries to target al Qaeda members and bases. Due to the United States inability to use the military to eradicate al Qaeda, the U.S should focus on preventing al Qaeda from launching attacks against the U.S. The U.S is the primary enemy to al Qaeda due to many Muslims disliking U.S foreign policy in the Middle East, so any military action the U.S takes to combat al Qaeda can be characterized as not just an attack on al Qaeda but as an attack on Islam. However, if al Qaeda was unable launch attacks many of its recruits may be persuaded to resort to different tactics to achieve their political aspirations. Geraint Hughes writes, "military and police operations can be integrated as part of an overall policy of containing and, if necessary, neutralizing hard-core terrorists who wish to fight to the bitter end, while impressing those amenable to compromise that negotiations offer a more viable means of achieving objectives than the continuation of violence"<sup>89</sup>. If the U.S. restricted al Qaeda's ability to attack, many members or recruits may view al Qaeda as unable to succeed in causing any change, and they may turn to more political strategies of recruiting which is very similar to the British forces thwarting IRA attacks during the 1990's. John M. Venhaus writes about how the U.S should take a two-step approach with nonviolent and military counterterrorism measures writing:

"Since defeating al-Qaeda does not involve fighting in a particular physical place, the central tenet of the radicalization prevention strategy is to discredit the brand image and dissuade those who seek membership or affiliation. Physical confrontation should continue, because discrediting the brand requires that al-Qaeda operations be continuously and publicly destroyed, dismantled, and disrupted with an active combination of military and law enforcement actions. Concurrently, a parallel effort should plant doubts about the viability and effectiveness of al-Qaeda operations in the

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<sup>89</sup> Hughes, "The Military's," [Page 36].

minds of those who seek to join al-Qaeda or establish an associated movement”<sup>90</sup>.

In order to do this, the U.S. should take a more domestic approach in preventing al Qaeda from launching attacks and only resort to launching military attacks in the Middle East if it is in order to prevent an attack from occurring because by doing so it will discredit al Qaeda and diminish al Qaeda’s recruitment capabilities.

ISIS’s goal is to establish a caliphate, and if it were unable to grab more land and especially if it started to lose land that it controlled, it would lose a lot of its credibility and inflict a blow to the organization’s ability to recruit new members to continue to fight to establish a caliphate. The U.S. could use more conventional military tactics against ISIS because it functions more as a state than a terrorist group as does al Qaeda. However, a U.S. “invasion would be a huge propaganda victory for jihadists worldwide”<sup>91</sup>. If the U.S. invaded, ISIS could rally many recruits to join because the U.S. is launching a War on Islam much like al Qaeda did during the U.S invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. With ISIS more focused on regional struggles, it launches fewer attacks against western countries so U.S. counterterrorism strategy against ISIS should be focused on supporting ISIS’s enemies. Supporting the Kurds with supplies, training, money, intelligence, and air support would be in the U.S. best interest militarily because “they can keep the Islamic State from fulfilling its duty to expand. And with every month that it fails to expand, it resembles less the conquering state of the Prophet Muhammad than yet another Middle Eastern government

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<sup>90</sup> Venhaus, "Why Youth," [Page 11].

<sup>91</sup> Wood, "What ISIS," [Page 27].

failing to bring prosperity to its people”<sup>92</sup>. The U.S. should use military action against al Qaeda only to support the enemies of ISIS in order to delegitimize the group’s goal of developing a caliphate because ISIS success thus far in controlling territory has led to members pouring in from all over the world.

U.S. counterterrorism strategy should not define U.S. military action as the sole method in combating terrorism, because as time has proven it is ineffective and in many cases has negative consequences for the state. Counterterrorism policies should focus more on nonviolent methods that disrupt terrorist recruitment, and only use military force to prevent attacks in order to save lives and destroy the group’s credibility and thus recruitment ability. The aim in counterterrorism should not be founded on the idea to eliminate these groups by force because militaries only have about a 7% percent success rate in ending terrorist organizations<sup>93</sup>. The U.S. should repeal the AUMF because it is only a continuation of the War on Terror,<sup>94</sup> and instead implement counterterrorism military policies that aim to discredit the terrorist group. By preventing al Qaeda from launching attacks against the West, and ISIS from grabbing more territory, they appear illegitimate to their potential recruits because they will seem to be weak organizations unable to achieve their aspirations. The U.S. should then focus on nonviolent strategies, which aim to prevent al Qaeda and ISIS from gaining more members, which I will describe later in this chapter. The idea of demilitarization in counterterrorism is very similar to the British counterterrorism approach towards the IRA during the 1990’s, which promoted more Irish

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<sup>92</sup> Wood, "What ISIS," [Page 27].

<sup>93</sup> Jones and Libicki, "How Terrorist," [Page 19].

<sup>94</sup> McIntosh, "Counterterrorism as War," [Page 26].

Catholic political involvement in Northern Ireland and the use of the military to prevent IRA attacks from occurring, both of which made joining the IRA much less appealing.

### **Nonviolent Counterterrorism**

#### **Government Suppression an Issue**

One way in which states can combat today's religious terrorist groups is for states to support many of the governmental and political changes occurring in the Middle East. Throughout the Middle East there has been a major push by younger generations wanting more democratic institutions like free elections, freedom of the press, equality, and more democratic governments, which is very damaging to groups like al Qaeda and ISIS. "When dictators reigned supreme in Arab lands, al-Qaeda could score points by emphasizing the struggle against despotism... When dictators such as Mubarak fall, however, al-Qaeda loses one of its best recruiting pitches: the repression of Arab governments inflict on their citizens"<sup>95</sup>. ISIS and al Qaeda have been able to take advantage of political turmoil throughout the Middle East and add thousands of members to their ranks because of their political disfranchisement. As previously referenced, Sunnis in Syria have been at odds with the Assad regime and joining ISIS has been a popular way for many Sunnis in Syria to fight back. Many Sunnis join because they feel that living under the rule of a caliph is a much

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<sup>95</sup> Byman, "Terrorism: Al-Qaeda," [Page 77].

better option than under the harsh Syrian government, which, routinely represses, economically disfranchises, and kills innocent Sunnis. Sunnis in Iraq have also joined both al Qaeda and ISIS for similar reasons, despite the Iraqi government not being as repressive towards them as the Assad regime in Syria. As Sunnis in Iraq have experienced a power shift since the end of Saddam Hussein's reign, with power transferring from them to the Shia majority, they have felt and have experienced political disfranchisement.

Much like today's religious terrorists groups, one can also see the same issue operating in Northern Ireland during the late 1900s, which sparked the Troubles and further IRA recruitment. One of the main reasons the IRA lasted so long as a terrorist organization is because so many Irish Catholics felt neglected by Irish Protestants and England, that they saw no other way to gain equality but to resist by the use of force. For good reason, Sunnis in Iraq and Syria, as well as Irish Catholics in the 1900's, felt repressed by their governments. Both al Qaeda and ISIS have vowed that they will fight democracies as hard as they fight dictatorships, however, this may not be possible because with democracy the idea of fighting a democratic government may be much less inviting to the Arab world<sup>96</sup>. With more democratic governments and policies in states such as Syria and Iraq that promote equality, fewer individuals would be inclined to pick up arms and fight for a terrorist groups because political and social issues that they currently face will more likely be resolved creating fewer reasons as to why a person would join a terrorist group.

If the United States, other western countries, and countries in the Middle East strengthened their engagement with Sunni Muslims in Iraq and Syria, they could possibly help prevent and reverse the current disfranchisement in both Sunni communities. If many

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<sup>96</sup> Byman, "Terrorism: Al-Qaeda," [Page 77].

of the grievances that Sunni Muslims have in both states were heard and addressed it would decrease the sectarian divide that currently exists in both states, inflicting a massive blow to much of al Qaeda's and ISIS'S recruitment. Propaganda made by both al Qaeda and ISIS that is aimed to recruit Sunni Muslims by drawing on sectarian issues would be less effective because the issues Sunni Muslims faced in both countries may be effectively diminished with a more democratic government and policies that develop equality for them as well.

### **Preventing Homegrown Terrorists**

Western states such as the U.S. can also develop more political and social policies to prevent individuals from becoming radicalized within their own states. A European study of individuals who have committed a terrorist attack in Europe, found that long-term citizens of the state that felt alienated and discriminated in their society were much more likely to commit a terrorist attack<sup>97</sup>. In the U.S., along with many other Western countries, Muslims have been treated as second-class citizens; many being immigrants and others being treated poorly even after having lived in the country for 2 or 3 generations. They do not achieve economically because they do not have the same opportunities as their counterparts in society. Individuals can be much more susceptible to radicalization because of the division between them and the society that they live in. Some become inspired to join these groups or carryout a lone wolf attack in the name of the group.

In order to combat this, states should adopt policies preventing discrimination against Muslims and other minorities, and create programs that help those that lack many

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<sup>97</sup> O'Brien, "Terrorism," [Page 200].

of the opportunities available to the majority of society, such as education and healthcare. In Europe especially, many states have already passed legislation aimed at protecting human rights, which may be infringed upon during counterterrorism measures, in order to prevent alienating Muslims in society and also create programs in order to assist poor Muslim communities. The United States has failed to adopt many of these same tactics, which has only helped fuel the radicalization of many individuals. The European Counter Terrorism Coordinator, Gijs de Vries states:

“To win the battle for hearts and mind our policies to combat terrorism must respect the rights and value we have pledged to defend including the rights of prisoners. Abu Grahib, Guantanamo and CIA renditions have damaged America’s standing in the world and have compromised our common struggle against terrorism. Credibility matters. The European Union continues to believe that in this battle we should be guided by established international legal standards, including international human rights law”<sup>98</sup>.

If the United States were to adopt many of these tactics to prevent discrimination such as wrongful imprisonment, torture, and restrictions on religious freedoms, it could strike a significant blow to ISIS and al Qaeda’s recruiting and the danger states face from citizens within their own population becoming a members of either terrorist organization or any other for that matter. One step that the U.S. could take in order to start to prevent the discrimination of Muslims is by closing Guantanamo Bay. The harsh prison conditions and the wrongful imprisonment of many Muslims in Guantanamo Bay has been used as a recruiting tool for al Qaeda and ISIS. They use this to enforce the idea that the U.S. is an oppressive government toward all Muslims. By shutting down the prison the United States could take the first step towards building policies that prevent the discrimination of

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<sup>98</sup> O'Brien, "Terrorism," [Page 55].

Muslims. More must be done after that in order to defend Muslim individuals equal rights. After the shutdown of Guantanamo Bay, the U.S. should look to develop laws to protect the Muslim population within the country, as have many European countries. If Muslims have the same rights as other non-Muslims, then they would not feel as discriminated against by the U.S. government. Muslims in the U.S would unlikely be as receptive to ISIS or al Qaeda's message that the U.S is waging a war on Islam if they were treated as any other citizen by the United States and had the same rights as any other American citizen.

Another issue that must be dealt in Western countries, especially in the U.S, is the treatment of Muslims by Western societies. The way in which Western societies treat and talk about Muslims is a systemic issue that has led to the radicalization of many Muslims. If Western societies continue to use language that discriminates against Muslims or Islam, they may cause Muslims to become alienated and more likely to join a terrorist organization. It is important that Western societies change their language when referring to Islam and Muslims especially when referring to terrorism because as of now there is a lot of anti-Muslim sentiment throughout Western populations. In the United States many prominent figures have painted Islam as a religion of hate and intolerance, and that the religion of Islam is directly responsible for why Islamic terrorist groups exist. For example, many Christian religious leaders are very influential because they have such large followings and in many cases have spread their intolerant views about Islam to the American public. An anonymous CIA officer wrote examples of what many American religious leaders were saying about Islam writing:

“Pat Robertson says, ‘Adolf Hitler is bad, but what the Muslims do to Jews is worse; the Reverend Jerry Falwell refers to the Prophet as a ‘terrorist’; Jimmy

Swaggart prays that ‘God blesses those who bless Israel and damn those that damn it’; and the Reverend Franklin Graham calls Islam a ‘wicked religion’<sup>99</sup>

The American government cannot change society’s beliefs, treatment, or sentiments concerning Islam or Muslims which makes it much more difficult to solve this issue. Also, given that many individuals who carry intolerant views towards Islam have platforms that allow them to spread their beliefs to thousands or even millions of Americans, makes it even more difficult to reverse anti-Islamic sentiment. The U.S. government cannot silence these individuals or those that hold intolerant views towards Muslims, but it can attempt to try and shape American public opinion away from anti-Islamic rhetoric. If American society is to become more tolerant of Muslims, prominent figures must begin speak about Islam using different language as not to demonize the entire religion and its followers. A clear distinction must be made between the very small percentage of Muslims that use Islam as a reasoning to wage a terrorist campaign, and the overwhelming majority of peaceful Muslims. If U.S. society were to become more accepting of Muslims, then Muslim individuals would feel less alienated and thus unlikely to join a terrorist organization. The ability to change anti Islamic views of American society may be extremely difficult and also impossible because no piece of legislation can shape American perception making this a very difficult issue to fix. However a campaign should be launched in order to shape American minds in order to prevent Muslims from becoming radicalized because they feel as though they do not belong in American society and begin to view the U.S and the West as their adversary.

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<sup>99</sup> Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris*, [Page 11].

## **Countering Social Media**

ISIS and al Qaeda have been able to rely on social media for recruitment because it has provided them an outlet to spread their brand to attract new members. The use of social media has been very advantageous to both groups and other modern terrorist groups not just because of the recruitment capabilities it provides, but also because no state has found a way that effectively prevents recruitment through social media. Social media is a new phenomenon in human history and has opened up a new frontier in terrorism that counterterrorism institutions are unable to deal with and as of now.

Before social media, terrorist organizations were dependent on the mainstream media to reach potential recruits, and would do so by launching attacks because the media's coverage of their attack would provide the organization a platform for them to promote their organization. The dependence on the mainstream media restricted the ability of older terrorist groups to recruit because if a media outlet chose to cover other current events, their message would go unheard. Social media has made this a non issue though by cutting out the media as a necessary middle man because now terrorists can directly communicate with a large audience through social media and promote their brand<sup>100</sup>. ISIS and al Qaeda can spread their propaganda, ideology, and narratives of their attacks through social media to a broader audience and gain recruits because of the freedom social media gives them to do so, and thus far no state has developed a truly successful method to combat today's terrorist organizations online<sup>101</sup>.

### **Why it's Difficult**

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<sup>100</sup> Bertram, "Terrorism, the Internet," [Page 232].

<sup>101</sup> Bouzis, "Countering the Islamic," [Page 888].

One reason the U.S. or any other state has been unable to stop terrorist's use of social media is because of states' governments inability to control the Internet as a whole. Gabrielle Wiemann writes about how terrorist recruitment and activities are suited for the Internet writing, " ... it is de-centralized, it cannot be subject to control or restriction, it is not censored, and it allows access to anyone who wants it"<sup>102</sup>. Weimann's description makes it seem as though the Internet is under no governmental control, which is not true. However, it does describe how many governments allow for the Internet to remain largely independent from the government's control, which gives terrorist groups the opportunity to operate in a more de-centralized space. The Internet creates a safe space because it allows terrorists to communicate more anonymously and out of reach of state authorities<sup>103</sup>. In countries that have more Internet censorship, such as North Korea, these safe spaces will be much less likely to exist, but countries such as the United States and other Western nations which allow more freedom on the internet due to less censorship allow for opportunities for terrorists to operate online without state interference. It may seem simple to just say the U.S. government should resort to more censorship of the Internet to prevent terrorist's recruitment, but if the U.S. government were to do so it would restrict the freedom Americans have concerning the Internet. For example, due to ISIS and al Qaeda using popular social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter to communicate, the U.S. government would have to censor both websites to prevent terrorist communication and would result in all Americans losing access to them as well. The same would go for any website which the U.S. government believes terrorists use to recruit

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<sup>102</sup> Weimann, *In Terror*, [Page 25].

<sup>103</sup> Bertram, "Terrorism, the Internet," [Page 229].

online. Censorship of the Internet to prevent terrorists groups from communicating through social media would be successful in preventing terrorist groups from recruiting, but it would be costly because American citizens would lose freedom on the Internet and would be a violation of the First Amendment. Censorship is not a dependable strategy because legally the U.S government cannot do it and because of the effect censorship would have on the American people.

The inability to censor the Internet allows terrorist groups to use social media platforms and have a larger audience, but why can't the U.S. control social media sites and restrict terrorist's group's use on social media? The U.S. and other state governments cannot control social media sites because of the high of volume of use by terrorists. The U.S. can't simply delete, block, and remove terrorists groups on social media sites because the shut down of all terrorists organizations on social media would be an impossible task because of the sheer amount of social media accounts and websites that already exist, and the fact that terrorist groups can promptly create new accounts and websites if one is deleted<sup>104</sup>. Due to the lack of control of the Internet, it had become impossible for the U.S. or other governments to stop terrorists from using social media to recruit because it would entail violating the right of others to freely use the internet and it's impossible to regulate social media accounts and prevent the access from specifically terrorist groups.

### **Current Methods**

Due to the inability for state governments to control the social media use of terrorists, the U.S. State Department has become more active throughout social media itself in order to combat terrorist online recruiting. The Center for Strategic Counterterrorism

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<sup>104</sup> Bouziz, "Countering the Islamic," [Page 888].

Communications (CSCC) has created a Facebook account, three Twitter accounts, and a YouTube account in Arabic only in order spread messages that counter terrorist social media groups, such as those created by ISIS and al Qaeda, in order to prevent the radicalization of individuals<sup>105</sup>. Many of the groups created by the Digital Outreach Program have thousands of followers, but many followers may be those who already shared the same views the group promotes, or be researchers studying the activity of the group so many actual followers may not be the targeted audience. The unknown reasoning as to why people are following the groups makes “The counter-messaging strategy difficult to evaluate, as metrics of views and followers do not equate to proof that people are deterred from being extremists”<sup>106</sup>. Counter-messaging by states can also use material posted on the social media sites of terrorists and use it as a propaganda tool against them as James Farwell describes, “ISIS fighters may take pride in tweeting and bragging about their experiences, but such material provides fodder for the group’s opponents, who can use it to discredit the militants’ narrative while mobilizing opposition”<sup>107</sup>. The extremely violent images can be used as propaganda to discredit and convince possible recruits that joining the terrorist group is not in their best interest. However, there is also proof that these violent images may be popular among many and that reposting these pictures may even help the terrorist group that originally posted it. Kathleen Bouzis writes about the effects a violent video posted by the Digital Outreach Program:

“To a troubled, youthful, predominantly male audience this message might elevate ISIL in their eyes as a force that dominates its enemies and shows no

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<sup>105</sup> Bouzis, "Countering the Islamic," [Page 889].

<sup>106</sup> Bouzis, "Countering the Islamic," [Page 889].

<sup>107</sup> Farwell, "The Media," [Page 51].

mercy toward its adversaries and therefore this video could be counterproductive and might function as pro-ISIL propaganda”<sup>108</sup>.

Due to social media being so new and its quick implementation by terrorist groups for recruitment and other purposes, states’ counterterrorism measures have not been an adequate solution to stop them from recruiting members online. States are limited in their ability to prevent terrorist groups from using social media because they cannot use censorship as it would be costly for their own citizens, and as of now there is no proven method that successfully deters recruits from becoming radicalized and joining terrorist groups like al Qaeda and ISIS. The U.S. is actively using counter-messaging to deter terrorist membership, but it is not known if it has had an impact. The U.S. should continue to develop the Digital Outreach Program and find a way to determine if it is having a positive outcome.

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<sup>108</sup> Bouzis, "Countering the Islamic," [Page 889].

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper is to explain how existing, religiously inspired terrorist groups are more likely to have greater longevity than secular terrorist groups because of their different recruitment methods. Certain terrorist groups have unique recruitment strategies due to their religiosity, which helps them appeal to more people and inspire more individuals to join their organizations. In this paper, I have written case studies about three terrorist groups, the IRA, al Qaeda, and ISIS, and have highlighted the key themes that have contributed to each groups' successful recruitment of new members, and how their continued recruitment is possible leading to each group extending their longevity.

Religious terrorist groups are different than secular terrorist organizations because they can recruit new members by using religious ideology. Religious terrorist groups, as with all other terrorist groups, are formed to cause a political change, but religious terrorist groups can tie their political and religious ideologies together and in doing so use a variety of new methods to gain members. Religious terrorist groups can use sectarian issues revolving around religion to gain members, utilize religious symbols that are meant to certify the group's ideology and draw in recruits, and describe their causes as divine and moral because they can project their enemy as being adversarial toward not only the group, but anyone who follows the same religion. Religion has proved to play a crucial motivating role for recruits, and terrorist groups have taken advantage of this. With religious terrorist groups' combination of political and religious aspirations, they can attract more recruits because people are drawn in for greater reasons than they would be in terms of secular groups. The number of religious terrorist groups and total number of individuals involved in these groups are expected to decrease around the year 2025

because, historically, previous terrorist groups have been popular for approximately one generation because they cannot support recruitment cross generationally<sup>109</sup>. Due to current religious terrorist groups new recruitment abilities they seem able to survive for much longer because religion adds a host of advantages regarding recruiting.

Given that religious terrorist groups may survive for much longer than other terrorist groups, it is important for states to develop counterterrorism policies focused on damaging the recruitment abilities of terrorist organizations. A key factor to combat today's terrorist organizations is that counterterrorism policy makers in the United States should not expect the War on Terror to end abruptly, but change the military's role in counterterrorism. The U.S. militarization of counterterrorism since the declaration of the War on Terror in 2001, has had no success for a variety of reasons. Most conventional military forces cannot effectively combat terrorists. The United States use of physical force cannot force terrorist groups into submission, and because the U.S. regards itself at war with terrorist organizations, it leads to the narrowing of counterterrorism policies and only focuses on the military aspect of combating terrorism<sup>110</sup>. States should not rely solely on military means for counterterrorism because they are ineffective for the most part. They do not prevent terrorist organizations from continuing to recruit and can often lead to terrorist organizations gaining even more support and recruits because a state's militarized counterterrorism strategy may be characterized by terrorist groups as aggressive, unnecessary, and as targeting the religious identity the group claims to have. If the U.S. would repeal the AUMF, it would be a major step in the demilitarization of

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<sup>109</sup> Rapoport, *The Four*, [Page 48].

<sup>110</sup> McIntosh, "Counterterrorism as War," [Page 26].

counterterrorism and would allow for new counterterrorism methods outside of the military to operate likely causing more significant damage to the recruitment of today's religious terrorist organizations, and in doing so, shorten the longevity of each organization.

Going forward it will be interesting to see what approach President Trump takes toward religious terrorists groups. President Trump has not been in office long enough to determine exactly what type of counterterrorism methods he will employ against al Qaeda, ISIS and other terrorist organizations. Despite the lack of clarity surrounding the Trump administration's policies towards counterterrorism, there can inferences made based on the limited actions he has taken thus far in office, and by the policies he suggested implementing throughout his campaign. It seems as though President Trump is more concerned with preventing terrorist attacks from being launched within the United States than directly combatting terrorism overseas. This is similar to the approach taken by President Obama.

President Trump has taken a more domestic counterterrorism approach because of his idea that ISIS and al Qaeda will send their members directly to the U.S. in order to launch a coordinated attack. His solution to prevent these terrorist groups from launching terrorist attacks in the United States is to change the United States' immigration policies concerning people travelling to the U.S. from countries that are predominantly Muslim. During a speech in August 2017, during the presidential campaign, President Trump gave a speech about fighting terrorism and stated, "Pew polling shows that in many of the countries from which we draw large numbers of immigrants, extreme views about religion

– such as the death penalty for those who leave the faith – are commonplace”<sup>111</sup>. President Trump’s belief that extremist groups are sending members to immigrate to America has resulted in him signing two executive orders preventing citizens and refugees from several Muslim majority countries from coming to the U.S. Judges have blocked both of these executive orders because they were ruled to be unconstitutional. Despite both executive orders not going into action, the Trump administration still seems focused on preventing domestic attacks from occurring, but nonetheless, these travel bans and other immigration policies that are aimed to prevent or make it much more difficult for terrorists to enter the United States may cause more issues as more Muslims may feel more alienated in the U.S. Also, his policies could deepen resentment toward the U.S. in the Middle East, only helping ISIS, al Qaeda, or other religious terrorists groups to recruit more members.

Trump has also taken a similar approach to Obama with counterterrorism activity in the Middle East. Trump claims to have been in opposition of the Iraq war and has promised to abandon the idea of nation building. President Trump, like President Obama, wants to refrain from establishing large-scale U.S. personnel operations in the Middle East to fight terrorism and thus far has been relying on the AUMF to launch drone strikes, bombings, and the use of special operation units to fight ISIS and al Qaeda. President Trump has also called to rely more on NATO and other regional allies in the Middle East to prevent the spread of these religious terrorist groups<sup>112</sup>. The continuation of President Obama’s counterterrorism measures in the Middle East is a better solution than escalating the military force, but it will still remain unsuccessful in preventing ISIS and al Qaeda from recruiting more members.

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<sup>111</sup> Trump, "Full text," Politico.

<sup>112</sup> Trump, "Full text," Politico.

Given President Trump's actions thus far, and the counterterrorism policies he laid out during his campaign, do not seem suitable to effectively bring an end to either terrorist organization. Yet it is still very early in Trump's presidency and many things can change regarding counterterrorism and the policies he and his administration make to fight al Qaeda and ISIS. If the Trump administration is to be successful in bringing an end to both groups, the U.S. should repeal the AUMF and resort to more nonviolent tactics. Nonviolent methods such as implementing diplomatic measures to develop equality of Sunni Muslims in Syria and Iraq, counter messaging Al Qaeda and ISIS's religious claims, and the promoting the Muslim minority populations in Western countries to prevent them from being radicalized would all deal a significant blow to ISIS and al Qaeda and make it much more difficult for them to survive. If the U.S. enacted counterterrorism policies such as these and abandoned older counterterrorism models, recruitment would be increasingly difficult and lead to the downfall of many religious terrorist groups because without enough membership terrorist groups cannot survive and will cease to exist.

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